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'The French Play in London': Performing, Translating, and Adapting from the French in Victorian Britain

Madame de Genlis on the Victorian Stage

Madame de Genlis sur la scène victorienne

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Abstracts

Français English
Cette étude analyse les œuvres de Madame de Genlis et leurs connexions avec le théâtre victorien. Au cours de sa longue et prolifique activité littéraire, Stéphanie Félicité du Crest de Saint-Aubin, Comtesse de Genlis, produisit une immense collection d'œuvres parmi lesquelles des textes pédagogiques, des romans, des pièces de théâtre et des nouvelles. Tous ses ouvrages reçurent un bon accueil en Europe car ils présentaient les nouvelles idées pédagogiques des Lumières françaises, mais sans les concepts et pensées associés à la Révolution. Bien qu'en Grande-Bretagne Madame de Genlis fût surtout connue pour ses livres pour enfants, son héritage peut y être triplement appréhendé comme étant celui d'une éducatrice, d'une moraliste et d'une dramaturge. C'est ainsi qu'elle apparut dès son premier texte traduit en anglais, *Theatre of Education*. Ce livre fut publié en 1781, un an après sa parution en France, une preuve s'il en est de l'intérêt que les lecteurs anglais portaient à son œuvre et au type de pièces qu'elle créait. L'attention réservée à cet auteur ne faiblit pas au cours de la période victorienne. D'ailleurs, ses aspirations morales et monarchiques, ainsi que son exaltation de l'effort personnel pour affronter l'adversité et grimper dans l'échelle sociale, firent d'elle un modèle du nouvel ordre mondial. La première pièce que vit la Reine Victoria fut *Siege of Rochelle*, adaptée de l'histoire *Le siège de La Rochelle* de Genlis. Des pièces telles que *The Palace of Truth*, l'adaptation de W. S. Gilbert du conte de fées de Madame de Genlis, *Le palais de vérité* ne s'adressaient pas uniquement aux sensibilités d'un public aristocratique, mais aussi à celles d'autres types de spectateurs. Environ 140 représentations de cette pièce furent données, elle parcourut la province britannique au cours d'une tournée, rejouée à maintes reprises. Cependant, la popularité de Madame de Genlis fut moindre à la fin du dix-neuvième siècle, lorsque le mépris de la critique victorienne pour son œuvre allait gagner l'opinion publique. Cette étude offre une analyse historiographique de la présence pertinente de Madame de Genlis dans le théâtre victorien et du type de critique que son influence suscita.

This study analyses the works by Madame de Genlis and their connections to Victorian theatre. Over the course of her long and prolific career, Stéphanie Félicité du Crest de Saint-Aubin, Comtesse de Genlis, produced an immense collection of works that include pedagogical texts, novels, plays, and short stories. All of her books were well received in Europe because they

presented the new pedagogical ideas of the French Enlightenment but without the concepts and thoughts associated to the Revolution. Even if in Britain Madame de Genlis was best known for her children's books, her legacy could be triply conceived as that of an educator, moralist, and playwright. Such roles appeared in her first text translated into English, *Theatre of Education*. The book appeared in print in 1781, a year after having been published in France, which shows the interest that English readers had towards her work and the type of dramatic pieces she developed. Such interest in this author did not falter during the Victorian period. In contrast, her moral and monarchic tendencies, together with her exaltation of the personal effort to face adversity and rise up the social ladder, made her a model of the new world order. Queen Victoria's first visit was to see the *Siege of Rochelle*, adapted from Genlis's story *Le siège de La Rochelle*. Beyond an aristocratic audience, other types of theatre-goers' sensibilities were alluded to in plays such as *The Palace of Truth*, W. S. Gilbert's adaptation of Madame de Genlis's fairy tale, *Le palais de vérité*. The play ran for approximately 140 performances, toured the British provinces, and enjoyed various revivals. Madame de Genlis's popularity, however, did diminish in the late nineteenth century, as Victorian critics' contempt for her work overpowered public opinion. This study offers an analytic historiographical revision of Madame de Genlis's relevance to Victorian theatre and of the type of criticism her influence generated.

