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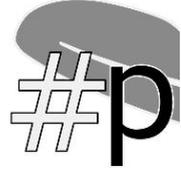
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Vie des théâtres et poésie dramatique du Consulat à la Restauration  
(1799-1823)

Sous la direction de Pierre Frantz et Paola Perazzolo

**Pixerécourt, Radcliffe and Ducray-Duminil:  
the Gothic and melodrama during  
the Directory and Consulate**

Katherine Astbury

**Per citare l'articolo**

Katherine Astbury, «Pixerécourt, Radcliffe and Ducray-Duminil: the Gothic and melodrama during the Directory and Consulate», *Publifarum*, 37, 2022, p. 63-82.

## Résumé

Cet article examine le rôle des romans dans le développement du mélodrame pendant la période du Directoire et du Consulat (1795-1804). Guilbert de Pixierécourt, qui a dominé la scène théâtrale française du début du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle avec un mélange de drame sentimental, de musique et de spectacle pour le grand public, appelé mélodrame, a connu ses premiers succès théâtraux avec les adaptations pour la scène des romans de l'écrivaine gothique anglaise la plus populaire en France, Ann Radcliffe, et de l'auteur français à succès François Guillaume Ducray-Duminil, dont l'œuvre porte un certain nombre de marques de Radcliffe. Ces adaptations révéleront l'importance du Gothique dans le développement du mélodrame et les priorités politiques, esthétiques et dramatiques de cette période peu étudiée.

## Abstract

This article looks at the role of novels in the development of melodrama across the Directory and Consulate period (1795-1804). Guilbert de Pixierécourt, who dominated the French theatrical scene of the early 19<sup>th</sup> century with a blend of sentimental drama, music, and large-scale spectacle that came to be called melodrama, had his first theatrical successes with adaptations for the stage of novels by the most popular English Gothic writer in France, Ann Radcliffe, and the bestselling French author François Guillaume Ducray-Duminil, whose work bears a number of Radcliffian hallmarks. These adaptations will reveal the significance of the Gothic in the development of melodrama and the political, aesthetic and dramatic priorities of this under-researched period.

## The Directory

Guilbert de Pixierécourt dominated the French theatrical scene of the early 19<sup>th</sup> century with a blend of sentimental drama, music, and large-scale spectacle that came to be called melodrama but his earliest dramatic successes during the Directory and the Consulate owed much to the vogue for the Gothic. In 1798 he adapted for the stage two novels of the most popular English Gothic writer in France, Ann Radcliffe, and, during both the Directory and the Consulate, he adapted several novels by the French author François Guillaume Ducray-Duminil, whose work bears a number of Radcliffian hallmarks. The place of these plays in the development of the Gothic in France has been touched upon by writers such as Alice Killen, and in the development of Pixierécourtian

melodrama by a range of critics from Nodier via Diane Hoeveler to Katherine Hambridge and Jonathan Hicks. As Marcie Frank has outlined, « A circuit of novelistic and dramatic traffic running between England, France, and Germany was an important enabling factor in the proliferation of mixed-genre theater pieces in the 1790s, including historical drama, sentimental drama, Gothic drama, melodrama, and Gothic opera » (FRANK 2013: 537). Nevertheless, Pixerécourt's adaptations of Radcliffe and Ducray-Duminil have not yet been placed side-by-side in the broader theatrical context in order to consider what the adaptations tell us about the political as well as the aesthetic and dramatic priorities of the age. This article will therefore place these plays – and thereby the reception in France of Radcliffe, and the role of the Gothic in the development of melodrama – in the theatrical and political context of the late 1790s and early 1800s.

## Radcliffe in France

Pixerécourt's *La Forêt de Sicile*, a « drame lyrique » inspired by Radcliffe's *A Sicilian Romance*, was first performed April 1798 with music by Gresnick, and *Le Château des Apennins*, a 5-act *drame* based on her *Mysteries of Udolpho* was first performed in December 1798. Ann Radcliffe was the most critically acclaimed of the British Gothic authors translated into French primarily because in her novels the supernatural was always explained – the French critics (and through them indirectly the reading public) were reluctant to accept the implications of the unexplained supernatural and so found her novels easier to embrace (see HALL 2005 and ASTBURY 2010). Although a translation of her *Romance of the Forest* had attracted the attention of the literary journals in 1794, it was not until the Directory that she cemented her reputation as the leading exponent of the genre. In 1797, translations of English Gothic novels flooded the literary scene, and the English Gothic became all the rage on the stage as well as in bookshops for the rest of the decade. Two of Radcliffe's major novels, *The Mysteries of Udolpho* and *The Italian*, were translated into French in 1797, the latter in two different versions, and *A Sicilian Romance* came out in translation in 1798. Radcliffe's novels were quickly adapted for the French stage – there were at least 5 plays adapted from her novels in 1798<sup>1</sup> –, helping the Gothic to become the dominant mode of artistic impression in France. The genre was characterised by the sceptical *Décade*

*philosophique* as being for those who liked « à laisser [leur] imagination errer au milieu des bois, des rochers, des déserts, des ruines », for those who were attracted to « des tableaux de prisons, d'églises gothiques, de couvens, d'ermitages », where « des scènes douces, mélancoliques » would alternate with « scènes terribles, déchirantes » (DÉCADE 1797 : 541).

