

## **Intermission: Beaumarchais and the *Société des auteurs dramatiques*, 1777–1780**

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In early 1777, in the aftermath of the lawsuits brought by Lonvay, Mercier, and Palissot and the printed challenges to the royal theater brought by Cailhava, Renou, and Rutledge, another aspiring author known for litigation and printed polemics, Pierre Augustin Caron de Beaumarchais, questioned his remuneration for Comédie Française performances of his "Barbier de Séville." After years of delay, it had been first performed on February 23, 1775, and then substantially revised, before beginning a hugely successful run. By the end of 1776, it had been performed profitably 32 times and had generated a gross receipt of more than 93,000 *livres*. <sup>1</sup> However, when the troupe leaders wrote him, they did not use the respectful and courteous tone evident in their correspondence with established writers; instead, they violated royal regulations by asking Beaumarchais to "make arrangements with us to lose your share of the proceeds from the work, but at least, ... have the pleasure of seeing your play performed more often." The actors pointed out that Voltaire had regularly renounced his remuneration from plays, and Beaumarchais himself had agreed to such a "private agreement" in 1767 for his less successful "Eugénie." This time, however, Beaumarchais requested the one-ninth of the net revenue due him under the regulations; in response, the troupe leaders informed him that his share amounted to only 4056 *livres*. Rather than accept this payment, Beaumarchais requested a detailed accounting, noting that, "It is not unworthy of a man of letters who is interested in the advancement of literature to discuss this peacefully with you." <sup>2</sup>

The Comédiens had not responded to similar complaints from Lonvay, Mercier, and others. Yet the actors could not ignore Beaumarchais's complaint, because he possessed a combination of various forms of cultural capital that Lonvay, Mercier, and the others had not. Foremost, Beaumarchais was politically well-connected. The Minister of the Royal Household, Antoine Jean Amelot de Chaillou, and the Duke de Duras, one of the First Gentlemen, both instructed the troupe leaders to meet with Beaumarchais. Indeed, these courtiers and the Comédiens knew him to be a protégé of the Count de Maurepas, first minister to the newly ascendant Louis XVI. <sup>3</sup> Thus Beaumarchais carried greater political weight than other playwrights who had previously negotiated with and even sued the Comédie Française. The Comédiens were therefore less certain of having a potential lawsuit by Beaumarchais dismissed from the courts.

Secondly, they knew that Beaumarchais had already demonstrated himself an able propagandist and astute manipulator of public opinion in his printed *Mémoires contre Goezmann* in the early 1770s. These satirical attacks on the venality of a leading member of the highly unpopular "Maupeou Parlements" had been widely celebrated, even drawing the

admiration of the decidedly pro-Maupeou Voltaire. <sup>4</sup> More highly charged, socially figurative language could be expected in any printed *mémoires* that would arise from the brewing conflict between Beaumarchais and the Comédie Française. Indeed, on January 3, 1777, the *Courrier de l'Europe* newspaper, edited by Beaumarchais's ally Samuel Swinton, reported that he was preparing such an attack on the Comédiens: "we expect more ink to be spilled." <sup>5</sup> This concerned the actors and theater supervisors, since the Comédie's spectators came from much the same public, well attuned to high cultural politics, that would be the primary readers of printed polemics. The Comédiens also regarded Beaumarchais differently due to his evident commercial appeal; "Barbier" had achieved the largest proceeds of any play performed at the Comédie to date. An author of such a lucrative play enjoyed leverage over the Comédiens, whose annual royal subsidy had been suppressed with the reorganization of the troupe in 1757, after which the theater suffered from chronic financial woes. <sup>6</sup> Thus the Comédiens, the First Gentlemen, and the Minister of the Royal Household—all concerned on one hand not to anger Maurepas and on another not to be embarrassed by printed polemics on one hand to retain control over the revenue generated by the theater and on another not to lose potential revenue from a successful play—perceived a battle with Beaumarchais as potentially much more dangerous than Renou's preface or Mercier's suits.