Index terms

Mots-clés : Genlis (Madame de), opéra anglais, théâtre éducatif, femme dramaturge
Keywords: Genlis (Madame de), English opera, educational theatre, female playwrights

Full text

1 A studious woman with encyclopaedic knowledge, a consummate harpist, a tireless educator, a prolific novelist, a popular poet, an exceptional memoirist, and an inexhaustible playwright, Stéphanie Félicité du Crest de Saint-Aubin, Countess of Genlis (1746-1830), seduced a very diverse audience at the turn of the 19th century, but she also generated countless enemies due to her political, religious, and intellectual ideas. Circumstances sometimes led her down contradictory paths; she was both the lover of the Duke of Orléans and a revolutionary sympathizer (Zinkeisen 128–74), a spy for Napoleon and a spokesperson of the establishment during the Bourbon Restoration (in which her pupil, Louis-Philippe, won the throne). The list of her writings is impressive and reflects the breadth of her interests and the extent of her literary, philosophical, and scientific knowledge.

2 Madame de Genlis possessed immense fame and notoriety throughout 19th-century Europe, which was fascinated by the example of a woman from an impoverished provincial nobility who was able to advance through her own efforts amid the rigid social structure of the *Ancien Régime* (Dow 2009, 41). Her European readers sought in her works the new pedagogical thinking of Enlightenment France, free from all possible revolutionary accusation and enveloped in a thick coat of religion and morality. Her work found considerable resonance in England and Ireland because of the strong personal and professional ties that she maintained there since childhood. In 1758, her father met the man who would later become her husband in a cell in Launceston, where the English were held as prisoners of war, and the future marquis fell in love with her at first sight. On the other hand, her travels before and after the Revolution allowed her to frequent the intellectual and political circles of the era, attend various theatrical performances, and gain a first-hand appreciation of English literature. This direct contact not only allowed her to become acquainted with this socio-cultural environment but also made her well known in the British Isles, and by 1781, when she was only thirty-five years old, her *Théâtre à l'usage des jeunes personnes* was available in English libraries under the title *Theatre of Education* (Pitcher 81–82).

3 This work was one of several that she composed for the education of the Orléans children, establishing a new genre of drama written for children and interpreted by the children themselves. The appearance of an anonymous translation of *Adèle et Théodore* (*Adelaide and Theodore, or Letters on Education*) in 1783 was a crowning moment in her pedagogical work for which she earned great respect, particularly in the area of child education (Dow 2006, 367–81). The challenges that she posed to the

theories of education proposed by Rousseau in *Émile* (particularly with regard to women, whom she believed to be more ambitious) became widely popular (Trouile 237–91). Meanwhile, her works praised the Anglo-Saxon people, whose language and literature she covered and often recommended as part of basic educational training, a fact that undoubtedly pleased her Anglophone readers.

4 As noted above, her fame on the other side of the English Channel was due to not only her artistic production but also her personal life, given that her ties to the House of Orléans (Britsch 294) opened the door to high society and the court. Hence, she became known by a large audience and, not surprisingly, became the most translated author in British magazines of the era (Mayo 1962)—though translations for audiences in the British Isles occasionally limited certain sensitive issues, such as the author's relationship with Catholicism, significantly distorting the original text. Her work was well known to women writers of her generation such as Catherine Macaulay, Maria Edgeworth, Hannah More, Mary Wollstonecraft, Anna Seward, and Jane Austen. However, her pedagogical texts faded into the background as her tumultuous romantic, social, and political life became more widely known and French customs came to be viewed in a more negative light by nascent Victorian society. Because of these factors and the frequent bad reviews of adaptations of her works based on style and grammar, the pace of translations of her novels slowed over the course of the century. However, traces of her reading and interest in her intellectual production persisted among most readers of the era.