The Gothic novelists translated into France at this time were mostly liberal writers, those associated with the English Jacobins (ASTBURY 2002: 80). Above all the French seemed to want to read novels about the abuse of power, familial secrets, questions of inheritance and legitimacy as these struck a chord with issues of very real concern in the post-Thermidorian context. French writers who exploited the Gothic in turn largely relied on the sentimental Radcliffian model of familial secrets being uncovered and order restored. The most successful of these is Ducray-Duminil, whose early, pre-Revolutionary novel *Alexis* is said to have inspired Radcliffe (MAYO 1941: 501; HUMPHREY 1959: 137; GILLET 1984: 63), and whose *Victor ou l'enfant de la forêt* (1797) would be Pixérécourt's first major stage success when it premiered towards the end of 1798.

## La forêt de Sicile

Radcliffe's *A Sicilian Romance* (1790) was translated into French in 1797 as *Julia, ou Les souterrains du chateau de Mazzini* and it was one of several texts that fed into Guilbert de Pixérécourt's « drame lyrique », *La Forêt de Sicile* which premiered the following year. Pixérécourt, a nobleman who had briefly emigrated before offering his services to the Revolutionary administration, had tried, without much success to break through into the Parisian theatre scene during the 1790s. Exact totals for performances of *La Forêt de Sicile* aren't known, but Pixérécourt himself gave the figure of 82 for Paris and 76 in the provinces and comments from Rémusat in 1803 suggests that the figure may be over a hundred in Paris (MARTIN & ROBARDY-EPPSTEIN 2013: 353). It is, in terms of performance dates, the earliest successful Pixérécourt play to draw on the Gothic tradition.

While Roxane Martin and Sylviane Robardy-Eppstein demonstrate clearly how *La Forêt de Sicile*, despite being a « drame lyrique », is « un jalon décisif dans la carrière naissante de Pixérécourt » (MARTIN & ROBARDY-EPPSTEIN 2013: 339), they make little of the connection to Radcliffe's novel *A Sicilian Romance*, seeing Lewis' *Monk* and Schiller's *Die Räuber* as more significant influences on a play which they judge to be an

amalgam of « episodes disjoints pris aux auteurs d'outre-Manche et d'outre-Rhin» (MARTIN & ROBARDEY-EPPSTEIN 2013: 350). But the fact that this is the first successful proto-melodrama of Pixerécourt's that made it to the stage, and that the choice of title so firmly echoes Radcliffe's text, mean that we should not dismiss the « Radcliffe effect », and it is worth considering the connection between the two writers' texts here. The heroine of both texts is called Julia, and Pixerécourt's « drame lyrique » does make occasional references to the castle of Mazzini and both texts refer to the prevalence of banditti, though the playwright makes much more of them than the author, in part of course because banditry has become an issue in France by 1797 (ANDRIES 2021). Until very recently, Pixerécourt's plays were seen as non- or a-political but work by Roxane Martin in the presentation of the *Classiques Garnier* edition of his melodramas has shown how there are not only close biographical ties between Pixerécourt and his plays but also intricate links to the socio-political issues of their day. The « drame lyrique » focuses on banditti who only feature briefly in the plot of *A Sicilian Romance*. Pixerécourt also borrows elements of another Radcliffe (non-translated) novel, *The Romance of the Forest* (1791), notably the stranding of a couple and their servant in a forest, though in *La Forêt de Sicile*, Pixerécourt's travellers find themselves in a bandits' hideout and only escape being murdered by the quick-witted thinking of Julia's mother's friend Antonia, who had been abducted by the leader and kept in the forest against her will. The bandits are repeatedly and unambiguously described as « monstres » or « scélérats » who are only interested in spilling blood and ruining families, but the virtuous Antonia ensures that they are defeated and the threat that the bandits posed to the region nullified. The forest setting and the storm with which the play opens are gestures towards the Gothic, but Pixerécourt is taking advantage of Radcliffe's popularity to lead audiences to the Théâtre Variétés-Montansier and the marketing strategy seemed to have worked.