Faced with this conundrum, the Duke de Duras (the First Gentleman primarily responsible for overseeing the Comédie Française in 1777) decided to use Beaumarchais's complaint as an opportunity to revise, yet again, the royal theater regulations. On June 15, 1777, he wrote to Beaumarchais, asking him to assemble "several of the most moderate and *honnêtes*" writers to express their opinions on how best to put an end to the incessant author-theater conflicts. <sup>7</sup> Perceiving an opportunity, Beaumarchais wrote to nearly all the living authors whose works had been performed at the Comédie, inviting them to his home on the corner of the rue vieille du Temple and the rue des Blancs Monteaux. <sup>8</sup> Twenty-two authors would attend a meeting there on July 3, 1777 of what, in retrospect, has been considered the formation of the Société des Auteurs Dramatiques (SAD), the first professional association for creative writers in French history.



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In a book to be published separately, I have undertaken a monographic study of Beaumarchais and the SAD from 1777 to 1780, the first such scholarly work on the topic. <sup>9</sup> That book interprets the SAD not as a writers' syndicate, reclaiming authors' due in terms of monetary compensation, but very much the opposite—an elite gathering modeled on a salon, intended to *distinguish* status-conscious men of letters from all venal and professional forms of writing. The 22 playwrights who first participated in the SAD did so for varying reasons, but all were concerned above all with their public identities as writers for the Comédie Française. They could not mark themselves

publicly as such without having their plays accepted and staged by its troupe, so their primary objective in seeking revised theater regulations was not to protest against the actors' management of the theater (especially authorial remuneration) but to protect their elite status by defining what it meant to be a Comédie Française playwright. This definition, for most, was based on *honnête* comportment and the avoidance of direct conflict (especially over matters of personal interest). For others, it was based on personal honor, or autonomy, which meant a disinterest in all forms of remuneration. Thus, Beaumarchais and the associated playwrights demanded greater remuneration for and control over their plays in order to obtain publicly visible markers of association with the Comédie (and, by extension, the court), which could identify them as *gens de lettres*.

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Though the SAD requires a separate study, its history overlaps sufficiently with the present topic to require a brief summary here. From the first meeting, Beaumarchais took great pains to fashion it, for both its members and outside observers, as a form of sociability worthy of *gens de lettres*. Before contacting Beaumarchais, Duras had written three other dramatic authors who were members of the Académie Française—Jean-François Marmontel, Michel Sedaine, and Joseph Saurin—and asked them to assemble the group to make suggestions on author-theater relations. Yet it was Beaumarchais, who was not a member of the Académie, although he aspired to it, who took the greatest interest in such a task. For him, hosting a group of writers under the auspices of a high-ranking courtier provided an opportunity to position himself as the public face of what he hoped would be a formation considered akin to a new royal academy. [10](#)



In the careful account he kept of the proceedings, Beaumarchais recorded the authors' interactions, beginning with their election of himself and the three others as "commissioners and perpetual representatives ... to pursue the present affair and all other events that it may entail ... before both the First Gentlemen of the Royal Bedchamber and all other persons." [11](#)



In many ways, the SAD was an utterly new form of literary sociability; despite evident comparisons to salons and academies, as a professional association it had an explicit purpose of representing the collective interests of playwrights. To do so, the leaders had to generate procedures to legitimate their claim to speak for "all *gens de lettres*." Beaumarchais's efforts to do so are evident in his correspondence with the other SAD playwrights and from the series of *comptes-rendus* he kept of meetings held between 1777 and 1780, and from his correspondence to and from the administrators of the Comédie, including troupe members, its legal council, officials of the Ministry of the Royal Household, and the First Gentleman,

Duras. <sup>12</sup> For his part, Duras saw Beaumarchais and the other SAD commissioners as his representatives to the authors, and he was surprised at times by their unwillingness to assent to his will. On the other hand, the authors saw the commissioners as their representatives to the court and at times were disappointed by the leader's lack of aggressiveness. Some authors complained that Beaumarchais exercised too much control and pursued his own personal advancement.



