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THE ITALIAN MENACE: OPERA BUFFA IN REVOLUTIONARY FRANCE

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ABSTRACT

The Parisian premiere of Paisiello's Nina, o sia la pazza d'amore *on 3 September 1791 triggered a hostile reaction from French librettists and composers. Since the opéra comique on which Paisiello had based his opera remained in the active repertory of the Comédie-Italienne,* Nina *was considered an infringement of copyright legislation recently passed by the National Assembly. In the controversy that followed, matters involving intellectual property and opera aesthetics were linked to revolutionary struggle. At a time when clarity and transparency were identified as republican virtues in France, the carefully wrought balance between music and text that was associated with French operatic genres acquired new political resonance. Simultaneously, the perceived emphasis on sensual musical pleasure – at the expense of a coherent libretto – in Italian operas like* Nina *was eyed with suspicion, deemed a potential symptom of counterrevolution. In this way, the relative merits of French and Italian opera were superimposed on issues of revolution, reaction and national identity.*

INTRODUCTION

The French never stop quarrelling, or so it appears from a quick survey of the eighteenth century. Before the repartee of the *lullistes* and *ramistes* had receded from view, the Querelle des Bouffons began. This in turn was followed by the bickering of *gluckistes* and *piccinistes*. Although overtly concerned with matters of musical taste, these eighteenth-century pamphlet wars also involved veiled political struggles. The participants, whose aesthetic preferences were of course also informed by ideology, debated questions of power and authority under the guise of compositional style.[1] These quarrels have generated considerable interest among students of music history, but in the early 1790s another controversy occurred that has, unlike its better-known predecessors, attracted little attention. This dispute, the focus of this article, revived many of the issues raised in the previous exchanges but subtly transformed them, accommodating the social and political changes wrought by the French Revolution.

The conflict in question surrounded the Parisian premiere of Giovanni Paisiello's *Nina, o sia la pazza d'amore* on 3 September 1791. Although a popular success, this work immediately earned the enmity of local authors and composers, who perceived this delightful opera buffa to be a serious threat to French literary and musical traditions. Their hostile reaction centred on the libretto, which was an Italian adaptation of a

I would like to express my thanks to Harrison Ryker, Yu Siu-Wah and the anonymous readers for their helpful comments on an earlier version of this article.

1 For analyses of the ideological content of these musical quarrels see Edward Lowinsky, 'Taste, Style and Ideology in Eighteenth-Century Music', in *Aspects of the Eighteenth Century*, ed. Earl R. Wasserman (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1965), 163–205, and Robert Isherwood, 'The Third War of the Musical Enlightenment', *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture* 4/1 (1975), 223–245. For an explanation of how these operatic wars continued to serve political purposes well into the nineteenth and twentieth centuries see Charles B. Paul, 'Music and Ideology: Rameau, Rousseau, and 1789', *Journal of the History of Ideas* 32/3 (1971), 395–410.

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celebrated opéra comique by Benoît-Joseph Marsollier, set to music by Nicolas Dalayrac.[2] Since the French opera (*Nina, ou la folle par amour*) remained in the active repertory of the Comédie-Italienne, the success of the Italian *Nina* in Paris represented a financial challenge to the original.[3] Furthermore, many French composers and playwrights considered the translation to be an infringement of recent copyright legislation (see discussion below). They attacked the Italian work in defence of their hard-won intellectual property rights and reinforced their arguments by invoking a well-worn French literary position that condemned Italian librettos for their inferior quality. In doing so, the authors placed the debate within a tradition of aesthetic wrangling that reached back to the first part of the century. Although matters of taste and style were initially of secondary importance within the debate, aesthetic concerns grew increasingly prominent and ultimately connected the furore over *Nina* with wider issues, including the struggle to define a national identity. Before addressing this development, however, it is necessary to outline certain events that preceded the premiere of this opera and created the volatile climate that led to this quarrel.

PRIVILEGE VERSUS PROPERTY

Prior to 1789, the French crown had organized Parisian theatres through a system of privilege that bestowed official recognition on only three establishments: the Académie de musique (or Opéra), the Comédie-Française and the Comédie-Italienne.[4] By limiting the number of spectacles, the state fostered a close relationship with the official theatres. As a result of their elite status, these theatres aligned themselves with the interests of the monarchy and became cultural representatives of the state, conscious and careful of their image. All other theatrical enterprises possessed an ambiguous legal status that made them vulnerable to attacks by their privileged counterparts. Nevertheless, these unofficial theatres managed to manoeuvre around the legal obstacles that limited their growth, and by the 1780s they constituted an established part of the Parisian theatrical landscape. The government tolerated these theatres because their light entertainments, when monitored, posed little challenge to the existing order. Indeed, the existence of these institutions, with their emphasis on parody and farce, in some ways reinforced the prestige of official theatres.[5] Thus privilege supported both the regulatory needs and the artistic aims of the state. Limiting the number

2 Paisiello's *Nina* began as a one-act opera with a libretto that was based on a translation by Giuseppi Carpani of Marsollier's *Nina*, with emendations by Giambattista Lorenzi. After this version met with success, Paisiello and Lorenzi expanded the work to two acts. The one-act version was performed in Paris with simple recitatives by Luigi Cherubini substituted for the spoken dialogue of the original, making the Parisian performances more 'Italian' in the eyes of audiences. The relationship of Paisiello's *Nina* to the original opéra comique is examined in Stefano Castelvecchi, 'From *Nina* to *Nina*: Psychodrama, Absorption and Sentiment in the 1780s', *Cambridge Opera Journal* 8/2 (1996), 91–112. Cherubini's recitatives are mentioned in *Mercure de France*, 24 September 1791, 151, which is cited in Michel Noiray, 'Le répertoire d'opéra italien au Théâtre de Monsieur et au Théâtre Feydeau (janvier 1789 – août 1792)', *Revue de musicologie* 81/2 (1995), 259–275, and Alessandro Di Profio, *La révolution des bouffons: L'opéra italien au Théâtre de Monsieur, 1789–1792* (Paris: CNRS, 2003), 471–472.

3 The majority of Parisian newspapers consistently referred to the Italian opera by its subtitle, *La pazza d'amore*, presumably to distinguish it from the French work. See, for example, the announcements and reviews published in *Affiches, annonces et avis divers* from September 1791.

4 The precise nature of the privileges awarded these three establishments differed significantly. For a concise description of the differences see Robert Isherwood, *Farce and Fantasy: Popular Entertainment in Eighteenth-Century Paris* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 81–97. Regarding the situation at the Comédie-Italienne see David Charlton, *Grétry and the Growth of Opéra-Comique* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

5 The most thorough analysis of privilege as it affected the boulevard theatres throughout the 1780s is found in Michèle Root-Bernstein, *Boulevard Theater and Revolution in Eighteenth-Century Paris* (Ann Arbor: UMI, 1984), 17–39. The performance histories of all the Parisian theatres during the period in question are covered by André Tissier, *Les spectacles à Paris pendant la révolution: répertoire analytique, chronologique et bibliographique*, 2 volumes (Geneva: Droz, 1992–2002).