## Ducray-Duminil and the trauma of the Revolution

Pixerécourt was reading Radcliffe and Ducray-Duminil concurrently in 1797 as he was working on both *La Forêt de Sicile* and *Victor ou l'enfant de la forêt*. In fact, his *drame* based on Ducray-Duminil's novel was offered first, though made it to stage after the «

drame lyrique ». The adaptation of *Victor* would be the first unequivocal success for Pixérécourt and would make him as a playwright.

François-Guillaume Ducray-Duminil was one of the most successful novelists of the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, although he attracted little scholarly attention before Łukasz Szkopiński's 2016 study of his *œuvre*. His 1789 novel *Alexis ou la maisonnette dans les bois* influenced Ann Radcliffe but, during the Revolution, Ducray-Duminil threw himself energetically into propagandistic short stories extolling the regeneration of the nation before being imprisoned during the Terror, which led to a personal reassessment of how « la vertu peut elle-même devenir criminelle sans le savoir » (DUCRAY-DUMINIL An V: I, 26), to borrow a line from his 1797 novel *Victor ou l'enfant de la forêt* which is, in part, a working through of his own responses to the trauma of the Revolution (ASTBURY 2012: 120-125). Critics have long recognised the link in Ducray's novel *Victor* between what Jean Gillet calls the terror of the narrative « la terreur du récit » and the Terror of history « la Terreur de l'histoire » (GILLET 1984: 20), despite the 17th-century setting. Michael Tilby has shown how the bandit leader Roger is a representation of Robespierre (TILBY 1986: 423). The Gothic became a way for writers to explore the tensions and contradictions inherent in the Revolution and for a recasting of the Jacobins as « villains » under the Directory. The sentimental novel's revival after the downfall of Robespierre, after being problematised and politicised during the Terror (TRAHARD 1936 and VINCENT-BUFFAULT 1986: 84-102); provided a space for shared trauma and a new imaged community (SOL 2004).

The French Revolution, and more specifically the period of radicalism known as the Terror, can be seen as providing an emotive shock linked to « une situation où le sujet a senti sa vie menacée » (LAPLANCHE & PORTALIS 1973: 286). But the Terror can also be seen as a collective traumatic event affecting an entire community. For Kai Erikson, collective trauma is:

a blow to the basic tissues of social life that damages the bonds attaching people together and impairs the prevailing sense of communality. The collective trauma works its way slowly and even insidiously into the awareness of those who suffer from it, so it does not have the quality of suddenness normally associated with "trauma". But it is a form of shock all the same, a gradual realization that the community no longer exists as an effective source of support and that an important part of the self has disappeared (ERIKSON 1995: 187).

This sense of trauma affecting a community and not just an individual can usefully be adapted to the radical phase of the French Revolution when there was a collective

sense that the world had been turned upside down and previous certainties about family and the structure of society seemed no longer to apply. Trauma theory allows us to re-examine the apparently non-political as a response to the upheaval of the Revolution, since those who have been subject to a traumatic experience are affected by « the impact of its very incomprehensibility » (CARUTH 1996: 6). It also allows us to look for tensions in the sentimental genres, for displacement or disguise, for traces of the effect of the Revolution, rather than the 'direct' representation of historical reality. There are now a number of studies on how the novel of the Revolutionary decade reflects trauma, but given that, as Suzette A. Henke reminds us in her succinct summary of the principal trauma theorists, « it is through the very process of rehearsing and re-enacting a drama of mental survival that the trauma narrative effects psychological catharsis » (HENKE 1998: xix), it seems useful to extend the exploration of trauma to the theatre of the period. The « acting out » that Henke talks about is often not verbal but gestural or physical, and the way to recovery is to be able to remember consciously and verbalise the traumatic event, to understand the relation between event and symptom, and to recognise that the threat is now over. It is, therefore, significant that Pixerécourt begins his theatrical career with three plays – two adaptations from Radcliffe and one from Ducray-Duminil – which share not simply close thematic links but what Cathy Caruth has labelled «insistently recurring words or figures » (CARUTH 1996: 5). They might therefore be seen as a way of working through of the radical phase of the Revolution. The three plays are bandit plays, all written within a year, all performed within seven months of each other, and underpinned by the same ideology.