Thus, Beaumarchais expended a great deal of energy over these four years trying to fashion—for the court, for the other authors, and for the theater-going public that would follow the SAD through word of mouth and the press, and most of all for himself—an individual and collective identity for playwrights as paradigmatic *gens de lettres*. In this respect, he worked against both the corporatist traditions that underlay theater culture and the tendency of contemporaries (and, for that matter, historians) to associate playwrights more closely than other writers with a commercial public. To distinguish himself and the others from both the corporate and commercial aspects of theater, he emphasized, above all, the writers' *honnête* comportment.

One example makes this clear, and provides context for the discussion of Beaumarchais in subsequent chapters. In a series of meetings at Beaumarchais's home in the summer of 1777, the authors drew up a petition to Duras regarding revisions to the regulations. Beaumarchais prefaced these demands with a preamble, describing the four "interests" of the "Auteurs Assemblés"—themselves, the theater, the public, and the king—and then submitted the entire document on August 12 to Duras and Amelot. <sup>13</sup>

Contrary to the expectations of many, Beaumarchais did not print the memorandum. The SAD members urged him to print it, hoping to generate outside pressure for reform, without which they feared the First Gentlemen would not offer any substantive revisions to the regulations without the pressure of a printed appeal to public opinion.

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Beaumarchais, however, made clear to the other commissioners, to the rest of the authors, and to the First Gentlemen that he wanted to avoid a printed attack on the Comédiens. He assured Duras and others at court that his conduct would remain self-restrained and civil, appropriate to one worthy of being considered a legitimate man of letters. Beaumarchais fashioned himself in this respect on the early members of the Académie Française, who kept their debates both civil and restrained, preventing them (at least in theory) from spilling over into printed polemics. Likewise, Beaumarchais sought to keep the authors' conflict with the theater within the existing institutions of the Comédie and the Royal Household, and to avoid the sort of *cause célèbre* for which he had become renowned early in the decade.

At moments when negotiations slowed, Beaumarchais did on several occasions raise the prospect of printing a *mémoire*, but he never made good on this threat. Beaumarchais and the other SAD leaders continued to act according to the terms dictated by the First Gentlemen, and they continued to negotiate in good faith with the troupe and its lawyers. In return, he hoped to be accepted by the First Gentlemen and other elite observers as a legitimate participant in such face-to-face encounters. [14](#)

By early 1780, the negotiations finally began in earnest between the four commissioners and the lawyers of the Conseil de la Comédie over the key issue of the calculation of an author's remuneration (referred to by both sides as the *droit d'auteur*) and the related calculations of costs and of the gate receipts. These discussions concerned not only the formula for making such calculations, of which six different versions were proposed, but also a process for verification. Beaumarchais, having demanded from the outset of the episode to see the Comédie Française accounting records, now called for the amount of an author's share of the revenues the *droit d'auteur*, to be documented at the time of payment. [15](#) These negotiations over authorial remuneration led to an accord on March 11, 1780, by which the author would receive one-ninth of the net revenue from each performance: the total from admissions sold at the door and a portion of revenue generated by the annual leases for the *loges* would be combined; then a fixed sum would be subtracted, representing one day's fraction of the yearly *droit des pauvres* (paid as a sort of "sin tax" to the *Hôpital Général*); also subtracted were another 600 *livres* to cover the estimated daily operating expenses. [16](#) When these terms took effect later that year, the Comédie Française accountant would complete a pre-printed form to calculate the *droits d'auteur*, replacing the scattershot accounting that had characterized the royal theater, especially its relations with authors.

