

Glossary

I. Theater-specific terms

cabale

A cabale consisted of a group of spectators organized in advance to influence the audience response to a given play. In the first half of the eighteenth century, authors commonly arranged for a cabale by obtaining several dozen admissions and then distributing them, with a glass of brandy, to a group of allies coached to respond at the proper moments. A group organized to respond negatively to the work of a rival was referred to as a claque. Though the theater regulations made this more difficult after 1757 by limiting authors to 20 parterre admissions, the cabale remained a regular reference in the culture of the Comédie Française up to the Revolution, when Chénier organized members of the Cordeliers district assembly into a claque on behalf of "Charles IX."

comédiens/ comédiennes

The royal troupe was composed of 24 full-share members, enough to enable the troupe to give performances at court and in Paris on the same day. Each actor and actress held a share in the theater—its building, its endowment, and its repertory of works—and, until the reforms of 1780, each had an equal vote in composing the repertory and deciding what works to stage.

drame

Generally associated with the "serious genre" advocated by Diderot, the term drame described works that were neither classical comedies nor tragedies. Rather than timeless settings, noble personages, and grand, mythic conflicts, drames depicted recognizable moments in the national past and the domestic relations of ordinary people. Much influenced by the genre known as "City Comedy" in England, which some translated as the drame bourgeois, this genre has for some critics and historians been associated with a socially "middle-class" audience, taking at face value the charge by some eighteenth-century critics that classical tragedies and comedies had been written only for court elites.

loges (box-seats)

In 1757, the First Gentlemen authorized the theater to divide the balconies that hung over the theater into enclosed boxes, or loges, and to rent these out for the season. Across the 1760s and 1770s, an increasing portion of the audience space in the theater was transformed into boxes; subscriptions to these seats became an ever-larger portion of the theater's total revenue. Some boxes were enclosed by a metal grill, so that they were not visible to the rest of the audience; most, however, were open, and appealed to status-conscious elites as a venue in which to present themselves publicly. By

1783, when the Comédie Française moved into a new, purpose-built theater at Odéon, over one-third of the seats were in loges, which accounted for over 40 percent of the theater's annual revenue.

pièce de circonstance

Though not specified in the regulations, the troupe regularly moved plays with contemporary resonance to the top of its active repertory, ahead of plays that it might have accepted at an earlier date. For this reason, authors sometimes revised plays to give them resonance or, more frequently, pointed out to the actors how a recent development had made their play into a pièce de circonstance.

II. General period terms

belles lettres

In the early modern period, the term "literature" referred to any writing of moral utility, whereas writing of specifically aesthetic value constituted "belles lettres." In seventeenth- and eighteenth-century French literary institutions, writers made little distinction between morally useful, socially resonant, and aesthetically moving writing.

bienfaisance

Though a literal translation of "welfare" would be accurate, this term implied a secular, civic response as opposed to religious charity or traditional forms of state poor relief.

droit d'auteur / propriété littéraire

When late Old Regime playwrights claimed their droits and their propriété, they were not speaking an Enlightenment language of property, autonomy, and self-interest; instead, they were describing themselves in terms of personal power and disinterested, civil comportment. Theater regulations referred to the "droits d'auteur" as one-ninth of the net proceeds of each performance, free entry privileges ("droits d'entrée"), or any creative control over the production, such as the distribution of roles to specific members of the troupe, ordinarily accorded to playwrights for works on the active repertory. In this sense, payments of droits d'auteur would be best understood by the eighteenth-century meaning of "royalty" payments, though denoting more than just cash payments.

honnête/té

During Louis XIV's reign, the ideal of both noble warriors and orators as men of forceful action in service was transformed at court into a different but related elite idea, of honnêteté, which implied a different kind of prominence and autonomy. Drawn primarily from Quintilian, this ideal also emphasized personal autonomy and disinterest; yet unlike "honor," it was not a quality to be made evident through valor in conflict. Rather, it called on individuals to prevent direct conflict, by

avoiding in encounters with others all language or behavior that could be considered coarse, unpolished, or uncivilized. The ideal honnête homme was described not merely as capable of aesthetically pleasing performance in social interactions, but also, and perhaps most importantly, as willing to disregard his own interests to better serve at his King's court. Like the sixteenth-century ideal of honor, this ideal of honnêteté emphasized personal virtue as made manifest in diligent service as a justification for one's prominence and as a restraint on the forceful action one might take from that prominent position.