5 Over the course of the century, Madame de Genlis, or the sweetened version of her popularized in England, continued to be a reference point for authors such as Susan Edmonstone Ferrier and Mary Shelley. However, the author lost her pedagogical weight (though her didactic grounding never disappeared completely) and instead made gains in terms of imagination and evocation. With her final works, her polemical life, and her political involvements, the perception of the author as a literary figure was complete, such that her writings (from the *Sacred Dramas* to the highly controversial *Memoirs*) continue to be translated and published. Therefore, it is not surprising to read in an 1853 edition of *Fraser's Town and Country Magazine*: 'There is no name in modern French literature better known than that of Madame de Genlis' (401).

6 British children educated in the first decades of the 19th century with the *Theatre of Education*, *Sacred Dramas*, *The Tales of the Castle* and *Adelaide and Theodore* grew up and turned to the author for intellectual stimulation in the areas of science, religion, and even moral and ethical issues. This is when her works and novels truly made waves. The first example of this appears relatively soon, at the end of the Regency, with the portrayal at Covent Garden of *Zuma, or, The Tree of Health* (1818), an opera by composers Henry Rowley Bishop and John Braham with a libretto by Thomas John Dibdin[1] based on the work *Zuma, ou La découverte du quinquina* (1817). The popularity of the librettist did not deter critiques of the crudely pedagogical style and absurdities present in the text, which caused the work to be presented in London on only six occasions.

7 Perhaps due to this complete failure, the next dramatization of a novel by Madame de Genlis took several years to emerge: *The Siege of Rochelle, or, the Christian Heroine*, an opera in two parts first staged five years after her death on 29 October 1835 at the Theatre Royal Drury Lane[2] (although it was initially slated to appear at the English Opera House). The opera debuted two years before the coronation of Queen Victoria, but curiously, it would play a highly symbolic role during her reign because it was the first work the monarch attended after ascending to the throne and at which she appeared as a declared protector of the dramatic arts. The choice of this work was motivated, as we will see, by several factors.

8 The opera was based on the novel *Le siège de La Rochelle ou le malheur de la conscience,* published by Madame de Genlis in 1807. The work begins with an untranslated quote from the Ambrose Philips tragedy *Humphrey, Duke of Gloucester*, which happens to have been staged at Drury Lane in 1723:

> O! Thou, eternal Power, whose piercing Eye
> Discerns each secret Guilt; search thou my Heart!;

> And, as Thou know'st Me innocent, support me;—
> And, to the World, acquit my blemish'd Fame. (Philips 33)

9 In this manner, the French author demonstrates her Anglophilia and knowledge of British literature. At the time of the operatic adaptation, this French recognition of British arts by a famous and stylish author meshed perfectly with the tendency and spirit that the new monarchy would extol.

10 The music for the opera adaptation was composed by Michael William Balfe, with a libretto by Edward Fitzball (Fitzball 1835a, 1835b). They chose not simply a short pedagogical tale by Madame de Genlis but rather a novel of great complexity that bordered on the risqué. It mixes family and romantic emotions, using religion and war as a backdrop, questioning national and moral sentiments at every turn. All of these issues would become central in the period of transition to the Victorian Era. The libretto was considerably simpler than the original text, though it maintained its force and essence, as required at the time. All of the actors earned widespread applause, and newspaper critics were generally enthusiastic (*The Observer*, 2 November 1835), which was certainly noticed by the future queen and her milieu.

11 However, *The Siege of Rochelle* also received its share of attacks. If Madame de Genlis had been harshly criticized in France for the abstruse and implausible aspects of the story (Esmenard 24), the operatic adaptation in London received similar disapproval: 'the whole drama is so incoherent, so incomparably weak and absurd, that we quitted the theatre almost as ignorant of the author's design as we were on entering' (*Supplement to the Musical Library*, December 1835). The story as a whole was highly far-fetched, and the songs stood out in an isolated manner. There were also accusations of plagiarism, which clearly sought to tarnish the honour of the young Irish composer (*The Examiner*, 20, 27 December 1835 and January 31, 1836). The work in question was *Chiara di Rosembe*rg (1832), by Luigi Ricci of Italy. Although it appears that the librettist was indeed inspired on several occasions by the Italian adaptation of the original French work, claims regarding the music appear to be unjustified (even though Balfe had sung in the Italian opera in 1834 [Walsh 42-56]). The case was resolved with the portrayal in 1837 of *Chiara di Rosenberg* and the definitive and flagrant demonstration that, although part of the libretto seemed familiar, the music did not resemble that by Ricci. That demonstration considerably contributed to the praise of Balfe and the English work with its Italian touches. It was a celebration of Anglo-Saxon artistic creation in the face of Italian tradition, something that many had dreamed of and that would be blessed by the new monarch.