[Règlement pour la Comédie Française](#)

[Extrait des Registres du Conseil d'État ...](#)

Other important issues concerned control and ownership of the plays, over which negotiations continued until, on August 26, 1780, Beaumarchais reached an agreement with the Royal Household and obtained the approval of the other SAD members. The provisions of this agreement would be registered by an Arrêt by the Conseil d'État, giving them the force of royal law, on December 9, 1780, and these terms became the basis for the First Gentlemen's new theater regulations, issued and printed in May 1781. [17](#)

The provisions of its sixteen articles dealt with the *chute* of a play, which determined control of the play (on which more in [Chapter 4](#)), and also dictated the procedures by which the troupe would deal with authors who proposed works to its repertory. The regulations dictated not only the

mechanics of the *lecture* at which the troupe heard and then voted on new plays, but also outlined how the actors and authors should interact at such meetings, to ensure adherence to standards of civility. For the first time, the regulations addressed the rights to the printed edition of the text, the authors being granted permission to print a work before performance once two years had elapsed after its acceptance if it had still not yet been staged. This article prevented the Comédiens from accepting new plays only to prevent them from being printed or performed elsewhere.

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Finally, and perhaps most importantly, "all oppositions or interference whatsoever" were forbidden to anyone other than the royal council, pre-empting any of the so-called "private agreements" that many authors had reached with the troupe in the past, as well as any intervention by the First Gentlemen or other courtiers on behalf of their protégé writers. The Minister of the Royal Household sought, above all, to routinize the operation of the theater, which meant ending any direct involvement of the court in the theater's relations with individual authors (or for that matter, with individual troupe members). Aspiring playwrights, however, had come to the SAD with the opposite objective, to establish a fixed, publicly visible, personal relationship to the theater. Beaumarchais thus recognized early on in their negotiations over the theater regulations that the handling of literary property and authorial remuneration would not satisfy his or the other authors' concerns about their status and legitimacy. Consequently, he sought tactics that would be civil and *honnête* yet effective in representing himself and the other playwrights to the literary world outside the court as *gens de lettres* who embodied the institution of the royal theater and, moreover, who were linked with both the French crown and nation.

He found his opportunity on November 29, 1777, when the Comédie Française staged Racine's "Athalie." The play had never been performed in its author's lifetime, and had never passed into the permanent repertory of the Comédie Française; the theater regulations made no provision for the inheritance of *droits d'auteur*. Moreover, Racine had been remunerated primarily through lump-sum payments and royal grants, and his works had been among those for which exclusive performance rights had been granted to the royal theater upon its foundation in 1680. Thus, the troupe did not consider itself obliged to pay anyone for its performances of "Athalie." But, in more recent cases, such as that of *Buirette de Belloy* (discussed in [Chapter 3](#)), an author's descendants had claimed the *droits* as their patrimony.

Indeed, there was a precedent for such a claim by descendants of a seventeenth-century writer, Marie Corneille, which had been highly publicized in 1760. Unlike Molière and, later, Voltaire, who amassed sizable fortunes in their lifetimes from commercial and financial transactions, Corneille and

Racine remained dependant on lump-sum payments for their plays, personal pensions from protectors, and eventually *rentes*, or subsidies, from royal offices. As a consequence, they did not secure any property or position to provide permanent income or status to their heirs. In March 1760, an impoverished man claiming to be Corneille's grandson (although he was actually a grand-nephew) appealed to the Comédie Française. In "recognition for the memory of greatest 'poet'," he sought succor not for himself, but for his wife and daughter, Marie. Hearing of this situation, Voltaire took Marie under his protection, housed her, and eventually married her off to an appropriately wealthy husband. To endow her, he arranged a benefit performance by the Comédie of Corneille's "Rodorogue," and then provided her with the proceeds from the subscriptions to a 1764 edition of Corneille's collected plays, which he edited, introduced, and dedicated to the Académie Française. To Voltaire's admirers, his actions provided further evidence of his unique combination of classical taste and humane beneficence. [18](#)