## Victor ou l'enfant de la forêt

Pixerécourt's adaptation of Ducray-Duminil's Gothic sentimental novel *Victor ou l'enfant de la forêt* is a striking example of the intertwining of politics and theatre at this critical moment for the Directory. When the play was first performed in May 1798, a debate about the moral and political purpose of theatre in the Conseil des cinq-cents had been going on for more than six months. The play was performed in the same month as Babeuf's execution; the defeat of a terrorist (the Directory made little attempt to distinguish Babeuvism from Terrorism from general left-wing opposition) is

of course paralleled in the play. The link that contemporary audiences made between Roger, a self-proclaimed 'independent' (or brigand), and Robespierre is well known, and the play was briefly banned in November 1798. Pixierécourt had to rewrite the third act so that the play revolved primarily around the restoration of order and the reinforcement of republican values. The play thus reflects some of the political uncertainty of 1798 but few of the moral complexities at the heart of Ducray-Duminil's novel. The eponymous hero must persuade his father, leader of a band of brigands, to renounce his lawless ways before his adopted father will let him marry his daughter. Pixierécourt presents a much less ambiguous portrayal of the bandit figure than Ducray-Duminil who carefully creates parallels between the two fathers to show how concepts of good and evil are not straightforward. In Pixierécourt's adaptation, Roger repents and asks for his son's forgiveness before dying on stage, the last action of the play. It struck a chord with audiences; there would eventually be over 800 performances, with several reprises well into the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

## Le Château des Apennins

After this first big success, Pixierécourt offers his first play conceived with guarantee of performance, an adaptation of another Ann Radcliffe novel, *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, entitled *Le Château des Apennins ou le fantôme vivant*, which premiered at the Ambigu-comique in December 1798. It went on to have 41 performances in Paris, though only 5 performances in the provinces, according to the figures Pixierécourt gives us in his *Théâtre choisi*, and was, therefore, less successful than Pixierécourt's other Radcliffian production, *La Forêt de Sicile*, earlier the same year. One possible reason for its more moderate success was perhaps the choice of 5 acts. The *Censeur dramatique* complained that the audience found the play too long, especially because of the long intervals which the elaborate scene sets required (20 frimaire An VII). While Pixierécourt only took inspiration from Radcliffe for *La Forêt de Sicile*, *Le Château des Apennins* is in fact an adaptation and retains many of the Gothic elements of the original. To comply with French theatrical conventions, the play focuses on just one part of the novel – the time Emilie spends in Montoni's castle. While some elements of dialogue follow the novel closely (Emilie and Anna discussing the latter's « extreme aptitude to credit the marvellous » (RADCLIFFE 1980: 235)), much has been simplified to make it work on stage. Montoni wants to sacrifice Emilie to his ambition by marrying her to

fellow bandit Morano who wants to kill Montoni on the wedding day and thereby be rid of his partner in crime whilst inheriting Emilie's fortune. The Italian setting enables Pixerécourt to play with masks and poison but Morano's plot to poison Montoni during the festivities is foiled and he is locked up by the castle's jailor who is in fact in his pay. Act II hinges on the appearance of the ghost of the subtitle to protect Emilie and Anna; here Pixerécourt is conforming with the vogue for *revenants* sweeping Parisian theatres at the time, but the ghost only serves to protect and isn't particularly supernatural or terrifying and its dramatic purpose is negligible. The 'ghost' is used in a way that is almost tongue in cheek – it is only the servant Anna who is perturbed by the rumours and the sight of the ghost – none of the principal characters are in any way bothered or afraid and the issue of the *revenant* is relegated thereby to the side lines. It is a matter that might frighten the unenlightened or the uneducated but is almost ignored by everyone else.

The oscillations between Montoni and Morano having the upper hand occupy much of the remainder of the play and act 4 is particularly clumsy. It has a stage split into 3 locations but the third, the ramparts and forest above the dungeons, is barely used and the recourse to secret passages is overused. Republican Venice is held up as the protector of the innocent and scourge to tyrants and usurpers and the ending reinforces the moderate republicanism of the Directory. When one of the Venetian soldiers is tempted to mete out justice to Montoni, Alfred stops him: « la loi seule peut prononcer sur son compte » he says (PIXERÉCOURT 2013: 804); it is for the Senate to distribute justice, not individuals. It is also significant that there is no older generation at the end of the play only the new, Alfred the soldier and Emilie the heiress. Do we see the first indication of Pixerécourt's nascent bonapartism developing here? It is the law-upholding young soldier who negates the threat of the *condottieri*...

The characterisation of the two noblemen has been changed by Pixerécourt. Radcliffe repeatedly shows Montoni to be governed by money, proposing Emilie's marriage to Morano out of avarice, and depicts Morano to be similarly motivated by money and pride. In Pixerécourt, although a desire for money is at the root of Montoni's actions, he is above all presented as bandit, who profits from the divisions in the country to serve whichever side is most beneficial. Morano is driven primarily by a thirst for power. The motivations of the two characters hence become firmly politicised in the stage adaptation and the Italian context becomes a metaphor for the divisions of

Revolutionary France. That the two characters are represented as bandits, links them firmly to the 'villain' in *Victor* and to the outlaws in *La Forêt de Sicile*. The links between the plays are reinforced by the stage settings for *Victor* and *Le Château des Apennins*, both performed at the Ambigu-Comique and quite possibly using the same set. The description of the castle courtyard for Act II of *Victor* and III of *Le Château* resemble each other closely. The audience at the theatre would be reminded of *Victor* in seeing *Le Château*, strengthening the thematic links between them.