12 Both the subordination of the ensemble to the drama of the music and the frenzy ignited by some of the songs—graced with new symbolic value under the new reign, in particular the clearly monarchical '*Vive le Roi*' or the hopeful 'Lo! the early beams of morning' and 'When I beheld the anchor weighed' (Fitzball 1859, 26), which were extraordinarily successful as separate publications—allowed the public to cast aside the tangled history of its origins and the quarrels surrounding the piece. That initial staging would include more than 70 performances (Walsh 192), and it was revived for the next three seasons with Balfe in the role of the protagonist, Michel. In 1836, the opera toured cities such as Manchester, York, Liverpool, Bath, and Dublin, and performances multiplied in later years.[3] In his memoirs, Fitzball recalls the immense success of the show from the very first night and a particular figure who was in attendance:

> It was a glorious night, the first night of *The Siege of Rochelle* […]. The cram there was, the fashion, the delicious music, the enthusiastic applause, the double *encores* […]. People bent over, and nearly threw themselves from the side boxes, next to the orchestra, to congratulate and shake hands with the young composer […]. And the first time Her present Gracious Majesty went in state to the theatre, it was to the Theatre Royal Drury Lane; the "Siege of Rochelle" being performed by *special desire*. There is a celebrated portrait of her Majesty, by Parris, seated in the box. (Fitzball 1859, 25-27)

13 On 15 November 1837, on her first state visit to the theatre, the young Queen Victoria went to Drury Lane to see this 'lively and pretty' opera 'by special desire'. The desire was undoubtedly motivated by the success of the work but also by the symbolism of its

content. The moment was chronicled by the media; for example, *The Stage* described the circumstances of the visit:

> Early in this season our youthful Sovereign, having taken the drama under her especial patronage, gave it the countenance of her presence by coming in state to each theatre. Drury Lane Theatre may boast of having been the first place of public entertainment in which 'the fair-haired daughter of the Isles' was received as Queen with the heartfelt welcome of hundreds of her subjects [...]. The enthusiasm of the people seemed to admit of no abatement—their hearts were in their hands; and gratified by their enthusiasm, and pleased, as she condescended to express herself, with the performance, her Majesty imparted new life to the hitherto drooping scene around her. (Bunn 285–86)

14 The new monarch understood that she became a central part of the event by contributing to the success of the ensemble and also captured the importance of its inherent theatricality as well as her role as an actress. For this reason, the Queen had a special memory of the performance, which she described in her diary:

> I, alone, was seated in the box, which was quite *on* the stage,—all the gentlemen, and the Duchess of Sutherland and Lady Tavistock standing behind me... The Maids of Honour etc., were in the adjoining box. The house was immensely full – quite crammed, and I was *splendidly* received, with the greatest enthusiasm and deafening cheering. When *God Save the King* was sung, the whole audience joined in the Chorus. (Schoch 113)

15 It is impossible to determine whether this reference to *God Save the King* refers to the singing of the national anthem—somewhat improbably because it would have been *God Save the Queen* (Schoch 113)—or the opera's chorus of *'Vive le Roi'* that had shown so much success. Regardless, it appears that this choice for her first visit in state to an opera, an opera that was clearly monarchic and moral and that represented the *Ancien Régime* values embodied by Madame de Genlis, was not unwarranted.