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and types of spectacles made them easier to police, while the hierarchical nature of the theatrical order helped concentrate talent within select establishments and ensured their ability to perform at a consistently high level.[6]

Critics of privilege challenged the efficacy of these state controls. In place of artistic excellence, they observed only stale conventions that stifled innovation and creativity; they questioned the motives of privileged enterprises, perceiving more venality than civic spirit in their methods of operation.[7] When the *sociétaires* (actor-owners) of the Comédie-Française publicly declared their support for privilege, critics seized the opportunity to ridicule their franchise. Baron Grimm, for example, sarcastically summarized the actors' arguments: 'forgetting their personal interest completely, they concerned themselves only with the cause of morals and good taste . . . (Could it be in better hands?)'.[8] Of course, Grimm was not opposed to high artistic standards, but his caustic tone implied that privilege benefited the official spectacles far more than it aided society as a whole. He and like-minded critics depicted privilege as an artificial and outmoded means of ensuring French dramatic pre-eminence. In their eyes, the official theatres not only failed to live up to their own standards but also kept other entrepreneurs from succeeding.[9]

The situation was complicated by the opening of a new theatre, the Théâtre de Monsieur (subsequently the Théâtre Feydeau), in January 1789.[10] This enterprise was intended to establish a permanent home for Italian opera within the French capital and, although its licence also permitted the performance of *vaudevilles* and short, spoken French plays, it was the productions of opera buffa that attracted the most attention and offered the greatest challenge to the existing order. However, any threat that the Théâtre de Monsieur/Feydeau posed to the official theatres paled in comparison to those brought about by the French Revolution. Following the creation of the National Assembly in June 1789, all the corporate hierarchies of France were called into question, and the system of privilege – despite the safeguards it offered – was openly assailed. Although the official theatres were accustomed to repulsing encroachments on their prerogatives by rival theatrical enterprises, the strongest attacks on privilege no longer came from other entrepreneurs but rather from authors and composers.[11] This change stemmed from a deeply rooted frustration with the status quo. Under the ancien regime, the privileged theatres had acquired proprietary rights over dramatic works performed on their stages. Although the situation differed somewhat from one theatre to the next, authors

6 This argument had been used before the Revolution in lawsuits brought by the administrations of the privileged spectacles against their rivals. See *Mémoire et consultation sur la cause pendante en la Grand-Chambre du Parlement entre les comédiens français, le sieur Nicolet, et les autres entrepreneurs des spectacles forains* (Paris, 1785).

7 Root-Bernstein, *Boulevard Theater*, 31–32.

8 'oubliant entièrement leur intérêt personnel, ils ne se sont occupés que de la cause des moeurs et du bon goût . . . (Pouvait-elle être en de meilleures mains?)'. Friedrich Melchior Grimm, *Correspondance littéraire, philosophique et critique* (Paris: Garnier Frères, 1877–1882), volume 14, 193. For more thorough explanations of the organization of the Comédie-Française see Max Aghion, *Le théâtre à Paris au XVIIIe siècle* (Paris: Librairie de France, 1926), and Marvin Carlson, *The Theatre of the French Revolution* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1966).

9 Thomas Rousseau, *Lettre à M sur les spectacles des boulevards* (Paris, 1781), 7–10, quoted in Isherwood, *Farce*, 254. See also Root-Bernstein, *Boulevard Theater*, 36.

10 Regarding the establishment of the Théâtre de Monsieur see Di Profio, *La révolution des bouffons*, 21–52, and Michael E. McClellan, 'Battling over the Lyric Muse: Expressions of Revolution and Counterrevolution at the Théâtre Feydeau, 1789–1801' (PhD dissertation, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 1992), 5–22. The establishment's name was changed to Théâtre Feydeau following the royal family's failed escape attempt and capture at Varennes in June 1791. For discussion of all theatres active in Paris at this time see Nicole Wild, 'Les théâtres parisiens sous la révolution', in *Orphée-phrygien: Les musiques de la révolution*, ed. Jean-Rémy Julien and Jean-Claude Klein (Paris: Editions Du May, 1989), 205–216.

11 The situation was further complicated by the efforts of the Parisian municipal government to exert its own control over theatrical establishments. For the city's position regarding theatres see F.-J. Cholet de Jetphort and others, *Rapport de MM les commissaires nommés par la commune relativement aux spectacles* (Paris: Lottin, 1790), and Jean-Louis-Brousse Desfaucherets and others, *Réponse du Département des établissemens publics, au mémoire présenté par le Département de la police à la commune & aux soixante districts au sujet des spectacles* (Paris, no date).

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generally resented their relative lack of control over performances of their works.[12] By calling the entitlements of the official theatres into question, they hoped to exert greater control over their intellectual property.

Organized opposition to theatrical privilege was led by the Society of Dramatic Authors and Composers. This association, founded by the playwright Pierre-Augustin Caron de Beaumarchais in order to promote the goals of playwrights and opera composers, lobbied the government to this end.[13] Jean-François de La Harpe, an editor for the literary section of the *Mercure de France*, represented the Society and pressed the concerns of his peers in an address to the National Assembly.[14] He called upon the legislators for support and presented them with a petition in which he made five interdependent demands: 1) privilege had to be abolished, 2) the city government of Paris should establish and enforce regulations protecting the rights of authors and overseeing the theatres, 3) the works of deceased authors had to be made public property, 4) no drama should be performed in France without the written permission of its author and 5) any theatre might perform the works of authors dead for five or more years.[15] La Harpe employed language in his address that appealed to the sympathies of the National Assembly. In particular he concentrated on the Comédie-Française's monopolistic control over its famed repertory, depicting the situation as a despotic appropriation of France's literary patrimony. Instead of a system of privilege, La Harpe proposed government regulation as an equitable means of balancing the needs of authors, theatres and the public. The Assembly took the matter seriously, and the petition was duly sent to the Committee of the Constitution for review.[16]

The initial response of the official theatres to the Society's manoeuvring was to invoke traditional aesthetic defences. For example, the *sociétaires* of the Comédie-Française attempted to circumvent criticism through appeals to cultural elitism. They insisted that they needed some form of protection in order to uphold the prestige of France's theatrical patrimony.[17] Arguing that the quality of their acting made a direct and lasting contribution to the value of a drama, the actors and their supporters depicted opposition to the Comédie-Française's monopolistic control over its repertory as dangerous. They stressed that only by means of their experience, tradition and proven talents could productions of superior quality be assured. Without their stewardship, inferior performances of great masterworks would result, leading to artistic corruption or

12 For a discussion of the process by which librettos were chosen and authors paid by the principal lyric theatres of Paris see M. Elizabeth C. Bartlet, *Étienne-Nicolas Méhul and Opera: Source and Archival Studies of Lyric Theatre during the French Revolution, Consulate, and Empire*, 2 volumes (Heilbronn: Lucie Galland, 1999), volume 1, 14–29.

13 Emmet Kennedy, *A Cultural History of the French Revolution* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 173.

14 La Harpe was no stranger to public quarrels. Fifteen years earlier he had participated in the Gluck/Piccinni controversy and had supported the Italian cause, vigorously attacking Gluck's Parisian operas. In that earlier aesthetic battle he had also opposed privileged institutions and the government. Isherwood, 'Third War', 233–235, 242. La Harpe would later grow disillusioned with the Revolution during the Terror. He ultimately worked for the right-wing press during the Directory, advocating stricter state censorship of the theatre. See Jeremy Popkin, *Revolutionary News: The Press in France, 1789–1799* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1990), 49, and 'Enlightened Reaction: The French Rightwing Press under the First Republic, 1792–1800' (PhD dissertation, University of California, Berkeley, 1977), appendix 2.

