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LA HARPE AS JUDGE OF HIS
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DISSERTATION

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate
School of the Ohio State University

By

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The Ohio State University
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I should like to call the attention of the reader to certain orthographical peculiarities in the edition of La Harpe's Lycée used in this study. This edition consistently uses the spelling parceque, written as one word, in place of the currently accepted parce que, and omits the circonflex accent (ˆ) over the letter a in grâce.
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INTRODUCTION

There have been to date three general approaches to the critical work of Jean-François de La Harpe. The first and most authoritative, because it is supported by Faguet and Brunetière, establishes La Harpe as the founder of historical criticism. In Faguet's analysis La Harpe, arriving on the critical scene at the time Voltaire's criticism was turning to polemic, and immediately preceding the great critics of the nineteenth century, was destined to a brief success. He was, according to Faguet, a frustrated poet, who, like Sainte-Beuve, turned to criticism; and because he was jealous of more successful writers, was often unjust in his judgments. But, "au fond, il était critique, et mieux que personne." Faguet declares, too, that La Harpe was the first literary historian to present more than an erudite compilation of facts and the first to have a concept of literary history "soutenu par des principes directeurs et des idées générales et une méthode sensiblement uniforme." Brunetière adds to this argument the strength of his prestige when he states that La Harpe was the critic "qui s'est avisé le premier de réduire en un corps toute l'histoire de la littérature et de faire marcher du même pas l'histoire et l'appréciation des œuvres." To be sure, La Harpe's critical history

1Emile Faguet, "La Harpe," Revue des cours et conférences, 1904-1905 (Première série), 196.
2Ibid., 194.
3Ibid., 195.
has serious lacunae; the Lycée, ou cours de littérature ancienne et moderne, his most important work, skims antiquity and omits the Middle Ages, scarcely acknowledging the sixteenth century. There seems to be little doubt, however, that whatever omissions exist, the Lycée is significant in its priority, in its scope and in its approach.

A second handling of La Harpe the critic sets forth in some detail the principles of his critical doctrine and traces the application of these tenets to his discussions in the Cours de littérature. Two doctoral dissertations, one by Bruno Eldich at Leipzig and another by Grace Sproull at the University of Chicago, follow this line of attack. Eldich's work emphasizes the critic's judgments on the seventeenth century and is largely a careful listing of the elements of La Harpe's critical apparatus as they are applied to the French classics. Miss Sproull's study is much more comprehensive, synthesizing the critical doctrine from La Harpe's various works and determining the extent to which the critic follows his theory in the whole body of his work. In general the latter dissertation is much more interpretive than is Eldich's. These two treatments of La Harpe's doctrine are the longest studies of the critic thus far, but both of them slight La Harpe's opinions of the eighteenth-century writers,


6 Grace Mildred Sproull, Jean-François de La Harpe, Controversialist and Critic, (unpub. diss.), Univ. of Chicago, 1937.
Eldich's because it is interested primarily in French classicism and Miss Sproull's because its scope permits only brief discussion of La Harpe as judge of his contemporaries.

The third and by far the largest body of criticism of La Harpe is that of the polemicists, both for and against the critic, who use random judgments from his writings as points of departure for political, philosophical or literary diatribes. These invectives usually are centered around the latter part of the eighteenth century and have successfully obscured the real importance of La Harpe's critical role in those hectic times. The curious aspect of the articles taking this approach is their bitterness, which continues to the present day. No doubt a good share of their characteristic acidity is explained by the fact that La Harpe was a renegade philosophe, once called by Voltaire "un des piliers de notre Église."7 During the Revolution he was a wearer of the "bonnet rouge,"8 and, after a period of imprisonment by the revolutionaries, a fervent Catholic and enemy of la philosophie. Whatever the case, no general study has yet been made of La Harpe's criticism of his contemporaries. Inasmuch as half the work for which he is remembered deals with eighteenth-century authors, it would seem only logical to examine impartially what the critic says of them, to determine the worth not of his personal beliefs but of his critical observations.

7Moland, XLV, 356. Voltaire means the "Église philosophique."

8Louis de Préauç, "La Harpe et son bonnet rouge," Revue hebdomodaire, IX, September, 1911, 532-56.
Such an investigation encounters immediate difficulties. After his conversion La Harpe revised much of the material in his *Lycée*; so we find frequent contradictions in the text regarding his contemporaries. It has been the sometimes malicious role of innumerable critics to indicate these contradictions. Acknowledging as irrefutable the inconsistencies in the *Lycée*, the present study will attempt to reveal general principles which have been previously ignored. A second difficulty in evaluating La Harpe's remarks on the authors of the Enlightenment lies in the exaggerated place given to many minor figures. Such writers, whose importance is now considered negligible, will be treated briefly in a separate chapter. Perhaps the greatest pitfall in studying La Harpe's contemporary criticism, however, is the fact that the critic, who was in no way a philosopher, tried repeatedly to evaluate philosophically the ideas of the great men of his age, thus weakening the literary aspects of his approach.

Despite the foregoing weaknesses, which, indeed, occupy a considerable part of the last eight volumes of the *Cours de littérature*, there are indications that La Harpe as a critic was ahead of his times. Jean-François de La Harpe represents not so much a doctrine or theory of literature as he does an approach to it. In his commentary, particularly that concerned with the authors of the Enlightenment, he has recourse to almost every technique of criticism. In his willingness to relate the life of an author to a work, he anticipates Sainte-Beuve and the flood of criticism dealing with "l'homme et l'oeuvre." When he attempts to explain the reception of a literary
work in terms of intellectual, political or social climate, he seems
to be foreshadowing the positivistic approach of Taine. By his fre­
quent citation of, and commentary on, individual texts he hints at
the intensive textual analyses characteristic of modern criticism.
It becomes obvious, moreover, that La Harpe, perhaps more than any
writer of his time, had his hand on the public pulse. His reaction
to popular opinion was almost instinctive.

In view of these facts, the present study will examine the
critic in the following way:

First, we shall give a brief summary of La Harpe's life.
Next his literary output will be considered, with special emphasis on
his response to the success or failure of his individual works. Af­
ter a short chapter outlining the nature and principal points of his
"doctrine," his judgments of the major figures of the eighteenth cen­
tury will be presented and an attempt made to establish La Harpe's
approach to authors then unmarked by posterity. Brief attention will
be paid to his analyses of the minor writers to determine the con­
sistency of his criteria. Finally, La Harpe will be compared to oth­
er critics of the same orientation to bring out his importance relative
to the subsequent development of criticism. It seems in fact to be
more than coincidence that the Lycée was followed almost immediately
by a series of Cours de littérature of varied orientation which cul­
minated in the great era of nineteenth-century criticism. Though
his works are rarely consulted today, both his lectures at the
Lycée and the work which is based on them enjoyed a brief period of
great popularity. It also becomes apparent that La Harpe himself was largely responsible for the lack of esteem in which he is held in modern times. The errors provoked by his post-conversion bias against the philosophes have made him an easy target for partisans of that group. In all fairness to him, probably the best approach to his work is one he himself advocates:

...ce n'est pas dans les journaux, dans les brochures, dans les extraits qu'on ira chercher ce que j'ai pensé; c'est dans mon ouvrage; et c'est là aussi qu'il conviendra de consigner, quand il sera temps, ce qui est fait pour caractériser la littérature de nos jours.\(^9\)

Jean-François de La Harpe wrote during an angry period which accorded him fame during his lifetime, but he represented a cause which made that fame fleeting. At the end of his classical era, much of his critical work was devoted to the defense of those literary rules and ideals which were soon to be overthrown by the proponents of the Romantic movement. In 1819 Saint-Surin said of him in the *Biographie Universelle* that he was "au premier rang des critiques par un grand nombre d'excellentes leçons."\(^1\) Two years before Saint-Surin's article, Stendhal had already made the biting statement, "La Harpe a appris la littérature a cent mille Français, dont il a fait de mauvais juges."\(^2\) Sainte-Beuve, in 1851, attested to the decline of La Harpe's reputation: "ayant bien des parties du juge (La Harpe) ne vient pourtant qu'au second rang des judicieux."\(^3\) And by 1897 Louis Bertrand was to qualify La Harpe, Marmontel and others with the adjectives "médiocres" and "pédants," while grouping them under what was to him the pejorative heading of "gens de collège."\(^4\)

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Today he is usually mentioned as the last of the critics to defend wholeheartedly the dying tenets of Boileau's classicism.\footnote{For an excellent treatment of this idea see John Richardson Miller, *Boileau en France au dix-huitième siècle*, Baltimore, Johns Hopkins Press; London, Oxford Univ. Press; Paris, Belles Lettres, 1942.}

Whether or not his works have stood the test of time, he was one of the foremost, though also one of the most controversial literary figures of his day. He wrote twelve tragedies, served as one of the editors of the *Mercure de France*, translated several Latin classics, was elected to the *Académie française*, produced several prize "éloges," participated in scholarly polemics with the greatest men of his time, and wrote what was considered the best general critical work of his century, his *Lycée, ou cours de littérature ancienne et moderne*, which remains today the best-known of his writings. He was on intimate terms with Voltaire, whom he called "papa," and who applauded some of his works.\footnote{Gustave Desnoisresters, *Voltaire et la vie au XVIIIe siècle*, Paris, Didier, 1875, vol. 7, 189.} Toward the end of his life he knew and was visited by Chateaubriand.\footnote{Sainte-Beuve, *op. cit.*, 112-13.} Even in the eighteenth century, however, he was reproached for the harshness of much of his criticism and the personal bias of many of his judgments. To appreciate fully the reasons for these reproaches and indeed to arrive at a fair appraisal of his work, one must know something of the life of the critic.
La Harpe's very birth was a source of controversy in his time. Some of his enemies claimed that he was the illegitimate son of a cook and an invalid. This contention has been proved wrong, but it shows the bitter hostility La Harpe engendered either through his writings or through his personality. La Harpe even felt obliged to write an article defending his ancestry in the *Mercure de France.* Saint-Surin and Sainte-Beuve both state that La Harpe was born in Paris on November 20, 1739, into the family of a poor nobleman whose origins were in the region of Vaud. His father died when Jean-François was nine years old, and from that time until the young man reached the age of nineteen, he was raised by charity. After spending six months with the "soeurs de la charité de la paroisse de St-André des Arcs," he was presented to M. Asselin, the proviseur of the Collège d'Harcourt, and demonstrated sufficient talent and intelligence to win a "bourse."  

His studies were brilliant, particularly in rhetoric. While he was still at the College he was accused of having directed a vulgar satire against his protector, M. Asselin. The so-called "Affaire des couplets" was used repeatedly by La Harpe's enemies as proof of the critic's base ingratitude. Though La Harpe admitted having written satirically against various aspects of life at the school, he

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always denied that he had turned against the man to whom he owed his scholarship. Refusing to name his collaborators in the volume, however, he was punished severely for the objectionable pamphlets. Curiously and unjustly, the punishment was administered not by the school, but by M. de Sartine, "lieutenant-général de police," who had him imprisoned first at Bicêtre and then at Fort-l'Eveque for several months. Saint-Surin points out that the obvious injustice of his treatment might explain the "direction que prirent ses talents."  

In 1759 La Harpe launched his literary career with two "héroïdes," which he preceded with an "Essai sur l'héroïde." Fréron called upon La Harpe to reread the ancients instead of judging them, predicting sarcastically that "avec du travail il (La Harpe) parviendrait à posséder toutes les qualités qu'on peut acquérir au défaut du génie." This hostile comment was the first of a long dispute between La Harpe and the editor of the Année littéraire. Four years later, La Harpe published what is generally considered to be his best tragedy, Le Comte de Warwick. It was played sixteen times in 1763 and forty-nine times between 1764 and 1816. As a result of the...

11 A close study of this "Affaire" by Paul Bonnefon, "Une aventure de la jeunesse de La Harpe: L'affaire des couplets," RHL, 18 (1911), 354-63, sees in it early indications of La Harpe's satirical talent.
12 Saint-Surin, op. cit., 182.
13 Ibid., 183.
success of his tragedy, he was presented to Louis XV. Almost im-
mediately, he wrote to Voltaire a letter on dramatic art which open-
ed a correspondence between them. La Harpe was to visit Ferney often
with his wife, a talented actress, whom the critic had married in the
face of scandal.\textsuperscript{15} While a guest at Voltaire's château, La Harpe
took it upon himself to correct parts of the tragedies in which he
acted with his wife. Chabanon, in his \textit{Tableau de quelques circon-
stances de ma vie}, reconstructs the following dialogue: "Papa, (dit
La Harpe) j'ai changé quelques vers qui me paraissent faibles." Vol-
taire écoute les changements, et reprend vivement: Bon! mon fils,
cela vaut mieux; changez toujours de même, je ne puis qu'y gagner.\textsuperscript{16}
When others were surprised at Voltaire's patience with the young man,
the \textit{philosophe} answered their reproaches with, "Il aime ma personne
et mes ouvrages."\textsuperscript{17} According to Desnoiresterres, who calls La
Harpe "l'un des esprits les plus distingués de cette fin de siècle et,
assurément l'élève le plus brillant du grand écrivain...",\textsuperscript{18} Vol-
taire's fondness for the critic led him, without La Harpe's ever know-
ing it, to write to the comptroller-general asking that half his own
pension be paid to La Harpe.\textsuperscript{19}

\textsuperscript{15}Peignot, \textit{op. cit.}, 21-22, C.f. Saint-Surin, \textit{op. cit.}, 182.
\textsuperscript{16}Cited in Saint-Surin, \textit{op. cit.}, 183.
\textsuperscript{17}\textit{Ibid.}, 183.
\textsuperscript{18}Desnoiresterres, \textit{op. cit.}, 178.
\textsuperscript{19}\textit{Ibid.}, 192.
The relationship between them was not always so happy, however, for in 1767 a manuscript of "La guerre de Genève," which Voltaire did not wish to circulate, appeared in Paris. La Harpe and Mme Denis were accused of having collaborated in the theft of the manuscript. Though La Harpe denied any part in the incident and even wrote angry notes to Voltaire while still his guest, he was probably guilty. In any case, he left Ferney shortly after the accusations and was not to return.20

In 1770, however, on the occasion of the publication of Mélanie, La Harpe quotes Voltaire as having said, "L'Europe attend Mélanie." Grimm points out that Voltaire also added, "Cela n'est pas très bon: cela réussira pourtant; c'est un drame, et l'on aime aujourd'hui les drames à Paris."21 This strange relationship reached as unhappy conclusion in 1778 after Voltaire had attacked one of La Harpe's tragedies, Les Barmécides, declaring, "Mon ami, cela ne vaut rien...jamais la tragédie ne passera par ce chemin-là."22 Later in the same year, La Harpe published an article comparing Zulime and Racine's Athalie, much to the detriment of Voltaire's tragedy.23 Needless to say, such an attack did not enhance the critic's standing with a public still mourning its hero.24 Later, however, La Harpe wrote an Eloge de

20Peignot, op. cit., 35 ff. Peignot attempts to establish La Harpe's innocence.
21Grimm, Correspondance littéraire..., Paris, Garnier, 1880, XII, 246.
22Ibid., XII, 122.
23Saint-Surin, op. cit., 187.
24Préaudeau, op. cit., passim.
Voltaire, and his discussions of the Patriarch in the Lycée, while not always laudatory, are generally highly complimentary. This affair illustrates perhaps better than any other why the critic's writing has invited polemic.

In his shorter works, La Harpe seems to have interspersed diatribes with panegyrics. His éloges of Racine, Fénelon, Charles V, Henri IV and Catinat seem almost out of place in his life of combat. A good example of La Harpe's controversial position in the eighteenth century is the account given of Marmontel's oration at La Harpe's reception into the Académie française. Marmontel, who had come up for sharp criticism in the Mélanges littéraires et philosophiques, took his revenge by praising the critic's predecessor and alluding plainly to La Harpe's violence in discussion and his exalted opinion of himself. According to Saint-Surin, Marmontel was applauded for his pointed remarks. Thus La Harpe, in the only parallel that can be drawn between him and Montesquieu, was welcomed into the Académie française with a personal rebuke.

La Harpe's conversion has provided considerable fuel for debate. At the beginning of the Revolution, the critic was at least outwardly a supporter of the Republic. Numerous articles in the Mercure and even some poems delivered in the Lycée give proof of this fact. Over his wig he wore a "bonnet rouge," proclaiming himself a partisan of the Revolution through some of the worst excesses of the Reign of Terror. But in 1794, when for an unknown reason he was imprisoned,

Saint-Surin, op. cit., 187.
he became a fervent Catholic and an enemy of the cause he had so re-
cently and heatedly defended.26 His moving account of opening by
chance L'imitation de Jésus-Christ to the sentence, "Me voici, mon fils,
je viens à vous parce que vous m'avez invoqué," is apparently sincere.27
The fury with which he turned on the Revolution after his release, how­
ever, does give rise to speculation as to the depth of his former con-
victions.28 Whatever the conversion accomplished, it did not in any
way impair the activity of the polemicist and the fanatic in La Harpe.

Besides Jean-François' unfortunate childhood, the vituperative
character which certainly resulted at least in part from his early mis-
fortunes, and his sudden conversion to Catholicism, some other factors
of his personal life must be taken into consideration. His first mar­
riage, to a young woman whose reputation he had compromised, ended in
divorce, followed later by the suicide of the actress who had been ap­
plauded at Ferney.29 Though he remarried, his second wife left him
shortly after the wedding.30 La Harpe's enemies attributed the dis­
astrous second marriage to his lecherous character, but this allega-
tion is probably only vicious slander.31 At least some of his

26 Préaudeau, op. cit., passim.

27 Peignot, op. cit., 115-118.

28 Sainte-Beuve, op. cit., 132-34.

29 Saint-Surin, op. cit., 193.

30 Ibid.

31 Sainte-Beuve, op. cit., 136-37.
unhappiness in married life might be due to his physical appearance:

Petit de taille et même exigu, "haut comme Ragotin" disait Voltaire, ses ennemies l'avaient surnommé Bébé, en lui appliquant le sobriquet d'un nain du roi Stanislas.32

Certainly the smallness of his stature and the eagerness of others to ridicule it did nothing to alleviate the rancor provoked by other circumstances of his life. Poor by birth, having lost his father when still a boy, victim of injustices, constantly subject to ridicule, but endowed with a sharp and even brilliant mind, La Harpe literally fought his way upward at the end of the eighteenth century.

Such were the main circumstances of La Harpe's life. We come now to speak of his chief work. The Lycée, ou cours de littérature ancienne et moderne, as its title hints, was the result of lectures given at the institution known as the Lycée, described by Sainte-Beuve in the following terms:

Le Lycée alors était une fondation à la fois scientifique et littéraire, une élégante Sorbonne à l'usage des gens du monde. La Harpe monte dans sa chaire vers deux heures de l'après-midi. L'élite des jeunes dames, des gens d'esprit et des littérateurs, tout ce qu'il y avait de plus brillant à cette florissante époque de Louis XVI, entoure sa chaire...Pour la première fois en France, L'enseignement tout à fait littéraire commence et se met en frais d'agrément; pour la première fois, quand on n'est ni frivole ni érudit, et qu'on cherche une juste et moyenne culture, on voit se dérouler les cadres faciles qui étendent et reposent la vue de l'esprit, même quand le professeur n'a pas réussi complètement à les remplir.33

In his lectures La Harpe quickly, indeed rather superficially, traces the literatures of antiquity. He then bridges the periods between

32 Ibid.
33 Ibid., 107.
antiquity and classical French literature with brief sketches. His best comments seem to be in the area of French classicism, which he, like most of his contemporaries, considers to be the culmination of literary art. In general,

Ce n'est pas un critique curieux et studieusement inves-
tigateur que La Harpe, c'est un professeur pur, lucide,
animé. Il étend, il développe et il applique les princi-
pes du goût de Voltaire...Dans l'expression comme dans les
idées, il trouve ce qui se présente d'abord et ce qui est
d'à l'usage de tous.34

So speaks Sainte-Beuve of the "bonnes et saines" parts of La Harpe's Lycée: those parts, we are to assume, which do not involve invective and polemic, which do not in short deal with those contemporaries whom he personally or professionally disliked. Since Sainte-Beuve's statement, most serious studies of La Harpe have cautiously avoided his judgments of his contemporaries. I shall devote the greater part of this study to those judgments.

In view of La Harpe's prowess as a student, Voltaire's respect for him, his extensive literary output, the wide acclaim received by at least two of his plays, his election to the Académie française, his editorship of the Mercure de France, and the praise accorded him by Saint-Surin, Desnoisrestersers, Chateaubriand and Sainte-Beuve, we must assume that La Harpe's criticism has some merit. Taking into consideration the bitter experiences of his life, however, we must admit that within his criticism there will be some ill-formed or biased opinions. La Harpe's teaching at the Lyceé was interrupted by his imprisonment in 1793. The critic later reworked all his

34 Ibid., 117.
lectures before publishing his *Cours de littérature*. So it is only natural that his sudden conversion influenced his lavish praise of Chateaubriand or his condemnation of Diderot. His fanaticism easily accounts for the highly moralistic tone of the later sections of the *Lycée*. But to deny the validity of half of La Harpe's best-known work on the grounds of prejudice is unfair. To assume that his review of eighteenth-century literature is of no interest because he is unjust to many of the *philosophes* is unrealistic. An examination of what La Harpe says of his contemporaries, on the other hand, if the personal elements of his criticism were set aside as much as possible, might give a clear picture of La Harpe's real worth as a critic. Deprived of the support of Aristotle, Longinus and Boileau, dealing with genres which are not "classical" in nature, La Harpe becomes the critic of a literature in a state of flux. His final value as a literary judge may perhaps best be determined by his conclusions about the writers of the Enlightenment, and the major question to be posed is whether, despite its prejudice, the *Lycée* provides us with any valuable insight into the still controversial literature of the eighteenth century.
CHAPTER II

LA HARPE'S CREATIVE WRITINGS

La Harpe's literary debut was prophetic of his later career. He chose as a form the briefly popular genre of the héroïde and became engaged in a polemic with Elie Fréron. His Héroïdes nouvelles, précédées d'un essai sur l'héroïde en général, published in 1759, thus established a pattern. On the one hand La Harpe wrote for immediate public success and on the other to defend himself against criticism engendered by his vanity and his dogmatism. Between 1760 and 1763 he composed numerous short poems, such as L'indifférence d'un homme sensible and Le philosophe des Alpes, which adhered to the philosophical ideas of Voltaire. For the last-named of the two poems he received honorable mention in the first of many academic contests he was to enter. His early writings and controversies added to the public attention he had already attracted through his successes at the Collège d'Harcourt. So in 1763 when the first of his tragedies, Le Comte de Warwick, enjoyed wide acclaim, the young author was firmly established as a disciple of Voltaire and an enemy of the conservative forces of the mid-eighteenth century.

Seeking to secure his position, La Harpe dedicated his play to Condé and upon its success wrote a letter to Voltaire presenting some ideas on dramatic art. The Patriarch answered immediately and threw his support and friendship to the young author. A year later, La Harpe tried to follow up his auspicious beginnings with a second
tragedy, Timoléon, in whose preface he felt obliged to defend himself against the charges of ingratitude inspired by the "affair des couplets." Timoléon was a failure, as was Pharamond, a third tragedy played in 1765. Despite the ridicule of his enemies, he published, at the age of twenty-six, the first volume of his collected works, the Mélanges littéraires ou Epitres et Pièces philosophiques, and won first prize at the Académie de Rouen for an essay on the Délivrance de Salerne. These minor triumphs and Voltaire's encouragement helped assuage La Harpe's disappointment...The future critic visited Ferney and under Voltaire's guidance started another tragedy, Les Barmécides, which was not produced until much later. In 1766, the complete failure of Gustave turned La Harpe away from the tragic stage for many years:

La Harpe, découragé par trois chutes consécutives, renonce pour quelque temps à la scène tragique, et dirige ses travaux vers les concours académiques, qui lui furent plus favorables.¹

He won in quick succession the prix de poésie and the prix d'éloquence of the Académie française.

In 1767, the year of his quarrel with Voltaire concerning theft of the manuscript of the Guerre de Genève, La Harpe won another prize in eloquence for his Eloge de Charles V. The following year Voltaire's efforts succeeded in obtaining La Harpe a position with the Mercure. Henceforth the young man's creative work was interspersed with journalistic writings. Finally, in 1769, La Harpe obtained, with Mélanie, a success which he had been vainly seeking since Warwick. Though the

¹Peignot, op. cit., 26.
drame was not actually presented on the stage until 1791, the author read it to almost every conceivable literary circle in the capital and found eagerly receptive audiences. Its theme, a protest against forced religious vows, was a perfect conversation-piece for the salons of the time. Indeed, La Harpe was remarkably active in the social circles of Paris, attending such disparate groups as those of Mme du Deffand, la maréchale de Luxembourg, Julie de Lespinasse, la duchesse de Choiseul, Mme Necker and Mme Geoffrin. Always avid for success, he catered regularly to public taste.

A translation from the Latin, Les Douze Césars de Suetone, was sharply criticized for its inaccuracies when it appeared in 1770, but La Harpe redeemed himself somewhat a few months later when he took first prizes in both eloquence and poetry at the Académie Française for his Eloge de Fénelon and a poem, Des talents dans leurs rapports avec la société et le bonheur. By now it appears obvious that La Harpe was dependent solely on his writings as a source of income. His prizes and journalistic work gave him a living. When he failed with any of his works, he turned to other genres which promised more reward. This fact explains why he collaborated in such ventures as the publication of a Galerie française and why, instead of withholding his Eloge de Racine for competition in 1772, he promptly published it. His financial situation accounts also for his attempts at the drame, a form which he often criticized. Having succeeded with Mélanie, for example, La Harpe wrote another play of the same kind,

Sproull, op. cit., 40-43.
Barnevel, to which he added a preface partially defending his use of the genre and outlining its strengths and weaknesses.

The years 1773 through 1777 were characterized by several éloges, including those of La Fontaine and Catinat, and more short poems. In 1775, for the second time, he took the prizes of the Académie française in both eloquence and poetry and was finally admitted to that body. During this period he also worked on two new tragedies, Les Barmécides and Menzicoff. The latter play was never presented in Paris, having obtained a cool reception at Fontainebleau. As if to dull further the glory of his reception into the Academy, La Harpe threw himself into a singularly abusive exchange with Dorat. The low point of his career was reached in the year of Voltaire's death, however, when his ill-received attack on Zulime was followed by the failure of Les Barmécides. The critic's unpopularity was summed up at this time by the abbé de Boismont, who remarked:

Nous aimons tous infiniment M. de La Harpe notre confrère; mais on souffre en vérité de le voir arriver sans cesse l'oreille déchirée.  

There were even rumors that La Harpe had left Paris in fear. Still he managed to produce another collection of his works.