This example also provided a model for Beaumarchais of how to fashion himself as leader of the SAD. An opportunity to do so appeared in mid-February 1778, when the Parisian press reported that the "widow of one of Corneille's grandsons and her eighteen-month-old daughter" had come forth in an "unhappy state" and pleaded for aid to "the family of the author of 'Cinna.'" With authorization from Versailles, the troupe of the Comédie Française held a benefit performance of that play on February 16, and donated to her the 6365 *livres* of proceeds. The actors also solicited aid for the woman and her baby from the Académie Française and from the Queen, who contributed 1200 *livres*. [19](#)



Beaumarchais and his fellow dramatic authors could not help but notice that such generosity was rarely shown towards contemporary authors, whose plays were rarely prepared for the stage as rapidly and few of whom received such a large share of the proceeds or acclaim from a successful production. Most importantly, they knew that the play had and would continue to belong to the troupe, and that the authors' heirs had no recourse other than appeals based on pity. Indeed, a year earlier, the troupe had explicitly rejected the SAD's request in its petition for payments to the heirs of authors who died with plays still in the active repertory. In response to that rebuff and in light of the successful benefit for Corneille's "grand-daughter," Beaumarchais hoped to demonstrate that his society of playwrights (instead of the troupe or even the Académie Française) should speak for the poor descendants of the "grand-masters."

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He informed the SAD that he had learned that the family of a woman named Madame Harriague, a grand-daughter of Jean Racine, had fallen into financial ruin and "think too nobly of themselves to accept pecuniary succor." Another

writer, Rochon de Chabannes, proposed that, instead of a donation, the authors should lend money so the family could "have a suit initiated by Racine *fiis* against the Comédiens ... above all for the payments for 'Athalie,' a tragedy which should still belong to the author or his heirs, because it has never fallen" from the active repertory. The assembled authors approved this "beneficent and ingenious" idea; a collection of 50 *louis* [1500 *livres*] was taken up by Beaumarchais to deliver to the family. [20](#)

This tactic was indeed "ingenious," because it would allow the authors to represent themselves as protectors of Racine's heirs, just as Voltaire, the Comédie, the Académie, and the Queen herself had done for the heirs of Corneille. Moreover, they could appear to do so not out of pity, or even appreciation, but based on the principles of beneficence—and those of literary property. Since the Comédiens were staging "Athalie" without the consent of or payments to the author's heirs, the SAD could imply that its charity on behalf of the destitute granddaughters of France's great writers was necessary *only* because those writers and their heirs were not allowed to retain the fruit of their artistic labor. Furthermore, this tactic would make possible a lawsuit against the Comédiens and a printed pamphlet stating the writers' complaints publicly without risking the reputation of the contemporary playwrights, since the suit would be in the exalted name of Racine's heirs.

The only problem with this proposed tactic was that the Harriague family, out of concern for its own status and honor, refused to participate. [21](#) In response, Beaumarchais modified his tactic and drafted two versions of a letter "To the Queen." Here he needed to represent himself and other playwrights not as supplicants to the crown for protection, nor as self-interested mercenaries seeking to enforce a contractual obligation on the royal theater, but—like Voltaire had repeatedly been able to portray himself—as dutiful, magnanimous, and beneficent protectors of others. Thus, he compared the situation of "the grand-daughter of Great Racine, mother of four children," to that of "the grand-daughter of Great Corneille, whom Mr. de Voltaire so honored," and to whose cause the Queen herself had contributed. Noting that the Racine family had been too proud to accept the playwrights' gift, he explained that the playwrights would offer the 50 *louis* as "a loan," since the family had "an inheritance" awaiting it: "One day, the Comédiens Français will make the justice due to the descendants of the Great Racine, from the immense revenues [to be generated by] his tragedies of 'Esther' and of 'Athalie,' which they have not performed since the death of their author," and the proceeds of which should therefore be shared with the heirs. [22](#)