16 So important was the moment that Edmund Thomas Parris painted a portrait of the monarch as she appeared at the royal palace, dressed in blue and white with a lavish crown. Her royal presence at the performance of *The Siege of Rochelle* at the Theatre Royal Drury Lane was thus captured for posterity. It was a metaphor of Queen Victoria as protector of the theatre, a declaration of the principles for which she chose to attend a performance based on the writing of Madame de Genlis. This was a calculated decision, given that the artist was present in the hall and sketched, from the orchestra, an image of his young model as protector of the theatrical arts. In 1838, a painting was made based on the sketch; it is now held in the Royal Collection. It was the Queen's first portrait since her coronation, and it became the basis of an engraving by Charles Edward Wagstaff that was subsequently widely disseminated. Several miniatures were also made from it, such as that by Sarah Biffin (1848), the English painter who was born without hands.

17 The final work by the French author to be brought to the English stage would also take a long period of time to arrive. *The Palace of Truth*, a comedy in three acts in iambic pentameter by William Schwenck Gilbert, would not be performed at the Haymarket Theatre in London until 19 November 1870. Although, in a note heading Gilbert's edition of the work, he assures that 'The Story upon which *The Palace of Truth* is founded is probably as old as the *Arabian Nights*' (Gilbert, n.p); the piece was based on Genlis's short story, *Palais de la Verité*, which, similar to *Zuma*, was contained in *Les Veillées du Château* (1784). Gilbert's claim establishes a link with *Les Lunettes Magiques*, a story that was part of *Le Caravanserail ou Recueil de Contes orientaux*, which attempted to be a translation from the Persian undertaken by Adrien Sarrazin (1811). However, as one commentator explained in the *Journal de Paris* in 1810, it strongly resembled the now detested work by Genlis: *'Les Lunettes magiques* sont agréablement racontées, mais elles ont le malheur de ressembler de trop près à plusieurs histoires bâties sur ce fonds, et entre autres à un conte singulièrement peu récréatif qui se trouve dans quelque tome de Mme de Genlis, sous le titre du *Palais de la Vérité*'. (*Journal de Paris*, November 1810, 2317)

18 Gilbert clearly utilizes Genlis's protagonists, maintaining their names[4] and the bulk of their story, though the behaviour of the characters often evokes the text by Sarrazin. It would not appear to be related to the anonymous theatrical adaptation *Le Palais de la Vérité*, presented a year later in May 1871 at the Odéon in Paris (the basis of the story and relationships between the characters are completely different), although it is possible that the French show was inspired by the success of the English version. The French comedy in three acts, written in prose, was a famous flop because of the uncomfortable underlying principle of the plot; that is, the need to impose truth at any cost as was described in various newspapers of the era:

> La vérité nue plaît rarement aux hommes. Le parterre de l'Odéon, transporté dans le palais sévère de cette déité si aimable, et pourtant si méconnue, n'en a admiré ni l'architecture ni les détails [...]. Tous les génies qui protégeaient *le Palais de la Vérité* n'ont pu le défendre contre la maligne influence du parterre; au théâtre, le parterre est le roi des génies, il n'a qu'à souffler sur les palais et les chaumières pour les faire disparaître, et c'est ce qu'il a fait sur *le Palais de la Vérité* qui s'est écroulé au milieu d'un bruit affreux. (*Mercure de France* 232)

19 The idea of the *'Palais de la Vérité'*, a place where only truth could be spoken, had been seared into the collective imagination since the publication of the work by Madame de Genlis; hence, they referred to a place in which truths were spoken with no filter and with a negative result, often causing suffering and discomfort among those who heard them. For example, the Marquise de Créquy refers to it in her memoirs: '*Le salon de Mme de la Reynière est devenu le* palais de la Vérité*, comme dans le conte allégorique, et rien n'est aussi tristement curieux que d'y lire ouvertement dans son mauvais cœur et son égoïsme dénaturé'* (Créquy 18). This allegory also reverberated beyond the English Channel; for example, Mary Russell Mitford (1787-1865) made reference to Genlis's *Palace of Truth* in one of her writings (Mitford 256).