15 See Jean-François de La Harpe, *Adresse des auteurs dramatiques à l'Assemblée nationale, prononcée par M de la Harpe, dans la séance du mardi soir 24 août* [1790] (Paris, no date). This set of demands was signed by many prominent authors of the day, including Marie-Joseph Chénier, Michel-Jean Sedaine, Louis Sébastien Mercier, Philippe Fabre d'Eglantine, Nicolas-Étienne Framery, Louis-Jean-Baptiste Vigée and Sébastien Roch Nicolas de Chamfort.

16 The authors may have had the support of a powerful member of the Assembly; it was alleged that Honoré-Gabriel de Mirabeau had thrown his support behind the authors' cause. See Carla A. Hesse, *Publishing and Cultural Politics in Revolutionary Paris, 1789–1810* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 116.

17 Molé, Danzincourt and Fleury, *Observations pour les comédiens français sur la pétition adressée par les auteurs dramatiques à l'Assemblée nationale* (Paris: Prault, 1790). See also Louis Poinsinet de Sivry, *Réflexions diverses sur la pétition des auteurs dramatiques* (Paris, 1790). Poinsinet supported the *comédiens* and argued that actors had a right to claim a drama as their own intellectual property, not only through payments for those works but also through their performances of this repertory. The talent that actors brought to the creation of a drama, he proposed, gave them an additional claim to that drama.

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worse.[18] By claiming to protect the interests of the audience, the *sociétaires* implied that the theatrical limitations developed under the monarchy were necessary for maintaining stability and sowed reasonable doubts about the wisdom of any proposed changes.

Four months later, with no legislation in sight, La Harpe continued his campaign on behalf of playwrights and composers in a speech to the Society of Friends of the Constitution, the political association later known as the Jacobin Club, in which he developed his arguments further.[19] On this occasion, La Harpe shrewdly depicted the *sociétaires* of the Comédie-Française as a small theatrical coterie opposed to the Revolution.[20] To that end, he began his remarks by lamenting the fact that the Committee of the Constitution had not yet produced a report on the authors' petition in spite of repeated promises to do so. The delay, he hinted, was the product of clandestine lobbying by minions of the Comédie-Française. The club members listening to the speech would have grasped the speaker's implication immediately: such conspiratorial behaviour was typical of counter-revolutionaries. By planting this impression in the minds of his audience, La Harpe drew on a deep-rooted prejudice that held actors to be socially and morally disreputable as well as untrustworthy, owing to their talent for dissembling.[21] Accordingly, the actors had stripped the French theatre of its strength and transformed playwrights into 'sycophant-poets' who encouraged the audience to adopt slavish attitudes.[22] In contrast, he represented the Society of Dramatic Authors and Composers as a patriotic organization responding to tyranny, a committed participant in the larger revolutionary struggle and an advocate of theatrical freedom:

> C'est donc au nom de la nation qui doit réclamer cet illustre héritage; au nom de la liberté qui doit permettre à tout comédien de jouer aujourd'hui Corneille, Racine, Molière, Crébillon, etc.
>
> Therefore, it is in the name of the nation that this illustrious [dramatic] heritage ought to be reclaimed. Today, in the name of liberty, every actor ought to be permitted to play Corneille, Racine, Molière, Crébillon etc.[23]

La Harpe employed the rhetoric of early revolutionary politics to condemn what he considered to be the actors' usurpation of a national legacy. The Comédie-Française, from this perspective, became a reactionary force impeding the triumph of liberty and equality within France.[24]

Final arbitration, of course, was in the hands of the National Assembly, but in making a ruling, the legislators found themselves caught between their professed support for property rights and their concern

18 Molé, Danzincourt and Fleury, *Observations*, 12–13, 35–36; also Root-Bernstein, *Boulevard Theater*, 37.

19 Jean-François de La Harpe, *Discours sur la liberté du théâtre prononcé par M de la Harpe le 17 décembre 1790 à la Société des amis de la constitution* (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1790).

20 Club members would have been aware that at this time the actors of the Comédie-Française were engaged in a fierce and divisive professional squabble, which was widely interpreted in stark political terms. See Martine Reid, 'Language under Revolutionary Pressure', in *A New History of French Literature*, ed. Denis Hollier (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), 572–579; and M. Elizabeth C. Bartlet, 'On the Freedom of the Theatre and Censorship: The *Adrien* Controversy, 1792', in *1789–1989: Musique, histoire, démocratie*, ed. Antoine Hennion, 3 volumes (Paris: Éditions de la Maison des Sciences de l'Homme, 1992), volume 1, 9–11.

21 The ambiguous social status of French actors had a long history that is outlined in Lenard R. Berlanstein, 'Women and Power in Eighteenth-Century France: Actresses at the Comédie-Française', in *Visions and Revisions of Eighteenth-Century France*, ed. Christine Adams, Jack R. Censer and Lisa Jane Graham (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997), 154–190, especially 160–163, and Root-Bernstein, *Boulevard Theater*, 141–143. Although actors were granted the rights of citizenship in December 1789, prejudice lingered in the minds of many. See O. S. Du Croisi, *L'homme aux trois révérences, ou le comédien remis à sa place* (Paris, 1790).

22 La Harpe, *Discours sur la liberté*, 7.

23 La Harpe, *Discours sur la liberté*, 14–15.

24 Of course, La Harpe's opinions were not universally endorsed. A large number of authors who were more closely associated with the boulevard theatres than with the Comédie-Française signed an alternative petition and distanced themselves from him. See *Pétition des auteurs dramatiques qui n'ont pas signé celle de M de la Harpe* (Paris: L. Potier de Lille, 1790). A thorough analysis of the latter document is given in Root-Bernstein, *Boulevard Theater*, 178–189.

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for the protection of the commonwealth. Like the monarchy, the National Assembly viewed theatres as centres of potential unrest. Large audiences could easily become large, uncontrolled mobs if proper precautions were ignored. Privilege, in connection with censorship, had served this purpose well, making the theatres much easier to police.[25] Altering the system of theatrical controls placed public order and stability at risk in favour of intellectual property. Thus the rights of the individual had to be weighed against the needs of the Revolution as a whole. Justice for one could not infringe upon the will of *le peuple*. However, the legislators ultimately put aside their concerns and resolved the matter with an orotund show of support for the property rights of individuals. Isaac-René-Guy Le Chapelier, a member of the National Assembly, submitted a report to that body on 13 January 1791 that endorsed the demands outlined by La Harpe.[26] Le Chapelier, writing for the members of the Committee of the Constitution, advocated a laissez-faire economic policy, and he analysed this situation within that framework. Arguing in favour of abolishing privilege, he adopted the view that theatrical enterprises were a form of industry. The revolutionary government, therefore, could not recognize privilege without permitting a monopoly to hamper the development of commercial interests. Nor could it grant one group control over the creative products of composers and authors. To do so would violate the rights of artists over their property and artificially limit the industry in question. Le Chapelier considered the favoured status of the privileged theatres to be inappropriate and reactionary – that is to say, an impediment to a free marketplace. After a few objections, which were quickly dismissed, Le Chapelier's recommendations were adopted and made into law.[27]

The legislation represented a first, flawed, step towards the development of French copyright law. Its shortcomings, in part, stemmed from the nature of the original charges levelled at the Comédie-Française, which focused narrowly on the concerns of playwrights. Thus the law addressed problems involving contractual disputes between theatre administrations and authors, but real governmental support for the authors was limited at best.[28] Although this legislation has often been lauded for its protection of the individual's intellectual property, its main concern was not the rights of individuals but rather a belief in the inviolability of public property. The language of the law does show concern for authors, but that is because of the service they perform for the community. From the viewpoint of the Assembly, too much emphasis on individual rights could easily lead to the creation of special interests and entitlements, another form of privilege. For this reason, a writer's output would enter the public domain five years after his or her death, where it became part of a sacrosanct national heritage. In addition, the law offered little indication of what the relationship between theatres and the new regime should be. The legislature seemingly believed that the removal of all traces of privilege and state censorship would produce a new creative atmosphere conducive to the development of truly revolutionary repertories. Yet the lawmakers offered no practical direction for realizing this goal. Instead, they maintained a vague and somewhat distant relationship with the theatres, producing a theatrical community that was even more fractured and querulous than it had been prior to this legislation.