By the following year public opinion had softened toward him, probably in large part because of two highly laudatory works on Voltaire, his Eloge de Voltaire and Les muses rivales, in which

*Peignot, op. cit., 77.  
*Sproull, op. cit., 82.
various muses were pictured disputing their claims to the great man. Whatever La Harpe's admiration for Voltaire, the former's thirst for recognition seems to have been stronger, for it has recently been brought to light that La Harpe apparently waited deliberately until the Patriarch's death to produce any further tragedies.\(^5\) Evidence strongly supports this assertion, inasmuch as the critic followed two comparatively unimportant works, an erotic poem entitled Tangu et Féline and an Abrégé de l'histoire des voyages de l'abbé Prevost with four tragedies in as many years. Both Philoctète and Coriolan were crowned with immediate success and remained in the repertory of the Comédie Française until well into the nineteenth century. Jeanne de Naples was moderately well-received and only Les Drames failed, giving rise to an effective pun: "Les bras me tombent."\(^6\) La Harpe seems to have timed well his return to the tragic stage.

It is curious that after having fared so well in his later tragic productions La Harpe should have once more abandoned the genre; but in 1786 the door of the Lycée was opened to him and from that time until his death in 1803 La Harpe was almost exclusively a critic. The year of his entrance into the Lycée he presented one more tragedy, Virginie. An indication of his temporary ascendancy in the field of tragedy after Voltaire's death is the fact that the usually vain La Harpe refused to acknowledge his authorship of the play, though it was quite successful.


\(^{6}\)Peignot, op. cit., 95.
From 1786 to 1793, the critic's pulpit at the Lycée was a sounding-board for liberal ideas, and his creative hand turned to pamphlets in favor of the Revolution. As a journalist he wrote for the so-called Journal littéraire and the Journal des Débats, always advocating liberal policies. Small wonder that many of his enemies cast doubt on the sincerity of his conversion. The change was indeed abrupt.

The final ten years of the critic's life were devoted to the revision of the Lycée, the composition of two religious works, L'Apologie de la religion and Le Triomphe de la religion, and short articles condemning the Revolution. Both his religious works anticipated Chateaubriand's apology and the spiritual revival of the early nineteenth century. La Harpe also collaborated in the Mémorial historique, politique et littéraire. So outspoken was he in his new beliefs that he was twice exiled, once under the Directorate and once under Napoleon. La Harpe's position and reputation during those troubled years is noted frequently in Chateaubriand's Mémoires d'Outre-Tombe. The romanticist writes delightedly that his Génie du Christianisme was approved by "une telle autorité" as La Harpe, and describes the critic as belonging to "une arrière-ligne solide dans la société." Though he actually published little creative work at the time, La Harpe from all indications enjoyed a period of comparative fame. One short publication, La prophétie de Cazotte, deserves

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8Ibid., 326.
mention. In it the critic displays his only attempt at the conte, and, if one is to believe Sainte-Beuve, his attempt is eminently successful.

It becomes increasingly apparent in studying La Harpe that the focal point of his efforts was the achievement of greatness in his time. Having come from a poor background, his only resource was his talent, which he continually used as effectively as he could. Throughout his life he depended upon the favor of either the public or powerful friends, and to gain that favor he was forced to cater to certain tastes. It is a tribute to his talent and to his character that he survived in the literary arena of the Enlightenment. At the center of most attacks on the critic is the fact that he was a renegade to the Revolution. Gaiffe and Préaudeaux infer that cowardice dictated his religious conversion; but there are strong indications that La Harpe was not timid. His conduct in the affair of the couplets was far from that of a coward. Nor is Chateaubriand’s portrait of the critic "faisant faire ses omelettes chez les ministres où il ne trouvait pas le dîner bon...disant des grossièretés philosophiques aux plus grands seigneurs..." one of fearfulness.10 Not even Préaudeaux doubts the sincerity of La Harpe’s conversion; and whatever the motives for it, the revival of religion had not yet set in solidly enough to make a Christian zealot entirely safe. Finally, it seems unlikely that anyone with La Harpe’s taste for diatribe or with his ability to survive literary failure and recover could be motivated by cowardice alone. The most accurate description of the man is probably that of Adolphe Jullien:

9 Gaiffe, op. cit., 126-127, and Préaudeaux, loc. cit., passim.
10 Bire, op. cit., III, 327.
...l'Aristarque dur et quinteux, à la petite taille, au ton tranchant, à l'air hardi; le brillant élève du Collège d'Harcourt...l'auteur applaudi de Warwick, l'auteur bafoué de mainte autre tragédie; le flatter, le favori et le correcteur de Voltaire, le célèbre critique du Mercure, La Harpe enfin, qui allait obtenir un succès de scandale avec le drame de Mélanie ou la Religieuse...ou les idées du temps et le goût du jour étaient également flattés par cette attaque contre les voeux forcés, par cette sensibilité déclamatoire et ce pathétique vulgaire.

The complete picture is that of an extremely intelligent man with literary talent, driven by inordinate ambition, flattering the public taste and striving to establish his ascendancy primarily for the present and only secondarily for posterity.

The Lycée itself was written to answer a real and widespread demand, and it may easily be called a gamble for success. La Harpe to all appearances staked his reputation on the decline of the philosophes and the rebirth of religion. If this were the case, the apparent inconsistencies of the Cours de littérature are partially explained. Safe in his admiration for the Greek, Roman and French classics, he chose to praise those of his contemporaries whom he believed would endure, and others he castigated. Thus Bayle, whose reputation had lasted was treated with respect, whereas Diderot, who was open to criticism, was attacked for free-thinking. As for Voltaire, La Harpe evidently had decided that the tragedies and some poetry would survive and other works would die. The simplicity of this view of La Harpe is dangerous, for

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12 B. Jullien, "Du Lycée de La Harpe," L'Investigateur, 1346, 1-5.
the religious factor does sometimes break the pattern of his approach, but we advance this hypothesis as generally true. La Harpe's reaction to changing public taste was almost instinctive, and the Lycée was directed to such taste.
La Harpe lectured at the Lycée from January 1786 until it was closed early in 1793. After his imprisonment from September, 1793, to August, 1794, he returned to the podium but was soon banished for one year because of his new-found religious zeal. He returned a third time to the Lycée in 1796 and remained as lecturer until he was forced to flee Paris in September of 1797. During this last year he completely revised the courses he had given:

...il revit toutes les parties de son Cours de littérature, et les disposa pour l'impression, après en avoir changé ou élagué les passages qui tenaient à ses anciens principes; car il ne faut pas croire que l'on ait le texte exact tel qu'il l'a prononcé à la tribune du Lycée, surtout pendant les premières années de la Révolution; s'il l'avait livré au public dans cet état, il s'en faudrait de beaucoup qu'il eût réuni tous les suffrages. Ce ne serait plus guère qu'un ouvrage de parti, comme tous les écrits de ce temps et de ce genre, qui semblables aux éclairs d'une vive et sinistre lueur, brillent pendant la tempête et disparaissent aussitôt que le calme reparaît.

In other words, the first and all succeeding editions of the Cours de littérature must be considered as representing La Harpe only after his conversion to Catholicism. The entire sixteen-volume work was written or revised to present a single, unified point of view. Whether this fact has or has not affected La Harpe's reputation with posterity is a futile question, for unless the texts of his lectures previous to 1796 can somehow be reproduced, there is no ground from which to argue.


2Ibid., 129-130. Peignot's opinion has been cited at length only to show the completeness of La Harpe's break with la philosophie.
The simple fact is that to study La Harpe as a critic one can use as a basis the Lycée alone, as it stands. His Correspondance littéraire is an interesting historical document, but what criticism appears in it is journalistic in nature, extremely superficial and not founded on close textual study. Moreover, the Correspondance was revised as thoroughly as was the Cours de littérature. As for the articles contained in the Mercure and other periodicals of the time, they are either polemics or merely spontaneous remarks, not carefully thought out.

Only one work, a doctoral dissertation by Grace Sproull, has set forth in detail the critical doctrine of La Harpe. Her study is comprehensive and good, in regard to both the life and the literary theory of the critic, but the application of the theory to La Harpe's contemporaries is only sketched. Using her work as a foundation, the present chapter will attempt to outline very briefly the critic's approach to literature in the Lycée.

La Harpe opens the introduction to his Cours de littérature with the unequivocal statement that art precedes criticism. He then embarks upon what was the most ambitious work of literary criticism undertaken until his day. In it he attempts to cover, in more or less chronological order, literary history from its beginnings in antiquity

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\(^3\) Sproull, op. cit.  
\(^4\) Ibid., 154-173.  
\(^5\) Lycée, ou cours de littérature ancienne et moderne, Paris, Deterville, 1818, I, 1. Henceforth, this work will be referred to in the notes as Lycée.
to the eighteenth century. The work is heralded by Brunetière and Faguet as the earliest monument of historical criticism.6

In his first volume La Harpe sketches his method and discusses what are to him the most important critical works written, Aristotle's Poetics and Longinus' Treatise on the Sublime. Having made the general pronouncement that art precedes criticism, the author tries to prove his statement through examples. Euripides and Sophocles, he points out, had created their masterpieces long before Aristotle defined the rules of tragedy.7 He believes that after numerous works of literature had appeared, arousing discussion among spectators and readers, comparisons, preferences and exclusions created a distinction between good and bad literature, that is to say, between what pleased and what did not please.8 From the disparate tastes of many spectators certain general conclusions, when codified by especially able and perceptive men, came to constitute desirable literary criteria. The rules of writing thus were born: genres were classified, techniques were regularized, principles of taste were established and the art of writing became an "ordered whole." The moment when art captures the public imagination and artists begin to compete for approval,

...est le moment où l'esprit philosophique peut faire de l'art un tout régulier, l'assujettir à une méthode, distribuer ses parties, classer ses genres, s'appuyer sur l'expérience des faits pour établir la certitude des principes, et porter jusqu'à l'évidence l'opinion des vrais connaisseurs, qui confirme les impressions de la multitude quand elle n'écoute que celles de la nature, les rectifie quand elle s'est égarée par précipitation, ignorance ou séduction, et forme à la longue ces cent voix de la Renommée qui retentissent dans tous les siècles.9

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6 See above, page 1.  
7 Lycée, I, 1.  
8 Ibid., 2-5  
9 Ibid., 4-5.
In other words, though literature preceded criticism, the former gave rise to, and must be governed by, the latter; and the rules of creative writing are the basis of modern literature. The role of the critic in this interpretation is to serve as a guide to public taste. Whatever cries of horror might greet this theory today, few save Diderot objected to it in the eighteenth century. Boileau, still highly respected at the time, seems to have dictated La Harpe's adherence to rules, and the idea that the critic is a final judge of the validity of public opinion is attributable perhaps to Voltaire.

Having set forth his idea of the relationship between art and criticism, La Harpe goes on to define the two terms gout and génie. The very fact that he proposes definitions of these abstract and often-abused words reflects the will to prove through demonstration which pervaded his era. His discussion of these concepts is long and thorough. He takes up both their uses and misuses and goes so far as to trace their etymological meanings. All that is important to this discussion, however, is the definitions at which he finally arrives. He concludes that génie is superiority and may be determined by answers to the following questions: (1) Did the author attain the goal of his art? (2) Did he produce rarely achieved beauties? These questions may be answered, La Harpe maintains, by starting with principles (presumably of criticism) and considering effects (probably of

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10 Ibid., 12-23.
11 Ibid., 19.
the work of art on capable critics). Goût, after a lengthy discussion is at last rather glibly defined as "connaissance du beau et du vrai, sentiment des convenances."^12

The critic brings his introduction to a close with an invitation to the reader to gain instruction with pleasure, once more echoing Boileau. He declares that his objective in the Lycée is the impartial examination of great works of art in terms of a critical theory which he has developed in a lifetime of reading.

Logically enough, the first chapter contains an analysis of Aristotle's Poetics, the work La Harpe acknowledges as the basis of all criticism. After a brief outline of the life and works of the great philosopher, the critic turns to Aristotle's criticism. Taking account first of the Greek's pronouncement that all art is imitation, springing from man's natural penchant to copy nature, La Harpe qualifies this statement by adding that the artist must be selective in what he chooses to imitate, thus limiting himself in subject-matter:

Dans la peinture même, dont le principal objet est l'imitation matérielle, il y a un choix à faire, et bien des choses ne seraient pas bonnes à peindre; à plus forte raison dans la poésie, qui doit sur-tout imiter avec choix, et embellir en imitant.\(^{13}\)

The example of Corneille should have taught modern writers, he insists, that the base or vulgar must not enter into literature. La Harpe turns next to Aristotle's view that the second chief reason for the existence of literature is man's love for rhythm and music. The

\(^{12}\)Ibid., 20.

\(^{13}\)Ibid., 43.
critic wholeheartedly agrees, offering his own definition of rhythm as "une suite déterminée de syllabes ou de mots qui symétrise avec une autre suite pareille..." La Harpe also concedes that the love for rhythm is natural to man.

As to the classification and definition of genres, the critic accepts without question his predecessor's description of comedy as "une imitation du mauvais, non du mauvais dans toute son étendue, mais celui qui cause la honte et produit le ridicule." In tragedy he agrees with everything in Aristotle that has been incorporated by Boileau, taking time only to discuss the meaning of Aristotle's contention that tragedy must "corriger" the emotions of pity and fear. La Harpe interprets these words to mean that a tragedy, because it is merely imitation, not reality, moderates and softens in the spectator the two emotions, which if they had been experienced in life, would have been unbearable. In other words, the writer of tragedy renders palatable what in actuality would have been too painful to be endured. Essentially, then, La Harpe follows Aristotle's theory of art, differing only in that he would limit the range of subject-matter. It is significant that to illustrate many of his points, the critic chooses passages from either Voltaire or Racine, whom he places on the same high level, an evaluation which was widely favored in the eighteenth century.

From Aristotle La Harpe turns his attention to Longinus, whose Treatise on the Sublime he accepts far less completely. His principal objection is that Longinus speaks more of a sublime style than he does of the sublime per se. La Harpe theorizes that the Athenian had

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14 Ibid., 46.  
15 Ibid., 52.  
16 Ibid., 54.
already defined the term in an earlier work which had been lost, and was interested mainly in how to attain that quality in writing. According to La Harpe the earlier author gives five conditions necessary to the realization of the sublime: an "heureux" boldness of thought, the enthusiasm of passion, the use of figures, the correct choice of words and a good composition.17 The French critic denies that these factors are the sole properties of a sublime style, pointing out several works which contain all the criteria listed above but which are not examples of sublimity. What is interesting in this discussion is La Harpe's own concept of the meaning of the term, reminiscent of the "je ne sais quoi" of the previous century. He confesses his own inability to define the word precisely:

Si quelque chose semble se refuser à toute analyse, et même à toute définition, c'est sans doute le sublime. En effet, comment définir ce qui ne peut jamais être préparé par le poète ou l'orateur, ni prévu par ceux qui lisent ou écoutent... Comment rendre compte d'une impression qui est à la fois la plus vive et la plus rapide de toutes?18

The critic does in fact approach a definition of the evasive quality, and one which has a great deal of importance in any study of the Lycée. He speaks always in the same vein:

Le sublime dont je parle ici est nécessairement rare et instantané; car rien de ce qui est extrême ne peut être commun ni durable. C'est un mot, un trait, un mouvement, un geste, et son effet est celui de l'éclair ou de la foudre. Il est tellement indépendant de l'art qu'il peut se rencontrer dans des personnes qui n'ont aucune idée de l'art.19

17 Ibid., 83. 18 Ibid., 75. 19 Ibid., 76-77.
La Harpe follows this statement with a series of examples of what he believes to be sublime moments. In all of them the reaction to an incident, whether verbal or gesticular, is in perfect harmony with the act itself. The test of sublimity is the impossibility to conceive a more fitting reaction than that expressed. So the term in La Harpe may be defined as a fleeting moment in which action and reaction are perfectly related. The sole condition beyond this relationship is, for the critic, that the situation be elevated, not trivial.20

Such in brief are the main points of the critical doctrine of Jean-Francois de La Harpe. Miss Sproull, in a privately-published condensation of her dissertation concludes that La Harpe holds, theoretically at least,

that criticism should be based upon a somewhat modified historical approach, that the concrete work rather than the abstract principle should be the point of departure, that feeling has a place by the side of reason as a judge of literature, and that beauties rather than defects should be emphasized.21

The treatment of La Harpe's theory has here been very much abbreviated, though not distorted, for two reasons: the details of his general approach to literature are carefully outlined in another work,22 and the theory as such often has but little application to La Harpe's judgments of his contemporaries. When evaluating the Greek and Latin classics or the French authors of the seventeenth century, the critic follows

20 Ibid., 91.
22 Sproull, Jean-François de La Harpe, Controversialist...85-115.
Aristotle, Longinus or Boileau, always choosing his texts for their suitability to the criteria outlined above. But as he approaches his contemporaries, the "doctrine" necessarily breaks down as classification by genre becomes impossible, philosophical ideas prohibit the application of purely literary tests, and personal prejudices interfere with impartiality. To be sure, the words vraisemblance, convenances, sentiment, goût and génie are repeatedly called up, but they no longer function as rigid criteria of a clear-cut doctrine. Applied only in isolated cases and then often from a position of strong personal bias, they have the same fleeting and isolated quality as the critic's concept of the sublime.

Despite the fact that the Cours de littérature presents a La Harpe fresh from his recantation and has, consequently a unity based on his opposition to the philosophes, the ten volumes dealing with his contemporaries have little to do with a definite critical doctrine.
In his *Eloge de Fénelon* of 1771, La Harpe says of him: "L'honneur d'être compté parmi nos premiers écrivains, qui suffit à l'ambition des plus beaux génies, est le moindre de Fénelon." Indeed, La Harpe's admiration for his predecessor goes beyond strictly literary matters. Besides the extended eulogy of the man and the author in the *Eloge*, La Harpe devotes to the Archbishop of Cambray several pages of the seventh volume of the *Lycée*. Volume VII deals with the minor genres during the reign of Louis XIV. Fénelon figures prominently under the rubric "Philosophie," first in a section designated as "Métaphysique" and again under the category "Morale." The first discussion opens with the remark that the author unites thought and feeling in his works. The "effusion spontanée" with which he accomplishes this union gives Fénelon's prose the qualities of sincerity and persuasiveness. To support these remarks, La Harpe presents a study of the author's *Traité de l'existence de Dieu*.2

The critic's discussion begins objectively enough with the remark that Fénelon has divided his work into two parts, the first of which is the development of the idea of the creative Being as illustrated in the harmony and order of the universe. Immediately, however, the

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1 *Eloge de Fénelon*, in *Oeuvres choisies et posthumes de M. de La Harpe*, Paris, Nimeret, 1806.

2 *Lycée*, VII, 277.
critic intrudes to state his opinion, not of Fénelon's style or proof of his contention, but of the existence of God. La Harpe reveals, like Voltaire, his unshakeable belief in the divine Being, thus taking sides theologically with Fénelon.\(^3\) Taking a few paragraphs to himself, La Harpe brings out his personal convictions that God's works are finite only to Himself, that all man sees is what God permits him to see, and that the argument of the "causes finales" is the despair of atheists.

The critic returns to Fénelon, again with a factual statement, when he observes that the earlier writer embellishes philosophy by presenting these subjects in a polished literary form. La Harpe is led from this observation to remark that those scientists who maintain the absurdity of the world are refuted by Montesquieu's comment in the second paragraph of *De l'esprit des lois*:

> Ceux qui ont dit qu'une fatalité aveugle a produit tous les effets que nous voyons dans le monde, ont dit une grande absurdité; car quelle plus grande absurdité qu'une fatalité aveugle qui aurait produit des êtres intelligents?\(^4\)

La Harpe seems to have departed from Fénelon once more to insert his own opinions, supported this time by a third authority. It would appear that the commentator is merely using Fénelon as a point of departure for his personal beliefs.

Having thus stated his convictions, La Harpe turns back to Fénelon to answer criticisms directed at the latter. He defends the Archbishop's prolixity on the grounds that it is wise and his redundance because it adds to the richness of his prose, inserting a long

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\(^3\)Ibid., 273.  
\(^4\)Ibid., 230.
uncommentated paragraph from the *Traité*, assuming that the judicious reader will be forced to agree with him. Apparently satisfied that Fénelon's style is its own best defense, he deviates once again from the immediate subject by calling upon Newton to support the idea of the existence of God, using the famous argument that only God can know why one's arm moves when one wills it. The extent to which La Harpe inserts and supports his own ideas gives rise to questions as to the purpose of some of his criticism. It would seem that the *Lycée* is at least in part a sounding-board for opinions which are far from literary. To be sure, he must give his own opinions to evaluate those of Fénelon, but the length and frequency of his digressions are somewhat excessive.

Still, the critic does not allow himself to stray too far from the subject of his discussion. After his appeal to Newton he returns to the second part of the *Traité*, which, he points out, uses the Cartesian principle of methodical doubt to reach the idea of God's existence. Critic joins author in scorning Spinoza as obscure and useless. In La Harpe's opinion,

*Fénelon réfute, en passant, ce qu'on nomme le spinosisme, mais en peu de mots: on voit qu'il dédaigne de s'occuper longtemps d'un système en général si obscur, et monstrueux dans ce qu'on en peut entendre...Fénelon fait ce qu'il peut pour l'interpréter, et résume son inintelligible livre en quatre pages, qui contiennent en effet tout ce qu'il est possible d'y apercevoir.*

The critic's preference for Fénelon's clarity over the somewhat confusing arguments of Spinoza, though it may strike us as dogmatic, was

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not an uncommon attitude at the time of the Lycée. Moreover, La Harpe's contention that those who admire Spinoza do so because of his unintelligibility, confusing obscurity with profundity, might be used as an argument today against the followers of such controversial figures as the existentialists. Like any good spokesman of the eighteenth-century, La Harpe is placing himself on the side of lucidity. Here again, La Harpe, though praising Fénelon, seems to be using the latter to support his own disdain for Spinozan thought. A certain narrowness of view also becomes obvious in his unequivocal dismissal of the Dutch philosopher's work.

From Spinoza, La Harpe is led to a discussion of whether Fénelon can himself deal with subtleties. To prove that he can the critic quotes a wordy passage in which the Archbishop declares that "infinite" is a positive, not a negative word. "Finite" for Fénelon is the true negative, for it implies limits, which are negative by definition. The critic feels that Fénelon has in this case handled effectively a sophisticated argument, but La Harpe also decides that in itself the argument is academic and futile. True to the pattern he has already established, the commentator adds his own opinions that "infinite" is positive for God, who embraces all things, and negative for man, who is limited by his nature. This whole section on Fénelon is a curious mixture of unsupported, though sometimes astute, observations, and strong personal statements on religion. Generally speaking, the critic is not objective in this discussion. What is most interesting, however, is that La Harpe is inclined to be far more dogmatic in his philosophical positions than in his literary observations.
Under the sub-heading "Morale," La Harpe's treatment of Fénélon is less digressive than was his examination of the author's metaphysical views. All of Fénélon's ideas on morality, declares La Harpe, are contained in Téléméaque. The critic defends this work against all detractors, including Voltaire, who said of Fénélon in Le Mondain:

J'admire fort votre style flatteur,
Et votre prose, encor qu'un peu trainante...7

For La Harpe, Téléméaque is a genre unto itself and must be considered in this light. Inasmuch as it is a gently didactic piece, as poetic as it is narrative,

Ce qui doit y dominer, c'est une abondance facile et pourtant sage, un style nombreux et liant plutôt que serré ou coupé.8

Since the banal details for which the work is often attacked are few and far between, they are, for La Harpe, only "un défaut particulier...et nullement un vice général."9 Unlike a work dealing strictly with political theory, Fénélon's novel cannot be cut-and-dried. It was not intended to be an Esprit des lois; so it must not be judged as one. Recalling that Téléméaque was written to persuade a young and obstinate prince of the seriousness of his future duties, La Harpe labels it an imaginative work which sought to please in order to instruct. Such general principles as justice and universal benevolence do not require profundity of thought, but must be stated so as to appeal to the youthful mind. Since the book was written for the specific purpose of teaching a prince, the character of this prince must be considered in any analysis of the work. La Harpe adds by way of

7Ibid., 295.  8Ibid., 296.  9Ibid.
defense, too, that Montesquieu did not have Fénelon's grace; so the latter should not be expected to demonstrate Montesquieu's profundity. Here La Harpe's lack of dogmatism on a particular literary point is manifestly clear. He is in fact defending the autonomy of a work of art. Both his arguments, that the work should be judged as a whole and not by its isolated faults, and that it must be considered by itself and not in relation to other novels or treatises are statements that would not be condemned today. The work of art is thus an integral unit and must be weighed on its own merits.

Judging finally Fénelon's importance as a writer, La Harpe denies a criticism by the Englishman Ramsay that the Archbishop would have brought out many more bold ideas if he had been in England instead of in France. The remark is more provocative, in fact, than La Harpe would let it appear. But for the critic, Fénelon expressed the boldest of opinions in both the Dialogues des morts and in the Direction pour la conscience d'un roi. After partially excusing Ramsay's remark on the grounds that the Englishman was probably not acquainted with the two works in question, La Harpe goes on to summarize them and quote from them at length. Several long passages excerpted from the two treatises elicit the critic's admiration. In particular, the latter feels that love for his people, respect for the public good and support of the general interests of society should be among the immutable laws of kingship. Though the King may have the power to govern the people, he in turn should be guided by these principles. It is noteworthy that though La Harpe himself could have been acquainted with Fénelon's Lettre à Louis XIV, and, with his wide reading background,
probably was, he makes no reference to it. If, like Voltaire, La
Harpe did not believe in its authenticity, which was not demonstrated
until about 1825, then the omission is not surprising. If the lack of
acknowledgement was intentional, then it merely illustrates the recant­
ed La Harpe's growing respect for monarchy.

In summation of Fénelon's contribution to morality, La Harpe main­
tains that the earlier author's power and influence lies in the fact
that he was not a revolutionary. Unlike Bayle, the Archbishop of
Cambray remained a strong Christian. Never seeking to overthrow the
existing order, he attacked its faults, with the aim of correcting
them. To some degree at least, he was hardly tolerant of Protestants
and no doubt could not be. In a time of persecution he was an apostle
of tolerance.

Generally speaking, La Harpe's discussion of Fénelon is rather
sketchy. Certain conclusions, however may be drawn from the analysis.
First of all, in regard to Fénelon at least, the critic's ideas on re­
ligion and philosophy had not changed strikingly between 1771 and the
time of the revision of the Lycée. In both the Éloge and the Lycée,
La Harpe points admiringly to Fénelon's moderation and wisdom in
philosophy and politics and to his clarity and originality in style.
Though his conversion may have strengthened his liking for the Arch­
bishop, it did not distort his judgments. It appears probable that
La Harpe adopted a liberal position during the enthusiasm of the pre­
revolutionary period because it behooved him to do so. His desire for
recognition may have overshadowed his essential moderation. Secondly,
when La Harpe is dealing with Fénelon's morality, he is far less
doctrinaire than when he discusses the author's metaphysical leanings. If he refrains from inserting his own strong opinions into his work, the critic remains generally impartial. Thirdly, La Harpe's literary judgments are even freer from prejudice than are his moral convictions. In any case, La Harpe is lucid. He has great respect for the text and returns to it frequently with quotations or references. If his conclusions are sometimes elementary, they are never vague or ambiguous. Lastly, though the critic is always aware of Fénelon the man, the Archbishop, the philosopher and the moralist, he is capable of extracting from the author's whole work an "ouvrage unique" and of considering it as a unit. Though his final evaluations are not usually startling, they are generally sharp and sound. Whatever his admiration for Fénelon, La Harpe in the Lyceé is not a mere eulogist but a critic.