By emphasizing the poverty of the "grand-daughter" and her children in an appeal to the Queen, Beaumarchais depicted the troupe as wrongfully depriving an author (and his heirs) of his due, without putting the playwright

in the position of a self-interested mercenary motivated by his own material concerns (since he was long since dead). Furthermore, he represented the SAD as disinterested protectors and, at the same time, pointed out that dramatic authors were "providing fathers [*pères nourissants*]" with families to support that could not be fed with "glory." Beaumarchais here figured the writer as the provider, who supplied the needs of his family by serving the needs of his audience, writing necessarily, but not selfishly, for gain. This rhetorical move was innovative, in that it combined a traditional representation of the writer as selfless servant of a cause larger than himself (a patron, the crown, God, or, increasingly in the eighteenth century, the public) with another image resonant in the late Old Regime, that of the virtuous yet beleaguered "good father," seeking against all odds to provide for his needy children. [23](#)

Not all the authors, however, envisioned themselves as "providing fathers." To some, this representation appeared beneath their dignity as writers; to others, it made too weak a statement of their material interests. "This brings nothing, either to the merit or to the nobility of comportment on the part of the authors," one playwright wrote to Beaumarchais, suggesting that rather than "speak of the distress, of the misery and of the lack of dignity" of Racine's heirs, the SAD should "say [instead] that the grand-daughter of Racine has lost, without any indemnity, the interests she had under the established" regulations. [24](#) Nevertheless, Beaumarchais prepared the letter to submit it to the Queen and, apparently, to other individuals at court, and also prepared to have it printed. However, this plan was again derailed by Racine's granddaughter's family, which even in a state of "misery," had its own status to be concerned with. Monsieur Harriague refused to consent, fearing that a public attack on the royal theater in his family's name would, "bring me disagreement in my company of glass-makers and perhaps cause me to lose my employment. It is that above all which makes us entreat you to prevent the printing of the letter that you have shown us." [25](#)

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Beaumarchais then considered a third tactic. "[F]ollowing the example of Voltaire," he would have his own newly-established printing company at Kehl publish "an edition of the works of Racine," and donate the proceeds to the Harriague family. However, the other authors worried that without prior assurances of its acceptance by the sort of elite subscribers whose names appeared in the prospectus for the 1764 edition of Corneille, an SAD-sponsored, Kehl-printed edition of Racine would risk looking too much like a crass commercial venture. They thus resisted Beaumarchais's proposal, "unless the queen deigns to honor it with her protection by saying that she desires it and that the edition be ... printed by the royal printer." Unable to find a satisfactory tactic for exploiting the situation to the SAD's advantage, Beaumarchais dropped the ingenious strategy; at the meeting of April 9, he returned the subscribed money to the assembled authors. [26](#)

Madame Harriague did, finally, in March 1782, accept a gift of 500 *livres*, not from the SAD, but from the Académie Française on behalf of the King. [27](#) The new theater regulations issued in 1780 did provide for authors' heirs to receive payments from the theater up to the 30th performance of a play. It also raised the important question of inheritability, closely linked to the questions of the personal and moral status of the writer and of the public domain, which remained central in debates over literary property into and beyond the Revolution (as discussed in [Chapter 6](#)). However, the refashioning of Beaumarchais and the SAD as beneficent, magnanimous protectors rather than self-interested mercenaries had failed.

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Literary and cultural historians have misunderstood the SAD. [28](#) It did successfully contribute to the revision of the royal theater regulations, but it failed to re-fashion playwrights generally and Beaumarchais personally as *honnêtes hommes*. In this respect, the SAD should be understood less as a triumphant moment in the inevitable progression of literary property and "author's rights" than as an indication of the difficulty for established outsiders, especially Beaumarchais, in establishing personal legitimacy. Beaumarchais and the other SAD authors sought *droits d'auteur* as a marker of status rather than a source of personal autonomy; in their understanding, literary property could not be distinguished from personal propriety, and thus liberty could not be distinguished from self-restraint. For this reason, Beaumarchais and the other authors resisted making a direct, public, printed case for literary property as an expression of personal interest. What he and other playwrights did instead is what we will see in greater detail in Chapter 4 and throughout Part II of this book.