The focus of Pixérécourt's adaptation is on the struggle both between the forces of disorder (which of Montoni or Morano will get the upper hand in their battle for supremacy) and between disorder and order as the Venetian troops, sent by the Senate, aim to overthrow the château. Alfred, the leader of these troops, is, in the novel, a nameless young officer, but Pixérécourt masterfully combines him with Emily's lover Valancourt to make a single protagonist fighting the cause of innocence and justice at the head of the Republic's forces. The hero and heroine are eventually freed from the unjust persecutions of the villain, the shackles of tyranny thrown off. The two villains, each intent on furthering their own aims at the expense of the heroine, and the manipulation of democratic processes reflect the tensions between neo-Jacobinism and royalist resurgence that threatened the stability of the Fructidorean regime.

Pixérécourt's recourse to Radcliffe seems to have less to do with the Gothic than the novel's subplot about banditry. The subtitle of *Le Château des Apennins*, was changed from « les Mystères d'Udolphe » to « le fantôme vivant » (MARTIN 2013: 699), which emphasises the non-supernatural nature of the ghost and suggests that the supernatural elements are to lure an audience but are less important than the political implications of the in-fighting of the *condottieri*. Nevertheless, the Gothic vogue, with its ritualised repetition of a stock narrative, helps, according to Diane Long Hoeveler « to expose and then relieve for its readers the anxieties produced in a new world in which neither a king nor a pope (nor their representatives) dominate the subjectivity or agency of the new bourgeois citizen » (LONG HOEVELER 2010: 54). In her work on French and British Gothic opera, Hoeveler talks of Rescue operas « constructing a distant past that the opera reshapes as redeemable through the elimination of corrupt aristocrats » (LONG HOEVELER & DAVIES CORDOVA 2004: 4). In fact, with his melodramas, Pixérécourt is not constructing a distant past but the present, even a future. The very recent Revolutionary upheaval is being worked through in the repetition of the bandit figure from one play to the next.

Banditry was a very real problem in France in the 1790s. A number of people took advantage of the political upheaval to lose their original identities and reinvent themselves. While at the beginning of the Revolution Lamartelière's adaptation of Schiller's *Die Räuber* promoted the idea of the noble bandit, and there was a positive identification between bandit and revolutionary, Pixerécourt's three plays have moved away from this more positive image to a representation of the bandit as disruptive, profiteering, scurrilous and without a conscience. Pixerécourt's melodramas of the Directory period were an expression of the trauma of the French Revolution and a stage in the process of coming to terms with the deep divisions in French society that the events of the Revolution created. His refashioning of Radcliffe and Ducray-Duminil can be seen as offering a way of experiencing the Revolution and a way of connecting to the new world order. As the political landscape was redrawn by Napoleon Bonaparte, and although Ducray-Duminil will remain a central source of inspiration, Pixerécourt moved away from using Ann Radcliffe as the vogue for the Gothic waned.

## The Consulate

Pixerécourt has no melodrama performed in 1799. His fallow period coincides with the political uncertainty caused by insurgency across France, unsuccessful calls for the *patrie* to be declared in danger, and, of course, the coup d'état of 18 brumaire (November). Examining the adaptations that Pixerécourt produced of three more Ducray-Duminil novels will enable us to see a shift in the production of melodrama between the Directory and the Consulate. While the source of plots remains the same – for now – the political context for the production of melodrama has changed. Censorship of the theatre had been introduced by the provisional Consulate almost immediately (26 brumaire), principally to put a halt to *pièces de circonstance* about the events at Saint-Cloud, but it meant that police approval was required for all plays, limiting freedom of expression on the stage (press restrictions would follow in January 1800). The early months of the Consulate were marked by anti-jacobinism and hostility to royalists but also by reconciliation with moderates of all persuasions. The provisional Consulate wanted to reassure moderate republicans that they should support the regime, landowners that they were valued, emigres' families that they would not be held hostage,

and initial gestures towards religious appeasement were also made. The year 1800 was marked by a vigorous campaign to bring law and order to the country, with special tribunals to deal with brigands for instance and with a certain sense (especially after the victory at Marengo in June 1800) that the new regime might be able to provide the order, stability and harmony that the country needed (CROOK 1998: chapter 3).