**BAYLE**

To open his article of Bayle, La Harpe characterizes the author of the *Dictionnaire historique et critique* as a man who "travaillait de toute sa force à établir un scepticisme presque général." Considering La Harpe's reputation for conservatism in religious and moral matters, the reader would expect him to attack the skeptic vociferously. Strangely enough, he does not do so. His treatment of Bayle, indeed, though far too brief, is quite favorable. The critic does pinpoint Bayle's subtlety and ambiguity when he declares:

Bayle...porta sur tous les objets la liberté de penser beaucoup plus loin qu'aucun écrivain n'avait encore osé le faire avant lui, mais pourtant avec un

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10 Ibid., 288.
art et des précautions qui laissent encore douter si c'était en lui un fonds d'incrédule raisonnable, ou le jeu d'un esprit porté à la dispute et à la controverse.\textsuperscript{11}

In short, the free-thinking of the \textit{libertin} is redeemed by his art, which produces an intentional and presumably enhancing vagueness. Apparently choosing to interpret this artistic ambiguity in favor of his own moral ideals, La Harpe continues,

Ce qui est certain, c'est que, hors de ses excursions métaphysiques, où il se plait à soutenir tour-à-tour tous les systèmes, il ne parle jamais des objets de la révélation qu'avec un respect qui paraît sincère, et même un ton d'affirmation qui, s'il était \textit{faux}, supposerait une hypocrisie dont il paraît bien éloigné.\textsuperscript{12}

The last assumption gives rise to the question of whether the critic was cognizant of Bayle's capacity for irony, which has been noted since the eighteenth century. There is perhaps some room for speculation in this matter, but I suggest that whatever the case, La Harpe simply refused to accept Bayle as an opponent. Certainly Voltaire was aware of the \textit{libertin}'s sarcasm and La Harpe must have known the former's opinion. If this hypothesis is true, then La Harpe was quite shrewd. By accepting Bayle's declarations of orthodoxy at their face value, the commentator welcomed the skeptic as an ally in the religious controversy; and, owing to Bayle's ambiguity, if anyone protested that Bayle was being ironic, the critic could simply disagree. Inasmuch as the great man's prestige was already firmly established, La Harpe thus neatly sidestepped the problem of trying to refute a formidable adversary.

\textsuperscript{11}\textit{Ibid.} \quad \textsuperscript{12}\textit{Ibid.}
Never deviating from his favorable approach to Bayle, the critic's underlines the libertin's erudition, indefatigability and memory. Special tribute is paid to the latter's "pénétration," which enabled him to envisage all sides of important questions. La Harpe theorizes that those "incrédules" who associated themselves with some of the skeptic's ideas to the exclusion of others found themselves, in Bayle's presence, faced with problems they had not even suspected. The scholar is also praised for his ascetic existence, but mildly rebuked for his "goût pour un certain pyrrhonisme," which is established by a citation. His style is characterized, accurately, as "naturel, facile et agréable, mais souvent diffus, néglige, et familier jusqu'à [la] trivialité d'expressions..." La Harpe pardons Bayle's use of coarse or obscene terms on the grounds that the skeptic, isolated from polite society by his studies, "oubliait ou ignorait les bienséances."

Pursuing his comments on Bayle's style, the critic remarks:

Il aimait à promener son imagination sur tous les objets, sans trop se soucier de leur liaison: un titre quelconque lui suffisait pour le conduire à parler de tout. C'est ainsi que, dans son premier ouvrage, à propos de la comète, qui parut en 1680, il traite en quatre volumes de toutes les questions metaphysiques, morales, théologiques, historiques et politiques qu'il est possible d'imaginer: mais on le suit avec quelque plaisir dans ses digressions, parcequ'il pense toujours et fait penser.

He then praises the plea for civil tolerance expressed in Bayle's Commentaire sur ces mots de l'Evangile: "Compelle intrare"; 'contrains-les d'entrer'. Of the Dictionnaire La Harpe lightly reproaches the

13Ibid., 288-99. 14Ibid., 289. 15Ibid.
16Ibid., 290. 17Ibid. 18Ibid., 291.
prolixity but affirms that the "quantité d'articles curieux" which it contains will always make it a valuable work.\textsuperscript{19} As with Fénélon, La Harpe treats the individual works on their own merits. Accepting Bayle's writings as literature, despite their philosophical orientation, the critic is putting into practice his contention that history and philosophy have their place in the study of literature.\textsuperscript{20}

La Harpe's only prejudice in regard to Bayle is again a philosophical, not a literary one. The skeptic's pyrrhonism prompts the critic to attempt a refutation of that philosophy. As usual, the French Quintilian's philosophical approach is not convincing. La Harpe argues in a Cartesian vein that the statement, "je doute," affirms the existence of the being who doubts,\textsuperscript{21} but the pyrrhonians had long since maintained that the statement itself was subject to doubt. So La Harpe, despite his self-satisfaction with the response, has not broken the stalemate of sophisms on the question. As has already been indicated, however, La Harpe is generally willing to accept Bayle's arguments as support for the orthodox position in religion. Thus the critic cites the scholar's declaration that atheists display "un excès horrible d'aveuglement, une ignorance prodigieuse de la nature des choses" as Bayle's final word on the matter. Though he admits that the philosopher at one time or another supports all metaphysical systems, La Harpe falls into his own trap of choosing one defense above all others.

\textsuperscript{19}Ibid. \textsuperscript{20}Lycee, III, 176.
\textsuperscript{21}Lycee, VII, 292.
Two facts emerge from the analyses of Fénelon and Bayle. The first is that La Harpe is willing to consider philosophical works as literature and apply to them stylistic criteria. In the second place, the critic takes each work as a unit and attempts to determine its merits or defects. Defending Fénelon's prolixity on the grounds that Télémaque is a unique work and cannot be submitted to examination under any preconceived set of principles, philosophical or literary, La Harpe is far from the dogmatist he is too often considered. And when he excuses Bayle's digressive style, familiarity and length as natural consequences of the scholar's habits and intellect, he scarcely can be said to be doctrinaire. To be sure, La Harpe has preferences, but what critic does not? In his treatment of the precursors, the only consequent charge seems to be that La Harpe is cursory in his remarks. In later discussions he is far less open to this indictment, which in any case is not a serious one considering the wide scope of the Lycée.

An interesting historical footnote to the analysis of Bayle in the Cours de littérature is to be found in the fact that although today Bayle is generally considered a source for a good part of the "esprit philosophique," La Harpe, one of the most eloquent spokesmen for the conservative group, far from maligning the skeptic, wittingly or unwittingly embraces him as an ally. In doing so, he lines up both Fénelon and Bayle, the two most prestigious figures of the transitional period between the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, with the cause of religious and political moderation.
Comparing La Bruyère to La Rochefoucauld, La Harpe declares:

La Bruyère est meilleur moraliste, et sur-tout bien plus grand écrivain; il y a peu de livres en aucune langue où l'on trouve une aussi grande quantité de pensées justes, solides, et un choix d'expression aussi heureux et aussi varié.\textsuperscript{22}

At first glance the critic's admiration seems unbounded. He lauds the accuracy, concision and liveliness of the \textit{Caractères}. Though La Bruyère's style is rapid, says the critic, it is clear, and leaves the reader not only with a lucid impression, but also with the pleasure of being able to add his own ideas to those of the writer. A number of examples of La Bruyère's "énergique brièveté" are then cited as proof of his greatness.\textsuperscript{23} La Harpe holds the author to be as good a psychologist as a painter and advises all potential comic authors to study his work for subjects, ideas and color. Then the critic promises to reveal not the portraits which would serve as models, for they would be too long, but rather the faults in some of the author's pensées, to which he devotes four times as much space as to his vague praise.

Most of La Harpe's objections to La Bruyère are predictable. As a stylist La Harpe protests against obscurity or inappropriate images, and his commentary seems pale on reading it. As a moralist the critic is naturally quite Catholic and rejects La Bruyère's maxim that all the evils of man come from his seeking society on the grounds that evil is within man himself. La Harpe is also critical, naturally, of the author's view that laws are a result of man's depravity. Rather, the critic observes, laws spring from the essential humanity which man

\textsuperscript{22}Ibid., 338. \textsuperscript{23}Ibid., 339.
expresses in trying to overcome depravity. Needless to say, a great deal of La Harpe's commentary is insignificant in comparison to the very axioms he attempts to refute. Indeed, the entire essay on La Bruyère would be void of interest except for one important point. The critic takes strong issue with La Bruyère's pensée:

Les hommes n'ont point de caractère, ou s'ils en ont, c'est celui de n'en avoir aucun qui soit suivi, qui ne se démente point, et où ils sont reconnaissables. 24

La Harpe's attempt to disprove the validity of this statement proves that he really did not understand La Bruyère, but it demonstrates also the personality of the critic as a spokesman of the eighteenth century. La Harpe strives vainly to prove that the maxim cited above contradicts the title and conception of Les Caractères. He apparently fails to see that by universalizing human foibles La Bruyère was in fact denying the individual personality. When La Harpe attempts to read Les Caractères as sketches of individuals, he apparently fails to realize that they are rather portraits of general human traits. In so doing, the critic gives expression to one of the major differences separating the two centuries, the element of the importance of the individual.

Nowhere are La Harpe's personal feelings better spelled out than in his objections to La Bruyère's portrait of William of Orange. In this sketch the author ridicules William's physical appearance, questions his legitimacy to the throne and berates the monarch's single-handedness. The critic takes up his objections to La Bruyère in order

24 Ibid., 341.
of their importance to him. La Harpe vociferously defends William's legitimacy on the grounds that the king was called to the throne by the English people, and the critic considers this mandate the most legitimate of claims to power. Though William was a Protestant in religion which was "erronnée sans doute", his Protestantism represented one of the basic aspects of English liberty. As for his high-handed use of power, La Harpe insists that his autocracy was necessary to the accomplishment of his duty, which he envisaged as the defense of Protestantism. This king, by his talents, by his character and by his activity "était digne d'être à la tête des puissances protestantes."²⁵ La Harpe goes so far as to say that his greatest claim to glory was to prevent Louis XIV from conquering Europe. Most significantly of all, the critic considers La Bruyère's reference to William's common birth the highest of praise:

La Bruyère lui reproche son ascendant sur tous les princes alliés contre la France, et il lui donne, sans y songer, la plus grande de toutes les louanges, en faisant voir qu'un stathouder de Hollande était l'âme de cette ligue puissante et politiquement nécessaire; qu'il la dirigeait par son génie, et l'échauffait par son courage.²⁶

Finally La Harpe protests against the writer's "petitesse de plaisanter"²⁶ in referring to Guillaume's thinness. The critic concludes by stating that William deserved to be called the true founder of the English constitution because he "l'affermir sur des bases plus assurées."²⁸

What La Harpe is affirming in this discussion is the supremacy of the individual character. Even after the Revolution he declares

²⁵Ibid., 345.  
²⁶Ibid.  
²⁷Ibid., 345-346.  
²⁸Ibid., 346.
that power belongs to those who merit it. As will be shown in a chapter on Rousseau, the critic’s position in politics was consistently one of moderation.

FONTENELLE

La Harpe’s analysis of Fontenelle shows the critic’s interest in the type of study later to be known as "l’homme et l’oeuvre." The essay opens with a promise by the critic to show the whole of Fontenelle’s literary character; he remarks that Fontenelle, who was "Susceptible plus qu’aucun autre écrivain d’être regardé sous un double aspect...n’a jamais été montré que sous l’un des deux..."29 As a reason for the one-sidedness of previous criticism, La Harpe suggests that a broad-minded treatment requires more intelligence and creates less effect than a narrow one, "et la plupart des auteurs s’occupent bien plus de l’effet que de la vérité."30 Before discussing the life of the author, La Harpe gives what he considers to be a general evaluation of his work, concluding that Fontenelle wrote primarily for effect. The critic bases this opinion on a reading of the Dialogues des Morts, of which he says that the writer deliberately chose disparate characters and arrived at unexpected results merely to attract attention. La Harpe claims that this approach was a jeu and laudable neither for its morality nor for its taste.31 After condemning the Lettres galantes as "babil" and the pastorales in general as negligent and artificial, La Harpe adds, as if to show his liberality, that some of these pieces

29Lycée, XV, 22. 30Ibid. 31Ibid., 23.
are readable and that Racine and Boileau were too severe in their criticism of them. Fontenelle's operas and tragedies are however felt to be insignificant.32

As if he were going then to offer some favorable commentary on Fontenelle, La Harpe states:

Mais aussi dans le même temps il avait donné son Histoire des Oracles et sa Pluralité des Mondes, qui furent les premiers fondements de sa réputation de philosophe et d'écrivain.33

If the reader expects to hear praise of these works, he is soon undeceived, for La Harpe declares that the moral intent of the first is vague and that the work itself is therefore harmful, whereas the second is "un roman enjolivé dans tout ce qui appartient à la chimère des tourbillons."34 The critic does admit that Fontenelle had a real gift for making difficult subjects appear agreeable and had a great hand in popularizing technical matters; but for La Harpe the author is much more impressive in his éloges of famous scientists than he is in the Entretiens. The Histoire de l'Académie des Sciences and the Éloges des Académiciens are in fact held by La Harpe to be his best writings. True to the pattern established in his criticism of Bayle, the critic minimizes the importance of the controversial works of Fontenelle while emphasizing the author's conservative aspects. La Harpe finds vicieux what today is considered to be one of Fontenelle's better traits. Though he confesses that Fontenelle's badinage is the mark of that author's originality, he maintains that it is also harmful,

32La Harpe gives a singularly uninteresting study of Fontenelle's opera in Lycée, VII, 380-383.
33Lycée, XV, 27. 
34Ibid., 29.
for the writer often sacrifices accuracy for subtlety. After this
general look at Fontenelle's works, one wonders why the critic has
placed the author first under the rubric "Des philosophes de la
première classe."35

Despite the severe tone of most of his remarks on Fontenelle,
La Harpe seems to feel that he is being fair, for he devotes the rest
of his analysis to the reasons why the author was a victim of injustices in his own time. To explain this bias against Fontenelle, La
Harpe declares that "une connaissance exacte de l'histoire littéraire
sert à éclairer le critique."36 The critic does indeed use literary
history as a basis for his discussion of the critical unfairnesses to
Fontenelle. He points out that in 1679, at the height of the Corneille-
Racine dispute, Fontenelle, who happened to be Corneille's nephew, came
to Paris. According to La Harpe, the young writer was chosen by the
Cornelian faction to present a tragedy to humiliate further Racine,
whose Phèdre had just failed. Having taken sides actively in a bitter
controversy, says La Harpe, the author left himself open to the harsh-
cost of criticism when his own tragedy, Aspar, was a total disappoint-
ment. As enemies he had the two most powerful literary figures of the
day, Racine and Boileau, and he further incurred their wrath by taking
the defense of the moderns in the famous Querelle.

When these disputes finally subsided and both Racine and Corneille
had died, Fontenelle withdrew entirely from controversy, for which he

had no talent, and as Secretary of the Academy of Sciences, became in Voltaire's words, "le premier parmi les savants qui n'ont pas eu le don de l'invention." The rest of his life was thus spent in peace and quiet. Later, when the "secte philosophique" tried to establish him as one of the forerunners of their movement, La Harpe asserts, they could not have chosen a man less inclined to their way of thinking, for Fontenelle stated emphatically, out of prudence, of course, "Quand j'aurais la main pleine de vérités, je ne l'ouvrirais pas." Moreover, the spirit of controversy was alien to him, and throughout the major part of his life he scrupulously avoided answering any criticisms. He was a practicing Catholic and a social conservative. There is a note of envy in La Harpe's final sentence: "Sa vie fut à-peu-près un siècle de repos." The moderation of Fontenelle's conduct seems to explain La Harpe's having classed him among the best philosophers of the eighteenth century.

In his essays concerning the precursors, La Harpe demonstrates an interest in the individual personality, a preoccupation with political questions, conservatism in philosophy and a definite ability to grasp the outstanding qualities of any given writer. In particular, the recognizes the uniqueness of Télémaque and the equivocal nature of much of Bayle's work. Though he perhaps misinterprets La Bruyère, he reflects an important difference between the seventeenth and eighteenth century outlooks. And while he seems not to evaluate correctly the the most significant contributions of Fontenelle, he recognizes what were his chief characteristics.

\[37\text{Ibid., 34.} \quad 38\text{Ibid., 38.} \quad 39\text{Ibid., 41.}\]
CHAPTER V
MONTESSQUIEU

Most of what remains of La Harpe's criticism of Montesquieu amounts to an éloge. The critic himself informs us that "au milieu du vertige" of 1789 he attempted a refutation of some of Montesquieu's principles, but that in 1794, after his recantation, "je jetai le manuscrit au feu...et je rendis graces à Dieu."1 It is difficult for us to be equally grateful that the critique of Montesquieu, which had provided the material for six lectures at the Lycée, is now lost; for the author of De l'Esprit des Lois now holds a relatively small place in the Cours de littérature.

In his final estimate of Montesquieu, La Harpe discounts two early novels, Arsace and Le temple de Gnide as insignificant, the first because it was simply a "délassement de ses travaux" and the second as a misdirection of the scholar's talents which resulted in "une bagatelle ingénieuse et délicate."2 The major shortcoming of the Temple de Gnide La Harpe considers its author's pretension "d'être poète en prose, sans avoir rien du feu de la poésie."3 Few will disagree with the critic that Montesquieu is out of his province in the pastoral. La Harpe and posterity again concur in rating the Lettres Persanes highly. The critic sees in this epistolary work a product of the political scientist's early studies and a prelude to the Esprit des Lois. For La Harpe, the only fault of the Lettres consists in a superficiality attributable to the author's youth: "Dans la suite, il décida

1Lycée, XV, 57. 2Ibid., 112. 3Ibid.
beaucoup moins, discuta beaucoup plus, instruisit beaucoup mieux; il était mûr. The critic does take special issue with Montesquieu's attack on poetry, arguing that there are good and bad poets as there are good and bad philosophes; but what Voltaire facetiously condemns as lèse-poésie, La Harpe is willing to pardon as "gaieté française." As for the content of the Lettres, the critic observes,

Déjà l'auteur s'essaie aux matières de politique et de législation, et plusieurs de ces lettres sont de petits traités sur la population, le commerce, les lois criminelles, le droit public; on voit qu'il jette en avant des idées qu'il doit développer ailleurs, et qui sont comme des pierres d'attente d'un édifice. La familiarité épistolaire met naturellement en jeu son talent pour la plaisanterie, qu'il maniait aussi bien que le raisonnement.

The history of the Troglodytes is then singled out as an essay in which the author

...sait intéresser et toucher...et cet intérêt n'est pas celui d'aventures romanesques, c'en est un plus rare, plus original, et plus difficile qui naît de la peinture des vertus sociales mises en action, et nous en fait sentir le charme et le besoin.

Almost a continuing theme in La Harpe's evaluation of the Lettres is the critic's chiding insistence that Voltaire was too much a poet and too little a philosopher to appreciate Montesquieu's full worth.

The Considerations sur les causes de la grandeur des Romains et de leur décadence is also described as a step in a progression toward the Esprit des Lois. La Harpe advances the probability that

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4Ibid.  
5Ibid., 43-45.  
6Ibid., 45.  
7Ibid., 46.  
8Ibid., 47.
...il [Montesquieu] se détermina à faire de ces Considérations un Traité à part, parce que tout ce qui regarde les Romains offrant par soi-même un grand sujet, d'un côté, l'auteur, qui se sentait capable de le remplir, ne voulut rester ni au-dessous de sa matière ni au-dessous de son talent; et de l'autre, il craignit que les Romains seuls ne tissent trop de place dans l'Esprit des Lois..."9

One of the outstanding achievements of the Considerations for La Harpe is Montesquieu's concision in presenting his "vérités morales."10

Rivalling La Rochefoucauld and La Bruyère in precision, Montesquieu is held to surpass them both in "la hauteur et la difficulté du sujet."11

La Harpe grasps the importance of the work, describing it as a history in which are concentrated "tout l'esprit de la vie qui animait et soutenait ce colosse de la puissance romaine, et en même temps tous les poisons rongeurs qui, après l'avoir long-temps consumé, le firent tomber en lambeaux..."12 Having thus fairly evaluated the contribution of the Considerations to the writing of history, La Harpe appends a paragraph regretting that Montesquieu did not, as did Bossuet, see in the course of Roman history "le dessein d'une Providence qui tenait les rênes."13

Surely even the converted La Harpe must have realized that Montesquieu's history, explaining external facts as results of internal causes, represented a sharp and final break from the ecclesiastically-oriented history of Bossuet and as such could have introduced Providence as a force only at the cost of his whole theory. The critic seems to be working hard indeed to make Montesquieu a symbol of order and stability, as he later did to make Diderot a model of chaos.14

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9 Ibid.  
10 Ibid.  
11 Ibid.  
12 Ibid., 49.  
13 Ibid., 50.  
14 Lycée, XVI, 3-272.
De l'Esprit des Lois is heralded by the commentator as a work admirable not only for its theory but for its application to political reality.\(^{15}\) La Harpe traces the history of the influence of Montesquieu's masterpiece in the eighteenth century, understood by few at its publication, later applauded for its Anglophilia, misinterpreted in the area of "pouvoirs intermédiaires," and gradually replaced by the Contrat Social as authority for the idea of popular sovereignty. Inasmuch as the critic's own attitude toward the Esprit des Lois probably followed this development before his conversion and was very likely typical of the course followed by many of the philosophes, his interpretation is of historical interest. At its publication, La Harpe suggests, "Personne ne trouvait dans ce livre ce qu'il cherchait, parce que chacun n'y cherchait que ce qu'il y aurait mis."\(^{16}\) Typical of the reception given De l'Esprit des Lois is Mme Du Deffand's quip that it should be entitled "de l'Esprit sur les Lois," a remark applauded by Voltaire.\(^{17}\) Eventually, the critic continues, it was acknowledged as a work of sweeping significance, adopted after Montesquieu's death by the faction of the Encyclopedists, but distorted by this group as a satire of everything but English government.\(^{18}\) As the time of the Revolution approached, according to La Harpe, Montesquieu's opinions in favor of the nobility and parliamentary rule were rejected or ignored; and, following America's example,

\(^{15}\)Lyceé, XIV, 53. \(^{16}\)Ibid. \(^{17}\)Ibid. \(^{18}\)Ibid., 54.
intermediary powers were discarded as ideals in favor of repre­
sentative powers.\textsuperscript{19} Finally, the critic concludes, Montesquieu was ousted by Rousseau as a political authority, for the former had written for "les hommes qui pensent" and the latter for "la multitude."\textsuperscript{20} This comment is followed by the observation:

On sait assez comment notre révolution a divinisé le républicain Rousseau en réprouvant le monarchiste Montesquieu, quoiqu'il soit plus que vraisemblable qu'elle les eût proscrit tous deux, s'ils avaient eu le malheur d'en être les témoins.\textsuperscript{21}

Despite the probable truth of La Harpe's last hypothesis, his interpre­
tation of the waning of Montesquieu's vogue as a political scientist on the eve of the Revolution is perhaps exaggerated. Hornet points out that the Contrat Social was largely neglected until just before the Revolution; and even at the height of the Republic, Montesquieu was held in high esteem by a large moderate faction. Rousseau, more­over, leaves himself open to interpretation to the extent that he has been embraced as the father of governmental systems ranging from com­munism to fascism. La Harpe is no doubt limiting his judgments of revolutionary theorists to the extreme radicals who understandably read Rousseau as an extremist. Contrary to La Harpe's pronouncement that Montesquieu would grow in prestige and Rousseau would die of his own charlatanism,\textsuperscript{22} posterity has accorded both writers a large meas­ure of fame. Montesquieu lives as an architect of government whose precepts have survived in the American system, while Rousseau, though

\textsuperscript{19}\textit{Ibid.} \quad \textsuperscript{20}\textit{Ibid.}, 55. \quad \textsuperscript{21}\textit{Ibid.}\textsuperscript{22}\textit{Ibid.}, 56.
much criticized as a political scientist, has been immortalized as a political idealist.

In retrospect La Harpe sees his own temporary rejection of Montesquieu's conservatism as the opposition of "une chimère de perfection que je croyais possible à un bien dont je n'apercevais pas l'imperfection nécessaire."\(^{23}\) This confession undoubtedly reflects the disillusionment of large groups of liberals faced with the excesses of the Revolution, not unlike the segments of discontent in many Communist countries today.

Along the same lines, La Harpe repeatedly acclaims Montesquieu's foresight and astuteness in emphasizing the "pouvoirs intermédiaires":

ils sont tellement adhérents à la racine de l'arbre monarchique, qu'il a fallu les arracher tous successivement, noblesse, clergé, magistrature, avant d'approcher la cognée qui a frappé l'arbre.\(^{24}\)

La Harpe also warmly defends Montesquieu's concept of the fundamental principles of the different types of governments, giving as a proof the abandonment of honor by the French monarchy and its resultant downfall:

L'honneur avait fait place à l'argent. A dater de la funeste époque du système de Law, l'argent était parvenu progressivement à être enfin partout au premier rang. Aussi a-t-il été, de plus d'une manière, un des mobiles et des moyens de la révolution.\(^{25}\)

\(^{23}\)Ibid., 60.  \(^{24}\)Ibid., 62.  \(^{25}\)Ibid., 65.
Departing from Montesquieu for a moment, the critic observes, still in regard to money,

C'est ce qui fait, entre autres raisons, qu'elle [la révolution] a été si abjecte dans les oppressors et dans les opprimés. Les uns n'ont voulu d'abord qu'envahir la propriété, et les autres n'ont jamais songé qu'à la conserver; en sorte que la chose publique est restée, au milieu des partis, indifférente à tous, et bientôt engloutie sans défense.26

This statement is that of a man disillusioned with a former ideal and aware of the reasons for its failure. Hindsight or not, La Harpe's brief analysis is an adequate comment on the causes for the "betrayal" of numerous revolutions, before and since, in France and elsewhere.

The remainder of the critic's treatment of Montesquieu is devoted to a contrast between that writer and Rousseau. The main differences, as conceived by La Harpe, have already been mentioned. Rousseau is pictured as "tout fait pour les révolutionnaires...Il blâme universellement ce qui est: c'est assez pour eux."27 Montesquieu, on the other hand, is,

...un génie conservateur parmi une foule d'esprits qui ont composé tous ensemble le génie de la destruction. C'est la différence de l'ordre au chaos, et de la lumière aux ténèbres.28

Pictured as having achieved greatness by alone refusing to follow his century to disorder, Montesquieu is finally qualified as the voice of reason, clear but profound, eloquent but restrained, authoritative but modest.