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### Notes:

**Note 1:** BCF, dossier: "Démêlés avec les auteurs," # 4. On the "resounding success" the play enjoyed in the press, see Louis de Loménie, *Beaumarchais et Son Temps* (Paris: Levy, 1858), vol. I, ch. XVI; on Beaumarchais's revisions to the text, see Arnoult, *La Génèse du "Barbier de Séville,"* 8–85. [Back.](#)

**Note 2:** BN-MSS FF 9228, f.32. f. 40. [Back.](#)

**Note 3:** AN O1 845, #28. This July 1777 memorandum to the Minister of the Royal Household discussed the need to proceed with caution, because Beaumarchais was "*protégé* [protected]" by Maurepas. [Back.](#)

**Note 4:** Maza, *Private Lives and Public Affairs*, 130–140. [Back.](#)

**Note 5:** Gunnar and Mavis von Proschwitz, *Beaumarchais et le 'Courrier de l'Europe,'* 2 volumes (Oxford: Alden Press, 1990), document #86 (I: 366): "On s'attend qu'il y aura encore bien de l'encre repandue." [Back.](#)

**Note 6:** Despite the refinancing and reinvestment enacted by the First Gentlemen in 1757, the theater had once again fallen several hundred thousand *livres* in debt by 1777; see Alasseur. This situation was rendered more acute in 1776 with the disappearance of 85,000 *livres*, which were probably embezzled by the cashier, Néelle. (BCF, "Registre des Délibérations du Comité de la Comédie, 1769—1791," f. 52.) [Back.](#)

**Note 7:** BN-MSS FF 9228, f.43: "...quelques des auteurs les plus sages et honnêtes." [Back.](#)

**Note 8:** The house still stands in the Marais, and the doors still bear Beaumarchais's monogram. (Personal photographs by the author.) [Back.](#)

**Note 9:** Gregory S. Brown, *Literary Sociability in the Old Regime: Beaumarchais, the Société des auteurs dramatiques and the Comédie Française* (London: Ashgate, 2003), which is drawn from Part II of my "A Field of Honor: The Cultural Politics of Playwriting in Eighteenth-Century France," (Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, 1997). The only previous book-length study, Jacques Boncompain, *Auteurs et comédiens au XVIIIe siècle* (Paris: Perrin, 1976), is well-researched but is a popularization that lacks both methodological rigor and academic apparatus. [Back.](#)

**Note 10:** As recent work on the formation of the Académie has demonstrated, Richelieu formed it out of several already existing small groups of writers, who he brought together at first informally, before it developed into an institution of state; see Jouhaud, *Pouvoirs de la littérature*; and Merlin, *L'Excentricité littéraire*. A century later, in part as a result of the Académie, writers had even fewer opportunities for direct interactions with courtiers, so Beaumarchais jumped at the chance. [Back.](#)

**Note 11:** BN-MSS, FR 9228, f. 8: "commissaire et représentant perpétuel ... pour suivre l'affaire présente et tous autres événements qu'elle peût embrasser ... tant auprès de MM. les premiers gentilshommes de la chambre que de toute autres personnes ...". [Back.](#)

**Note 12:** These documents are to be found primarily in three locations: BN-MSS FR 9228; the BCF dossier "Démêlés avec les auteurs dramatiques"; and in the Beaumarchais Family Archives, carton XI. [Back.](#)

**Note 13:** BN-MSS, FF 9228, ff. 48—50. [Back.](#)

**Note 14:** Beaumarchais reminded Duras in a letter of July 20, 1780, of the "attention respectueuse ... des auteurs dramatiques dans leurs contestations avec les Comédiens ... " in having not printed a "requête" and of their expectation, in return, of Duras' "justice." *Révue retrospective* 2nd ser., t. VII (1835), 449. [Back.](#)