## *Rosa and Cœlina*

Pixerécourt's two plays from 1800 show how some of the regime changes are filtering through to the stage. The first, *Rosa ou l'érmitage du torrent*, breaks away from using Gothic novels as the basis for the plot. Roxane Martin has shown how it contains « un réseau de thèmes dont on perçoit clairement qu'ils relèvent d'une éthique construite au gré des épisodes malheureux ayant ponctué sa vie sous la Révolution » (MARTIN 2013 : 821). This reworking of his personal experiences, particularly during his brief period of emigration, into his theatre is a technique also seen in novelists of the early 19<sup>th</sup> century who were forced into emigration (ASTBURY 2002: 132-155). Displacing personal experiences onto fictional characters became a means to assimilating the trauma of the Terror. As Sander Gilman has pointed out, projecting fear onto literature means it is « not we who totter on the brink of collapse, but the Other » (GILMAN 1988: 1).

In August 1800, *Rosa ou l'érmitage du torrent* premiered at the Gaîté the month before another Ducray-Duminil adaptation, *Cœlina, ou l'enfant du mystère*, began its run at the Ambigu-Comique. Each was labelled a « drame en 3 actes en prose et à grand spectacle » but whilst *Rosa* had a relatively limited performance run, *Cœlina* would be one of Pixerécourt's most successful plays (387 performances in Paris, 1089 in the provinces). A comparison of the two texts allows us to trace the evolution of what will soon be known as melodrama as Pixerécourt reuses ideas and practices found in *Rosa* but develops and refines them in *Cœlina*.

*Rosa* allows us to see the transition from pantomime to melodrama clearly. The plot is so simple that it could be followed without listening to any of the dialogue. There is no back story, and the restricted number of characters makes the plot straightforward to follow. The most emotionally dramatic scenes are mime scenes (most notably Act III scene iv where the villainous Théodore conveys to the abducted heroine that he will not take her son from her « à condition que Rosa couronnera sa flamme »

(PIXERÉCOURT 2013: 882). The play's finale similarly is without dialogue: Rosa's husband Alphonse shoots Théodore before the villain can kill Rosa. The story line is, of course, a very familiar one – the oppression of a virtuous peasant by a seigneur was a standard 18<sup>th</sup>-century trope. One area of novelty, however, was in the natural setting for act II. It's a setting that Pixerécourt (or audiences) liked so much that it appears in almost identical form in *Cœlina* too. « Acte second : un lieu sauvage et pittoresque. Dans le fond s'élève un pont de bois entre deux montagnes, du haut desquelles se précipite un torrent écumeux en formant plusieurs cascades » (PIXERÉCOURT 2013 : 15). Here it is just a setting for an encounter with the hermit who does what he can to help Rosa but is ultimately powerless against the villains, in *Cœlina* it is the location of the the dénouement where the villain does battle on the bridge, pushing one man off, before being overcome by force of numbers. The escalation of dramatic purpose to the wild surroundings in *Cœlina* is typical of how prototype elements in *Rosa* are expanded upon in *Cœlina*.

*Cœlina* is drawn from the best-selling Ducray-Duminil novel of the same name, and the novel provides backstory, dialogue and characterisation that, coupled with the greater budget, orchestra, and stage size of the Ambigu-Comique allowed Pixerécourt to think big. The plot of the novel also afforded Pixerécourt greater opportunity to play with suspense and reversal of situation, most notably when the festivities to celebrate the forthcoming marriage between Cœlina and her 'cousin' Stephany are interrupted by Truguelin's letter announcing that he is not the son of her guardian's brother. There is also more room for Truguelin to become aware of his guilt - his conscience grows in line with his fear in the course of the play. Whereas Théodore in *Rosa* dies unrepentant, Truguelin is led away « profondément accablé » (PIXERÉCOURT 2013: 1022). The themes of the two plays converge on the post-Thermidorian idea that crime catches up with those who commit it. Théodore is warned by Rosa that his vassals will take revenge for his persecutions and a *ronde* at the end of *Cœlina* spells out for us the message that

De l'ombre en vain l'on couvre,  
Les crimes que l'on a commis;  
Tôt ou tard ça s'découvre. (PIXERÉCOURT 2013: 1025).

Issues of inheritance and legitimacy are integral to the plot of *Cœlina* just as they are central to the novel and they will be at the heart of Pixérécourt's next adaptation of a Ducray-Duminil novel, *Le Pèlerin blanc* drawn from *Les Petits Orphelins du hameau*.