The first response to the law was an immediate increase in the number of theatres, since the legislation allowed anyone with sufficient means to open one. By the end of 1791 the number of theatres had more than

25 With respect to censorship during the French Revolution see Victor Hallays-Dabot, *Histoire de la censure théâtrale en France* (Paris: E. Dentu, 1862; reprinted Geneva: Slatkine, 1970), 143–206.

26 Isaac-René-Guy Le Chapelier, *Rapport fait par M Le Chapelier au nom du Comité de constitution, sur la pétition des auteurs dramatiques, dans la séance du jeudi 13 janvier 1791 avec le décret rendu dans cette séance* (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, no date). For a discussion of how questions of censorship relate to this report see Bartlet, 'On the Freedom of the Theatre', 9–24.

27 *Le spectateur national*, 15 January 1791, 198.

28 Studies of the history of copyright argue that social issues were of far greater concern to the National Assembly than the rights of individual authors. See Jane C. Ginsburg, 'A Tale of Two Copyrights: Literary Property in Revolutionary France and America', in *Of Authors and Origins: Essays on Copyright Law*, ed. Brad Sherman and Alain Strowel (Oxford: Clarendon, 1994), 131–158; David Saunders, *Authorship and Copyright* (London: Routledge, 1992), 90–95; and Hesse, *Publishing and Cultural Politics*, 105–114.

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doubled, and it remained at that level for the next year as new establishments replaced those that failed.[29] Advocates of theatrical liberty had expected this increase in the number of theatres, but there were other unforeseen responses to the law as well. The removal of state controls led theatre administrations to dispute the *quart des pauvres*, a municipal tax that generated relief for the poor and indigent, arguing that enforced charity was akin to theft.[30] Furthermore, the law had the effect of intensifying arguments between theatre administrators and the Society of Dramatic Authors and Composers, with the former exploiting the legislation's ambiguities to their advantage. The *sociétaires* of the Comédie-Française, for example, argued that article three of the new law, which stated that 'works by living authors may not be performed in any public theatre in all of France without the formal written permission of the author', did not apply to dramas published prior to 13 January 1791, and thus allowed the Comédie-Française to retain control over its existing repertory.[31] The continuation of the argument ultimately led to additional legislation being passed six months later, on 19 July 1791. This time the National Assembly attempted to clarify its intent and explicitly stated that the works of all living authors – even those printed, published or performed prior to passage of the 13 January 1791 law – were covered by that legislation.[32] But even this follow-up law did little to resolve tensions in the theatrical community, which were aggravated by a rapidly deteriorating political situation.[33] It was with this situation in mind that the author of a letter to the *Journal de Paris* described the legislation as a failure, unable to achieve its own objectives and inherently flawed.[34] The scene was set for another confrontation in which authors and composers would once more vent their frustration.

At about the same time an even greater test of the law's effectiveness came from provincial theatre directors, who insisted that once a work was published and printed it should be considered public property.[35] From this point of view, authors forfeited all performance rights by publishing their work, since the purchase of a single copy of a printed drama entitled the buyer to perform that play. If authors wanted to maintain ownership of their works, their adversaries insisted, they could do so only by avoiding publication and distributing their work to theatres by means of manuscript copies.[36] In other words, performance rights were obtained with the purchase of each copy of a published drama or opera. This was a matter of grave importance, and not only for the playwrights and librettists. For opera composers, whose most successful works often circulated in published form, there was also much at stake. Publishing scores had been one of the few ways for composers to establish their name, as well as making their music available to theatres outside of Paris. To do so, they either sold their property rights to publishing firms outright or subsidized publication

29 Root-Bernstein, *Boulevard Theater*, 201–202, and Wild, 'Les théâtres parisiens', 210–216.

30 'Tyrannie du maire de Paris', *Révolutions de Paris*, 26 February – 5 March 1791, 387–390, and Nicolas-Étienne Framery, *De l'organisation des spectacles de Paris* (Paris: Buisson, 1790), 17–22. The supporters of the *quart des pauvres*, in contrast, decried the loss of revenue to public charities. See Fortin, procureur au Châtelet, *Hôpitaux et spectacles: Question, les droits des hôpitaux sur les spectacles doivent-ils être conservés ou supprimés?* (Paris: Imprimerie de la rue Notre-Dame des Victoires, 1791).

31 The complete article reads 'Les ouvrages des auteurs vivans ne pourront être représentés sur aucun théâtre public, dans toute l'étendue de la France, sans le consentement formel & par écrit des auteurs, sous peine de confiscation du produit total des représentations au profit de l'auteur.' Le Chapelier, *Rapport*, 22.

32 M. L. F. Duport, *Loi relative aux spectacles* (Paris: Imprimerie Royale, 1791).

33 The attempted flight of the royal family, who were intercepted at the town of Varennes late in the evening of 20 June 1791, generated a crisis for the Girondin government then in power. For the impact of this event on Parisian theatres see Carlson, *Theatre of the French Revolution*, 94–128.

34 *Journal de Paris*, 5 September 1791, 1013–1014. Notably, the letter appeared in the same issue as a glowing review of Paisiello's *Nina*. For the text of the review see Di Profio, *La révolution des bouffons*, 413–414.

35 *Observations sommaires par les comédiens contre les auteurs dramatiques* (Paris: C. F. Perlet, no date), 10.

36 See Flachat, *Réplique des comédiens* (Paris, no date). Flachat, who was associated with the theatre in Lyon, represented the interests of provincial theatres in this debate. See Françoise Karro, 'Le musicien et le librettiste dans la nation: propriété et défense du créateur par Nicolas Dalayrac et Michel Sedaine', in *Fêtes et musiques révolutionnaires: Grétry et Gossec*, ed. Roland Mortier and Hervé Hasquin, Études sur le XVIIIe siècle, volume 17 (Brussels: Editions de l'Université de Bruxelles, 1990), 9–52.