20 When Gilbert undertook his theatrical project, the reign had already advanced considerably. Left behind was the pedagogical passion that had inspired *Zuma*, and the monarchy, now well established owing to the stability generated by British hegemony, was not in need of great exaltation. Instead, it seemed an opportune moment for fantastical daydreams. Influenced by the 'fairy extravaganzas' of James Robinson Planché (which themselves were based on French fairy tales, in this case, those written by Madame d'Aulnoy for adults), the author proposed to develop 'fairy comedies' (Booth 174). He began what some would call his second phase (which would also include *The Wicked World* in 1873, *Pygmalion and Galatea* in 1871, and *Broken Hearts* in 1875), moving away from earlier productions based on burlesques and extravaganzas. The original cast included John Buckstone as King Phanor, William Kendal as Prince Philamir, his wife, Madge Robertson Kendal, as Princess Zeolide, Chippendale as Queen Altemire, and Caroline Hill as Mirza. The actors earned unanimous praise from critics:

> To this very graceful and original work ample justice has been done by the manager and company of the Haymarket Theatre. Mr. Buckstone, droll as ever, under a novel aspect, and Mrs. Chippendale, as the jealous Queen, stand at the head of a number of comic personages, each of whom is adequately represented . . . . As a comic contrast . . . , we should mention Azéma, a coquette of a very pronounced kind, who avows her amiable foibles with alarming frankness, and is played with excellent humour by Miss Fanny Gwynne. ('Haymarket Theatre'. *The Times,* 25 November 1870)

21 Act one opens on the reign of Phanor and Altemire, the parents of Zeolide. Everything proceeds peaceably, with the monarchs receiving praise from their dedicated court and the princess preparing to marry the handsome Prince Philamir, although she has doubts about his love. The queen, for her part, is jealous of her husband, who often retires to a castle that she has never been able to visit. He explains that it is the *Palace of Truth*, a palace where everyone who enters is forced to speak the truth even though they may think that they are lying. The monarchs visit the castle with the entire court and Zeolide and her betrothed, and endless comical episodes unfold. The truths of the courtesans, as with the royal couple, are difficult to tolerate, and for

their part, the future bride and groom have several disagreements and grow apart. Predictably, in the third act, all are reconciled and learn their lesson, and the castle breaks its spell.

22 The story is told with Gilbert's lyrical eloquence, and his domain of metre confers upon the ensemble an excellent poetic quality. Until recently, critics had praised his affected and delicate style (*The Times*, 24 May 1905). The original French work favoured humorous situations within a tone of moral equilibrium that analysed the issue of when it is convenient to be truthful and when it is not as well as how to manage amorous feelings. The comedic moments are perfected in the English version and, favoured by the idea of the enchanted palace, are brilliant, though never hurtful or disrespectful, always maintaining the appearance of drama. In this manner, the spirit of Madame de Genlis is maintained, with attentiveness to tone and respect for form, perfectly melding with the Victorian spirit. This makes Gilbert's comedy a true gem that unfolds in a dreamlike universe, as suggested in an article in *The Times*:

> In the new 'fairy comedy' entitled the *Palace of Truth*, and produced at the Haymarket with great success, the author, Mr. W. S. Gilbert, has attained a point which he has been for some time approaching . . . . The *Palace of Truth* is based on a romance affixed to the *Tales of the Castle* of Madame de Genlis, a work fifty years ago as familiar to the children of England as to those of Paris, and, if we can trust to the memory of early impressions, well worthy of republication now . . . . In the hands of Mr. Gilbert the story acquires a passionate intensity, which gives it a tone rather of the early 17th than of the later 18th century. ('Haymarket theatre'. *The Times*, 25 November 1870)

23 The work was an immediate triumph: its first staging included nearly 140 performances (*The Times* 22 April and 2 May 1871) and was followed by multiple tours through the provinces, becoming one of the author's greatest successes. This led Gilbert and the British composer Edward German to propose creating an opera based on the story, though the failure of another work that they composed together, *Fallen Fairies*, ultimately deterred them (*Daily Telegraph*, 9 December 1909, 11–12). Curiously, *The Palace of Truth* brought about an encounter between William S. Gilbert and Arthur Sullivan, whose rich contributions to the Victorian period include fourteen brilliant comic operas. Gilbert, seeking the advice of a musician regarding the entrance of one of the characters in *Palace*, consulted Sullivan, and their collaboration began after that initial meeting.