### *Le Pèlerin blanc*

First performed in April 1801, *Le Pèlerin blanc* would be the most successful of Pixérécourt's plays in the provinces (1147 performances with 386 in Paris). In part, this popularity outside Paris is due to the fact that the staging is more straightforward than many of his other plays: the sets and machinery required are not as complex. We are beginning to see a shift away from the atmospheric Gothic to psychological Gothic (though the château in Act II remains firmly embedded in the Gothic tradition). It is the emotional conflict that takes precedence (as well of course as two actresses dressed as young boys – guaranteed to make the play attractive to a sizeable part of the audience). The plot follows how two boys, Paul and Justin (Pixérécourt changed the names of Ducray's protagonists) avoid the machinations of the villain and are reunited with their father, the eponymous pilgrim, who turns out to be the rightful owner of the castle they have been imprisoned in. In the novel, the pilgrim is their older brother but, in changing the relationship, Pixérécourt rehabilitates the father figure in the play (albeit tempered by the fact that the father is played by the lead comic actor). The two children are protected repeatedly by their father and regain their true identity at the end of the play.

At the time of the play's performance, work on the civil code to restore the importance of the family and strengthen the patriarchal is well under way and it is certainly the case that the father figure is more prominent than in many of Pixérécourt's other plays. While Lynn Hunt has seen rehabilitating family as « the cornerstone of a republican regime » (1992: 151), it is tempting to speculate that the play's success in the provinces is not just due to two cross-dressed actresses and relatively straightforward stage machinery but also because audiences could read the play as royalist. The white pilgrim has been abroad for many years after a sorrowful, indeed traumatic past, but returns to restore order and reward his vassals for being faithful to his memory. The role of the good father is spelled out towards the end of the play: « le devoir d'un bon père est de veiller à la conservation de ses enfants » (PIXERÉCOURT 2014: 147). The theme

of families reunited had huge resonance in the period, and the play comes shortly after the closure of the list of émigrés (April 1800) and further legislation which tacitly allowed them to return to France.

The play marks a shift in tone that would become a hallmark of Pixerécourt's most successful melodrama thereafter. While over the preceding years, the light-hearted tone of village festivities and comic moments had been increasing (the tone of *Victor* is almost entirely serious, in *Rosa* the comic concierge provides some light relief, in *Coelina* we have two comic characters), in *Le Pèlerin blanc*, Pixerecourt makes much more of the potential of the comic. This is in part because of the setting and characters – the villagers open the play with their preparations for the marriage of the *niais* Jacquinet and the two eponymous protagonists are meant to be innocent and inexperienced. The comic would become an essential ingredient in melodrama, alternating with pathos.

After a parenthesis where Pixerécourt used German theatre as a source for *L'Homme à trois visages*, at the Ambigu-Comique in 1801, based on Zschocke's *Abelino* but adapted to the French stage, he returned to using Ducray-Duminil one last time for *La femme à deux maris* in 1802, the first of Pixerécourt's plays to be formally labelled a *mélo-drame* by critics (MARTIN 2014: 303).

### *La femme à deux maris*

By the opening night of *La femme à deux maris* in September 1802, Napoleon has established peace within France and (temporarily) abroad, restored Catholicism, made himself consul for life and modified the constitution to concentrate power into his own hands (JOURDAN 2000: 58-61). The amnesty for émigrés did cause some concern amongst those who had bought land and the plot of *La Femme à deux maris* fits with some of the worries about the past coming back to disrupt the present.

Adapted from Ducray-Duminil's novel, *Paul ou la ferme abandonnée* from 1800, the plot hinges on Eliza discovering that her villainous first husband, Fritz, had faked his death in order one day to reappear and claim possession of all that Eliza has been given by her second husband, Edouard. At the same time, there is a domestic issue to resolve: Eliza's father disowned her when she married Fritz, but she has secretly been caring for him in the hope that one day he will forgive her. Despite the ever-present

bandit figure, Ducray-Duminil has openly moved beyond « toutes les invraisemblances du genre anglaise » (DUCRAY-DUMINIL 1803: vi) and Pixierécourt follows suit in the adaptation. Melodrama is now established in a recognisable form: a moment of high tension for the heroine, a comic *meneur du jeu*, touching family scenes with son and father, music to enhance the emotional effect, and, above all, the ability to alternate tone: « les situations sont tour à tour fortes, gaies, sombres et touchantes » (DUSAUL-CHOY 1802: 27).