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personally.[37] The provincial theatres that bought scores in order to mount their own productions typically did not acknowledge any financial debt to the creators and certainly made little effort to pay them. So it is not surprising that composers hoped the new law would change this situation to their advantage. The separation of the legal right to perform a dramatic work from intellectual property rights protecting a printed work, if enforced by the government, promised significant financial gain to whoever held those rights. As a result, the Society of Dramatic Authors and Composers strenuously fought to distinguish between intellectual property per se and a printed exemplar, insisting that performance rights remained with the original author/composer even after publication.[38] Opponents of the new law subsequently sought to attack the Society itself by condemning this professional association as an illegal corporation – that is to say, a coalition of workers or tradesmen similar to those organized under the ancien regime.[39] This charge attempted to tarnish the revolutionary image that the Society had constructed for its membership and to denigrate its activities as conspiratorial. In doing so, critics turned the charge that La Harpe had originally levelled against the *sociétaires* of the Comédie-Française on the authors and composers themselves. Of course, members of the Society immediately pointed to the fact that, although the organization reflected the common interests of composers and playwrights, it neither participated in the creative work of individuals nor interfered in contract negotiations involving its members, theatre administrations or publishers.[40]

An eloquent expression of the authors' position vis-à-vis the charges made against them was produced by Nicolas Dalayrac, the composer of the French *Nina*, in an address to the Committee of Public Instruction on 26 December 1791.[41] Dalayrac's argument is notable for the clear distinction it makes between publication rights (*le droit de la faire imprimer*) and performance rights (*le droit de la faire représenter*) with respect to opera and drama. Using examples drawn from personal experience, he forcefully argued that both these rights pertained to the creator and that the transmission of one set of rights to another party through a formal contract did not involve the other set. Thus, when negotiating with a publisher to produce a printed version of a play, libretto or score, the author and/or composer was not relinquishing control over potential performances. Indeed, if one accepted the arguments of theatre directors, and performance rights were in fact ceded in a contract for publication, those rights would not be placed in the public domain, but rather would reside with the publisher, something that no one – certainly not the publishers – had suggested. Dalayrac highlighted the problems that authors and composers faced with respect to provincial performances. He appealed to the committee members' sense of fair play and justice, insisting that the amounts of

37 Bartlet, *Étienne-Nicolas Méhul and Opera*, volume 1, 89–96. In her discussion of the printed scores as sources for French opera, Bartlet provides a succinct explanation of the difficulties faced by composers in the late eighteenth and the early nineteenth centuries when planning the publication of their operatic scores.

38 *Dernière réponse des auteurs dramatiques aux derniers écrits des entrepreneurs de spectacles de départemens, notamment à ceux qui portent pour titre. Observations sommaires, etc. et Pétition présentée à la Convention nationale* (Paris: Louis-Pierre, no date).

39 Flachat, *Dénonciation de la corporation des auteurs dramatiques* (Paris, no date). In June 1791 the National Assembly had reaffirmed the government's position against all forms of privilege by outlawing coalitions or unions of workers. William H. Sewell, *Work and Revolution in France: The Language of Labor from the Old Regime to 1848* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 86–91. This legislation, which outlawed any form of corporate association, was likewise sponsored by Le Chapelier, the author of the law outlawing theatrical privilege.

40 Paul-Philippe Gudin de la Brenellerie, *Observation sur la dénonciation de la corporation des auteurs* (Paris, no date), and Pierre-Augustin Caron de Beaumarchais, *Pétition à l'Assemblée nationale par Pierre-Augustin Caron de Beaumarchais contre l'usurpation des propriétés des auteurs par les directeurs de spectacles, lue par l'auteur au Comité d'instituction* [*sic*] *publique, le 23 décembre 1791* (Paris: Du Pont, no date), 27. For a broader discussion of charges of conspiracy as a means of discrediting opponents see Lynn Hunt, *Politics, Culture and Class in the French Revolution* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 38–44.

41 *Réponse de M Dalairac à MM les directeurs de spectacles, réclamans contre deux décrets de l'Assemblée nationale de 1789; lue au Comité d'instruction publique, le 26 décembre 1791* (Paris: Potier de Lille, 1791). The complete speech is reproduced in Karro, 'Le musicien', 42–49.

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money accorded to the creators would not substantially decrease the profits of the theatres as a whole, but would mean a great deal to individual authors and composers. Although maintaining a judicious tone throughout the address, Dalayrac nevertheless expressed his and his colleagues' discontent with the uncertainties of the theatrical economy, which had recently become even more complex with the Parisian premiere of Paisiello's *Nina.*

THE MARRIAGE OF MUSIC AND TEXT: REACTING TO *NINA*

By the time Paisiello's *Nina, o sia la pazza d'amore* arrived in Paris, it was already an international success. The heroine is a young woman who believes her lover, Lindoro, has been killed by a rival suitor, whom her father wished her to marry. The trauma engendered by this belief has led to her derangement. The plot centres on Nina's emotional frailty and the reaction of those around her to this pitiable state. Only after her remorseful father acknowledges and accepts Lindoro – who did not actually die – does she regain her senses. This sentimental story enthralled late eighteenth-century audiences eager to display their own sensitive natures.[42] They welcomed Nina's show of *sensibilité* and the tuneful score that accompanied it.[43] The Théâtre de Monsieur/Feydeau, where the opera's Parisian premiere took place, made no attempt to conceal the fact that the new Italian opera was clearly modelled on Marsollier's French libretto. Indeed, familiarity with the story may have been perceived as an advantage for members of the audience who could not understand Italian.[44] Not surprisingly, newspaper reviews of the Italian *Nina* did not bother to include synopses of the plot, as was customary. Instead the journalists simply informed their readers that the story was identical to that of the Marsollier/Dalayrac opera.[45]

The opera appealed to Parisian audiences and received sixteen additional performances within the four months following its premiere.[46] This positive reception by Parisians of the Italian *Nina* incensed members of the Society of Dramatic Authors and Composers. The production of this particular opera constituted, in the Society's eyes, the latest in a series of entrepreneurial subterfuges to circumvent authorial franchise. Its success reaffirmed for them the failure of the National Assembly to protect their intellectual property rights satisfactorily. In response, the members took direct political action. Two weeks after *Nina*'s premiere, the Society formally called upon the National Assembly to outlaw similar translations and submitted yet another petition to that legislative body.[47] This document merits close attention; in it the authors grappled with the problem of defining the nature of intellectual property:

> Et pourra-t-on jamais imaginer qu'un homme ait le droit de vendre la pensée et génie d'un autre homme, malgré lui, à sa porte ou dans ses propres foyers, sous le prétexte que l'énonciation en est différemment accentuée et cadencée?

42 Castelvecchi, 'From *Nina* to *Nina*', 102–112. For a discussion of displays of sensibility by eighteenth-century French audiences see James H. Johnson, *Listening in Paris: A Cultural History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 53–70.

43 See the enthusiastic reviews reprinted in Di Profio, *La révolution des bouffons*, 412–418.

44 At least nine of the Italian operas performed at the Théâtre Feydeau from 1789 to 1790 would have been familiar to Parisian audiences from arrangements that had been made of them during the 1770s and 1780s with French librettos. These works may have been selected for performance by the administration of the Théâtre de Monsieur/Feydeau because of this fact. The phenomenon of these opera parodies (Italian comic operas performed in translation or with a completely new libretto) is discussed in Michael Robinson, '*Opera buffa* into *opéra comique*, 1771–90', in *Music in the French Revolution*, ed. Malcolm Boyd (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 37–56.

45 See *Affiches, annonces et avis divers*, 5 September 1791, 3246–3247; *L'esprit des journaux*, November 1791, 335; *Chronique de Paris*, 5 September 1791, 1000; *Feuille du jour*, 3 September 1791, 519; *Journal de Paris*, 5 September 1791, 1014; *Mercure de France*, 17 September 1791, 114–116. Also see Di Profio, *La révolution des bouffons*, 412–418.

46 See the list of daily performances in McClellan, 'Battling over the Lyric Muse', 453–461.

47 *Pétition adressée à l'Assemblée nationale par les auteurs dramatiques sur la représentation, en France, des pièces françaises, traduites en langue étrangère* (Paris: Du Pont, 1791).