24 The work was revived on several occasions: in 1877, in Haymarket, with 34 performances (*The Times*, 24 April 1877); in 1884, to inaugurate the Prince's Theatre on Coventry Street, with 43 performances (*The Times,* 19 January 1884); and even in the 20th century, with the 1905 version at the Great Queen Street Theatre, which only had 13 performances (*The Times,* 24 May 1905). Although these interpretations have extended over a long period of time, critics of the later versions have not always been so unanimous as with the first staging. In an 1877 copy of *The Times*, we read:

> We doubt very much whether those who were pleased with the *Palace of Truth* when they saw it seven years ago at this house will be quite so pleased with it now, and we doubt, too, whether those who may see it now for the first time will be inclined to give it credit for all those good qualities which it was once held to possess. The idea is quaint, if not very original, and permits a fair display of the author's humorous fancy . . . . But the conceit is too strained, the humour somewhat too prolonged. (*The Times*, 24 April 1877)

25 The choice of this play for the inauguration of the Prince's Theatre was considered—despite being considered a comedy 'of assured respectability' (*The Times,* 19 January 1884)—because it was viewed as a simplistic comedy. The levels of humour between comedy and satire, seriousness and harshness appeared to disrupt the fantastical universe devised by Madame de Genlis and inherited from the tradition of *préciosité*. Nevertheless, the multiple revivals of the work appear to contradict the opinion of angry critics who were disappointed by a fairy comedy with brilliant dialogue and an exquisite poetic rhythm. Madame de Genlis had contributed an idea that was innocent though full of charm, with delicate but clear moral connotations, something theatrical

adaptations attempted to sublimate with a careful and elegant style that the Victorian public appreciated, making it a box office success.

26 Hence, the influence of Madame de Genlis marked the period in a subtle but consistent manner. An epigraph used by the poet and critic Coventry Patmore in her narrative poem *The Angel in the House* (1854) appears to offer a clue: 'Did I ever read de Genlis? Never. Do!' (180) All the values of Victorian society—morals, education, and monarchic values—are found in her multiple volumes of French pedagogy, and she also inspired 19th-century English playwrights who were drawn to an author so removed from the Academy. The writer, more than a stylist, must have been a true magician of entertainment: her society theatre, staging of proverbs, harp concerts, parties, and countless novels and stories were devoured by high society and opened doors for her throughout Europe. It is reasonable, then, that the Victorian playwrights found in her the solution to many of the entertainment needs of their contemporaries.

27 Her style and her exotic, warlike, fairy-populated universe reverberated among British authors living amid the Napoleonic wars, cultural expansion, and generalized desire for dreamy escape. The broad dissemination of her works, which she published herself, reached the most far-flung places, making her a symbol of French culture. Surprisingly, however, British playwrights have not paid much attention to her theatrical works, perhaps because they were perceived as being for children or because of the translations that existed at the time. Meanwhile, Madame de Genlis's encouragement of encyclopaedic knowledge, religious teachings and education through theatre appears not to have resonated with the contemporaries of the Industrial Revolution and great advances in engineering and technology. Only her moral and political teachings seem to have survived the purge, and hence, we continue to find them among the works inspired by her novels. All allusions to the Countess's eventful life and her memoires, naturally, were avoided. Similarly, not even in the most sensitive works was her Christian zeal demonstrated, apparently due to the problems that doing so might raise among an Anglican audience.