There is little doubt that La Harpe's panegyric of Montesquieu is largely sincere. Through his overemphasis on the author's

26Ibid.  27Ibid.  28Ibid., 67.
conservatism and his insistence upon opposing Montesquieu to the philosophes at their worst, and on every conceivable point, the tone of honest admiration is manifest. Though he fails to state that Montesquieu might have been considered just as radical at the beginning of the century as he was held to be conservative at the end, the critic's tracing of the theorist's influence is clear and convincing. The two most important factors emerging from this discussion are that La Harpe displays an acute interest in, and some ability to grasp, historically significant relations, and that he is far more concise and accurate when praising than when condemning. This last fact will be obvious by a mere juxtaposition of the essay on Montesquieu and that on Diderot.29

29 See below, 65 ff. It is also significant in this respect that the original lectures delivered at the Lycée were critical of Montesquieu and numbered six, so were probably longer than the existing article.

An exception to the rule of length is La Harpe's consideration of Voltaire.
CHAPTER VI
DIDEROT

In his Correspondance littéraire La Harpe says of Diderot:

...je n'ai jamais aima les écrits de Diderot, ni même sa personne, parce que jamais je n'ai pu souffrir ni l'athéisme, ni le charlatanisme, ni le mauvais goût...1

His severity toward the Encyclopedist is borne out in the Lycée. La Harpe devotes almost three hundred pages of the final volume of his critical work to Diderot, and promises another volume, which he never completed, dealing with the latter's posthumous works.2 The harshness with which the critic consistently attacked Diderot, though not justifiable, is understandable in terms of the biography of La Harpe's later years. Though he admits having at one time favored the philosophes and even having been one himself, he was essentially a conservative throughout his life. As Louis de Préaudeau points out, the critic "mit un bonnet rouge sur sa perruque Louis XV."

At any rate, La Harpe emphatically renounces in his discussion of Diderot whatever ties he might have had with the more liberal elements of the last half of the century; there is no equivocation in La Harpe's statement of his break with the philosophes:

Mais depuis que j'ai vu les philosophes nos maîtres de plus près, je suis venu à réciprocence, et tandis qu'ils sont restés tout aussi savants qu'ils l'étaient, j'ai cru devoir faire comme ce bon Mathieu Garo qui finit par louer Dieu de toutes choses...4

1Correspondance littéraire adressée à Son Altesse Impériale, Mgr. Le Grand Buc, aujourd'hui empeure de Russie, et à M. le Comte André Schowalof, Paris, Migneret, 1801-1807, 6 vols. Henceforth, this work will be referred to as Correspondance littéraire.

2Lycée, XVI, 273. 3Préaudeau, op. cit., 532. 4Lycée, XVI, 8.
When he composed the final volume of the Lycée La Harpe had lived through a period of imprisonment by the revolutionnaires and had seen the Reign of Terror replaced by a moderate reaction. Embittered by his incarceration, he blamed the Revolution for most of the evils of the times and the philosophes, with Diderot as their leader, for the Revolution. In defense of the critic it must be remembered that many of the Encyclopedist's best-known and most original works had not yet been published and those which had did not enjoy universal acclaim. Nor was La Harpe, old and no doubt warped by his experiences, ready to evaluate even Diderot's best works with an impartial eye.

The critic's chief discussion of the philosopher is found in the section of the Lycée entitled "Philosophie du XVIIIe siècle" under the sub-heading "Des Sophistes." After a brief sketch of the author's youth in which he likens Diderot's mind to "ces estomacs chauds et avides qui dévorent tout et ne digèrent rien," La Harpe takes up one of Diderot's early works, an "imitation très libre de l'Essai sur le mérite et la vertu." For the critic the chief interest of this work is its proof that the philosophe "commença bien authentiquement par croire en Dieu." La Harpe seizes upon this fact as if it were a blow to Diderot's followers, conveniently forgetting that the religious views of Bayle, Voltaire and even the critic himself were not

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5See above, 15-17. 6See above, 13.

7Lycee, XVI, 1. C.f.; Candide, ed crit...par Andre Morize, Paris, Droz, 1931, 189-190.

8Ibid., 2. 9Ibid., 1.
consistently presented in their writings. Inasmuch as the Encyclopedist's materialistic and atheistic compositions were all to follow after his translation of Shaftesbury's work, which Diderot published when he was thirty-two, the fact of his early religious beliefs is proof neither of hypocrisy nor of an irreconcilable inconsistency in his thought. Though the evolution of Diderot's philosophy is anything but clear, the deism of this early work is not the insoluble enigma that La Harpe would make it. That the former should have had inclinations toward atheism later in his life is not nearly so worthy of explanation as the fact that between 1730, when Diderot was apparently still a good Catholic, and 1745, he became a deist.

Having made the point of Diderot's early religious convictions, La Harpe turns his attention to Les bijoux indiscrets. His condemnation of this work is absolute: it is a "roman très licencieux d'un bout à l'autre...sans imagination, sans intérêt, sans goût..." But both the lack of morality and the absence of literary values are minor faults in La Harpe's analysis of the novel. Its chief sin is that it is obsequious; "c'est un ouvrage d'adulation, et tout entier de la plus basse adulation." Not only does this roman à clef praise the reign of Louis XV above that of Louis XIV, but it is composed, the critic contends, in honor of the marquise de Pompadour. Although the critic attempts to support his accusation, it is, to say the least, controversial. Assézat, for example, says that Diderot intended merely

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\(^{10}\)Ibid., 5. \(^{11}\)Ibid., 6. \(^{12}\)Ibid., 7.
to give a "peinture volontairement vague et indécise de Louis XV et sa
cour."\textsuperscript{13} And far from praising that monarch, according to Assézat,
what Diderot undertook was "la critique de cette habitude qu'avait Louis
XV de se faire lire à son petit lever la chronique scandaleuse relevée
pour lui par les agents de M. Berryer, et plus tard de M. de Sartine,
lieutenants de Police à Paris."\textsuperscript{14} If La Harpe's interpretation of the
allegory is defensible, his treatment of at least one textual passage
is not. Speaking of the author of \textit{Les bijoux indiscrets}, La Harpe
writes, "\textit{Il fait ordonner au Sultan du Congo, pour somnifère, la lec­
ture de la Marianne de Marivaux, des Confessions de Duclos et des
Egarements de Crebillon fils.}"\textsuperscript{15} On these grounds the critic condemns
Diderot for professional jealousy, unfairness and immodesty, adding
that the three novels concerned are far superior to \textit{Les bijoux indis­
crets, Jacques le fataliste} and \textit{La religieuse}. The plain fact of the
matter is that La Harpe has misread the text. Diderot has his rivals'
novels recommended not as a somnifère but as the last three ingredients
"d'un antisomnifère des plus violents."\textsuperscript{16} Apparently La Harpe's dis­
taste for the Encyclopedist has made him too eager to condemn.

The pages that immediately follow the attack on \textit{Les bijoux indis­
crets} are even more surprising, for in them La Harpe roundly abuses
Diderot for a work the latter never wrote. The \textit{Lettre au père Berthier
sur le matérialisme}, which the critic attributes to Diderot, was,

\textsuperscript{13}Diderot, \textit{OEuvres Complètes} (Assézat-Tourneux ed.), Paris, Gar­
nier, 1875-1879, \textsuperscript{138}. Henceforth, this edition will be referred to
as A-T.

\textsuperscript{14}Ibid.

\textsuperscript{15}Lycee, XVI, 9.

\textsuperscript{16}A-T, 335.
according to Barbier, written by l'abbé Coyer. Barbier points out that the styles of the two men are completely dissimilar, making La Harpe's blunder all the less excusable. Moreover, the critic repeats the error twice more when he falsely attributes both Etienne Beaumont's *Principes de philosophie morale* and Morelly's *Code de la nature* to the Encyclopedist. The first of these two errors is remarkable in that La Harpe has already given his opinion of Diderot's translation of Shaftesbury's *Essai*, subtitled *Principes de philosophie morale*, with which he seems to have confused Beaumont's work. The second puts La Harpe's intellectual honesty very much in question, for he appears more than a little determined to assign the *Code de la nature* to Diderot despite every strong evidence to the contrary.

After mentioning that there was some doubt as to whether Diderot actually wrote the work, La Harpe tries to show that it contains the philosopher's whole doctrine. Perhaps embarrassed by this tactic, he states by way of further confirmation:

...ce qui est certain, c'est qu'il est imprimé dans la Collection des Œuvres de Diderot, en cinq volumes in-8°, titre d'Amsterdam, depuis 1773, et que Diderot, qui n'est mort qu'en 1784, n'a jamais désavoué ni l'édition ni l'ouvrage.

Again Barbier indignantly corrects the critic's misstatements, calling the Amsterdam edition "ces misérables recueils que des éditeurs
du 18ème siècle ont lâchement publiés".

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18 *Lycée*, XVI, 97.

19 Ibid., 160.
familieux faisaient imprimer sous son nom et à son insu." \(^{20}\) He adds that the Naigeon edition of Diderot's works was available to La Harpe at the time, and that even if the latter were unaware that both the Encyclopedist and his friends had repudiated the Amsterdam collection, he should have consulted the later and more accurate edition. La Harpe's guilt here is obvious. \(^{21}\) The reason for his conduct is somewhat open to speculation, but one conclusion, suggested by his repeated linking of the names of Diderot and Babeuf, seems almost inescapable: La Harpe was attacking the Revolution as the direct product of the *raison* of the philosophes. Evidently it suited his purposes to lay as much of the blame as possible on one man, and the best choice for him was Diderot.

In view of the facts and the probabilities, the problem is posed as to whether La Harpe's commentary in these three cases should be considered at all. Inasmuch as none of the falsely-attributed works seems to offer any significant philosophical or literary merit, the best course appears to be to cite La Harpe's treatment of them as one of the reasons for the decline of his reputation. Surely his worth as a critic may better be determined by examining how he judges the works Diderot actually wrote.

La Harpe's approach to Diderot's *Pensées philosophiques* is in no way a revelation. Because of the very nature of the book, the critic is forced to give a general evaluation and choose some of the "pensées" for closer scrutiny. Among the broader comments is a

sentence which characterizes the Encyclopedist as "un esprit vif, mais qui ne conçoit que par saillies, et qui hasarde beaucoup pour rencontrer quelquefois; un style qui a du nerf mais qui laisse trop voir l'effort...22 Certainly this observation has some validity in regard to this work in particular and to Diderot in general, and is supported today in many estimates of the philosophe. Most critics would agree, too, that among the Pensées philosophiques,

...il y en a de vraies et de fausses, de raisonnables et de folles, d'ingénieuses et de plates.23 Moreover, La Harpe chooses from Diderot's collection some maxims with which he agrees and some with which he disagrees. Of one he says, "l'absurdité se laisse voir dans toute son étendue: je défie qu'on trouve dans cette phrase l'ombre du bon sens."24 Of another he states, "Le raisonnement rentre dans celui de Descartes...Mais Diderot a répandu la chaleur oratoire dans l'argumentation sèche du philosophe."25 Besides this attempt at impartiality there is nothing striking to point out in this discussion of the Pensées philosophiques. On the whole, La Harpe's criteria are moral; when Diderot is unorthodox or irreverent, he is condemned, and whenever he tends toward moderation, he is praised.

The Lettre sur les aveugles offers more opportunity for La Harpe to make an organized analysis. The critic's attitude in regard to the work becomes apparent from the beginning of his essay when he calls the latter "un de ces écrits insidieux où le matérialisme, n'osant

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22Ibid., 14.  
23Ibid., 16.  
24Ibid., 21.  
25Ibid., 31.
pas se produire en dogme, s'enveloppe dans des hypothèses sophis-
tiques."26 The critic's chief weapon in attacking it is ridicule.
After declaring bluntly that the only valid part of the letter is
taken from Saunderson's study, La Harpe insinuates that Diderot's
choice of a woman correspondent was dictated by women's gullibility.
He then cites the following passage from the letter:

Ah! madame, que la morale de l'aveugle est différente
de la nôtre! que celle d'un sourd différerait encore de
celle d'un aveugle, et qu'un être qui aurait un sens de
plus que nous trouverait notre morale imparfaite, pour
ne rien dire de pis!27

Diderot's provocative statement of the relativity of morality follows
a description of a conversation between the blind man and a group of
scientists. The development of his proposition, though theoretical,
is rigorous. La Harpe, quoting the sentence out of context and quali-
fying it as senseless, asks how the morality of a deaf man and a blind
man would differ and further demands how Diderot, who has no sixth
sense, can know so much about the matter. The critic's questions are
irrelevant and immature, but because he has lifted Diderot's state-
ment out of context and reduced it to an axiom, he makes his argument
appear ridiculous. La Harpe even takes delight in pointing out in
a footnote that his citing of the passage always provoked laughter
from his audience at the Lycée. One is forced to wonder at this
point whether the appellation "sophist" better applies to Diderot or
to La Harpe.

26 Ibid., 59. 27 Ibid., 60-61; A-T, I, 289.
Somewhat later, La Harpe takes another passage from the Lettre and treats it in the same manner. Diderot's observation, "Je me contente d'observer que ce grand raisonnement, tiré des merveilles de la nature, est bien faible pour les aveugles..."\(^{28}\) is turned in ridicule. La Harpe italicizes the words on which he wishes to focus attention, then proceeds to condemn the contention as a glaring inconsistency in Diderot's philosophy:

\[
\text{Faisons même grâce à Diderot du mépris qu'il affecte pour ce grand raisonnement que tout-à-l'heure lui-même em-ployait si victorieusement dans ses Pensées...}^{29}\]

Diderot's point, that the glories of nature offer a proof of God only to those who can behold them, is not necessarily in conflict with his earlier use of the opposite argument. It may be, and probably is, the discovery of a very real weakness in the grand raisonnement. La Harpe's attempt to refute Diderot's claim, on the grounds that people who are born blind are rare and that even they can be taught that the sun exists, is trivial. His further declaration that all blind people yearn to see, is irrelevant. As if he realizes that his refutation is unconvincing, the critic has recourse to an eloquent denunciation of the philosophes in general. Grouping them all under the rubric "sophists," he unleashes the following diatribe:

\(^{28}\)Ibid., A-T, I, 289.  \(^{29}\)Ibid., 65.
Tous ces sophistes ont une tournure d'esprit particulière, et qui suffirait pour rendre compte de toutes leurs extravagances. L'aperçu le plus frivole, le plus vague, le plus gratuitement hypothétique, les frappe comme les autres hommes sont frappés de la vérité, et je dirai bien pourquoi: c'est que la vérité est à tout le monde, mais leurs aperçus sont à eux; et plus ils sont obscurs, insignifiants, contraires à toutes les notions de la raison générale, plus ils savent gré de les avoir et de pouvoir en tirer parti.30

After next pointing out that Diderot was particularly fond of contemplating "plus à son aise toute la beauté de ses conceptions,"31 La Harpe introduces a parody of the philosophical jargon of the day. On the following page the critic hits a theme which has become tiresome by its frequency:

Vous avez dû voir notamment que ce que j'ai dit d'une génération et d'une expérience est le résultat formel et positif de toute la philosophie révolutionnaire, le grand mot de la révolution mille fois répété de mille manières depuis Diderot jusqu'à Robespierre.32

Once again Diderot is linked with the worst aspects of the Revolution. Here, Babeuf is replaced by Robespierre; but in this case the inference becomes rather clear, through the words "depuis Diderot," that the Encyclopedist was one of the major intellectual sources of the upheaval.

The rest of La Harpe's commentary on the Lettre sur les aveugles and indeed on Diderot himself follows the same lines. Beginning with a quoted passage from the philosophe (or someone else), he attempts to refute its content through ridicule, logic or a theoretical argument. Often he becomes oratorical and follows his specific commentary with a resounding condemnation of the whole school of the

30Ibid., 61. 31Ibid., 67. 32Ibid., 68.
Tous ces supposés esprits particuliers, et qui se tuaient pour rendre compte de toutes leurs extravagances, l'ennuye le plus frivole, le plus vague, le plus gratuitement hypothétique, les frappe comme les autres nomes sont frappés de la vérité, et je dirai bien pour moi: c'est que la vérité est à tout le monde, mais leurs apories sont à eux; et plus ils sont obscurs, insignifiants, contraires à toutes les notions et le raisonnement, plus ils savent gré de les avoir et les vouloir être parti.30

After next page: "...and Habeur was particularly fond of contemplating "...plus frivole de mes conceptions,"31 La Harpe introduces a somewhat口号ical jargon of the day. On the following page: "...of the jargon which has become tiresome by its frequency:

Tous avons d'ores et déjà que ce que j'ai dit d'une génération et d'une expérience est le résultat formel et positif de toute régence révolutionnaire, le granit de la révolution n'est pas répété de mille manières vertes de terre à autre terre.32

Once again with this refers to the worst aspects of the Revolution. Here, Babeuf refers to the same terrain, but in this case the inference becomes rather clear, for he is using "Les Liderot," that the Encyclopedia was one of the major intellectual sources of the upheaval.

The rest and remainder, in the Lettre sur les aveugles and indeed in every text that follows the same lines. Beginning with a quoted passage from the philosophe (or someone else), he attempts to refute its依托寓言 historical, logic or a theoretical argument. Often he becomes historical as follows his specific commentary with a research conversation of the whole school of the

30Ibid., . 31Ibid., 17. 32Ibid., 68.
philosophes as the principal contributors to the Revolution. Considering all these facts, the case against La Harpe as a critic of Diderot seems strong. In fact, most critics from Naigeon onward dismiss La Harpe's commentary as worthless.  

Certain obvious facts, however, call for a closer scrutiny of La Harpe's criticism of Diderot. First of all, whatever apparent scorn La Harpe shows for Diderot, the critic's respect for his adversary is clear. Not only does he dedicate a large part of the final volume of the Lycée to the philosophe and promise a further treatment of the latter's posthumous works, but he also devotes much of Volume IV to a refutation of the Vie de Sénèque. Nor does he pass up an opportunity to belittle the "drame bourgeois," either in the Lycée or in his Correspondance littéraire. So frequent and so lengthy are his references to Diderot that he exclaims at one point, almost to excuse himself, "Que d'erreurs en quatre lignes de Diderot! Et il faut des pages pour les détruire!" Secondly, from La Harpe's diatribe against Diderot there arises a question which has apparently never been raised: Does the critic show any penetration into the great man's work? Leaving the falsely-attributed works, the bitterness and the "mauvaise foi" aside, do we find any really valid judgments on Diderot in the Lycée? An attempt to answer this question seems to indicate that La Harpe, surprisingly enough, had a clearer idea of Diderot's significance than did most of his contemporaries. Throughout the Cours de littérature

33 A-T, III, 3.  34 Lycée, IX, 419 ff. and XIII, 55.  
35 Lycée, XVI, 93.
there are comments on the literary style, the use of form and the content of the Encyclopedist's writings which reveal La Harpe's critical insight.

The first evidence of such perception is found through a comparison of La Harpe's statements with the general reputation of Diderot today. The main points of the critic's assault are that: (1) Diderot's works are full of inconsistencies and paradox; (2) his style is uneven; (3) he takes great liberty with form, and (4) his works violate standard morality. The first contention seems to be a fact. If it is possible to find unity within any one of Diderot's individual writings, it is decidedly difficult to find it in the body of his literary production. Indeed, La Harpe does show that some statements made in the reworking of Shaftesbury's essay are at variance with the philosophe's later atheistic principles. The very title of the Paradoxe sur le comédien is indicative of Diderot's penchant for paradox. Moreover, the contradictory citations which the critic later indicates with delight in the Vie de Sénèque might keep any defender of Diderot's unity occupied for some time. Without laboring the point or detracting in any way from Diderot himself, it may be said that La Harpe has found a strong element of inconsistency in the former and is exploiting it to attack an enemy. Whether or not the critic has distorted the fact, he has recognized it.

Still the paradoxical element in Diderot's work is not difficult to perceive and recognition of it is in itself no claim to critical

36 Lycée, IX, 243-235.
acumen. But La Harpe also criticizes the unevenness of the philosophe's style. Again he seizes upon an apparent weakness and attacks. Extracting several of Diderot's Pensées, he attempts to demonstrate that the author has "des idées, mais plus souvent des formes gratuitement sentencieuses pour ce qu'il y a de plus commun, ou impératives pour ce qu'il y a de plus absurde."37 La Harpe's first effort to render the Encyclopedist absurd is not, for us, auspicious. He quotes this introductory statement to the Pensées:

Je compte sur peu de lecteurs, et n'aspire qu'à quelques suffrages. Si ces Pensées ne plaisent à personne, elles pourront n'être que mauvaises; je les tiens pour detestables, si elles plaisent à tout le monde.38

Declaring that the remark is enigmatic and in direct contrast with the rest of the book, which is clear, La Harpe asks how anything can please everyone and be detestable. Obviously, Diderot meant that his book was not intended for the "herd" and that if it were heralded by everyone, he personally would consider it a failure. Strictly speaking, however, the remark is not clearly expressed; and the criticism of obscurity is doubly harsh against a collection of axioms, which by eighteenth-century standards demanded extreme precision and clarity. La Harpe, writing during the Enlightenment for an audience which had judged severely some of his own works by these same criteria, was no doubt aware that his objections to Diderot would find support among many of his readers.

37 Lycée, XVI, 15.  38 Ibid., A-T, I, 127.
Even if La Harpe is unfairly critical in the preceding case, he is not so in another. To the axiom, "Les passions sobres font les hommes communs," the critic objects,

Passons sur l'expression sobres, que l'auteur croit neuve, et qui n'est que forcée. Il est faux que les passions modérées (comme l'auteur voulait et devait dire) fassent toujours des hommes communs. Aristide, Marc-Aurèle, Phocion, étaient très modérés dans leurs passions, très sobres dans tous les sens...

The critic has made a point which might well have been brought out through the previous citation. Diderot's preference for the unusual word, or in the first case, the forced paradox, has laid him open to the charge of showmanship. His fondness for his own boldness was not and still is not one of his more endearing traits. Again, when Diderot queries, "Quoi donc! te serait-il plus facile de redresser un boiteux que de m'éclairer?" La Harpe answers sarcastically and indeed with persuasiveness:

C'est selon: en rigueur, je ne crois pas que les miracles admettent le plus ou le moins de difficulté, puisque tout est également possible à celui qui fait seul les miracles; mais en me prêtant à la question de Diderot, je la trouve douteuse. C'est sans doute un prodige de redresser la jambe d'un boiteux; mais ce pourrait bien en être un autre de redresser l'esprit d'un athée, et je ne voudrais pas répondre que le dernier ne fût pas le plus difficile.

In these cases, La Harpe has recognized Diderot's vulnerability and has used the charge of charlatanism as a basis for attack.

Unfortunately for La Harpe, his intensive analyses are far outweighed by general broadsides not only on Diderot but on the whole

\[39\text{Ibid.}, 17.\]  
\[40\text{Ibid.}, 18.\]  
\[41\text{Ibid.}, 71-72.\]  
\[42\text{Ibid.}, 55.\]  
\[43\text{Ibid.}.\]
generation of the philosophes. His indictments of declamation and
egotism in the style of the Encyclopedist are nonetheless defensible.

In a third area, that of form, the critic limits himself, except
for widely scattered blanket condemnations, to Diderot's theater,
where he finds easy picking. Of Le fils naturel La Harpe has little
to say. Observing that the play had received a certain amount of
notoriety through Diderot's editorship of the Encyclopédie but "tomba
très tranquillement" when presented, he adds, no doubt remembering
some of his own less successful productions,

C'était une déclamation froide et emphatique, aussi
insupportable à la lecture qu'au théâtre; c'est
tout ce qui est possible d'en dire.\textsuperscript{44}

Here he is certainly right. To be sure, the Entretiens sur "Le fils
naturel" have some historical interest, but the play compares un-
favorably with Est-il bon? Est-il mechant? or even with Le père de
famille. The former of these two plays was not published until 1734;
so La Harpe had no chance to comment on it. The latter, however,
elicits this scathing criticism:

Les deux premiers actes ont de l'intérêt, et il y
a au second une scène entre le père et le fils, où
le rôle de ce dernier est du moins passionné, si
ceux du père est déclamatoire, mais passe ce moment,
toute la machine du drame manque par les ressorts.\textsuperscript{45}

For La Harpe as for many others, most sentiments in the play are
false, most elements of the plot are contrived, "Afin que tous les
personnages, divisés sans aucune raison, se désolent tous sans sujet."\textsuperscript{46}

Of the father the critic has more to say:

\textsuperscript{44}Lycée, XI, 420. \quad \textsuperscript{45}Ibid. \quad \textsuperscript{46}Ibid., 421.
Son dialogue s'en éloigne autant que son action: c'est tantôt le language d'un philosophe, tantôt celui d'un prédicateur, ailleurs celui d'un énergumène. C'est une suite d'exclamations, d'invocations, de lamentations. Le père de famille pleure, et Saint-Albin pleure, et Sophie pleure et Cécile pleure... Cette monotonie emphatique et larmoyante ennuye au point qu'on ne supporte la méchanceté si gratuitement tracassière du commandeur que parce qu'il rompt un peu cette triste uniformité...

If today we can partially excuse the faults in Diderot's drame because it pointed the way to a reform of the classic theater, we cannot expect the contemporary critic to have been so lenient. We might even agree with La Harpe when he says of the drame, "Ce genre d'ouvrage demande un homme qui sache se transformer en tout personnage: Diderot est le contraire; il transforme tous les personnages en lui-même..." Both the critic's general evaluation of Diderot the dramatist and his comments on particular plays would be acceptable today.

Strangely enough, La Harpe's most provocative discussion of Diderot is in an area where it would be least suspected: morality. Apparently contradicting earlier statements of Diderot's lack of consistency, the critic assigns to the author's work an element of unity by referring to the "doctrine de Diderot," which according to the commentator, springs from the fact that the philosophe "avait juré une guerre mortelle à l'homme moral, comme Voltaire à l'homme religieux." This conclusion is reached through the examination of a quotation from the Vie de Sénèque: "A parler proprement, il n'y a qu'un devoir, c'est

\[\text{\textsuperscript{47}Ibid., p.23.}\]
\[\text{\textsuperscript{48}Correspondance littéraire, VI, p.6.}\]
\[\text{\textsuperscript{49}Lycée, XVI, 273.}\]
d'être heureux: il n'y a qu'une vertu, c'est la justice."\textsuperscript{50}

For La Harpe, the first part of the maxim is a proof that Diderot "ne reconnaissait point de devoir moral, qu'il a qualifié de devoir le voeu naturel du bien-être dans chaque individu."\textsuperscript{51}

Thus, "tout ce qui est de l'homme naturel étant bon, l'homme moral est anéanti expressément."\textsuperscript{52}

As for the second part of the axiom, the critic suggests that it at first appears contradictory to the first, for happiness is an individual pursuit, whereas justice is generally considered to be universal. To La Harpe's mind, the only possible resolution of the contradiction is to believe that "la Justice et la vertu consistent à remplir le seul devoir de l'homme naturel, celui d'être heureux."\textsuperscript{53}

In other words, La Harpe declares that Diderot denies universal morality, and offers an axiom from one of the Encyclopedist's last works as proof of his contention.