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> Could it ever be possible to imagine that a man has the right to sell the thought and inspiration of another man, against his wishes, at his door or in his own home, under the pretence that it is expressed with different accents and rhythms?[48]

The image of authors' creative work being peddled on their own doorstep without approval conveys the sense of violation Society members felt when confronted by the Feydeau's production of *Nina*. For the Society, intellectual property transcended all translations and adaptations; the intangible nature of creative thought was emphasized rather than the material existence of printed exemplars. Thus the essence of any creation remained the property of the original author. In their opinion, the libretto of the Italian *Nina* depended on the Marsollier original for its existence, and the new opera represented a theft of the original author's intellectual property. They contended that the familiarity of the Parisian theatre-going public with the original opéra comique contributed significantly to the latter's success. *Nina*'s popularity therefore demonstrated the inadequacy of existing laws.[49] In order to safeguard France's literary patrimony, stronger legal protection was required. To support their cause, the authors depicted Marsollier as a French writer stripped of his property by a 'foreign' theatre (that is to say, the Théâtre de Monsieur/Feydeau). The choice of words pointed to the alien nature of Italian opera and the troupe that performed it. The petition assumed that French authors surpassed their Italian counterparts and that the translation of French works into Italian for performances in Paris was nothing less than an insult.[50]

This disparaging attitude towards Italian drama recalled earlier eighteenth-century quarrels that assumed the pre-eminence of French literature. French critics had routinely dismissed Italian comic librettos as a string of implausible and illogical scenes that entertained audiences by means of vulgar humour. It is not surprising, therefore, that reviews of Italian operas at the Théâtre de Monsieur/Feydeau, despite enthusiasm for the quality of the singing, often included complaints about the lack of structure, the absurdity of the plots and the poor taste that characterized Italian librettos.[51] Of course, translation in and of itself was not without its uses. Indeed, the petitioners explicitly mentioned the importance of translation for making the *chefs-d'oeuvres* of foreign authors available to readers of French.[52] However, *Nina* did precisely the opposite. In the eyes of its critics, the Italian opera took a well crafted French work, made it unintelligible, and in the process rendered it less valuable.

Provoking further critical displeasure, the Monsieur/Feydeau's Italian operas often included arias or ensembles not in the original score. Many of these numbers were produced by the composer Luigi Cherubini, who served as the theatre's music director and composed additional arias, ensembles and recitatives in order to accommodate the talents of its troupe of Italian singers.[53] While a small amount of musical emendation might be tolerated, Parisian critics generally viewed this practice unsympathetically. In their opinion, the mixing of airs by various authors and composers within a single entertainment created a work that lacked unity of style. For example, a production of Salieri's *La bella locandiera*, initially advertised by the directors of the theatre as an opera by Paisiello, appalled one reviewer, who wrote: 'The public was not a little surprised to discover in [*La bella locandiera*] many weaknesses, dull moments, and to recognize it as a *cattivo pasticcio*.'[54] The phrase *cattivo pasticcio* (miserable pastiche) underscores the reviewer's disdain for

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48 *Pétition adressée à l'Assemblée nationale par les auteurs dramatiques*, 8–9.

49 *Pétition adressée à l'Assemblée nationale par les auteurs dramatiques*, 4.

50 *Pétition adressée à l'Assemblée nationale par les auteurs dramatiques*, 9.

51 See, for example, *Affiches, annonces et avis divers*, 5 December 1791, 4415; *L'esprit des journaux*, January 1790, 322, and February 1791, 340; *Le spectateur national*, 9 April 1791, 3; *Journal des théâtres*, 9 December 1791, 12.

52 *Pétition adressée à l'Assemblée nationale par les auteurs dramatiques*, 6–7.

53 Information on the Italian opera repertory of the Théâtre de Monsier/Feydeau, including details of musical additions and substitutions, are provided in Di Profio, *La révolution des bouffons*, 437–485. See also Noiray, 'Le répertoire d'opéra italien', 259–275.

54 'Le public n'a pas été peu surpris d'y trouver beaucoup de faiblesse, de froideur, de reconnaître qu'on dit un *cattivo pasticcio*.' *L'esprit des journaux*, May 1792, 315. *Affiches, annonces et avis divers*, 2 March 1792, 854–855, lodged a similar

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Italian opera. The use of Italian was necessary since the concept itself was so decidedly foreign to the lofty ideals of francophone literature being espoused. For these critics the current popularity of Italian opera was a fad on which certain entrepreneurs were capitalizing to attract large audiences. The genre itself was an inherently inferior form of entertainment.[55]

Although such arguments about the merits of French and Italian opera were hardly new, the debate was not a simple repetition of previous battles. The criticism of *Nina* reflected specific concerns of the 1790s. The composers could not accept *Nina* as an independent work of art; to do so would have undermined their efforts to defend the literary and musical products of French citizens from unauthorized translations and performances within France. Certainly, this goal constituted a primary motivation behind their petition to the National Assembly. Yet there was another component to the debate, an aesthetic concern of great significance. The authors invested the French *Nina* with an authenticity that they believed the Paisiello version could never possess, an authenticity based upon originality and musico-textual coherence. This was, they believed, an inextricable element of the original and could not be transferred to a translation. Emphasizing the dangerous precedent being set, the authors described the response of Parisian theatre administrations to the success of Paisiello's opera:

> Déjà les divers théâtres de la Capitale ont annoncé ne vouloir plus risquer des frais d'exploitation, et consentir des rétributions aux Auteurs français pour des Ouvrages qui, dès-lors qu'ils auraient quelqu'éclat seraient aussitôt dérobés par le théâtre de la rue Feydeau, lequel s'en approprierait hardiment tous les avantages, en prenant le lèger soin d'y plaquer quelques brillans morceaux de musique italienne, et sous prétexte du travestissement des paroles dans un idiôme étranger.

> Already the various theatres of the capital have announced that they no longer want to risk any more operating costs by agreeing to pay French authors for works that, from the moment they attract attention, will be stolen by the Théâtre de Feydeau, an enterprise that brazenly reaps advantage by carefully gilding [the operas] a bit with some brilliant pieces of Italian music under the pretext of dressing up the works in a foreign tongue.[56]

In the petitioners' minds Paisiello's music lured audiences away from authentically French theatre by means of gaudy charm. Left unchecked, this situation would not only keep authors from earning a living, but it would threaten the future quality of French literature. In order to safeguard France's literary standing, they demanded even stronger legal protection. The disdainful reference to Italian music as mere ornament also reveals an underlying preoccupation of French authors and composers. The musico-dramatic values of the petitioners were informed by a French aesthetic position that emphasized the special relationship of music and text within opera.[57] The labels 'Italian' and 'French', therefore, were more than stylistic traits loosely associated with certain geographic regions; they constituted separate, and largely opposed, aesthetic standards. For this reason, the authors perceived the Italian libretto to be a mechanical copy of Marsollier set to new and inappropriate music, making it inherently inferior to the original.

Musicians, especially composers of opéra comique, a genre in which the musico-textual bond was deemed particularly tight, implicitly acknowledged this set of operatic values by throwing their support

complaint against the same opera. For information on *La bella locandiera* as performed at the Théâtre de Monsieur/Feydeau see Di Profio, *La révolution des bouffons*, 439–440.

55 One reviewer did warn the Monsieur/Feydeau, 'Si les administrateurs du théâtre de la rue Feydeau n'y prennent pas garde, ils éloigneront le public, qui, tôt ou tard, se venge quand on le trompe.' *Journal des théâtres*, 6 March 1792, 39.

56 *Pétition adressée à l'Assemblée nationale par les auteurs dramatiques*, 4.

57 The nature of the relationship between text and music in French opera, with emphasis on eighteenth-century opéra comique, is explored in David Charlton, 'Continuing Polarities: Opera Theory and Opéra-comique', chapter 2 of *French Opera, 1730–1830: Meaning and Media* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000), 1–50.