**Note 15:** BCF "Demêlés," #5. The distinction between *droit d'auteur* (in contemporary French, the category of law pertaining to author's rights) and *droits d'auteur* (remuneration received under this category of law) did not yet exist at this time; this semantic confusion will be discussed in Chapter 4. [Back.](#)

**Note 16:** BN-MSS FF 9228, f.20-21; 74-78. The inclusion of box-seat revenue and the use of fixed sums for the *droit des pauvres* and the "ordinary and daily costs" were innovations benefiting the authors. This net receipt would then be divided by nine (for a full-length play), twelve (for a three- or four-act play) or eighteen (for a one- or two-act play) to arrive at the *droit d'auteur*. Before the author was paid, to be deducted still was one-fifteenth of "extraordinary" expenses (including the fixed cost of four *livres* per day for soldiers posted at the theater) as well as any charges the author owed for admissions requested beyond his specified allotment. The remainder was due to the author. [Back.](#)

**Note 17:** AN O1 844, #8, May 18, 1781. A printed version is in BCF, IV-A DL, #7.

To avoid further disputes over the order of performance, works would have to be performed in the order of acceptance, with allowances being made for rotation of genres. Any modifications to the order would require the consent of all authors affected (Art. 3–5; 9). The authors' ability to trade order of performance was curtailed; this tactic had been a standard authorial maneuver to avoid being performed too soon after a work on a similar theme or otherwise to gain favorable placement in the repertory (Art. 6). Authors would continue to distribute roles to actors, maintaining an important element of creative control (Art. 7). On the important question of the minimum gross proceeds necessary for the continued performance of a play, new levels were set of 2300 *livres* (during the winter season) and 1800 *livres* in summer (Art. 11). [Back.](#)

**Note 18:** David Williams, "Voltaire's guardianship of Marie Corneille and the pursuit of Fréron", *Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century* 98 (1972): 27-46. As Williams points out, Marie was actually the playwright's great-grand-niece, but her chronically impoverished father, Jean François Corneille, consistently and effectively claimed to be Pierre's grandson, so that he could claim that the needs of his wife and daughter should merit the attention of all those who had been moved by "Cinna." [Back.](#)

**Note 19:** *Journal des Théâtres*, III, XXIII (March 1, 1778), 318–320; BHVP CP 4433, #5, "To the Queen," February 13, 1778. [Back.](#)

**Note 20:** BAF XI, III, 35, "Compte rendu" of January 18, 1778; also described in *L'Espion anglais*, VIII, VI, 242; and *Mémoires secrets*, XI, 90. It is unclear if the authors knew at this time that the troupe had agreed to give a benefit performance for the granddaughter of Corneille. [Back.](#)

**Note 21:** BN-MSS FF 9228, f.4. When Marmontel visited Madame Harriague, she refused the aid. Although "the motive is laudable," Marmontel informed Beaumarchais, the plan could not be continued without

the family's consent. [Back.](#)

**Note 22:** BN-MSS FF 9228, ff. 1–2. [Back.](#)

**Note 23:** On various figurations of the "good father" in the late Old Regime, see Lynn Hunt, *The Family Romance of the French Revolution* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 17–33, although none of the tropes she discusses are of a "père nourissant." [Back.](#)

**Note 24:** BN-MSS FF 9228, f. 7. The author of this letter to Beaumarchais is not identified. [Back.](#)

**Note 25:** BN-MSS FF 9228, f. 6. This letter was written to Beaumarchais following a second attempt to convince the family to accept the SAD's support. [Back.](#)

**Note 26:** BAF XI, IV, 12; April 9, 1778. [Back.](#)

**Note 27:** *Registres de l'Académie Française* (Geneva: Slatkine, 1971), III: 508. [Back.](#)

**Note 28:** On the limited attention afforded the SAD in French literary historiography of the eighteenth century, see Brown, "Beaumarchais and the Society of Dramatic Authors in Cultural History and Historiography," in *Beaumarchais: Homme de lettres, homme de société*, ed. Philip Robinson (Bern: Peter Lang, 2000), 29–38. [Back.](#)

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