honneur

To sixteenth-century nobles, "honor" had implied the privilege of using violence to defend personal autonomy, of acting forcefully to defend one's position or to advance in status. Yet even before the devastating wars of religion, this idea of personal autonomy had become tempered by the expectation that action would be taken only with authorization from and based on allegiance to a hierarchy of protection culminating in the King. In no case was it acceptable for a man of honor to act in his own interest; using power and autonomy untempered by virtue and magnanimity would threaten the honor, the status, and the existence of the entire community. Humanists propagated this Renaissance ideal of the noble as man of honor, and used similar terms to describe their own actions as writers. Drawing on Seneca and the Stoics, they deployed the classical ideal of honestus to describe their protectors and themselves as men autonomous from all control by a superior power, due to their indomitable personal wills and capacities for self-mastery. At the same time, they emphasized that, as men of honor, they preferred the exclusive companionship of each other and would act forcefully in a public forum only to defend their autonomy and capacity for self-mastery, never to advance personal interests.

livres

The standard currency of exchange in Old Regime France. A skilled artisan earned approximately four livres per day; a single admission to the parterre cost one livre.

mémoires judiciaires/ factum

Legal arguments before civil courts had to be filed in advance of the pleading; in the mid-eighteenth century, certain lawyers began having their arguments printed. Such texts did not require censorial review and thus became, in the latter decades of the Old Regime, a forum not for political dissidence per se, but for cultural narratives of private disputes that informed how literate French viewed public life. Several eighteenth-century playwrights used this genre to narrate their personal conflicts with the royal theater.

moeurs

Best translated as mores, the term figured centrally in civic discourse of eighteenth-century France, especially discussions of theater. The classical topos that theater should be a "school for morality" was

frequently translated, especially by self-described patriots, as an *école de moeurs*, which they argued the Comédie Française could not provide so long as it remained under the domination of the court and thus closed off from the Nation.

privilège/ approbation

The Company of Printers and Booksellers of Paris in the late seventeenth century developed a system for granting licenses, or *privilèges*, to printers for particular titles. To obtain a privilege, the printer had to submit the text to the Royal Corps of Censors, appointed by the Lieutenant-General for Police of Paris and under the authority of the Chancellor. Only after censorial approval, or approbation, had been secured for a manuscript would the Director of the Book Trade approve a privilege, which carried with it the sole legal right to print and market that book for the lifetime of the author. After 1777, authors could obtain *privilèges* for their own works, though this option was rarely exercised.

III. Early Modern Literary Institutions

Académie Française

Founded in 1635 under the auspices of the Cardinal Richelieu, this body was, and remains, an autonomous corporation composed of the forty supposedly most prominent writers of the day. Its mission was and is to standardize the French language, and its *Dictionnaire* carries the force of law. At the moment of its founding, the Académie was typical of early seventeenth-century literary sociability; through Richelieu's direct sponsorship and protection, it became the central pole in the "first literary field," and a model for subsequent institutions, including the Comédie Française. It also quickly became the central venue for resolving literary debates, notably the "Quarrel" over Pierre Corneille's "Le Cid." To resolve this debate, the Académie developed what became known as "the rules" of classical dramaturgy.

First Gentlemen of the Royal Bedchamber

Four dukes held these venal offices, which were technically valets to the king. In 1689, they were given authority over the Comédie Française, for which they began to issue a series of "orders." In 1697, they issued the first complete set of "regulations" for the theater, which they revised repeatedly across the eighteenth century. Prior to 1757, the First Gentlemen alternated supervising the public theaters. In 1762, two of the First Gentlemen, the Dukes de Duras and Richelieu, took responsibility for the Française and the Italienne, respectively. However, their authority was gradually diminished in favor of successive Ministers of the Royal Household, Amelot, and then Breteuil. Moreover, the First Gentlemen during the 1760s and 1770s increasingly distanced themselves from personal relations with authors, allowing subordinates such as the Intendants of Royal Amusements, the legal Council, and the Police Censor to mediate the

theaters' relations to its writers. In October 1789, the First Gentlemen ceded authority over public theaters entirely to the municipality of Paris.

Intendants des Menus Plaisirs

These officers of the Royal Household were responsible for administration of court spectacles and, by extension, administering the regulations of the Comédie Française. Prior to the mid-century reforms, they had no active role in the theater, and during the 1760s authors rarely had contact with these officials. This changed during the 1770s and 1780s, when they became actively involved as mediators among the troupe, royal officials, and authors. They also mediated between the Minister of the Royal Household, under whom they served, and the First Gentlemen of the Royal Bedchamber, who remained responsible for court and public theater to 1789.

