Representing the Political

Chair: Lawrence Schehr, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

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Staging Identity: Delphine de Girardin's Theater and the Second Empire

When she began writing for *La Presse* in 1836, Delphine de Girardin re-invented herself as a writer, transforming her identity from self-proclaimed "Muse de la Patrie" to *Vicomte de Launay.* Critics such as Cheryl A. Morgan have focused upon Girardin's transition from Muse to Vicomte, and her witty, satirical writings have earned much-deserved respect as innovative journalism. Despite the recent critical interest, there has been little discussion of Girardin's transformation from journalist to dramatist. Although it might seem that Girardin discarded her political satire for a lucrative career in the theater, devoting the last seven years of her life to writing comedies, further exploration of her plays reveals a continuation of the political satire from her *Courrier de Paris*.

Rejecting the exotic as did other women playwrights such as Virginie Ancelot and Sophie Bawr, Girardin's comedies focus on France, forcing a reconsideration of contemporaneous society. The plays therefore engage the audience in a re-examination of the values of the Revolution, using apparently domestic themes as a vehicle. *C'est la faute du mari* (1851), centering on an inept husband who fears his wife is unfaithful, allows Girardin to satirize government repression in the early years of the Second Empire. *La Joie fait peur* (1854) highlights familial devotion and patriotism while subtly revealing Girardin's views on freedom of expression when a long-lost son, brother and fiancé, presumed dead, returns home. *Une femme qui déteste son mari* (1856) similarly emphasizes liberty and devotion, depicting a wife who outwits the Reign of Terror in order to protect her Revolutionary husband. Through her use of wit to simultaneously highlight and conceal her attacks, Girardin was able to protest Napoléon III's betrayal of Republican values in the public arena of the theater, portraying a society whose superficial stability conceals a crisis of political identity.

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Witness to an execution, or Victor Hugo's conversion

The nineteenth century was a volatile and chaotic era in French history, a tumultuous time of extreme political and social change. Coming of age during the 1820's, Victor Hugo made his first step into politics with a heartfelt stance against capital punishment. Commentators such as Foucault have noted that the Empire used public execution for the dual purposes of spectacle and control. Biographers maintain Hugo's political radicalization was due to his mother's influence. However, this paper will argue that the predominate cause of Hugo's political independence was a childhood trauma that occurred in French-occupied Spain. At the age of 10, he witnessed a boy's decapitated body and severed limbs nailed to a crucifix on the orders of his father, a general in Napoleon's army. This trauma lay dormant for 10 years until he witnessed another execution at the age of 20. The power of the first experience, when reawakened by the second, transformed Hugo from bourgeois conformist to liberal humanitarian. Examination of his

personal and political writings, *le Dernier Jour d'un Condamné* of 1829, *Napoléon le petit* of 1852, and *Les Misérables*, written in exile from France during 1860-1862, will reveal the significance of witnessing these two executions, and will shed new light on the Empire's effect on the life and works of France's most prized author.

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Getting Personal: Marius Pontmercy and the End of Politics in *Les Misérables*

In Victor Hugo's *Les Misérables*, the political climate of the early part of the Nineteenth Century frequently takes center stage, most notably, perhaps, in the character of Marius Pontmercy. He is raised in an anachronistic and sepulchral society of the *salon ultra*, is reborn through his discovery of the heroism of the Empire, and he faces death on the republican barricades of the 1832 insurrection. One might therefore reasonably presume that his presence in the novel is of primarily political significance, as a way of representing both the author's own political transformations and his notion of political progress in society at large. In this paper, however, I will show the ways in which Marius's political journey is motivated not by pure conviction, but rather by forces that are first and foremost personal and emotional. In his initial conversion from royalism to Bonapartism, in his decision to join the cause of the insurrection, and in his eventual reconciliation with his royalist grandfather, I will show that the personal and the political are not only in constant dialogue, but are also constantly substituted for one another in a dynamic that undermines and ultimately eliminates the rigid divisions created by a highly politicized society—one of the forms of exclusion that is, for Hugo, at the root of *la misère* .

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Allegory and Exoticism: Balzac's allusion to Delacroix

Filled with exotic imagery, death and half-naked women, it is easy to see why Balzac's 1834 novella, *La Fille aux yeux d'or,* is dedicated to "Eugène Delacroix, peintre."[1] The two possibly knew each other as early as 1824, and Balzac clearly draws his inspiration for Paquita, the "jeune créole des Antilles," from Delacroix's exotic female figures (272).[2]

Critics have long appreciated Delacroix's importance when reading *La Fille,* but they have nonetheless overlooked a striking allusion to Delacroix's then scandalous *Liberty Leading the People* (1831) in the bloody dénouement of Balzac's novel as the Marquise stands bare-breasted with hair flying over a dead body. I show that this allusion resonates with the political and social context of the July Monarchy, even though the story of De Marsay and Paquita takes

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[1] P. 244. *La Fille aux yeux d'or,* Gallimard : Paris, 1976. Ed. Rose Fortassier. All future citations will be to this edition.

[2] Rose Fortassier notes that Balzac met Delacroix through painter Horace Raisson, adding that Balzac was a particular admirer of *Les Femmes d'Alger dans leur appartement* from the Salon of 1834, and that Delacroix penned his high regard for *Louise Lambert* around the time Balzac started writing *La Fille* (395).

place during the Hundred Days.[3] More than just a wink to an admirer, the allusion to Delacroix's fleshy and hirsute Liberty actually represents a far-reaching historical commentary on the end of allegory amid the rampant materialism of the 1830's.

Although intended as an allegory for the Republic, Delacroix's Liberty never materialized out of the smoke of *Les Trois Glorieuses.* Instead, stripped of her lofty valence by the coming of the Monarchy, only her bare breasted body remains. Balzac's hymn of "gold and pleasure" therefore closes with a fitting allusion not to Delacroix's *allegory*, but to her *body*.[4] Like the exotic Paquita, Balzac's allusion goes to show that everything is for sale in modern Paris—from sexual to national identity. A mere four years after the July Revolution, Balzac refutes Delacroix in *La Fille*, revealing that allegory holds no deeper meaning than the gaudy plaster facades of the cabaret.[5] Allegory, suggests Balzac, is the price of materialism.

[3] The story takes place " […] vers le milieu du mois d'avril, en 1815 […], " toward the beginning of the so-called Hundred Days, which elapsed from Napoleon's return to Paris from exile to the restoration of the Bourbon Dynasty with Louis XVIII (March 20th to July 8th, 1815) (273).

[4] "Qui donc domine en ce pays sans mœurs, sans croyance, sans aucun sentiment; mais d'où partent et où aboutissent tous les sentiments, toutes les croyances et toutes les mœurs? L'or et le plaisir " (247) ; " Toute passion à Paris se résout par deux termes : or et plaisir " (260).

[5] Balzac paints Paris as "[…] cette grande cage de plâtre, […]" (247). Gone are the days of lofty revolutionary ideals : " Sans les cabarets, le gouvernement ne serait-il pas renversé tous les mardis ? " (249).