Pursuing his argument, La Harpe chooses another maxim from the same work:

\begin{quote}
Il n'y a pas de science plus évidente et plus simple que la morale pour l'ignorant; et il n'y en a pas de plus épineuse et de plus absurde pour le savant.\textsuperscript{54}
\end{quote}

There is little need to give La Harpe's reply to this passage, for it is the consecrated response of faith to skepticism. It seems safe to say, however, that every remark of this kind to be found in Diderot justifies La Harpe's accusation of immorality. To a further opinion

\textsuperscript{50}\textit{Ibid.}, A-T III, 312. A-T has "rigoureusement" for La Harpe's italicized \textit{proprement}.

\textsuperscript{51}\textit{Ibid.} \textsuperscript{52}\textit{Ibid.} \textsuperscript{53}\textit{Ibid.}, 274. \textsuperscript{54}\textit{Ibid.}, 275; A-T III, 313.
of Diderot, that human slavery should be ended by a revolt of the slaves and the destruction of their masters, La Harpe answers eloquently that one evil cannot correct another. When the Encyclopedist argues that he speaks for humanity, the critic answers that the interest of humanity cannot be served by the slaughter brought about by revolution. The difference of opinion would indeed seem to oppose Diderot, the defender of individual "bonheur" to the advocate of universal justice, and serves clearly to show that La Harpe had witnessed the French Revolution and that Diderot had not. Although any impartial reader would probably oppose Diderot's sophistication and erudition to La Harpe's oversimplifications, the critic's point of immorality is at least partially substantiated. In fact, the argument that Diderot is often strongly opposed to conventional morality is generally accepted today, and it is fitting that La Harpe, who represented a mentality that the Encyclopedist detested, should recognize the attitude.

In an equally provocative vein, familiar to the reader of the twentieth century, Diderot, inspired by Seneca, looks forward to his remaining years as follows:

Il me semble que j'en vois l'existence comme un point assez insignifiant entre un néant qui a précédé et le terme qui m'attend.  

La Harpe retorts, quite rightly, that unless the terme is also le néant, Diderot's statement is meaningless. If life is an insignificant point between two gulfs of nothingness, then the philosophe is more than Pascalian, he is approaching existentialism. The problems of

55Ibid., 235; A-T, III, 372. La Harpe again quotes out of context with no reference for "en."
existentialist morality, of course, will not bear discussion here; it need only be said that at the beginning of the religious revival of the post-Revolutionary period, such a philosophy would hardly meet with wide approval.

The aim of presenting these ideas is not to prove that La Harpe gave, in the *Lycée*, a valid or even accurate appraisal of Diderot's works. Rather it is to indicate that the critic knew his subject to the extent that he could attack the *philosophe* where he was most vulnerable. The treatment of Diderot in the *Cours de littérature* is a near-perfect model of injustice and is frequently and rightly condemned as such; but it is significant to note that the objections which La Harpe raised to Diderot are still debatable today. The inconsistencies, the stylistic unevenness, the liberty taken with form and the moral position of Diderot must have been subject to even more dispute at the period when the *Lycée* appeared. Both Naigeon and Brière in the introductions to their editions of Diderot's works take pains to defend Diderot against La Harpe.\(^{56}\) Although Barbier states categorically in a collection of some of La Harpe's works,

\[
\text{Hon dessein n'est pas de réfuter ici les sophismes de \text{H. de La Harpe, de faire voir que les philosophes avaient en lui un adversaire peu redoutable, et qu'ils pouvaient négliger sans compromettre leur cause...}^{57}\]
\]

the fact remains that before 1830 there were twenty-two editions of the *Lycée*, not including abridgments, and that someone must have been reading La Harpe's ideas.\(^{58}\) La Harpe's prestige was extremely high

\(^{56}\)A-T, I, 5-6; III, 5-6. \(^{57}\)Barbier, op. cit., 360-361.  
\(^{58}\)Sproull, Jean-François de la Harpe...op. cit., 270.
at the turn of the century, and it is entirely possible that the critic's judgments of Diderot were partially responsible for the lack of interest shown in the latter until the last half of the nineteenth century.
Though Voltaire's tragedies are rarely played and little read today, La Harpe opens his two-volume study of "Le théâtre de Voltaire" with this perhaps tactful remark:

Si parmi nos trois tragiques français du premier ordre, Corneille, Racine et Voltaire, la prééminence est susceptible de contestation, suivant les différents rapports sous lesquels on les envisage, au moins la supériorité de ce dernier sur tous ses contemporains n'est pas contestable...

The question of disputing the pre-eminence of the three playwrights named is enough to make us aware of the difference between contemporary literary judgments and those of the eighteenth century. If our first impulse is to set the volume aside and look for conclusions more compatible with our own, our second is to examine La Harpe's criticism to find his reasons for suggesting this comparison. In fact such a study is more refreshing and perhaps more rewarding than reading the tragedies themselves.

La Harpe is so frequently hailed as the defender of Boileau and the French classical tradition that the reader might expect in his discussion a prose re-working of the Art Poétique, or in any case constant references to the rules of tragedy. Such is not the case. La Harpe's invoking of "rules" is so infrequent as to be negligible. Instead of an academic study of Voltaire's tragedies in terms of a rigid code of

1Lyceé, IX, 1.
dramatic criteria, La Harpe produced individual analyses of the works in regard to sources, conception of character, effectiveness of technique and style. Only in the last of these categories is he inclined to be dogmatic, and, as if out of consideration for the reader, he treats style separately at the end of his textual observations. Quite frankly, La Harpe's judgments have not stood the test of time as well as have the plays he discusses, but his remarks give a clear insight into a set of criteria which are somewhat surprising in the eighteenth century.

As to sources, the critic's investigations are not searching. For OEdipe he naturally cites Sophocles' classic, and he compares Voltaire's tragedy favorably with the Greek play. Few critics would agree with the points of his comparison, but his contentions at least deserve mention. La Harpe first admits that the first three acts of the French OEdipe are faulty, largely because the love affair between Jocaste and Philoctète divides the interest of the play. The final acts, however, he considers superior to the Greek original: "le dialogue est encore plus vif, plus animé, et le style plus éloquent."\(^2\) The critic finds, in addition, the following curious source for Voltaire's superiority:

Le pathétique de la double confidence est poussé plus loin dans Voltaire: le rôle de Jocaste est plus soutenu, et celui d'OEdipe est aussi intéressant qu'il peut l'être, parce qu'il n'a pas à se reprocher, comme dans le poète grec, une accusation injuste et violente contre un prince innocent.\(^3\)

\(^2\)Ibid., 16. \(^3\)Ibid., 17.
Of the "pathétique" mentioned in the first line, more will be said
later. That Voltaire's OEdipe is more sympathetic to the audience for
the reason given is highly debatable. La Harpe obviously bases his
opinion on the demands of bienveillance, as he does again when comparing
the two versions of OEdipus' description of his battle with Laius:

Voltaire a retranché la circonstance, trop peu
noble pour notre théâtre, de l'injure proférée dans
l'ivresse.\footnote{Ibid., 21.}

Preferences of this kind are undoubtedly a direct outgrowth of con-temporary taste and are reflected as much in Voltaire's working of the
play as in La Harpe's criticism. Rousseau himself is quoted by the
critic as having said, "Le Français de vingt-quatre ans l'a emporté
en plus d'un endroit sur le Grec de quatre-vingts."\footnote{Ibid., 2.} It seems clear
that in the public eye Voltaire had improved on Sophocles' master-
piece, at least in the area of propriety.

In another parallel the critic blames Sophocles for limiting the
description of the battle to factual detail and praises Voltaire for
including in the récit "des traits de caractère," "des mouvements
d'âme," "des peintures animées," and "des détails touchants."\footnote{Ibid., 25.} What
La Harpe reproaches in Sophocles' version is the very simplicity for
which the Greek tragedy has been so much admired. This "simplicité
quelquefois un peu nue des tragiques grecs" comes up for more criticism
when the commentator compares the self-discovery process of the two
heroes. In Voltaire's rendition OEdipe evokes the portrait of a vir-
tuous Laius, and La Harpe lauds the innovation:

\footnote{Ibid., 21.} \footnote{Ibid., 2.} \footnote{Ibid., 25.}
...dans notre langue, où les petits détails ont plus besoin d'être relevés que dans celle des Grecs, il me semble qu'il faut louer l'auteur d'avoir su les orner de manière à leur donner plus d'intérêt, sans que l'ornement nuise à la vérité. Ce qu'il dit de la popularité de Laius fait plaindre davantage le triste sort de ce prince; et c'est en même temps une leçon donnée aux rois en beaux vers, sans que ces vers, qui n'énoncent qu'un fait, aient l'air d'une leçon.7

These incidental moral reflections are another example of the tenor of eighteenth century opinion. D'Alembert, in his Lettre à M. Rousseau states that plays are "leçons utiles déguisées sous l'apparence du plaisir."8 The mathematician-encyclopedist goes even further when he speaks of the moral value of the "bonnes pièces" of the French stage:

C'est la morale mise en action, ce sont les préceptes réduits en exemples; la tragédie nous offre les malheurs produits par les vices des hommes, la comédie les ridicules attachés à leurs défauts; l'une et l'autre mettent sous les yeux ce que la morale ne montre que d'une manière abstraite et dans une espèce de lointain.9

Diderot and Sedaine also gave their drames an unmistakable moral tone. In tragedy the insertion of the moral elements would seem to violate dramatic unity in some cases, but for La Harpe, "Toutes ces convenances, relatives à la personne et à la situation, sont bien plus sensibles et plus fréquentes chez les modernes que chez les anciens," and are a mark of superiority.10 To be sure, the critic praises Voltaire's skill in working them into the dialogue, but that he should prefer them to the classic simplicity of the Greeks is to us curious.

7Ibid., 30-31.
9Ibid., 277.
10Lycée, IX, 31-32.
La Harpe thus appears to find Voltaire's OEdipe generally superior to that of Sophocles for two reasons: the French play does not violate propriety and demonstrates more versatility of technique. The stylistic parallels drawn in the discussion are insignificant, for the critic quotes Sophocles in prose translation and then asks the reader simply to admire Voltaire's versification. Despite the high praise he bestows on the French OEdipe, La Harpe concludes that because of the faulty first acts, the play was a "coup d'essai brillant," but not among Voltaire's masterpieces.\(^1\)

Another reference to sources is to be found in the critic's analysis of Hérope, which he compares to Maffei's play on the same subject. Again, the comparison works to the advantage of Voltaire, more justly in this case than in the previous one. Maffei is accused of violating "toutes les bienséances."\(^2\) According to La Harpe, the Italian author is crude for having Polyphonte explain that he has delayed in declaring his love for Hérope because of the "soins et les travaux de la guerre."\(^3\) The excuse does sound contrived. A more convincing argument for the superiority of Voltaire's play is La Harpe's belief in the consistency of Hérope's character in the French version:

\(\ldots\text{l'auteur a conçu que, fondant toute sa pièce sur le seul élément maternel, il fallait commencer par nous y attacher fortement... Aussi Hérope n'est-elle jamais que mère, et ne pouvait l'être trop; elle ne parle que de son fils, ne voit que son fils, ne veut que son fils...}^{4}\)

\(^{1}\text{Ibid., 36.}\)  \(^{2}\text{Lycée, X, 6.}\)  \(^{3}\text{Ibid.}\)

\(^{4}\text{Ibid., 7.}\)
The remark is valid and perhaps explains why this tragedy is ranked among Voltaire's best. It is interesting to note at this point that posterity agrees with La Harpe to the extent of rating Zaire, Hérope, Alzire and Mahomet above other Voltairean tragedies.\(^{15}\)

Continuing his comparison of the two versions of Hérope, La Harpe points out that Maffei is guilty of prolixity, insufficient character development and monotony of tone.\(^{16}\) Voltaire avoids all these faults and adds to his productions "la vraisemblance des faite et des moeurs,"\(^{17}\) and his ability to handle the "pathétique."\(^{18}\) In most cases the critic supports his arguments with juxtaposed quotations and textual commentary; but as in the preceding discussion of OEdipe he quotes the foreign author in prose translation. His treatment of the two Hérope plays, though, is more soundly supported than is the first comparison.

La Harpe's commentaries on OEdipe and Hérope have been chosen to illustrate the critic's treatment of sources because the comparisons are extensive and typical. In most cases La Harpe finds Voltaire's tragedies better than those of his predecessors. His judgments, however superficial they may now appear, are not hastily made. They demonstrate that he had seriously considered Voltaire's precursors, had compared their works with those of the philosophe and had decided, on the basis of his own taste, that the latter were superior. The

\(^{15}\)Ibid., II, 315.  
\(^{16}\)Ibid., x, 1-57.  
\(^{17}\)Ibid., 30.  
\(^{18}\)Ibid., 43.
modern critic may disagree with La Harpe in the superficiality of his comparisons and the criteria on which he based his final opinions, but not with the method by which he attempted to make point-by-point comparisons of similar works, except for comparing French verse with prose translations of foreign languages.

A good part of La Harpe's two-volume study of Voltairean tragedy deals with the consistency and depth of character portrayal. The conception of Hérope has been mentioned very briefly, but more provocative discussions on the subject are to be found in the studies of Mahomet and Zaire. Of the former play La Harpe declares, "tous les connaisseurs s'accordent à la placer au premier rang des productions qui ont illus­tré la scène française." He then draws a striking parallel between Mahomet and Tartuffe:

C'est une chose remarquable, que deux de nos plus étonnants chefs-d'œuvres dans la tragédie et dans la comédie, Tartufe et Mahomet, aient pour objet de démasquer l'hypocrisie, de faire voir tout le mal qu'elle peut faire, et d'en inspirer l'horreur.

The critic notes that Mahomet caused little stir when it was first presented in 1741, but "son succès a toujours augmenté depuis que le grand acteur [Lekain] qui devinait Voltaire a révélé toute la profondeur de son rôle." The play had been withdrawn temporarily because of protests that Voltaire's central character committed crimes that could not be ascribed to the historical prophet. To this objection La Harpe retorts:

19 Lycée, I, 364. 20 Ibid. 21 Ibid., 366.
C'est pousser loin le scrupule: n'était-il pas ambitieux et hypocrite? Avec ce double caractère, de quel crime n'est-on pas capable? L'essentiel était qu'il n'en commît un qui ne fût nécessaire, que ses forfaits fussent médités par la politique et amenés par les conjonctures, qu'il obéît à ses intérêts, et jamais à ses passions.22

What interests La Harpe is the consistent presentation of a human fault. When the critics cried out in horror that Mahomet had raised Séide to commit a useless paricide, La Harpe defends the motivation of this crime:

...Voltaire savait trop bien que jamais un homme qui aurait d'autres passions que son intérêt ne serait l'auteur et le chef d'une révolution opérée par la fourbe et par la force. La conduite de Mahomet est entièrement dirigée par les circonstances où il se trouve.23

Mahomet urged the parricide after Omar had suggested it and then as a matter of expediency; so Voltaire cannot be accused of overemphasizing the horror of the crime.24: La Harpe's arguments are well-enough taken in this case, but again it is apparent that the critic is defending, in the name of tragedy, an element that is not necessarily tragic. In the critic's evaluation the Prophet emerges as a personification of unmixed political ambition. If this is true, then Mahomet is not a tragic hero, but a spokesman of one of the conflicting sides in a "pièce a thèse."

The blame for La Harpe's confusion is to be shared at least in part with Voltaire, for the very title Le Fanatisme shows that the author was deliberately or unconsciously preaching in his tragedy.

22Ibid., 369. 23Ibid. 24Ibid., 371-372.
La Harpe, then, is criticizing the play for what it is. Twice, for example, the critic pronounces the play a success both dramatically and morally. He says first:

Ainsi l'auteur remplit à-la-fois l'objet de la scène et celui de la morale. La perspective théâtrale est pour Mahomet; le sentiment de la justice est pour Zopire.25

and later:

...c'est la nature et la vertu qui sont immolées, sans qu'on puisse avoir moins de compassion pour l'assassin que pour les victimes. Le fanatisme seul pouvait donner ce résultat; et c'en est assez pour apprécier la conception de cet ouvrage, qui est également forte pour l'objet moral et pour l'effet dramatique.26

Whatever particular aspect of the eighteenth century Voltaire was attacking in Mahomet, he appears far afield from the tragedy of the age of Louis XIV, and La Harpe was no closer to Boileau than was Voltaire to Racine. Both were innovating. The innovation itself is hardly a fault, but Voltaire on the one hand was obviously trying to write a classical tragedy and La Harpe was judging the play by some of the same criteria he applied to Racine's theater. It is unlikely, in short, that either writer realized the change to which tragedy was being subjected in the eighteenth century.

The same deviation from the tragic production of the preceding century is clear in La Harpe's essay on Zaire, which, like modern critics, he considers far and away Voltaire's best tragedy. From the

25 Ibid., 379.  
26 Ibid., 339.
point of view of character development La Harpe believes Orosmane to be a giant of the French stage. Voltaire's creation is praised in these terms:

...l'on ne peut trop louer l'auteur de Zaire de nous avoir peint un soudan qui mêle aux maximes sévères de la politique les mouvements de l'humanité compatissante, et qui descend jusqu'à s'excuser auprès d'un ennemi qui a été son esclave de retenir dans les fers un concurrent au trône qu'il occupe. Mais en faisant briller les vertus, le poète ne manque pas de ramener toujours ce premier sentiment qui doit dominer dans tout ce rôle, l'amour.\(^{27}\)

Moreover, the author has created in Zaire a woman worthy of such a hero:

Le poète a commencé par mettre sous nos yeux le couple le plus aimable que le même penchant et les mêmes vertus aient pu assortir; d'un côté, un prince jeune et victorieux, plein de sensibilité, de noblesse et de bravoure, un successeur de grand Saladin... de l'autre, une jeune esclave, d'une âme douce, tendre et naïve, mais qui, née avec tous les sentiments de la vertu, conserve dans l'ivresse même de l'amour cette juste fierté qui est le principe de l'honneur et de la modestie de son sexe.\(^{28}\)

Surely both the author and the critic must have realized that having posited the perfection of the two central characters, they would make any tragedy gratuitous, the simple result of circumstance: as it turns out, of gross coincidence. But La Harpe sees in the misunderstanding between the two paragons of virtue a tragic conception unequalled in literature. The critic pays the highest tribute to Voltaire when he points out that Orosmane, trustful to the extreme, is moved to jealousy only because of the inevitable course of events. For

\(^{27}\)Ibid., 112-113.  
\(^{28}\)Ibid., 136.
La Harpe, the sultan's descent is "trop bien motivée." In the critic's mind, the playwright succeeds in making Orosmene's fall convincing by the careful balancing of opposing forces: the tenderness of love and the august power of religion. He admits that the tragedy of Zaire does not lie in the characters themselves. Neither author nor critic was worried about the "tragic flaw" of modern criticism.

La Harpe's discussion of the two forces in conflict is worthy of note. They are set in motion by Orosmene's freeing of the Christians, which permits Zaire to learn that her father is Lusignan and her brother is Nérestan. The uncompromising nature of the two Christians forces Zaire to vow to receive baptism. All the artificialities: the recognition scene, Zaire's cross, Nérestan's scar, the ambiguous note, contribute, for the critic, to an inevitable misunderstanding and the tragic dénouement. All that La Harpe asks is that the coincidences be plausible and reasonable. The spectacle of two faultless people being brought to death by a series of coincidences which are no more than "plausible" is less than tragic in the traditional sense. The critic says almost as much when he describes Lekain's interpretation of the role of Orosmene:

Il faut, pour concevoir ce qu'elle [la tragedie] est, avoir vu cette terreur profonde, ce silence de consternation interrompu de temps en temps, non par des exclamations tumultueuses...mais par les accents douloureux qui répondaient à ceux de l'acteur, par des sanglots qui attestaient le froissement de tous les coeurs, par des larmes dont ils avaient besoin pour se soulager. Quel spectacle!

29 Ibid., 151. 30 Ibid., 166. 31 Ibid., 209.
Orosmane's tears are for La Harpe almost as great a moment as the final scene of the play. The critic's partiality for the maudlin becomes clearer in a discussion appended to his treatment of Zaire. La Harpe cites at length from letters written by two women readers in response to the critic's question: "Was Orosmane more wretched when he had cause to believe that Zaire was unfaithful, or when he realized that he had killed her on a false assumption?" 32

To understand how completely the concept of tragedy had changed from Boileau to La Harpe, a simple count of the number of times the latter uses the words "touchant" and "pathétique" would be sufficient. To introduce his analysis of Zaire La Harpe observes "... je ne crois pas trop hasarder en assurant que Zaire est la plus touchante des tragédies qui existent." 33 Later in the same essay he remarks, in regard to Zaire's sudden zeal for Christianity, "... il est encore plus dangereux de blesser le sentiment que la raison." 34 It may be wondered whether Boileau might have posed an objection to this maxim. Once again, speaking of La mort de César, the critic quotes Vauvenargues' "heureuse expression," "les grandes pensées viennent du coeur." 35 And he finds the hero of this play, Brutus, more tragic because the patriot discovers on the day he assassinates Caesar that he is the emperor's son! To avoid any doubt that La Harpe was speaking of anything but pathos, one need only glance at his tribute to one of the

32 Ibid., 216-225.  
33 Ibid., 132.  
34 Ibid., 132.  
35 Ibid., 299.
scenes from Oreste. La Harpe evokes for the reader the scene in which
Electre embraces the urn which is supposed to contain her brother's
ashes and covers it with tears and kisses:

Elle s'étonne de la compassion qu'Oreste ne peut
cacher, et de l'impression qu'il fait sur elle:

Non, fatal étranger, je ne rendrai jamais
Ces présents douloureux que ta pitié m'a faits.
C'est Oreste, c'est lui: vois ta soeur expirante
L'embrasser en mourant de sa main défaillante.

Et Oreste est là; il est témoin de ce spectacle.
Si ce n'est pas de la tragédie, où est-elle? Les
beautés succèdent aux beautés...36

The conclusion is inevitable; the "pathétique déchirant," the "sanglots,"
the gémissements," which in our day would be considered maudlin were
for La Harpe the soul of tragedy.37

The view that tragic effect resides in poignancy points up the
fact that Voltaire and tragedy on one hand were approaching the same
idea of theater as were Diderot, La Chaussee and the comédie larmoyante
on the other. To push this hypothesis further, let us examine La
Harpe's dramatic criteria in general.

Among the factors for which Voltaire is judged are dialogue, moral
tone, treatment of the "pathetic," motivation of action, balance and
local color. Most of the critic's emphasis is placed on single speeches
which for him create a powerful impression. In Zaïre, for example, La
Harpe lauds a single line which he believes epitomizes the struggle
within Orosmane. Corasmin has just suggested that the Sultan set a

36Lycee, X, 187. 37Ibid.
trap for Zaire by having the intercepted note delivered. After this speech, in which the evil counsellor has explicitly accused Zaire of infidelity, Orosmane replies: "Pense-tu qu'en effet Zaire me trahisse?" In his discussion of Mahomet, too, the critic finds a perfect réplique in Séide's answer to Palmire's question, "Qu'as-tu fait?" Séide, having just assassinated Zopire without knowing that the latter was his father, replies, "Je viens d'obéir." For La Harpe, "C'était le mot nécessaire, le mot unique, celui que Séide doit prononcer, parce que c'est le seul qui l'excuse aux yeux du spectateur." There is no doubt that the lines in both cases were conceived for maximum theatrical effect, and the critic has rightly applauded them. Besides his enthusiasm for such speeches, which are too numerous to mention, the critic makes some special observations on dialogue which are worthy of note. Speaking again of Mahomet, this time in regard to the scene in which Mahomet has laid bare to Zopire his plans for world conquest, La Harpe comments,

...ce qui achève d'enlever l'admiration, c'est le dialogue toujours adapté aux caractères et à la progression de la scène; nombreux et plein quand chacun des deux déploie diversement son âme et ses principes; serré et pressant quand il faut en venir au dernier résultat. Le langage de l'un est imposant, menaçant, superbe: c'est le crime, joint au génie, qui cherche à se rehausser par de grands intérêts: le langage de l'autre est simple, ferme et animé...

38 Lycée, IX, 204.
39 Ibid., 386.
40 Ibid.
41 Ibid., 374.
The critic has chosen a good scene to illustrate that Voltaire has achieved the desirable aim of adapting dialogue to characters and situation. Finally, regarding a scene in Oreste in which Electre displays her emotion at the news that Oreste is still alive, La Harpe comments enthusiastically:

Que toute cette scène est bien dialoguée! Comme des interruptions continuelles, ces phrases entrecoupées et suspendues, peignent fidèlement le trouble et les secousses d'une âme bouleversée! Ce ne sont pas là de ces phrases où l'auteur s'arrête sans raison, de ces points inutiles qui viennent au secours du poète quand il ne sait plus que dire; ce sont les accents de la nature.\textsuperscript{42}

The last sentence of this passage is probably aimed at Diderot or other writers of the drame bourgeois, whom La Harpe considers unsuccessful in their attempts to reproduce natural dialogue.\textsuperscript{43} As concerns the language of the theater, then, La Harpe stresses the ever-important elements of theatrical effect, suitability to character and situation, and naturalness.

Of moral tone enough has been said to indicate La Harpe's belief that tragedy should have a didactic function. He makes this idea most explicit in two cases. First, while commenting on Mahomet, the critic refers to the scene between the Prophet and Zopire and declares:

\textsuperscript{42}Ibid., 183.

\textsuperscript{43}Correspondance littéraire, I, \textit{43} ff.
C'est à la fin de cette entrevue que l'avantage balancé jusqu-là, comme il devait l'être pour l'effet théâtral, entre Mahomet et Zopire, demeure tout entier à ce dernier, comme il fallait pour l'effet moral, et que l'homme droit et incorruptible, le citoyen intégre et courageux, l'emporte sur le politique oppresseur et le conquérant coupable.\textsuperscript{44}

La Harpe here is echoing Rousseau, who said in his \textit{Lettre à D'Alembert}:

Mahomet, sans se démentir, sans rien perdre de la supériorité qui lui est propre, est pourtant éclipsé par le simple bon sens et l'intrépide vertu de Zopire.\textsuperscript{45}

Rousseau, however, finds that Mahomet's character is so strong that in the hands of a good actor it will appeal to the public, and "de pareils exemples ne sont guère encourageants pour la vertu."\textsuperscript{46} Unlike La Harpe and D'Alembert, Rousseau finds the moral aspect of tragedy a relative thing: "...quand le peuple est corrompu, les spectacles lui sont bons, et mauvais quand il est bon lui-même."\textsuperscript{47}

La Harpe reiterates his opinion on morality in the theater in a remark concerning \textit{Les Guêbles}, a late and unsuccessful tragedy of Voltaire. He states that the author "voulut encore faire de la tragédie une école de morale, mais si le dessein était bon, ses forces n'y répondaient plus."\textsuperscript{48} It is remarkable that the same critic should have criticized Sedaine for moralizing in his \textit{Philosophe sans le savoir}.\textsuperscript{49}

Of the "pathétique" nothing need be added except that with all his praise of Voltaire's most tearful scenes the critic delivers a free-swinging attack on Diderot's \textit{Féte de famille} because of its

\textsuperscript{44}Lycée, IX, 375. \hfil \textsuperscript{45}Rousseau, op. cit., I, 197.
\textsuperscript{46}Ibid. \hfil \textsuperscript{47}Ibid., 221. \hfil \textsuperscript{48}Lycée, X, 360-361.
\textsuperscript{49}Correspondance littéraire, I, 47 ff.
To be sure, the Encyclopedist's drama is excessively maudlin, but to criticize Diderot's sentimentality on the one hand and on the other to praise Voltaire for having made Brutus Caesar's son is incongruous.