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behind the petition.[58] The esteemed composer André-Ernest-Modeste Grétry, for one, expressed his anger at the Monsieur/Feydeau's production shortly before the premiere and actively sought to prohibit similar operas from appearing on Parisian stages in future. Writing to Beaumarchais while *Nina* was in rehearsal, the composer declared that such adaptations constituted a substandard artistic product. In doing so, he focused attention on the collaborative nature of opera.[59] The current laws protecting intellectual property, he feared, permitted a libretto to enter the public domain after the death of the author, even if the composer of the music was still alive. If this situation remained ambiguous and unresolved by lawmakers, Grétry warned, the ties between text and music in French opera would be ignored and more works like the Italian *Nina* would appear, translations on which 'Italian music will be stuck'.[60] In order to generate political sympathy for his position, Grétry raised this issue with Le Chapelier, the legislator who had introduced the 13 January 1791 law. According to the composer:

> J'en parlai un jour à M. Lechapellier, il me dit en propres termes: cela ne doit pas être, vous êtes mari et femme quand vous vous associés pour faire un ouvrage [. . .] c'est l'ouvrage à tous deux, il doit être votre propriété jusque après la mort des deux auteurs.
>
> I spoke of [this matter] one day to M Le Chapelier. He told me in no uncertain terms: this should not be the case; when you collaborate in order to make a work of art, you are husband and wife [. . .] it is the work of both; it ought to be your property until after the death of both creators.[61]

Le Chapelier's comments drew on a marriage metaphor that French librettists and composers had long used to describe their relationship, and in doing so they stressed the indissolubility of music and text in French opera.[62] Tampering with this relationship risked weakening the artistic balance that French composers and librettists had developed over the course of the previous century. The majority of Italian operas, including Paisiello's *Nina*, posed a serious problem by skewing this equilibrium in favour of music, which could only be perceived as a distortion, given French standards. At best, such a work offered mindless diversion, and although such distractions may have appeared harmless to others, they alarmed French critics, who expected dramatic works to possess both moral content and a social purpose that the composer reinforced with music.[63] This pedagogical function, considered a hallmark of the French theatrical tradition, required the libretto to possess a high moral tone in addition to demonstrable literary value. By privileging music, opera buffa made the educational significance of a performance less clear.[64] When listening to Italian opera,

58 Among the signatories of the 1791 *Pétition* was the composer of the French *Nina*, Nicolas Dalayrac, as well as Henri-Montan Berton, Stanislas Champein, Marc-Antoine Desaugières, André-Ernest-Modeste Grétry, Bernardo Porta and Rodolphe Kreutzer. Prominent among the librettists were Benoît-Joseph Marsollier, Jean-François Marmontel and Michel-Jean Sedaine, as well as the aged Charles-Simon Favart and his son Charles Nicolas Joseph Justin Favart. See *Pétition adressée à l'Assemblée nationale par les auteurs dramatiques*, 11.

59 Grétry to Beaumarchais, 18 August 1791, in *La correspondance générale de Grétry*, ed. Georges de Froidcourt (Brussels: Brepols, 1962), 158–159.

60 Grétry, *La correspondance générale*, 158.

61 Grétry, *La correspondance générale*, 158–159.

62 Karro, 'Le musicien', 23–24, and Charlton, 'Continuing Polarities', 13–14.

63 See Charlton, 'Continuing Polarities', 14–36. Only a few exceptional critics of the day argued in favour of uniting the best of French and Italian approaches to opera. See Antoine-Chrysostôme Quatremère de Quincy, *Dissertation sur les opéras bouffons italiens* (Paris, 1789). Quatremère's discussion of music owed a great deal to Michel-Paul-Guy de Chabanon, *De la musique considérée en elle-même et dans ses rapports avec la parole, les langues, la poésie et le théâtre* (Paris: Pissot, 1785; reprinted Geneva: Slatkine, 1969). Regarding the influence of Chabanon's essay on musical thought during the Revolution see Ora Frishberg Saloman, 'French Revolutionary Perspectives on Chabanon's *De la Musique* of 1785', in Boyd, *Music and the French Revolution*, 211–220.

64 *Affiches, annonces et avis divers*, 7 February 1789, 357–359. One Italian author who received praise from French authors was Carlo Goldoni. See the reviews of *Il burbero di buon cuore* in *Affiches, annonces et avis divers*, 24 February 1791, 698; *L'esprit des journaux*, April 1791, 353–354; *Journal général*, 5 March 1791, 256; and *Le spectateur national*, 7 March 1791, 416. See also the obituary for Goldoni in the yearbook *Spectacles de Paris* (1794), 32–46.

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Parisian audiences were encouraged to take pleasure in the music independently, to celebrate its ambiguity, without concern for meaning.[65] For this reason, if an opera buffa gained popular success, reviewers occasionally dismissed its dramatic content and compared the performance to a musical concert. Indeed, the inchoate structure of Italian dramas, in the opinion of some critics, was a by-product of this odd reversal of aesthetic priorities. Italian authors merely provided composers with a suitable foundation for their tunes. In this way, literary thought was replaced by what French authors considered empty sensuous enjoyment.[66]

After 1789, as the Revolution entered increasingly radical phases, calls for dignity and seriousness within theatrical representations intensified and became more political.[67] At a time when clarity and transparency were quickly becoming revolutionary virtues, any perceived emphasis on sensual musical pleasure in Italian opera at the expense of text would have been eyed suspiciously, as a potential symptom of counter-revolution and treason.[68] The revisiting of the aesthetic debate involving text, music and the relative value of the French and Italian traditions, just as revolutionary politics were transforming French culture, assured that the arguments acquired a political resonance. Thus the perceived merits of French and Italian opera were superimposed on issues of revolution, reaction and national identity. During the ancien regime, the monarchy had generated a social hierarchy that provided France with a focus, defining individual subjects with respect to their king. Once France lacked a credible monarch, however, the state needed a new cohesive agent. In this context the concepts of citizenship and shared national identity gained momentum, ultimately replacing fidelity to the crown.[69] Successive revolutionary governments offered citizens a fresh image of themselves, simultaneously stripping society of monarchical inequalities and justifying their rule. In doing so, they developed a national rhetoric that focused on regenerating the past for use in the construction of a utopian future. The new politicized language permitted revolutionaries across the entire political spectrum to criticize the ancien regime for permitting French society to stagnate as well as to establish a sense of a historically constituted community for revolutionary France.[70] As a result, they projected a model of an ideal French nation that had yet to materialize.[71] So although France in the 1790s was far from 'one and indivisible',

65 For example, Cimarosa's music for *Il fanatico burlato* was declared pleasing, but 'les paroles sur lesquelles elle a été composée n'offrant absolument aucun sens, il faut la regarder comme une longue symphonie, dont l'imagination féconde de Cimarosa a fourni seule tous les motifs'. *Affiches, annonces et avis divers*, 30 November 1789, 3420. See also *Chronique de Paris*, 16 April 1790, 423, and 16 May 1790, 543; *Journal de Paris*, 14 March 1789, 333, and 19 March 1789, 361–362.

66 This limited view of music, more typical of French thought of the mid-eighteenth century, was changing at this time, as is evident from selected writings of Michel-Paul-Guy de Chabanon and Bernard Germain Étienne de Lacépède. See Saloman, 'French Revolutionary Perspectives', 216–220. However, widespread attitudes towards the appropriate relationship of music to text in opera, especially in literary circles, changed more slowly.