28 If the first translations of her work found a wide audience, that enthusiasm declined over time, most likely as other facets of her personality became more well known: a puritan but also a libertine, a revolutionary but also a monarchist, interesting but also dangerous. Madame de Genlis represents old France, the Revolution, the empire, and the Bourbon Restoration, though devoid of the burden of any of these (Burwick 58–92). She also evokes Rousseau, Voltaire, and other Enlightenment philosophers, though stripped of their danger. The French writer also suggests seduction and licentiousness, *maîtresses* and *badinage* without the threats represented by someone such as Laclos. She symbolizes French Anglophilia, the international recognition of English literature and history, and devotion to the Georgian Era and its characters (Wahba 221–38).

29 Trends also played a large role both in the glorifying and in the forgetting of Madame de Genlis, from her triumph during her lifetime in France and England with hundreds of publications to her gradual disappearance based on political, pedagogical, stylistic, and even moral trends. However, interest in her undoubtedly endured over time, as suggested by her presence on English billboards for more than a century. Nevertheless, her language gradually lost steam until it disappeared circa the beginning of the 20th century, yielding to a period of relative obscurity for her work until feminist critics and historians of education came to reassert her. Her ties to music, non-pedagogical theatre, and entertainment have fallen practically into obscurity, despite being a central part of her life.

30 The traces of her pedagogy, apparently out of style, likely condemned translations of her work to other formats such as the opera, though those who adapted it learned the lesson. The authors of *The Siege of Rochelle* and *The Palace of Truth* exploited the author's fame and sought success, owing to brilliant music in the one case and scintillating lyrics in the other. It is notable that her work is so strongly associated with the opera. Of the three adaptations that were made, two were operas and the third was nearly a libretto. Perhaps the reason was Madame de Genlis's deep connection with music (she played the harp, among other instruments, and her disciples included great musicians), or perhaps the new times required new formats and a new language. Regardless, this connection was not based on her style, nor her stories, which were

rarely light; in reality, all of the versions sought in the author a certain moral depth. Even Gilbert turned to her to leave aside the burlesque and move from a comic tone towards a more serious phase.

31 Genlis may have resembled a trinket or a perfume more than profound principles, but she remained present and current in her own way, as she had always wanted. She embodied an exotic touch of the French *Ancien Régime* on English soil, the advances of the Enlightenment with a thick coating of morals. If French audiences forgot her nearly the moment she died, even rejecting her for the bitter past that she evoked, England perhaps held onto her memory as if to an Arcadian childhood, a symbol of happier times. Additionally, as demonstrated by Queen Victoria's attendance at *Siege of Rochelle* and portrait at the performance, she was also a symbol of the era.

32 Madame de Genlis was also a symbol for aristocrats schooled in the old value of the *Ancien Régime* and for other social classes that discovered, in large part owing to the theatre and opera to which they were just beginning to gain access, a subversive character who got ahead despite her difficult position. She represented tranquil change, married perfectly with parliamentary monarchy, allowing for progress and certainly always encouraging the maintenance of good manners and political stability. Her message was not directed solely towards the upper class for the maintenance of the status quo. Her status as a woman and exaltation of personal effort as the only route to success and social advancement make her, in a certain way, a model for the striving middle class. All of this crystallized in some innocent works of theatre.

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Notes

1 In a 1918 study by F. Corder regarding works by Bishop, the story is attributed to the *Contesse* [sic] *de Ségur* (who, on the other hand, did not publish until much later) (Corder 87).

2 The manager of Drury Lane embraced this opportunity, which favoured a broad subsequent collaboration with Balfe.

3 In 1838 by the Caradori-Allan troupe at Park Theatre in New York; the following year, Balfe once again interpreted Michel in Dublin and in 1848 in Sydney; and Emma Romer opened the 1853 season at The Surrey with this work. It was then produced in Manchester in 1875, Liverpool in 1876, Birmingham and Edinburgh in 1877, and Dublin in 1879. The Turner Company took it up again in 1963. We recently found the song 'When I beheld the Anchor Weigh'd' on an album recorded by the British Music Society commemorating the centennial of Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee.

4 These same names, specifically Phanor, Murza and Azema, were given to subspecies of lemurs by John Edward Gray, who appears to have seen the work in 1870 (Dunkel, Zijlstra and Groves 64–70).

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