Motivation of action is another factor which the critic emphasizes. Having excused Mahomet's actions on the grounds that the Prophet as conceived by Voltaire is fanaticism personified, and having defended the elaborate recognition mechanism in Zaire because it is plausible, La Harpe makes a statement on Tancred which epitomizes, or perhaps even exaggerates, his view of motivation. He stresses the bareness of the plot with which Voltaire had to work; then he brings out the difficulty of constructing a play on the subject:

Il faut trouver le moyen de fonder l'intérêt de cinq actes uniquement sur l'amour, et cependant les deux amants ne pourront se voir et se parler qu'un seul moment au quatrième acte, entourés de témoins, et comme étrangers et inconnus l'un à l'autre. Sans cette condition, il n'y a pas de pièce...51

La Harpe speaks of the difficulty as if it were purely a mathematical problem to be solved by a technician alone. In fact, he states, "une machine entière de cinq actes a été construite pour ce seul dessein..."52 Of all Voltaire's plays, the critic feels Tancred to be, therefore, the "plus artistement travaillée."53 Such admiration for the overcoming of technical difficulties may be merely an outgrowth of La Harpe's own poor attempts to write tragedies. It may also explain why neither Voltaire nor La Harpe has remained on the French tragic stage. The

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50 See above, pages 32-33. 51 Lycée, X, 299.
52 Ibid., 301. 53 Ibid.
artificialities on which a good many of their plays depend constitute a real weakness for us. Yet vraisemblance was as much a by-word for La Harpe as it was for Boileau, and, needless to say, was one of the criteria which Diderot, La Chaussée and Sedaine did not, in La Harpe's opinion, meet.

The balance which the critic demands in tragedy is the posing of two equal forces one against the other, as, for example, the opposition of human love and religion in Zaire. It is for lack of balance that Brutus is condemned. La Harpe finds that,

Un caractère aussi faible que celui de Tullie est une véritable disparate à côté du consul Brutus et d'un Romain tel que Titus. Cette jeune princesse, qui n'a pour armes que des soupirs et des pleurs contre ce colosse imposant de Rome et de la liberté, ne semble faite que pour effeminer une production mâle et vigoureuse.\(^5\)

One could hardly disagree with La Harpe's criterion in this case. The only variable element here is what, in a given age, would constitute equal forces.

As for stageability, La Harpe makes frequent references to the success or failure of Voltaire's tragedies in production. Of Mariamne, a play which was badly received on the stage, he remarks:

\(\text{Mariamne n'est pas une production indifférente aux amateurs de la poésie et du théâtre: Si la multitude ne connait guère les pièces que par leur effet sur la scène, ils ont un plaisir particulier à rendre justice à celles qui, sans obtenir ce succès, arrachent l'estime par les ressources du génie.}^{55}\)

\(^{51}\text{Lycee, IX, 91.}^{55}\text{Ibid., 51.}\)
On the other hand, **Adélaïde**, which was a great success on the stage, is of limited interest to the reader. Semiramis, because of the difficulty encountered in getting the ghost past the nobles who blocked its entrance, had a disconcerting reception, but once the area was cleared of spectators in 1759, the tragedy was played successfully. There can be no doubt, either, that the talent and popularity of the great actor Lekain counted heavily in the fate of Voltaire's theater. La Harpe repeatedly pays the highest tribute to the finest actor of the century, and his concern in this area merely points up again the fact that Voltaire, in writing his tragedies and La Harpe in his analysis of them, were expressing the taste of the contemporary public.

A final point on which La Harpe places considerable stress is local color. The interest of the eighteenth century in exoticism is well-established, but that it should have entered into the field of tragedy is somewhat surprising. Two of Voltaire's plays, **Alzire** and **L'Orphelin de la Chine**, bring out the importance of this factor. La Harpe seems to be the first critic to have used the term "local color," though in the two cases which will be quoted, the expression is pluralized. Speaking of **Adélaïde** the critic suggests, "pour peu que le poète eût répandu l'intérêt des couleurs locales sur la situation de Charles VII, il eût rendu odieux le principal personnage." This use of the phrase is less striking than a later application of the same words in his treatment of **Oreste**:

56 Ibid., 265.  
57 Lycée, X, 93.  
59 Lycée, IX, 231.
J'ose attester ici tout ce qu'il y a d'hommes équitables et instruits: la magie des couleurs locales, qui est celui du poète comme du peintre, ne nous a-t-elle pas transportés au milieu de la Grèce, au milieu des monuments de la famille des Atrides, de leurs infortunes, de leurs tombeaux, de leurs dieux? Ne s'imagine-t-on pas entendre un fragment d'Homère ou de Sophocle? Ne respire-t-on pas, pour ainsi dire, l'air de l'antiquité? 60

Along these same lines La Harpe praises the author of Alzire in these words: "...il voulait conduire Hélimomènes dans les routes qu'elle n'eût pas encore fréquentées, et ce fut lui qui, le premier parmi nous, lui ouvrit le Nouveau-Monde."61 The characters are "infiniment plus près de la nature que nous,"62 and Zamore "a toute la force de la nature primitive."63 After Zamore stabs Gusman and offers himself to the mercies of the Spaniards, the critic pronounces that this act is "parfaitement conforme aux mœurs des sauvages."64

The interest in the faithful evocation of customs is carried even further in L'Orphelin de la Chine. Describing the events of the play, La Harpe declares:

Tous ces faits, qui se passent au moment même où commence la pièce, racontés successivement forment une peinture progressive de cette grande révolution, peinture qui devient encore plus frappante par le contraste des mœurs chinoises et tartares, des vainqueurs et des vaincus, tracées avec un éclat qui n'ôte rien à la fidélité.65

According to the critic the historical facts, the predominance of the Chinese culture over its conquerors, motivation of characters, all reflect an exact portrayal of the age and situation depicted. Tancredé

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60 Lycée, X, 175. 61 Lycée, IX, 313. 62 Ibid., 326. 63 Ibid., 327. 64 Ibid., 343. 65 Lycée, X, 258.
is lauded for its reproduction of the "moeurs de la chevalerie" and later for its evocation on the stage of "les cérémonies du champ de l'ancienne chevalerie, et les combats appelés le Jugement de Dieu."\textsuperscript{66} Zaïre calls up "le caractère des Chrétiens du temps des croisades";\textsuperscript{67} and in Adélaïde the critic pays tribute to the author's painting of the "esprit de la féodalité qui régna si longtemps en France."\textsuperscript{68} Such references, overwhelming in number, serve to show the pervasiveness of public interest in exoticism, which was to become one of the hallmarks of the Romantic movement. Rousseau, of course, did not share La Harpe's enthusiasm for Voltaire's depiction of moeurs. Speaking generally, the Genevan finds that "Tout auteur qui veut nous peindre les moeurs étrangères a...grand soin d'approprier sa pièce aux nôtres. Sans cette précaution, on ne réussit jamais."\textsuperscript{69} Rousseau is evidently more accurate in his appraisal here than La Harpe.

In summary of this discussion of La Harpe's commentary on Voltaire's tragedy, it may be said that both author and critic point up a change in the direction of tragedy in the eighteenth century. The rules of seventeenth-century tragedy were followed to the extent that the plays were written in verse and in five acts, but the precepts of classicism are rarely invoked in the judgment of an individual tragedy. La Harpe for the most part bases his estimates of Voltaire's tragedy on criteria which are still sound. In addition to grounding his

\textsuperscript{66} Ibid., 327. \textsuperscript{67} Lycée, IX, 171. \textsuperscript{68} Ibid., 325. \textsuperscript{69} Rousseau, op. cit., 189.
opinions on the hallowed and essential points of the effectiveness, suitability and naturalness of dialogue, motivation of action and characters, and stageability, La Harpe applies his own yardsticks of moral tone, balance of forces, treatment of the pathetic and local color. In all these areas he returns continually to the text of Voltaire's plays for examples. The critic unquestionably is too enthusiastic in his admiration for Voltairean tragedy, as we can see today, but there is little basis for condemning him as a dogmatist. It would be unreasonable, however, to expect him to be completely out of step with his times and to deny entirely the effect of great actors like Lekain and Mlle Clairon in bringing Voltaire's plays to life on the stage. Geoffroy, writing at a greater distance from Voltaire, and consequently more accurate in predicting the eventual fate of the Patriarch's theater, was after all far less broadminded in his judgments.
La Harpe's remarks on Voltaire's poetry are generally vapid, but a part of his commentary is salvaged by incidental observations that point up his awareness of contemporary literary demands. If the French Quintilian's defense of La Henriade today seems trivial, some of his hypotheses are not, and if many of his judgments of individual poems are biased one way or the other, just as many are well-supported.

The critic's introductory comments to a discussion of La Henriade are of particular interest historically. Before launching into a long refutation of the Lettres sur La Henriade, by Clément of Dijon (1773), La Harpe gives a historical sketch of the time when Voltaire's epic poem appeared. He begins effectively:

Louis XIV n'était plus, et la plupart des hommes fameux qui semblaient nés pour sa grandeur et pour son règne l'avaient précédé dans sa tombe.¹

In few words the critic evokes the internal discord, scholarly disputes, religious fanaticism, moral license, financial instability and lack of leadership that have become the hallmarks of France under the Regency, adding,

Au milieu de cette espèce de vertige et d'ivresse, il restait peu de traces de cette ancienne dignité, de cet enthousiasme d'honneur qui avait exalté la nation dans les beaux jours du règne précédent.²

Having traced the political, moral and social situation of the time, he proceeds to outline the contemporary literary activity. Sparing only

¹Lycée, VIII, 33. ²Ibid., 35.
Massillon and Jean-Baptiste Rousseau, La Harpe condemns the writers of the day as mediocre. Only then does he introduce Voltaire, the literary prodigy and witty favorite of many circles of Regency society, already famous for *Œdipe* and politically notorious for his sojourn at the Bastille.

Combining the three factors he has thus outlined, the critic accounts for the success of the *Henriade*. Henri IV, he notes, had been overshadowed by the brilliance of the roi soleil; Frenchmen "s'en souvinrent quand ils furent malheureux." Voltaire, like so many others, became interested in the "bon roi" through anecdotes recounted by men who remembered hearing of Henri's exploits; in Voltaire's case, the narrator was M. de Caumartin. In short the public was waiting for an epic about the hero of the Ligue. Those disgusted with the chaos of the age provided a ready-made audience for a historical epic by a talented poet. Such analyses substantiate the claims of Brunetière and Faguet that La Harpe was the founder of historical criticism. Indeed, it seems almost unfortunate that La Harpe's conservatism and admiration for Voltaire prompted him to write an animated defense of the poem, for the judicious historical notations outlined above are nearly buried in his flat analysis of the epic itself.

Even within his study of *La Henriade*, however, La Harpe displays astuteness. If one considers the pall of ignorance which at that time covered the Middle Ages, the critic's overall evaluation of Voltaire's poem is reasonable:

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4 See above, page 1.
To be sure, Voltaire's epic now is considered cold and declamatory, but its merit was differently judged in the eighteenth century. Beuchot, in an incomplete list, names twenty-eight editions of the epic between 1723 and 1826.  

La Harpe was right at least in admitting the faultiness of its plan, and despite its failure as a whole, there are still occasional passages notable for their action and color. Nor is La Harpe's defense of the author's use of the marvelous without value. Many readers will answer "No" to the critic's question,

Le fanatisme sortant des Enfers sous la figure de Guise massacré à Blois, et venant dans la cellule du moine Clément lui demander vengeance, et lui remettre un glaive pour frapper Henri III, n'est-il pas une belle fiction? 

Few, however, might care to argue against the statement that the invention is "la meilleure de l'ouvrage." Even fewer will object to the following conclusion:

Quelques personnes ont pensé que ces fictions ne pouvaient s'accorder avec la gravité d'un sujet historique et récent. Je crois cette opinion outrée; j'accorderai seulement que la distance des temps et des lieux, la différence de religion, permettaient au poète plus ou moins en ce genre. La conquête du Nouveau-Monde, inconnu pendant une longue suite de siècles, ouvrirait, par exemple, un champ plus étendu et plus libre aux fictions de toute espèce: l'ignorance absolue ce qui était étendrait la sphère du possible.

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5Ibid., 41.  
6Ioland, VIII, 4-5.  
7Lycée, VIII, 48.  
8Ibid.  
9Ibid., 49.
For better or for worse, the critic seems to have announced the exotic aspects of Bernardin de Saint-Pierre and Chateaubriand, especially the latter.

Most of the remainder of the discussion of the *Henriade* is devoted to a sterile attempt to refute Clément's *Lettres*. La Harpe's admiration for some of Voltaire's lines often appears warranted; his defense of others is ridiculous. Whatever the value of La Harpe's treatment of individual verses, his commentary is rendered uninteresting by the fact that few people today read either the epic or Clément's long and insipid criticism of it.

The critic's judgments of most of Voltaire's other chief poems offer little variation from the general pattern established above. The *Poème de Fontenoi* is thus summed up:

> Il [Voltaire] jeta son poème sur le papier, aux premières nouvelles de la victoire, et ne cessa, pendant huit jours, d'y changer et d'y ajouter quelque chose...Cette manière de faire un poème...était un piège pour le talent, sans être une excuse pour l'auteur.¹⁰

Though La Harpe accords more merit to the *Poème sur la Loi Naturelle* and later is generally lenient with the *Discours en vers sur l'homme*, he states clearly that he considers the philosophical poems of minor interest:

> ...s'il [Voltaire] a su habiller la philosophie en vers, ce fut toujours une philosophie assez commune quand elle était vraie, et dont tout le mérite était dans l'intérêt des couleurs.¹¹

La Harpe conspicuously avoids mentioning the Poème sur le désastre de Lisbonne in this connection, preferring to turn the full force of his post-conversion moral indignation against La Pucelle. At this point let us consult the critic's Eloge de Voltaire, published in 1780, and look at another view of the philosophe's poems.

Grimm had praised this Eloge, which is printed in its entirety in the Moland edition of Voltaire's works, as follows:

...de tous les ouvrages ou l'on a tâché de présenter le tableau du génie de M. de Voltaire, il n'est, ce me semble, aucun où le mérite de ses différents travaux ait été développé avec plus d'admiration, d'intérêt et de goût.\footnote{Moland, I, 145.}

Far from condemning the Patriarch's philosophical poetry in this essay, La Harpe finds room in it for high praise. The critic concedes that Voltaire's poems have less scope and elevation than those of Pope, but insists that the former's have "une raison plus intéressante, plus aimable, plus rapprochée de nous."\footnote{Ibid.} He qualifies Voltaire's philosophical poetry as the rarely-accomplished union of "une philosophie consolante et de la plus belle poésie."\footnote{Moland, I, 160.} La Henriade, as well as being France's sole worthwhile epic is hailed as a work which "chantait en vers sublimes les merveilles révélées à Newton."\footnote{Ibid., 149.} Instead of denouncing La Pucelle as "une espèce de monstre en épée comme en morale,"\footnote{Lyceé, VIII, 189} La Harpe pleads for tolerance in judging the work:

...que la France ne soit pas plus sévère que l'Italie... ne jugeons pas dans toute la sévérité de la raison ce qui a été composé dans des accès de verve et de gaieté.\footnote{Moland, I, 160.}
The point of La Harpe's inconsistency has been made frequently enough not to be labored here. Moreover, the nature of an éloge does not permit extended comment on individual work. For specific criticism of any length the reader is always forced to return to the Lycée.

Besides the treatment of La Henriade, which is too laudatory, and that of La Pucelle, which is merely vindictive, La Harpe's longest discussion of one of Voltaire's poems in the Lycée deals with the Discours sur l'homme. The analysis of this composition will be presented as the critic's most comprehensive view of Voltaire's success in the philosophical poem. La Harpe's admiration for the author is balanced by his post-revolutionary conservatism. He finds the Discours "ce que nous avons de plus estimé en ce genre, sur-tout les quatre premiers, beaucoup mieux travaillés et mieux pensés que les autres." La Harpe agrees with Voltaire's first assertion, that Providence, though it has decreed the inequality of human conditions, has endowed men with equal means toward happiness. On a second point, that there is a "secret d'etre heureux," the critic is again in accord with the poet, but blames Voltaire for not revealing the secret. La Harpe maintains that such a revelation would have forced the poet to arrive at "des moralités sévères dont il ne pouvait s'accommoder ni comme poète ni comme philosophe." In two subsequent lines:

Nos cinq sens imparfaits, donnés par la nature,
De nos biens, de nos maux sont la seule mesure.

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18 Lycee, XIII, 276.
19 Ibid.
20 Ibid., 278.
the critic finds "la quintessence de l'epicuréisme," for which he reproaches the author. To refute these two verses, La Harpe insists that Voltaire himself had frequently avowed, intentionally or unintentionally, "que le bien-être et le mal-être de l'homme est principalement dans son moral, dans son coeur, dans son imagination."21 The weaknesses of the "raisonneur" are redeemed, however, in La Harpe's eyes, by the talent of the "peintre." Citing a long passage beginning, "Vois-tu dans ces vallons ces esclaves champêtres..." La Harpe lauds it as a "liaison naturelle des idées qui s'enchaînent l'une à l'autre,"22 embellished by "des peintures vives, riches et contrastées; des traits de force et des traits gracieux..."23 Unable to deny the beauty of the lines, the critic regrets that the poet did not employ his talent to propound Christian truths.

The second discours is found to be less brilliant both poetically and philosophically than the first. Its chief philosophical weakness is that it poses the question of the freedom of the will, which La Harpe believes to be an established truth. Voltaire's device of using an angel as a source of revelation the critic considers facetious, arguing that a philosophe would not address himself to Heaven for an answer to such a problem and that Providence would in no case respond to agnosticism by sending an angel.24 Nevertheless, the angel, who "a lu son Locke," delivers some excellent verses in the passage, "Oui, l'homme sur la terre est libre ainsi que moi;...Qui conçoit, veut, agit, est libre en agissant."25

21Ibid., 277. 22Ibid., 281. 23Ibid., 280. 24Ibid., 284. 25Ibid., 285.
Pausing to comment on what posterity will think of Voltaire's "contradictions perpétuelles" on the subject of free will, La Harpe prophesies:

...la postérité n'en observera pas avec moins d'étonnement qu'on ait pu si long-temps faire une autorité sur quelque sujet que ce soit de raisonnement et de certitude, de l'écrivain le plus versatile...qui ait jamais existé; que la secte dont il était le chef et le héros n'ait jamais eu l'air de s'apercevoir d'aucune de ses innombrables inconscéquences; et la postérité en saura aussi et en comprendra fort bien les raisons, qui seront déduites à leur place.26

Certainly it is true that Voltaire is no longer ranked as an authority in philosophy and that he is at least among the most versatile writers who ever lived. It is equally false that posterity has, as La Harpe predicted, condemned Voltaire for inconscéquences, though during the religious revival of the early nineteenth century, many of Voltaire's boldest statements found little favor.

From his digression on Voltaire and posterity La Harpe returns to the angel of the second discourse. When the angel depicts the human condition as that of an atom lost in immensity, the critic calls for an appeal to God as an escape from meaninglessness. Later, as an antidote to the passions, the angel instructs the imploring philosophe: "Prends ce livre sénés, consulte cet ami..."27 La Harpe finds the advice laughable, arguing that the young man in the throes of passion will be unable to gain instruction from a book. The critic then misreads two lines posing the question,

26 Ibid., 235-236.  
27 Ibid., 238.
La Harpe makes the word "pensée" obscure in reference, and perhaps it is; but Voltaire apparently means that the man in peril can think of nothing but seeking a remedy to that peril. In this interpretation, Voltaire's following lines, presenting a man who denies free will and yet acts in his own behalf under conditions of stress, form a clear transition. If La Harpe truly did not understand the two lines to which he objects, his charge of obscurity is only partially justified, for the reading suggested above is certainly possible and even probable. In a final salvo against the second discours the critic rejects the angel's parting words, "Sois heureux," as ridiculous, inasmuch as any good angel should know that happiness is impossible on earth. La Harpe maintains that the ange should have said, "Sois raisonnable, docile et humble, et tu pourras être aussi heureux qu'il est possible de l'être dans ce monde d'un moment..."29

To open his analysis of the third discourse, Sur l'envie, La Harpe reprimands Voltaire for his assault on Jean-Baptiste Rousseau and Desfontaines. Particularly cruel in the eyes of the critic is Voltaire's charge that Rousseau is a hypocrite. As for Desfontaines, Voltaire refers to a morals charge of which the former had been acquitted; and La Harpe, remembering the injustices of which he himself had been victim, self-righteously cries slander. The outward charity of such a statement is in such contrast to the diatribes which permeate La Harpe's

28Ibid., 289. 29Ibid., 290-291.
work that the accusations of hypocrisy and hatefulness levelled against him down to the present day seem justified. Two facts must be remembered in his connection, however: La Harpe's defense of the underdog is, probably because of his own experience with injustice, a consistent trait in his work; and Chateaubriand insists that "le Quintilien français" was fighting continually against his tendency to vituperation.

La Harpe concludes his examination of the Discours sur l'envie by declaring that Voltaire grossly exaggerates the persecutions undergone by the early Copernicans, Locke and Hope. The critic feels that Voltaire emphasized the social and political pressures on these men to give philosophy an aura of martyrdom. Though he contends that the slander and exaggeration of this discourse cannot be completely excused, the critic quotes a long passage from the last part of section three, which he calls beautiful, but on which he makes no comment.

La Harpe finds the versification of the fourth discours "peut-être la plus égale et la mieux travaillée," but he protests against the palinodies of this section, particularly those of Naupertuis and Frederick the Great. And in the fifth part, both Voltaire's verse and ideas

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30See Gaiffe, op. cit., 126-127: "Quant à La Harpe, pédant fiable et hargneux, prompt à faire dégénérer la critique littéraire en satire personnelle et la satire personnelle en pugilat, homme de mauvaise foi et de mauvaises moeurs, matamore de lettres aussi prompt à l'agression lâche qu'à la reculade honteuse..." The passage continues in the same vein, without a single redeeming word. The personal animosity of Gaiffe's passage, published over a century after La Harpe's death, is striking. In his acidity Gaiffe might easily be taken for a polemicist of the eighteenth century.

31See Biré, op. cit., II, 323. 32Lycée, XIII, 295-296.
are roundly condemned, after being distorted by the critic as an attack against Christian morality. Let it suffice to point out that once more La Harpe's editor, who is essentially conservative, finds it necessary to intervene and indicate where the critic has falsified statements by paraphrasing them, and has deliberately made Voltaire appear contradictory by quoting verses out of context. What La Harpe hoped to gain through such tactics remains a mystery, especially in the light of this remark:

Ferrault disait, à propos d'une pièce de vers qu'il croyait digne du prix, et qu'on soupçonnait d'être de son ennemi Despréaux,...: Quand elle serait du diable, elle mérite le prix et elle l'aura. Et moi de même, si Satan avait fait de belles tragédies, je dirais: Satan est l'ennemi de Dieu, mais il est bon poète; et si je maudis Satan, j'estime sa bonne poésie. Et pourquoi donc ne dirais-je pas de Voltaire ce que je dirais de Satan?

It appears likely that La Harpe, in estimating Voltaire's posterity, felt that the Patriarch would live as a tragic author by his talent and as an epic poet by his priority, but that his philosophical verse would have little durability, largely because of its liberal views.

As a critic of poetry, La Harpe leaves much to be desired. Though Faguet points out that La Harpe was capable of producing good poetry, the latter's ability to perceive the merits of that art is limited. Faced with an individual poem, La Harpe has two basic techniques: he cites long passages and heralds their beauty in vague terms; or he analyzes single verses for their content alone. His criteria are

33 Ibid., 305-312.
34 Ibid., 311.
35 Faguet, op. cit., 337 ff.
regularity and accuracy of form and of vocabulary, and even these demands are frequently tempered by moral considerations. In a century noted for its dearth of good poetry, La Harpe is more an explanation for that shortcoming than an analyst of it. More will be said of La Harpe's poetic views in a later chapter.

Voltaire's prose is almost ignored in the Lycée. Though La Harpe calls him an "excellent prosateur" and superior to everyone in the century except Montesquieu and Buffon in this area, the critic pays but little attention to the Patriarch's histories and novels. L'histoire de Charles XII is called one of the purest models of French prose, but the Essai sur les moeurs and the Siècle de Louis XIV are not even mentioned. The novels are all grouped together and characterized on one page. La Harpe's observations are laudatory and as accurate as such generalizations can be, but they show that he did not feel the novels to be important. His lack of insight is not surprising, inasmuch as Voltaire himself had little regard for his novelistic production. The critic acknowledges that the situations of many of Voltaire's romans were borrowed from other works, but he pays tribute to the philosophe's originality and "le cachet de son génie." For La Harpe:

Ce qui caractérise Zadig, Candide, Memnon, Babouc, Scaramantado, [sic] l'Ingénû, c'est un fonds de philosophie, senée par-tout dans un style rapide, ingénieux et piquant, rendue plus sensible par des contrastes saillants et des rapprochements inattendus, qui frappent l'imagination et qui semblent à-la-fois le secret et le jeu de son génie.

36Lyceé, VIII, 270. 37Lyceé, V, 34. 38Lyceé, XIV, 272.
The critic apparently enjoyed reading the works but did not believe they would survive.

Perhaps in the case of Voltaire, La Harpe's closeness to the subject interfered with his perspective. Yet he was not alone in misjudging the philosophe's eventual literary reputation. During his last years he was asked to collaborate in the edition of Voltaire's works finally published under Beuchot's name, and Beuchot himself expressed regret that La Harpe's death prevented their cooperation. Whether or not we accept the validity of La Harpe's judgments on Voltaire today, they were apparently widely accepted at the beginning of the nineteenth century.

39 Ibid.
CHAPTER IX

ROUSSEAU

More clearly than anywhere else, both La Harpe's merits and his defects as a critic emerge in his treatment of Jean-Jacques Rousseau. The strong personal bias which caused the critic to be excessively severe with Diderot and too laudatory of Voltaire does not figure heavily in his remarks on the famous Genevan. It is true that La Harpe has a pre- and a post-revolutionary attitude toward Rousseau, but neither of these is markedly personal.

In an article which appeared in the Mercure de France shortly after Rousseau's death La Harpe takes an approach to the great man's work which must still be considered valid:

Ce serait une chose également curieuse et intéressante de suivre, dans tout le cours de la vie de Rousseau, les rapports de son caractère avec ses ouvrages, d'étudier à-la-fois l'homme et l'écrivain, d'observer à quel point l'humeur et la misanthropie de l'un a pu influencer sur le style de l'autre.