Parlement of Paris

One of twelve royal law courts that constituted the highest level of Old Regime justice, this court adjudicated all suits to which the crown or high nobles were a party. Moreover, it served as the highest sovereign body in Paris, with supervisory authority over all municipal and royal institutions in the capital. In the 1770s, the Parlement of Paris became the focal point of constitutionalist opposition to royal power, when Louis XV's Chancellor Maupeou, frustrated by the court's refusal to consent to financial and judicial reforms, sought to replace the court outright. Over a period of four years, this conflict divided French politics, providing self-described patriots with a cause around which to rally their arguments that the "Nation" needed to be regenerated from the state of decadence into which the absolutist government and court had reduced it.

Société des auteurs dramatiques

This group of 22 Comédie Française playwrights was founded in 1777 under the sponsorship of the Duke de Duras and the leadership of Beaumarchais and three other, more established playwrights. Its ostensible purpose was to advise Duras on revisions to the theater regulations concerning literary property, though for Beaumarchais it became an opportunity to fashion himself as an honnête homme through direct relations with prominent writers, royal officials, and courtiers. It would exert great influence on the revised regulations, completed in 1780, though it was less successful in enhancing the status of playwrights. The group effectively dissolved in late 1780, though Beaumarchais tried to revive it in 1784 to negotiate with provincial theater owners. In 1790, Beaumarchais and other writers adopted this name in their petition to the National Assembly for literary property legislation, which was passed in January 1791.

IV. Analytic Concepts

double-bind/ established outsiders

An "established outsider" is a concept borrowed from Norbert Elias to describe those in a community who cannot control the collective norms of accepted behavior (that would be to be "established") but who are not entirely free from those norms (that would be to be an "outsider").

This book posits aspiring eighteenth-century playwrights as "established outsiders" in literary life. As newcomers, they sought to demonstrate their suitability for inclusion in literary life by adhering to the rules and norms of comportment set by others better established; yet they found that those very rules prevented their advancement by requiring deference towards those better established and punishing any self-assertive behavior of their own. This tension is described, again drawing from Elias, as a "double bind," a situation that the individual can neither master nor escape; he or she can only tack back and forth in his or her self presentation, like a boat caught in a storm, hoping to find a safe haven, to restore an emotional equilibrium. When no further options are available, the double bind becomes unsustainable, and established outsiders effectively lose control of the situation and of their self-presentation. At such moments, the individual's self control is compromised and becomes more prone to violence.

literary field

In a "literary field," writers are defined not by their personal autonomy but by their relationship to "literary institutions." Those who "dominate" the institutions control the field; they have the "authority" to confer on or withhold from aspiring writers the "legitimacy" needed to be accepted into the institutions and, in turn, to speak credibly outside those institutions. Through encounters with institutions, new writers learn implicitly the "rules of the game"—that they must conform to the norms set by the "dominants" of the field. Transgressors of these norms, even if entirely legal in their actions, will be denied legitimacy and be subject to "domination" within or even exclusion from the field through such exercises of symbolic power as censorship.

self-fashioning

Studies of self-fashioning explore the tension between what individuals feel about themselves in relation to society as a whole (rather than a specific order or corporation) and the status ascribed to them by others, especially by social and political elites. More generally, a great deal of recent scholarship on the problems of interpreting life narratives, especially in the early modern period, has argued that autobiographical texts should be read not as expressions of a previously held self-conception, but as actively constructing self-conception through the creation of life narratives. That is, not only can the self not be distinguished from the representation of it, but also the autonomous self does not exist prior to or outside the

representation of it. Self-fashioning, then, is the performance of the role of the autonomous individual, not merely to deceive others but above all to preserve a coherent conception of oneself as the willful, active cause of one's own destiny.

strategy/ legitimacy

To speak of an individual's action as "strategic" is to suggest that it is indeed a willful and intentional attempt to achieve an end; however, it should not be taken to imply that the individual is acting instrumentally or is even fully conscious of the context for or consequences of their action. Rather, it is to suggest an instinctive attempt to produce an effect based on an always imperfect understanding of the situation. In taking strategic action, an author's objective cannot be reduced merely to material gain, such as patronage, to power over others, or to simple self-promotion, such as the performance or publication of his or her plays. These writers' goal is best described as "legitimacy," meaning authority, credibility, and respect from others who control the institution or institutions in question.

[A Field of Honor: Writers, Court Culture and Public Theater
in French Literary Life from Racine to the Revolution](#)