*La Femme à deux maris* is the earliest Pixierécourt melodrama where the music has survived. Rather than accompanying dialogue, music is more generally used by Gérardin-Lacour to enhance the emotional effect of tableaux, such as the concluding scene of Act I, when Eliza collapses into the arms of her chaplain after Fritz has issued his threats, or late in Act II, when we see her on her knees, distraught at her father's refusal to forgive her for marrying Fritz. The scene in which Eliza reads the letter telling her that her first husband is still alive takes place to orchestral accompaniment, and the pact to assassinate Edouard is sealed to music but, on the whole, the composer chooses to highlight love and forgiveness rather than discord: twice music is used to underscore an embrace, between mother and child. These two moments are the 'tear-jerking' highlights of the play, but the emphasis on love and forgiveness in both scenes may also reflect the political context in which the play was performed. In 1802, the divisions caused by the Revolution had not fully healed and for the sake of social and political stability there was a need for reconciliation, a theme which recur time and again in the literary productions of the immediate post-Revolutionary period. The decision to reinforce scenes of love and forgiveness by underscoring them with music perhaps demonstrates how closely attuned the playwright and composer were to public feeling and popular sentiment.

## Conclusion

Ducray-Duminil provided Pixierécourt with plot ideas for some of his most successful melodramas. In part this is because Ducray-Duminil was one of the most successful novelists of the period and Pixierécourt's 'spin-offs' benefited from that. But the *Journal des débats* in 1809 while reviewing the 3<sup>rd</sup> edition of *Les Petits orphelins du hameau*, offers other indications as to why the transfer from page to stage worked so well with Ducray-Duminil's novels. For the reviewer, Ducray-Duminil « semble être

parti d'un principe qui l'a dirigé uniquement dans toutes ses compositions ; savoir, l'innocence et la foiblesse aux prises avec la force et la scélératesse » (22 September 1809 : 4). Furthermore, « sa morale est en action, bien plus qu'en paroles ». He was skilled at leading the reader « à travers une multitude innombrable d'épisodes et d'événemens, et, enfin, après lui avoir fait éprouver toutes les alternatives de la crainte et de l'espérance, l'amène à un dénouement toujours heureux, et d'autant plus frappant qu'il était moins prévu » (3). The thematic and structural particularities of Ducray-Duminil's novels made them ideal sources for the burgeoning melodramatic tradition. But the significance of the Gothic as a mode cannot be ignored either. Both Ann Radcliffe and Ducray-Duminil were able to exploit to the full the benefits of lugubrious settings, sinister characters, and the frisson of the supernatural. Although the extent to which Pixerécourt relied on Gothic elements lessens as the vogue fades, its significance in the genesis of melodrama is undeniable. During the Directory, La Revellière had published a call for theatre to be moral, large scale and political; Pixerécourt's first stage successes with adaptations of Ducray-Duminil and Ann Radcliffe fulfilled this request.

*La Femme à deux maris* is the last major Pixerécourt melodrama to use Ducray-Duminil as a source. This is in part because Pixerécourt no longer needed the legitimacy that adaptations of successful novels would bring him – his reputation was by then firmly established – and the two literary figures would move increasingly in different directions, Ducray-Duminil towards children's literature and Pixerécourt towards German plays as theatrical sources of inspiration. Henceforth, there is a thematic shift, a change in scale and ambition, and even traces of changes in the way the music is used, although this is difficult to identify because of the few surviving scores from the early period. For a long time, studies of melodrama have regarded it as a fixed genre, where themes and formal attributes are fixed from the outset and where, as a result, there is very little differentiation between authors or dates of composition. For Anne Ubersfeld, melodrama was « une forme dramatique aussi rigide que la tragédie - plus encore sans doute, et que l'on ne comprend que si l'on la considère comme une totalité signifiante », a « forme théâtrale fixe, rigidement codée » (UBERSFELD 1974 : 193). Examining Pixerécourt's use of the two leading Gothic novelists of the period, Ann Radcliffe and Ducray-Duminil, has shown that little was fixed about the genre during the Directory and the Consulate and that the evolution of melodrama was not only tied to

literary tastes of the day but the socio-political context in which Pixérécourt was coming to terms with the radical phase of the Revolution. The Empire would bring a further shift in the form of melodrama and novels would lose their dominance as source of Pixérécourt's artistic practice as a new phase of melodrama began.

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<sup>1</sup>In addition to the Pixérécourt plays that are the focus of this article, there were also the following stage adaptations of Radcliffe novels in 1798:

- June 1798 Pujos & Dabaytua's *Eléonore et Rosalba ou les ruines de Paluzzi* (from *The Italian*) performed at the Théâtre de la Cité
- July 1798 Lamartelière's *Le Testament ou les Mystères d'Udolphe* at the Théâtre Louvois and Alexandre Duval's *Montoni ou le Château d'Udolphe* at the Théâtre de la Cité.
- November 1798 Sewrin's *Julie ou les souterrains de Mazzini* at the Théâtre des jeunes artistes
- December 1798 Hoffmann & Dalayrac's *Léon ou le Château de Monténero* at the théâtre de l'Opéra-Comique.