La Harpe then explains that he is attempting an impartial evaluation of an "homme supérieur" whose works have become "l'un des ornements de la littérature française." His discussion follows a more or less

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1Mercure de France, October 5, 1778. Cf. also Lycée, XVI, 325-343. For convenience, footnotes refer to the Lycée article.

2Lycée, XVI, 325.

3Ibid., 326.

4Ibid.
chronological scheme. Recalling that Rousseau's unfortunate childhood and poor background accounted for his late arrival on the scene of literature, La Harpe theorizes that this very tardiness gave Rousseau a chance to "exercer son esprit par l'étude et son coeur par les passions." Jean-Jacques had thus avoided the pitfalls of youthful impetuosity and had profited from years of mature reflection.

In a later article, written after 1795, the critic takes a somewhat different position in regard to the relationship between Rousseau's life and his work. An unmistakable tone of harshness characterizes one of the first statements of the post-revolutionary essay: "je suis obligé de montrer l'homme en même temps que ses opinions: l'un sert à infirmer l'autre." La Harpe proceeds to heap ridicule on Rousseau for pretending to scorn literary fame when he had striven twenty years to obtain it. To add insult to injury the Academician castigates Jean-Jacques for blaming his tardy fame on society, when he alone was responsible. These widely divergent views serve to show that La Harpe had come to regard Rousseau as one of the sources of the revolutionary spirit. That the critic had not forgotten his earlier article is proved by his reference to that very essay. Whether he was aware of the drastic change in his attitude will become clearer below. Whatever the case,

5Tbid.
6Tbid., 305-321. La Harpe refers to an acte constitutionnel which appeared in 1795.
7Tbid., 312.
8Tbid., 313-315.
La Harpe evaluated the same set of facts from two diametrically opposed points of view.

Continuing his treatment of Rousseau in the earlier article, La Harpe, like Marmontel, states that the Genevan's position in the first Discours was suggested by a friend [Diderot], who explained that a negative approach to the question would be more controversial than an affirmative one. The critic adds that the work skyrocketed its author to fame because in the resulting polemic, "sa thèse fut célèbre et mal combattue." La Harpe next suggests that Rousseau, who had a gift for controversy, adopted as a credo, by dint of his heated defense of it, a thesis in which he had not at first believed:

...tel fut l'effet de la première dispute de Rousseau sur les arts et les sciences, que cette opinion, qui d'abord n'était pas la sienne, et qu'il n'avait embrassée que pour être extraordinaire lui devint propre à force de la soutenir.

The question of Rousseau's sincerity has been a matter of dispute until the present day. La Harpe, whose hypothesis is no doubt based on the anecdotes recounted by Marmontel and Morellet, offers little support for his argument except the author's continuing bitterness against society. Professor Havens, in his introduction to the Premier Discours, has given an exhaustive study of this controversy and has concluded in favor of the Genevan's sincerity and originality.

9Ibid., 329.
10Ibid.
11Ibid., 330.
Whatever the circumstances may have been, there is little doubt as to the accuracy of La Harpe's description of Rousseau's debut:

...Rousseau entrait dans le champ de la littérature comme Marius rentrait dans Rome, respirant la vengeance et se souvenant des marais de Minturnes.\textsuperscript{13}

From this image we have a picture of Rousseau as a kind of hero, a talented writer fighting a background of hardship and winning his laurels in spite of odds. His bitterness is here evoked as justifiable.

In the post-revolutionary essay the fact of Rousseau's struggle for recognition is lent a different significance. Rousseau is no longer pictured as an underdog competing for literary fame. Instead he is a monster of pride. To the critic,

\begin{quote}
L'orgueil, et l'orgueil blessé explique tous les travers et tous les paradoxes de Rousseau; l'orgueil, et l'orgueil flatté explique toute sa vogue et son influence.\textsuperscript{14}
\end{quote}

In this case it is not the fire of ambition which for La Harpe explains the writer's thirst for celebrity but sheer vanity. As for Rousseau's defense of the thesis that the arts and sciences had contributed to the corruption of mankind, La Harpe conveniently forgets the supposed influence of Diderot and argues that the Genevan was seeking vengeance for his own shortcomings, not for the injustices of society. Rousseau, says the critic, "D'abord pour se venger de la longue impuissance de ses efforts et de ses prétentions,"

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{13}Iyce, XVI, 331.
\textsuperscript{14}Ibid., 312.
\end{flushright}
et ensuite pour paraître en quelque sorte au-dessus de sa célèbrité.¹⁵

The full effect of La Harpe's recantation in regard to Rousseau may perhaps best be measured by the simple juxtaposition of quotations from the two articles. In 1778 the critic states: "ce qui distingue son style, c'est la chaleur et l'énergie."¹⁶ After the Revolution, however, he concludes, "Je n'avais jamais pu goûter l'arrogance paradoxale qu'on appelait énergie et le charlatanisme de phrase qu'on appelait chaleur."¹⁷ The use of the identical terms in both cases forces one to wonder whether the critic's later statement is dictated by anything but the rankest hypocrisy. What is intriguing about the reversal of opinion is that in both remarks La Harpe has expressed an excessively general but nonetheless defensible judgment of Rousseau. The Genevan is today still praised for énergie and chaleur, and still condemned for arrogance paradoxale and charlatanisme de phrase.

The revolution of the critic's attitude toward Rousseau is also apparent in his appraisal of La Nouvelle Héloïse. In 1778, La Harpe's observations are not unfavorable. Of the work as a whole he says, 

...La Nouvelle Héloïse semblait n'être qu'un prétexte pour réunir dans un même cadre les lambeaux d'un portefeuille. Il est vrai qu'il y en a de bien précieux; on y remarque des morceaux de passion et de philosophie également admirables.¹⁸

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¹⁵Ibid., 313.
¹⁶Ibid., 313.
¹⁷Ibid., 311.
¹⁸Ibid., 338.
The weight of La Harpe's commentary here is in favor of Rousseau. The critic finds the defects of structure balanced by the merits of Rousseau's philosophy and the accuracy of his psychological notation. La Harpe even adds the flattering observation that Voltaire himself "avait distingué plusieurs lettres qu'il eût voulu ... en arracher."\(^{19}\) Largely because of the Nouvelle Héloïse, Rousseau is, for the critic, popular with "les femmes et les jeunes gens parce qu'il parle beaucoup à l'imagination."\(^{20}\) A development from this position of admiration is illustrated in the section of the Lycée devoted to romans. La Harpe compares Rousseau's novel to Richardson's Clarissa Harlowe and treats the Nouvelle Héloïse rather severely:

Claire, l'amie de Julie, a paru une copie de Miss Howe, et l'auteur a suivi le système épistolaire de Richardson, en donnant à ses amants tout le babil de la passion qui aime le plus à écrire et à parler. Ce sont des amants et non des académiciens, dit-il dans une note, croyant justifier par ce seul mot les incorrections, les longueurs et les inutilités... Non, ce ne sont pas des amants qui parlent, c'est M. Rousseau qui les fait parler... Julie, ainsi que Clarisse, est un peu prêcheuse, et je crois que toutes les deux le sont trop.\(^{21}\)

La Harpe has no doubt lost his enthusiasm for the gems of passion and philosophy which he had mentioned in the Mercure article, for he adds,

L'imagination est la qualité dominante dans Richardson; la philosophie et l'esprit de controveure caractérisent

\(^{19}\) Ibid.\(^{20}\) Ibid., 341.\(^{21}\) Lycée, XIV, 267.
La Harpe also reproaches the novelist in this second analysis because Julie's morality is open to question when she marries Wolmar.

The critic next goes into some detail on what he considers weaknesses of structure. Among the faults he distinguishes the fact that Julie's love for Saint-Preux is a given element and is not developed at the beginning of the book. Julie's marriage is another weak point, for, "c'est aimer bien peu un homme que d'en épouser un autre." Nor is Saint-Preux's conduct entirely convincing. The critic finds it curious and somewhat revolting that after two years of travel the hero should come to "vivre tranquilllement entre sa maîtresse et l'homme qui l'a épousée." A final defect in its structure is Julie's death, which La Harpe evidently considers an artificiality:

"Enfin, l'auteur, ne sachant comment sortir de cette situation bizarre, termine le roman par un incident fortuit, étranger à tous les intérêts dont on a été occupé jusque-là, et Julie meurt uniquement pour tirer M. Rousseau de l'embarras."25

As a conclusion to this second treatment of the novel, La Harpe declares it a success not for its beauties, but for its innovations.26

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22Ibid., 269.  
23Ibid.  
24Ibid.  
25Ibid.  
26Ibid.
might be expected, is unequivocally harsh. La Harpe opens his attack by labelling the Genevan a "Vil charlatani" for excusing the novel on the grounds that "\textit{Il faut des romans à un peuple corrompu.}\" After the Revolution Rousseau's work appears to La Harpe grossly immoral, a "roman licencieux." What were merely faults of structure in the second essay have finally become examples of the author's baseness. Instead of appealing to women and adolescents because he is imaginative, Rousseau does so in the final analysis for a different reason. The critic's change of mind is almost incredible; his complete statement begs to be quoted:

\begin{quote}
\textit{J'avais déjà observé qu'il avait sur-tout pour lui les femmes et les jeunes gens: et pourquoi? c'est qu'il avait l'art pernicieux de donner à leurs passions favorites le ton et l'air des vertus.}\textsuperscript{29}
\end{quote}

There is little doubt that La Harpe has distorted his own previous statements and has turned on Rousseau the same kind of invective he aimed at Diderot, and probably for the same reason. Once again, however, the critic supports his contentions with passages from individual works.

However shameful La Harpe's last word on Rousseau may appear, there remain elements of his criticism, both favorable and unfavorable, which indicate the critic's astuteness. Obviously, he has shown little insight into the \textit{Nouvelle Héloïse}; and though his remarks on

\begin{itemize}
\item[27] \textit{Lycée,} XIV, 318.
\item[28] \textit{Ibid.}, 319.
\item[29] \textit{Ibid.}, 317.
\end{itemize}
Rousseau's personality and desire for fame are provocative, they are not well substantiated. But La Harpe does seem to foresee Rousseau's popularity with the Romantics when he observes in regard to the

_Devin du village:_

...c'est que Rousseau était bien plus naturellement sensible que penseur, et avait réellement une très vive imagination, beaucoup plus qu'une tête philosophique. C'est une vérité qui n'a encore été observée que par un petit nombre d'hommes qui réfléchissent; mais le temps n'est pas loin où elle sera généralement reconnue.

La Harpe is apparently aware also of the enormous influence that Rousseau was to have in the field of education; not only does he call *Emile* the author's masterpiece and suggest a statue testifying the gratitude which children and mothers should show to the Genevan, but he never retracts either statement. It is not surprising that on the basis of this work La Harpe should have had a feeling of friendship for Rousseau. Both men had wretched childhood experiences which no doubt explain the bitterness of many of their opinions.

The following enthusiastic pronouncement is revealing:

_C'est Rousseau qui a délivré des plus ridicules entraves et de la plus triste contrainte un âge qui ne peut avoir toutes ses graces que lorsqu'il a toute sa liberté, et de qui l'on peut dire (avec les restrictions convenables) qu'on peut lui laisser tout faire, parcequ'il ne peut nuire, et tout dire, parcequ'il ne peut tromper._

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30_Lycée, XII, 85._

31_Lycée, XVI, 334._

32_Lycée, XIV, 271._

33_Lycée, XVI, 340._
A curious proof of La Harpe's early affection for Rousseau is to be found in the critic's sole reference in the Lycée to the Guerre de Genève, the manuscript of which he had been accused of stealing. Voltaire is severely reprimanded for having assailed Jean-Jacques in this work, and the critic is particularly disturbed when he sees the Patriarch of Ferney

...vomir contre Rousseau, alors fugitif et proscrit, les plus brutales invectives et lui reprocher, heureusement en très mauvais vers, ses maladies, sa pauvreté, et ses malheurs.34

It seems a pity that La Harpe, who at first apparently had a real feeling for the works of Rousseau and a sense of fellowship for the man should later have turned to diatribe.

The best of La Harpe's commentary on Rousseau is not to be found in the Lycée itself, nor may it be called pre- or post-revolutionary, for it was written at the height of the Revolution. Barbier has collected in his Nouveau Supplément au Cours de littérature the critic's observations on the two works for which Rousseau is chiefly remembered today, the Contrat Social and the Confessions. Of the first of these works La Harpe says in an article written for the Mercure de France,

Ce livre est devenu le bréviaire de nos législateurs; on le cite sans cesse dans leur assemblée et dans tous les écrits du jour; et il est sûr que les principes généraux de notre constitution...sont pris dans son ouvrage, comme lui-même les avait pris dans celui de Locke...35

34Lycée, VIII, 197.
35This article appeared originally in the Mercure on April 9, 1791. I am citing from Barbier, op. cit., 266.
The critic speaks of the "obligations éternelles que nous avons à ce grand écrivain," who was as vigorous in his expression as he was in his thought. He praises Rousseau for rendering familiar to the public abstract truths which most people would not have recognized or sought in Locke because of the latter's dryness. But La Harpe cautions his readers that any principle acceptable in theory is admissible only insofar as its application to political institutions is practical. Such is the tone of the whole article.

La Harpe agrees with Rousseau theoretically that national sovereignty is inalienable, but he argues that in France the feasibility of assembling twelve million citizens to vote on every governmental action is out of the question. Nor, declares the critic, is there any possibility of calling the voters together by regions and arriving at solutions acceptable to the whole nation. So he concludes that the powers of government must be delegated:

...la souveraineté considérée dans le droit ne peut être représentée; je l'accorde: considérée dans l'exercice, je le nie. Elle peut, elle doit l'être dans une nation nombreuse, sous peine de s'anéantir: et de quelle valeur serait un droit dont on ne saurait faire usage?

He calls upon men to consider the hand of Providence, which set the world in motion and left it to operate according to invariable laws, sacrificing the happiness of individuals to the conservation of the

36 Barbier, op. cit., 266.
37 Ibid., 270.
whole. La Harpe's deism in this case belies the argument that he was at that time an unthinking advocate of all revolutionary actions. He seems rather to be the voice of caution.

To Rousseau's declaration that the English people are not free, La Harpe retorts:

En total, il n'est que ridicule d'appeler esclave un peuple aussi libre et aussi content de sa liberté que le peuple anglais, et d'insulter un gouvernement qui a produit cent ans, non pas d'une gloire trompeuse et ruineuse, mais d'une puissance réelle, d'une prospérité vraiment nationale, et d'une aisance intérieure et générale, sans exemple, peut-être, dans l'histoire du monde...38

He finds that Rousseau "a souvent de la force aux dépens de la mesure,"39 and distinguishes in the author's method three characteristics which give his prose its force. For the critic,

Ce sont l'affection du paradoxe, la roideur des principes sans examen des conséquences, et la confiance touchante, qui annonce d'avance le mépris des objections.40

Admitting that Rousseau has genuine talent, La Harpe feels that the extremity of some of his ideas often creates an effect greater than the value of the ideas themselves.

Concluding his treatment of the Contrat Social, La Harpe quotes Rousseau's own statement to the effect that if there were a people of gods, their government would be democratic, but that democracy is

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\begin{align*}
38 & \text{Ibid., 274-275.} \\
39 & \text{Ibid., 274.} \\
40 & \text{Ibid., 275-276.}
\end{align*}
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impossible to men. The critic correctly characterizes the work as a "spéculation et non pas une leçon," advising the citizens of the Republic to admire eloquent writers but to distrust them as well: "Profitez des traits lumineux dont Rousseau a fortifié les principes de Locke, mais rejetez toutes les conséquences erronées et brillantes qu'il a voulu en tirer." Then, with an eloquence perhaps worthy of the Genevan, he exclaims:

Ne vous soumettez à l'empire du génie que quand il est le premier ministre de la raison: s'il veut régner seul, c'est un despote qui vous subjugue, ou un enchanter qui vous égare.

Even at the center of the Revolution, while he was writing odes in favor of the Republic and wearing his red cap, La Harpe demonstrated a strain of conservatism. A fiery radical would hardly have used the image of Providence as a model of government nor have praised the example of English moderation. At a time when France had been glutted with ideas, La Harpe was in fact calling for a return to reason. Though his evaluation of the Contrat Social was essentially correct, his experience proved that reason could not then prevail.

A year after the article on the Contrat Social La Harpe published in the Mercure some "Extraits des Lettres sur Les Confessions de Jean-Jacques Rousseau," to refute a position taken by Ginguene in regard to the Confessions. La Harpe takes the side of the philosophes

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1Ibid., 283.  
2Ibid.  
3Ibid., 283–284.  
4Ibid., 129. These "Extraits" appeared in 1792 in response to Ginguene's letters, published the previous year.
who had been attacked in Rousseau's most celebrated work. Before examining his long analysis of 1792, I should like to state briefly La Harpe's opinion of the Confessions before and after the Revolution. In 1778 the critic had heard of the work only at second-hand from friends who had attended Rousseau's public readings, and he remarked,

On dit que plusieurs personnes y sont maltraitées; mais pas une autant que lui [Rousseau]. Il se peut que l'on mette à avouer ses fautes l'amour-propre que l'on met commanement à les dissimuler, et médire de soi est encore une manière d'être extraordinaire, concevable dans un homme qui a voulu être singulier.\textsuperscript{11}

His closing word on the Confessions is, however, of a different slant. He finds Rousseau not extraordinary or even unusual, but rather "commun."

Qu'y a-t-il en effet de plus commun que toutes les petites passions, vaines et basses...? ce qui serait original, ce serait d'avoir été au-dessus de ces passions-là, comme ont été quelques hommes.\textsuperscript{45}

In both these general remarks La Harpe has obviously concluded that the most important element is the revelation of a human personality. In the first case he is sympathetic to that personality and in the second he is not; but the emphasis and the approach are consistent.

The essay of 1792 is equally centered on the individuality of the author. In this article, however, the critic is as impartial as he is capable of being. He tries to explain the motives for Rousseau's attacks on Voltaire, Diderot, Hume, D'Alembert and others.

\textsuperscript{11}Lycée, XVI, 343.
\textsuperscript{45}Ibid., 323.
Rousseau's accusations against Voltaire are objectively treated, one by one, and refuted. La Harpe and most modern judges attribute the persecutions undergone by Rousseau not to Voltaire's enmity but to the Genevan's dangerous frankness. La Harpe points to the fact that Emile, with all its boldness and unorthodoxy, could hardly have been expected to win Rousseau friends in the theocracy of Geneva; the Profession de foi d'un vicaire savoyard seemed to La Harpe deliberately conceived to arouse the protests of Catholics and Protestants alike:

C'était la première fois qu'on l'avait attaqué [le clergé] si ouvertement et avec tant de force et de hardiesse; c'était un moraliste sévère, et un écrivain du plus grand talent qui l'attaquait à visage découvert, à la face du monde entier; en un mot, qui signait son ouvrage, ce que n'avait fait aucun philosophe français, et ce morceau était un chef-d'oeuvre d'éloquence.\(^\text{66}\)

La Harpe is probably right when he attributes the attacks on Rousseau to that writer's insistence, through honesty or pride, on declaring his authorship of controversial works. He rejects as well and with equal accuracy the idea that Voltaire was jealous of Rousseau at the time of the persecutions:

J'affirme, moi, que Voltaire n'était point alors et ne pouvait être jaloux de Rousseau, et voici pourquoi je suis en droit de l'affirmer: c'est que j'affirme en même temps qu'il fut jaloux et très-jaloux du prodigieux succès de l'Héloïse, qui parut bientôt après. Oui, il le fut, je l'ai vu...\(^\text{67}\)

La Harpe maintains to the contrary that it was no doubt Rousseau who was jealous,\(^\text{68}\) and he asserts with penetration that the jealousy

\(^{66}\)Barbier, op. cit., 165.
\(^{67}\)Ibid., 196-197.
\(^{68}\)Ibid., 196.
sprang from social reasons. The critic offers as proff the difference in the receptions accorded to the two men in Geneva, which must have deeply affected a sensibility as acute as Rousseau's. He points out also that Rousseau was not in any way a social lion, and this fact is widely accepted today. La Harpe admits in all fairness that Rousseau was morally incapable of denigrating Voltaire's talent as a writer, whereas the Patriarch did not hesitate in his later years to attack Rousseau on all fronts and with little regard for truth. In his defense of Voltaire's essential innocence in regard to the charges of political persecution, La Harpe appears acute, impartial and penetrating.

More surprising than his discussion of Rousseau and Voltaire is the critic's desire to defend Diderot and D'Alembert, for whom he felt no personal friendship. Though La Harpe confesses that Diderot's violent note against Rousseau is much too strong, he insists that the Encyclopedist had every right to seek vengeance. The Lettre sur les spectacles, he observes, besides containing a malicious though veiled reference to Diderot, was a frontal attack on the Encyclopédie itself. As for D'Alembert, whose reputation was unimpeachable, La Harpe simply denies that a man of D'Alembert's character would be capable of stealing a manuscript. Enough is now known to bear out most of La Harpe's well-supported arguments and judicious

49 Ibid., 203.
51 A-T, III, 91 ff.
52 Barbier, op. cit., 235-236.
53 Ibid., 215-216.
speculation in analyzing the disputes between Rousseau and the other
great men of his day.

It may be generally stated that the Revolutionary essay on
Rousseau is the very opposite of La Harpe's article in the Lycée on
Diderot. Not only is the critic accurate and painstaking in his
bibliographical research, but he is impartial toward Rousseau.
Barbier, who corrected all of La Harpe's false attributions and
injustices in the Diderot essay, pays high tribute to La Harpe's
discernment in showing Rousseau's persecution mania.\(^{54}\) La Harpe seems
also to have been the first critic to have made a study in literary
terms of the effects of Rousseau's personality on his works. The
critic claims to have guessed Rousseau's illness from reading an
episode in the Confessions. According to La Harpe, the anecdote
concerning an adventure Rousseau had had with a "courtisane de Venise"
was a revelation, the more so because no one else had paid any atten-
tion to the incident. Rousseau's description of his bewilderment
at being attractive to a woman, though he had neither fortune nor
physical beauty; then explaining the attraction by the fact that the
woman had a growth on her breast and was therefore a "monstre", was
enough to convince La Harpe of the author's emotional instability.
From this revelation the critic was led to consider Rousseau's
literary beginnings. Having been pampered and treated like a child,
while with Mme de Warens, La Harpe speculates, Rousseau's precipitation

\(^{54}\)Ibid., ix.
into literary fame was probably a shock to his personality. Finding himself surrounded by the talented and socially-oriented writers of his age, he must have perceived quickly his own moral and intellectual superiority to most of them, at the same time noting his social inadequacies. From these factors, Rousseau, "Né avec une imagination excessivement tendre et aimante," 55 concluded that society was deceiving him.

La Harpe proceeds to show how Rousseau needed both a deep affection and a sense of belonging. Thérèse was not able to provide the affection, inasmuch as she did not understand Rousseau, and Rousseau could not belong to a society which he felt was corrupt. Eventually led to suspect both Thérèse and Dupeyron, his only friend, Rousseau began thinking only of himself. For La Harpe,

Il roule dans son esprit ses Confessions comme pour se justifier, mais en effet par l'inévitable besoin de parler de lui. Se croyant méconnu, il veut se venger en se montrant. 56

This view of Rousseau is, then, an intensive look at an individual. La Harpe is careful and convincing in the development of his theory, and his conclusions are in accord with many modern opinions of Rousseau. Whatever one's view of Rousseau, however, it must be based on the self-portrait in the Confessions, and it must be developed from a careful study of that work.

55 Ibid., 246.
56 Ibid., 248.
Just as La Harpe pointed out that moral questions were at the center of Diderot's literary output, so he showed that the individual personality is of greatest importance in the analysis of Rousseau. In this light, his change of opinion toward the Genevan is not surprising. La Harpe had seen his share of anarchy, the ultimate expression of political individuality, and was reacting naturally to the consequent disorder. As strong as was his reaction to injustices, the post-revolutionary critic leaned toward social stability. Having exalted the personality in *Warwick* and *Coriolan*, La Harpe assailed it in his judgments on Rousseau.
CHAPTER I
NON-TRAGIC THEATER

Before discussing the writers of comedy in the eighteenth century, La Harpe embarks on a long and futile examination of the question: "Si l'art de la comédie est plus difficile que celui de la tragédie."¹ He admits himself that the question is academic, for both genres are based on "l'observation de la nature et la connaissance du coeur humain".² Noting the popularity of the subject, however, he undertakes his essay out of "pure curiosité".³ The critic points out that a widely accepted view holds that comedy must be more difficult, inasmuch as the eighteenth century had produced tragic authors worthy of Corneille and Racine but had not brought forth a writer equal to Molière in comedy. La Harpe accepts the premise but rejects the conclusion. He argues that comedy appeals to the mind, while tragedy must reach the heart, that comedy needs only to reproduce nature, whereas tragedy must ennoble it, that tragedy is more vast in scope and in inspiration than comedy, concluding that tragedy is therefore the more difficult of the two.

In his examination of comedy La Harpe presents no less than twenty-three authors, many of whom are virtually forgotten today. Only his analyses of Le Sage, Sedaine and Beaumarchais will be

¹Lycée, XI, 275-294.
²Ibid., 277.
³Ibid.
considered in any detail, for the others hold little interest in themselves and offer no greater insight into the critic's approach. Destouches, for example, is roundly condemned for his "insipide monotonie d'intrigues communes, froides ou forçées; des scènes de valets remplies de plaisanteries triviales..." Only Le Philosophe marié and Le Glorieux are granted any merit by La Harpe, the first because it has "de la conduite, et de l'intérêt, des situations et des contrastes," and the second because its inherently comic opposition of a haughty nobleman and an obtuse parvenu is supported by good use of minor characters, fast dialogue and well-wrought verse. The critic regards Le Glorieux as superior to La Métromanie of Piron for two reasons: Destouches' play ridicules common social phenomena, but Piron's mocks a relatively rare preoccupation; and the first brings its characters to a satisfying conclusion while the second closes with the defeat of the most sympathetic character. Gresset's Le Méchant is classed as inferior to both plays because it fails to combine "l'intérêt" and comic effects. These three plays have been mentioned because in his discussions of them La Harpe brings out his two chief criteria for comedy, technical success and moral acceptability. To gauge technical success, La Harpe examines the structure,
dialogue and characters of the play, and to determine its moral value he applies the tests of universality and the presentation of conventional virtues. More will be said of both these factors in the body of this chapter.

The critic analyzes Le Sage's *Turcaret* in a section with Boissy's *L'Homme du jour*, but only the first of these comedies will be discussed here. Le Sage is introduced as an author with "un goût particulier pour la littérature espagnole dans un temps où tout le monde l'abandonnait." He is said, without any qualifying remarks, to have surpassed his Spanish models. Of particular interest to La Harpe in Le Sage's dramatic masterpiece is the moral problem. He remarks that the playwright had been frequently reproached for his depiction of "mauvaises moeurs". La Harpe defends the presentation of immorality, with recourse to Aristotle, on the grounds that "la comédie peut et doit peindre le vice, mais particulièrement par le côté ridicule, afin d'en égayer la peinture." He adds that comedy could not combat vice if the portrayal of vice were forbidden on the stage. Granting that the absence of a decent character in the play is a weakness, that *Turcaret* lacks the "mérite précieux de la versification" and is structurally only a succession of extremely amusing incidents, La Harpe still finds it redeemed by "la vérité des peintures, le sel du dialogue, la bonne plaisanterie, la gaîté

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9La Harpe, however, devotes ten pages to *L'Homme du jour*, only five to *Turcaret*. He does seem to prefer the latter.