67 See the articles advocating more dignified theatrical offerings in *Chronique de Paris*, 8 November 1790, 642, and 27 February 1792, 230–232; *Le patriote françois*, 23 June 1790, 2–3; and *Le spectateur national*, 21 February 1791, 360. See also Laura Mason, *Singing the French Revolution: Popular Culture and Politics, 1787–1799* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1996), 84–87. Mason discusses the reaction to the *vaudeville La Chaste Suzanne*, which was criticized for conveying anti-revolutionary sentiments.

68 Hunt, *Politics, Culture and Class*, 44–46, and Johnson, *Listening in Paris*, 116–125.

69 Georges Lefebvre, *The French Revolution*, trans. Elizabeth Moss Evanson, 2 volumes (New York: Columbia University Press, 1962), volume 2, 88–91 and 196–197. See also Otto Dann, 'Introduction', in *Nationalism in the Age of the French Revolution*, ed. Otto Dann and John Dinwiddy (London: Hambledon, 1988), 1–11.

70 The discourse of a 'corrupt' ancien regime that stood in opposition to 'virtuous' revolutionary France as well as the concept of a community based on a shared history and politics are explored in François Furet, 'Ancien Régime', in *A Critical Dictionary of the French Revolution*, ed. François Furet and Mona Ozouf, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 1989), 604–615, and Pierre Nora, 'Nation', in *A Critical Dictionary of the French Revolution*, 742–753.

71 Jacques Godechot, 'The New Concept of the Nation and its Diffusion in Europe', in Dann and Dinwiddy, *Nationalism in the Age of the French Revolution*, 16–18, 26. See also William Sewell, 'Ideologies and Social Revolutions: Reflections on the French Case', *The Journal of Modern History* 57/1 (1985), 83.

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various revolutionary factions contributed to the realization of this goal through the image of a unified *peuple*.[72] The role that this early nationalist rhetoric would contribute to reifying French identity in the post-revolutionary period should not be underestimated. By cultivating the 'nation' through the manipulation of images and ideas, revolutionary governments not only helped make the difficult transition from monarchy to republic,[73] they also inaugurated a process by which the new national identity would eventually enter popular consciousness.[74]

Triggered by legal questions involving intellectual property and drawing upon a long-standing tradition of aesthetic wrangling, the debate over *Nina* invoked many of the political metaphors of the day and as a result participated in this development of identity. The consternation engendered by this opera reveals the extent to which concerns about the issue permeated French society during the 1790s. Clearly, the sundry states that covered the Italian peninsula in the eighteenth century posed no serious political or military threat to France. Nevertheless, the increasing popularity of Italian opera represented a perceived erosion of France's cultural autonomy and posed, within this context, a threat to French cultural – and ultimately national – integrity. Thus the reviewer of the *Le spectateur national* who condemned Paisiello's *Il tamburo notturno* as 'one of those works that, by the absence of any structure, the absurdity of its situations and the vulgarity of its comedy, will ultimately disgust the inhabitants of the capital with purely Italian opera' rejected the opera not only for aesthetic reasons but in support of a politico-cultural ideal as well.[75] It is not surprising, therefore, that the attempt to establish a permanent home for Italian opera in Paris failed less than one year after Paisiello's *Nina* was premiered. This defeat, however, did not result from legislative or judicial intervention but rather from other, unforeseen, political changes. At the very time when the Society of Dramatic Authors and Composers demanded action with respect to this matter, the government was simply occupied with more pressing questions. Aside from its ongoing financial woes and the threat of a food shortage, France was increasingly isolated from neighbouring countries. With the declaration of war against Austria in April 1792, it was essentially cut off from the rest of Europe and in serious danger of losing its valuable colonial possessions.[76] Amid these problems, additional legislation aimed at safeguarding intellectual property was postponed.[77]

The political turmoil adversely affected the Théâtre Feydeau and its troupe of Italian singers. On 10 August 1792 the French monarchy finally collapsed under the pressure of a Parisian insurrection. Insurgents overcame the guard at the Tuileries and forced the royal family to seek sanctuary with the Legislative

72 E. J. Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 21.

73 Hunt, *Politics, Culture and Class*, 123–124.

74 Clive Emsley, 'Nationalist Rhetoric and Nationalist Sentiment in Revolutionary France', in Dann and Dinwiddy, *Nationalism in the Age of the French Revolution*, 39–52. Emsley assesses the gap between the nationalist rhetoric and the extent to which nationalist sentiment penetrated the populace. See also Florence Gauthier, 'Universal Rights and National Interest in the French Revolution', in Dann and Dinwiddy, *Nationalism in the Age of the French Revolution*, 27–37, which examines the differences between various expressions of nationalist rhetoric of the day.

75 '[*Il tamburo notturno*] est un de ces ouvrages, qui, par la nullité de leur contexture, l'absurdité de leurs situations et la bassesse de leur comique, finiront par dégoûter les habitans de la capitale, de l'opéra purement italien.' *Le spectateur national*, 9 April 1791, 3. Other national styles, particularly Spanish, were also pilloried in the press at this time. For example, see *Affiches, annonces et avis divers*, 18 June 1791, 2258, and *L'esprit des journaux*, July 1791, 292.

76 Lefebvre, *The French Revolution*, volume 1, 213–226, and Alfred Cobban, *A History of Modern France*, third edition, 3 volumes (New York: Penguin, 1963), volume 2, 185–200. On the war in the colonies see Jack R. Censer and Lynn Hunt, *Liberty, Equality, Fraternity: Exploring the French Revolution* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2001), 116–129.

77 Postponed, but certainly not forgotten. The 1790s witnessed a series of laws that attempted to address the problems that the legislation of 13 January 1791 had unleashed. See Yves-Claude Jourdain, *Table générale-alphabétique des matières contenues dans les décrets rendus par les Assemblées nationales de France depuis 1789 jusqu'à 18 brumaire an 8* (Paris: Belin, 1802–1803), 606, and McClellan, 'Battling over the Lyric Muse', 328–342.

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Assembly. Over the next few days radical elements in Paris were able to dictate the immediate course of the Revolution. They required the suspension of the king and demanded a new constitution. Between the events of 10 August and the opening of the newly elected National Convention on 21 September 1792 Paris remained in a constant state of unrest. Amid the political instability, most of the Italians attached to the Théâtre de Monsieur/Feydeau hastily fled France, fearing the random violence.[78] Their abrupt departure left Paris bereft of a resident troupe of Italian singers for the remainder of the decade.[79] Thus the Revolution entered a new stage of development, and the theatres of Paris followed suit, turning their attention away from foreign distractions. As the Revolution approached its most radical phase, the Terror, *opéra italien* was forgotten; *opéra français* would be the order of the day.

78 The exception was Luigi Cherubini, who remained employed by the theatre. Nonetheless, he left Paris for part of 1793 and resided in the north of France, in and around Le Havre. See Stephen Charles Willis, 'Luigi Cherubini, a Study of His Life and Dramatic Music, 1795–1815' (PhD dissertation, Columbia University, 1975), 33–36.

79 Of course the nineteenth century witnessed the return of Italian singers and Italian opera to Paris, but by then the political turmoil of the 1790s had given way to the authoritarian stability of the Consulate and Empire. The most thorough account of the nineteenth-century Théâtre Italien is Janet L. Johnson, 'The Théâtre Italien and Opera and Theatrical Life in Restoration Paris, 1818–1827' (PhD dissertation, University of Chicago, 1988).

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