10*Lycée*, XI, 342.

piquante et satirique; enfin par la verve comique." The critic goes so far as to call the comedy "la satire la plus amère à-la-fois et la plus gaie qu'on ait jamais faite." Le Sage is complimented for his ability to "humilier le vice et rendre cette humiliation plaisante et non pas dégoutante." Singled out for special praise is the scene between Turcaret and the marquis, who has just discovered his pawned ring on the finger of Turcaret's mistress:

Le dialogue est aussi parfait que les incidents sont heureux. Chaque mot du marquis est une saillie, chaque mot de Turcaret est un trait de caractère. Ce rôle du marquis est le meilleur modèle qu'il y ait au théâtre, de ces libertins de bonne compagnie qui passaient leur vie au cabaret.

It is obvious from the foregoing remarks that the critic stresses the moralizing aspects of Turcaret. He cites only one line, Frontin's parting remark, "Voila le règne de M. Turcaret fini, le mien va commencer." though he admits that Le Sage's prose is "si fertile en bons mots" that it is easily memorized. Vice is punished and the comedy is theatrically effective; so La Harpe condones it.

Before undertaking an analysis of Sédaine, La Harpe runs a gamut of authors including Marivaux, whom he condemns for the artificiality of his dialogue, La Chaussée, whom he praises for his
moral lessons, particularly in the *Ecole des mères*, and Voltaire, whose failure at comedy he attributes to the fact that nature had not endowed the patriarch with a gift for that genre.\textsuperscript{18} He fails to recognize that Marivaux somewhat like Musset, was to have the power to survive on the French stage.

The critic calls *Le Philosophe sans le savoir* "un drame qu'on... revoit avec plaisir".\textsuperscript{19} The author avoids Diderot's bombast, according to La Harpe, but is guilty of "l'insipidité des petits détails".\textsuperscript{20} The commentator finds the situation well-conceived but the action slow-moving and unconvincing. He concludes that the play depends a great deal on the actor and appears forced when read. Sedaine's faults are blamed on the author's attempts in another genre, the comic opera. For La Harpe, Sedaine "indique plus qu'il ne développe" in both forms.\textsuperscript{21} In fact, the critic spends much more time in studying Sedaine as a writer of comic opera than as a dramatist.\textsuperscript{22} What is more interesting than his remarks on Sedaine, however, is La Harpe's discussion of the *drame*.

The critic observes that the *drame* strives for the same effects as does tragedy: pity and terror, but he adds that in the *drame* it is much more difficult to avoid the pitfalls of "le romanesque des événements, et l'atrocité ou la bassesse des caractères."\textsuperscript{23} He

\textsuperscript{18}Ibid., 348-419. The idea of literary ability as a "natural gift" (p. 408) is left completely undeveloped.

\textsuperscript{19}Ibid., 426.

\textsuperscript{20}Ibid.

\textsuperscript{21}Ibid., 426.

\textsuperscript{22}Lycée, XII, 348-389.

\textsuperscript{23}Lycée, XI, 427.
declares that the lesser genre has neither the dignity of characters, nor the stage effects, nor the historical interest of tragedy. It must depend for success on "deux grands pivots, la morale et l'intérêt." In the area of morality, La Harpe believes that the drame has an advantage, for it may appeal to all walks of life, while tragedy is limited to the portrayal of the great. On the other hand, audiences are much more likely to be involved in the tribulations of superior individuals than in the everyday problems of society. He adds that the plights of great characters are also more likely to arouse our imagination. To gain the same audience reaction as tragedy, the drame must therefore depend on powerful effects. These must often be obtained by calling up extraordinary circumstances, usually at the expense of verisimilitude, or by resorting to revolting characters. If this last danger is also possible in tragedy, it is less likely, says La Harpe, for the personal power of a great man makes his crimes less vile in our eyes.

Strangely enough, however, the drame is not condemned as an inferior form. Its chief drawback is that it offers more opportunity to mediocre writers than does tragedy. Any mind can conceive a maudlin situation, but genius alone can produce great theatrical art:

Rien n'empêche qu'entre ses mains un drame, sur-tout s'il est écrit en vers, ne puisse être un très bel ouvrage; il peut même l'élever jusqu'aux situations et jusqu'à l'éloquence de la tragédie. 

In the area of genres, then, La Harpe is relatively broad-minded.

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24 Ibid. 25 Ibid., 430.
Though he feels that tragedy is more difficult to produce than either comedy or the *drame*, he does not posit the superiority of one form over the others. His only dogmatic contention is that verse is better than prose in the theater. Naturally, he has preferences among various authors, but his judgments are generally based on comparisons of texts and supported by commentary.

A third of La Harpe's section on eighteenth-century comedy is devoted to Beaumarchais, but only forty pages of the critic's hundred-page discussion studies Beaumarchais' plays. The other sixty take up in some detail the fascinating life of the dramatist. La Harpe's admiration for the watchmaker, inventor, musician, gun-runner, financier and author is obvious. Why the converted La Harpe, sworn enemy of subversiveness in any form, should have condoned and even applauded the social and political irreverences of his younger contemporary is at first glance astonishing. The reason for the outwardly strange kinship, however, becomes clear when the critic takes up the playwright's wrangles with justice. Beaumarchais is a victim, a lone voice crying out against persecution, and loudly enough to triumph. Unlike Rousseau, Beaumarchais in La Harpe's mind seemed to pose no threat to the social order. Though some of Figaro's more radical statements are roundly assailed by the critic, the author is not represented as a danger to stability, but only as an expression of discontent. Beaumarchais, like La Harpe, was a man who had complaints about society, but he did not seek to overthrow the social order. It appears, then, that the same muse that inspired *Le Comte de Warwick, Coriolan* and La Harpe's other works presenting
a victim-hero also inspired his animated defense of Beaumarchais. Interesting as is La Harpe's espousal of the dramatist's cause, it has little bearing on the matter of comedy, during the Enlightenment. His description of Beaumarchais' active life is at most an explanation of why the author of the *Barbier de Séville* produced only two plays which have survived.

When he finally turns to Beaumarchais' dramatic production, the critic takes up first *La Mère coupable*. He finds the author's last play "indigne de lui."26 Starting with the title, La Harpe condemns the play from beginning to end. The title itself is misleading, for the play deals not with motherhood but with marital duty to the spouse. In conception La Harpe believes that the play could be highly moral, but "le drame moral est précisément celui dont Beaumarchais n'avait point le talent."27 A master of plot, La Harpe considers the author ignorant of both the theory and the style of morality. The critic expresses his revulsion at the portrait of Almaviva in *La Mère coupable*: "c'est un petit-maître français, un fat, un libertin, qui couve, depuis vingt ans, la profonde et haineuse jalousie d'un mari espagnol."28 Almaviva is the more repulsive in the later play because in *Le Mariage de Figaro* he was human. Particularly disgusting for the critic is the scene in which the Count rages with jealousy over the letters which point to his wife's infidelity.29 Posterity

26Ibid., 551.
27Ibid., 552.
28Ibid., 553.
29Ibid., 554.
has agreed with La Harpe in condemning the play "dans le plan, dans les caractères, dans les situations, dans les moyens, dans le dialogue."^30

It seems curious that La Harpe should have opened his discussion of Beaumarchais' theater with the last of the author's plays. The harshness of his attack makes the commentary on La Mère coupable appear to be almost an apology for admiring Beaumarchais as a man. Only in the case of Beaumarchais does La Harpe separate his commentary on the life of an author so completely from his work.

After his unfavorable analysis of La Mère coupable La Harpe resumes a chronological approach. Mentioning first Eugénie, which he calls a "roman dialogué", the critic assails Beaumarchais' introduction to the play as a tribute to Diderot, whom the playwright admired as a philosopher and as a poète. He then uses Eugénie as an explanation of the lack of success enjoyed by prose drama. In his opinion, the prose play in general depends too much upon the actor and

...ne peut porter dans l'âme du lecteur ces impressions soutenues que la magie poétique doit joindre à l'illusion dramatique: toutes deux ont besoin l'un de l'autre. Deux vers de sentiment feront couler mes larmes, en se gravant d'eux-mêmes dans mon âme et dans ma mémoire; au lieu qu'un amas de phrases que j'ai vues ne m'affectera nullement.^31

La Harpe is, of course, distinctly wrong if one considers the enormous popularity of the Mariage de Figaro or the Barbier de Séville both on and off the stage.

^30Ibid., 553.  
^31Ibid., 565.
Though he finds the Deux amis more successful than Eugénie, La Harpe compares it with the Père de famille in regard to artificialities of plot. All the crises he claims to be manufactured for their own sake. Having thus largely blamed the influence of Diderot for Beaumarchais' early dramatic failures, the critic declares that "sa route fut beaucoup plus sure et plus heureuse quand il courut au gré de son génie, qui était celui de la gaieté." Even when Beaumarchais' humor is grotesque and slapstick, La Harpe finds it original enough to redeem itself. He praises the creation of Figaro, who is barely credible, as a perfect outlet for such humor. The critic suggests that in his versatility the barber could be a reproduction of the author himself:

On ne peut douter, quand on entend son Figaro dans les trois pièces où il figure et prime toujours, que ce ne soit Beaumarchais lui-même qui a voulu se transformer sur la scène, et qui avait besoin d'un tel personnage pour lui donner tout son esprit. C'est un valet, il est vrai; mais il est auteur, il est musicien, il fait des vers, il fait des études, il parle de grammaire en termes aussi exacts que le docteur Bartholo; il est parfois philosophe, et toujours intrigant... Figaro's speech to Almaviva on the advantages of noble birth is evoked as an outburst of Beaumarchais' amour-propre, and the superiority of intelligence over circumstance is held to be one of the chief points of resemblance between the author and his creation.

La Harpe maintains that the Barbier de Séville is "le mieux conçu et le mieux fait des ouvrages dramatiques de Beaumarchais."  

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32 Ibid., 568.  
33 Ibid., 569.  
34 Ibid., 572.
Yet despite his praise for the play, the critic classes it below not only *Turcaret* but also *L'Homme du jour* and *Le Mariage fait et rompu*, two plays which have disappeared completely. The third act of the *Barbier* is singled out as the best example of the author's originality. This quality for La Harpe is not one of conception, but of technique:

> Ce qui est de Beaumarchais c'est d'avoir substitué aux fadeurs et aux bouffonneries qui sont tout l'assaisonnement des anciens canevas espagnols et italiens...un dialogue plein de saillies et une hardiesse plaisamment satirique...<sup>35</sup>

As by now must be expected of La Harpe, he passes from a five-page discussion of what he hails as Beaumarchais' best play to a much longer criticism of *Le Mariage de Figaro*, with which he is very severe.

First describing the anxiety with which the Parisian theater public awaited the later play, La Harpe recalls its immediate and lasting success:

> *Les Noces de Figaro* furent jouées deux ans de suite, une ou deux fois par semaines, et toujours suivies; on y accourut de toutes les provinces de la France, et même des pays étrangers. La pièce valut 500,000 fr. à la comédie, et 80,000 à l'auteur...<sup>36</sup>

The rest of his commentary is devoted to an attack on the style and the ideas of the play, especially for its length, its lack of verisimilitude, its immorality and its mauvais goût. Having seen the comedy four times, La Harpe claims that all four times he enjoyed the first three acts but that the last two are so full of *fatras* that "la pièce tomberait, si l'intérêt en était le mobile."<sup>37</sup>

But, argues the critic, "c'est la curiosité seule qui soutient cette

<sup>35</sup>Ibid., 574.  
<sup>36</sup>Ibid., 576.  
<sup>37</sup>Ibid., 577.
machine compliquée."38 If it were not for the unity of action and motivation of the first acts, the audience would be unable to endure the "remplissage, les scènes de mots, les fêtes de noces, les petits jeux de théâtre..."39 It seems apparent that either La Harpe could not account for the immense success of the Mariage de Figaro or that he was trying to explain it away.

The action of the comedy, especially in the last act, is completely unbelievable for the critic. The night scenes, in which mistaken identities are compounded to a point of absurdity, are made less convincing when both the Count and Figaro mistake the Countess' voice for that of Suzanne. More incredible for La Harpe is Figaro's reaction to the confusion. The critic refuses to believe that the valet would have sought out Bartholo, Basile and Antonio, the very people he had mocked so often, to witness his own humiliation and provide them with a means for revenge. Almaviva's gullibility is pointed out as a supreme invraisemblance, not in keeping with his previous character. Finally, the very plot of the play is based on the Count's droit de seigneur, which La Harpe insists Almaviva could have practiced at whim. The reader of the Lycée at this point finds it infinitely more invraisemblable that a critic of La Harpe's stature, with his insight and his obvious appreciation of Beaumarchais' character and talent, really subscribed to such an opinion of the great comedy. Because La Harpe disagrees with some of its social and political statements he apparently tries to discredit the play artistically.

38Ibid.
39Ibid., 577.
At the center of the play's immorality La Harpe sees the Countess' fascination for Cherubin, which, curiously, he seems to find more revolting than Almaviva's lust; La Harpe evidently is not a feminist. Despite the statements in Beaumarchais' preface, the critic holds that the Countess' interest in the page is thinly disguised lewdness, and he accuses Beaumarchais of appealing to the moral licence of the age by presenting "pour la première fois sur le théâtre le premier instinct de la puberté." The role of Cherubin is conceived for its "attract purement physique" and is nothing less than indecent. La Harpe points out that the "innocent" page knew enough to "s'enfermer avec Fanchette" and to kiss Suzanne when he was alone with her. His moral indignation reaches its high point when he pronounces:

Ce charmant page entre ces deux charmantes femmes occupées à le déshabiller et à le rhabiller est un tableau de l'Albane, et rien n'a autant contribué à faire courir aux représentations de Figaro.

Contrary to Beaumarchais' opinion, then, the critic condemns the Mariage de Figaro as grossly immoral.

Besides the example of Cherubin, La Harpe discovers points of mauvais goût in Marceline's insistence that Figaro marry her, in Bartholo's affair with Marceline and in Bazile's role as a pander. But the critic accepts these facts as aspects of Beaumarchais' grosse gaîté. The playwright's references to cuckoldry are found to be

\[10\] Ibid., 587.
\[11\] Ibid.
\[12\] Ibid., 588-589.
\[13\] Ibid.
trite and many lines are declared to be lifted bodily from other plays.\footnote{44}

All the faults of the comedy are finally summed up in La Harpe's remarks on Figaro's long monologue; it is too long, it is \textit{invraisemblable, immoral, and in bad taste}:

Il est d'une impossibilité morale que Figaro, furieux et presque aliéné de jalousie, s'asseya sur un banc pour y faire le narrateur le plus travaillé à sa manière, de l'histoire de sa vie...\footnote{45}

The critic emphasizes his own perspicacity in recognizing the significance of the speech when he observes:

Je n'oubliai pas dans quel étonnement m'ejet ce monologue... Une grande moitié n'était que la satire du Gouvernement; je la connaissais bien... mais j'étais loin d'imager que le Gouvernement pût consentir à ce qu'on lui adressât de pareilles apostrophes en plein théâtre. Plus on battait les mains, plus j'étais stupéfait et rêveur. Enfin je conclus à part moi que ce n'était pas l'auteur qui avait tort; qu'à la vérité le morceau, là où il était placé, était une absurdité incompréhensible, mais que la tolérance d'un gouvernement qui se laissait avilir... l'était encore bien plus.\footnote{46}

If we are to believe La Harpe, he grasped immediately the full social and political significance of the speech. Next condemning the pyrrhonism of the author, he wonders what Molière would have thought of "cette métaphysique mêlée à la bouffonnerie."\footnote{47}

The reason for La Harpe's attack on the \textit{Mariage de Figaro} by now is clear. The critic's assault is directed at \textit{la philosophie} as represented by Diderot. It also is obvious why La Harpe separated

\footnotesize{\begin{itemize}
\item \footnote{44}{Ibid., 591-594.}
\item \footnote{45}{Ibid., 582.}
\item \footnote{46}{Ibid., 583.}
\item \footnote{47}{Ibid., 585.}
\end{itemize}}
the life and writings of Beaumarchais, and he himself gives the explanation by apostrophising the dramatist:

Vous êtes logicien dans vos mémoires, mais vous n'êtes que sophiste dans vos préfaces: d'où je conclus seulement que vos procès valaient mieux que vos pièces.  

Later he adds,

Vous n'avez pas la bouffissure monotone de Diderot votre maître, mais vous avez dans vos préfaces un peu de son charlatanisme; et quoique aussi gai qu'il est triste... vous ne laissez pas de céder comme lui à la tentation de figurer là où il n'y a pas de place pour vous.

La Harpe is unable to reconcile the life of Beaumarchais with his works. So he draws a sharp line dividing the social victim from the philosophe. Diderot, whose life and works were inextricably bound to one another, was not susceptible of the same division; nor was Rousseau. But the versatile Beaumarchais, whom La Harpe regarded as a dilettante, gave the critic an opportunity to express both his sympathy for the outcast and his contempt for the philosophes.

48Ibid., 590.  

49Ibid., 597.
Before embarking on his career as a critic in 1768, La Harpe had been imprisoned for his role in the "Affaire des couplets," and had become involved in a literary polemic with Elie Fréron. One of his tragedies had been enthusiastically received and three others utterly rejected. At the age of twenty-nine he was a friend and correspondent of Voltaire, a poet of some stature and a darling of the philosophes. He had published two collections of his works. In short, he was already a celebrity and had chosen sides in a period characterized by the bitterest of controversies. Every work he penned was the object of attention by a public acutely aware of the literary rivalries of the time. His successes were heralded as victories for the party of the philosophes and his failures were a source of rejoicing by their enemies. Yet La Harpe's role had consistently been primarily literary in nature. If some of his poems were of a liberal imprint, he warily refrained from political or philosophical writings as such. His bibliography boasted no scientific or speculative works. Though many of his productions depicted social victims and protested against injustice, he was more a passive subscriber to the philosophie movement than a spokesman of it.

As editor of the Mercure de France, La Harpe maintained the same primarily literary position. It seems that he might have suffered somewhat from his refusal to enter directly into philosophical questions, for while his successes were cheered by the liberals, La Harpe was left

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1As editor of the Mercure de France, a position which Voltaire was instrumental in obtaining for La Harpe.
to defend his own lost causes. In any case, the orientation of his writings was consistently and significantly non-philosophical, and, until the eve of the Revolution, only incidentally political. It is true that the tone of many of his Mercure articles was pro-philosophe and that he hailed the literary accomplishments of the writers in that group, but he could not be expected to have done less than they did for him. So when he became a lecturer at the Lycée in 1786 he was essentially and fundamentally a literary critic.

As the Revolution developed La Harpe took up the cause which be-fitted him. Though he was a moderate, he had been influenced enough by the philosophes to support the upheaval. His article on the Contrat Social is sufficient to show, however, that his position was not a delirious acceptance of everything revolutionary. When he was finally imprisoned and subsequently converted to Catholicism, his hostile reaction to the Revolution was natural. In 1794 Voltaire, Diderot, Rousseau and most of the celebrated men of the century had been long-since dead. That he should remember his friendship for Voltaire, to whom he owed much of his career, is to be expected. But for him to continue to support the philosophes, whom he had come to blame for the bitterly disillusioning experience of the Reign of Terror, is almost out of the question. The cries of traitor levelled at him down to the present day are unreasonable. Would the great writers of the Enlightenment have reacted any differently? It must be remembered that at the time of his conversion La Harpe was being criticized, not by the immortals of the
eighteenth century, but by men usually of far less claim to greatness than he.

It is perhaps unfortunate for La Harpe's posterity that the Lycée should have taken its final form after his conversion. His obvious hatred for Diderot was enough almost to destroy the validity of whole sections of the Cours de littérature. Yet we are left to judge La Harpe by that work alone, revised as a unit after his conversion. We must accept the fact that his opinions of various writers had changed, but in all fairness we must, better than La Harpe, set aside personal prejudice. What must be determined is the consistency of his approach to literature and the soundness of his judgments within that approach. La Harpe's worth as a critic must be determined by the insight he provides into literature.

The Lycée consists of sixteen volumes. Of these the first is introductory, and the next three deal with ancient writers. Even these four volumes, however, are filled with references to La Harpe's contemporaries, and a good part of the fourth is devoted to a refutation of Diderot's opinions of Seneca. Two more volumes take up essentially the writers of the seventeenth century, while the last ten treat generally, though not exclusively, of the age of Enlightenment. La Harpe deserves to be complimented for the priority in time of his attempt to write a comprehensive critical study of world literature; but when the value of his commentary on the Greeks and Latins is negligible because of lack of information on his part, and when the views expressed on the seventeenth century turn out to be substantially those of Boileau, how can La Harpe finally be evaluated except as judge of his contemporaries?
If we turn to his studies of the eighteenth century authors, following as he does a chronological approach, we find a form similar to that of present-day manuals of literature. La Harpe's tone is more personal and his facts usually far less accurate than those of modern works, but he is animated, vigorous and infinitely more readable. Even with figures as far removed from him by time as the precursors, Fénelon, Bayle, La Bruyère and Fontenelle, La Harpe adopts a personal approach. In Fenelon the critic sees an undisputed ally in the cause of moderation. The Archbishop's style, tone and vocabulary are restrained. His insights are penetrating; his metaphysics is sound and carefully reasoned. His political ideas are critical but not revolutionary. In his *Télémaque* La Harpe sees a unique work which does not fit any genre and the critic passes a general judgment on it, supported by citation and commentary. La Harpe may be superficial, but he outlines accurately the Archbishop's most salient traits. Most important, perhaps, he sets forth in some relief a literary personality.

Bayle is a different case. The skeptic is less acceptable to La Harpe's post-revolutionary character. Still, the critic points up Bayle's subtlety and great erudition. He mentions the scholar's digressive style and refers to his ascetic existence which might account for certain stylistic peculiarities. Again La Harpe's interest in the individual is clear and again the critic notices predominant characteristics without much analysis in depth. From Bayle to La Bruyère the change in tone is marked. La Bruyère is a severe moralist and his style is painstaking and exact. La Harpe pays almost no attention to
that author's personality but after a few general remarks passes to a
close analysis of some of his tightly-written pensées. With Fontenelle, finally, the biographical approach begins to emerge more fully.
The most important events in the writer's literary career are related
to his artistic production. Accepting or refuting his individual works
with a minimum of commentary, La Harpe still manages to mention his
chief characteristics. The critic's remarks are noticeably more extreme,
demonstrating that he is more intrigued by Fontenelle's personality than
with those of the other writers.

With Montesquieu La Harpe's approach is more akin to that taken toward
Bayle, though he obviously understands Montesquieu more clearly. As
Montesquieu methodically wrote the Lettres Persanes, the Considérations
and the Esprit des Lois, so the critic just as methodically describes the
career of the author as a progression toward his greatest work. If La
Harpe's treatment of the political scientist is less enthusiastic than
his study of Fontenelle, it is a clearer example of the critic's ability
to grasp a whole personality. But as with the others La Harpe does very
little analysis in depth.

It is when he examines the works of Voltaire that La Harpe begins
to give detailed analyses of single works. Each study is a unit in it­
self. For La Henriade he outlines the cultural situation of France at
the time of the epic's publication. He may slight Taine's criterion of
race, but those of milieu and moment are used to good effect. Mahomet
is examined as a treatise against fanaticism, which it is, but it is
also closely analyzed as a study of character and as a stageable tragedy,
which it is as well. *Alzire* La Harpe approaches as a relativistic work, important for its study of *moeurs* and local color, while in *Tancrede* he admires the technical achievements. When he takes up Voltaire's poetry the critic naturally agrees or disagrees with the author's strong opinions. La Harpe slights only the Patriarch's prose in length of commentary, and then he characterizes it rather well.

Throughout his long discussions of Voltaire the critic has frequent recourse to texts on which he makes both stylistic and ideational observations. His errors in judging Voltaire's posterity have no bearing on his approach, which is biographical, historical and textual at the same time.

Nor is his discussion of Diderot, which attempts to follow the same lines, completely worthless. La Harpe deserves to be condemned for losing sight completely of the prime critical quality of impartiality. No excuse can hide the misreading of passages, distortions and deliberate wrong misattributions of works. In spite of these facts the critic sets forth some important elements of the Encyclopedist's style. And he does assert that at the center of the great man's work is the question of morality. La Harpe's greatest fault in the chapter on Diderot is starting from a preconceived position and using all the author's weaknesses as weapons against him.

Though he vacillates in his position on Rousseau, first defending him warmly, apparently because of personal sympathy for his misfortunes; then maltreating him for political views. La Harpe seems in his revolutionary essays to place the proper emphasis on the two areas of
personality and eloquence. Rejecting or rather playing down the Genevan's role as a philosopher, even in the earlier discussions, La Harpe points to his sensitivity, imagination and personal outlook. He appears to have been the first to have attempted an analysis of the Confessions on these grounds. Limited by his own rationalism, La Harpe fails to see where the author's appeal lies. So indeed do many modern critics. Finally, on the eve of the Revolution La Harpe perceived that Rousseau, in his somewhat vague idealism, was susceptible of interpretation by extremists and could become the spokesman of fanaticism.

The essay on Beaumarchais, sixty per cent biographical, demonstrates conclusively that La Harpe's critical emphasis lay on "l'homme et l'oeuvre." In this respect he seems to be far ahead of his age. Villemain and Geoffroy, despite their better knowledge of history, cannot boast La Harpe's insight into personality. Not until Sainte-Beuve was criticism to go deeper into this area. It would be an exaggeration to claim that La Harpe was the founder of the historical, positivistic and textual approaches, but the germs of all these orientations are apparent in his work. It is a distortion of fact, however, to classify this talented and versatile writer under the rubric "critique dogmatique," as Vial and Denise do, and relegate him to obscurity. Criticism has undergone considerable development since the days of La Harpe. What he says of the writers of the eighteenth century is of little importance to the ultimate appraisal of their true worth; but his commentary gives clear and sometimes striking insight into their reputation and following at the time when the Age of Ideas was not past, but present.
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I, Douglas Alan Bonneville, was born in Greenfield, Massachusetts, on April 30, 1931. I received my secondary education in Greenfield High School and the Bullis School of Silver Spring, Maryland. In 1955 I received the Bachelor of Arts degree from Wesleyan University and during the following year studied at the University of Bordeaux, from which I obtained a certificat d'études françaises. I was granted the Master of Arts degree at the Ohio State University in 1958, after having been a graduate assistant in the Department of Romance Languages for two years. In 1958-59 I served as an assistant instructor in the same department. After having taught for one year as an instructor at Kenyon College, I returned to the Ohio State University as an assistant instructor and completed the requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy degree.