

ROUTLEDGE REVIVALS

Michel-Jean Sedaine
(1719- 1797)

Theatre, Opera and Art

David Charlton
Mark Ledbury



MICHEL-JEAN SEDAINÉ
(1719–1797)



Taylor & Francis

Taylor & Francis Group

<http://taylorandfrancis.com>

Michel-Jean Sedaine
(1719–1797)

Theatre, Opera and Art

DAVID CHARLTON
and MARK LEDBURY

 **Routledge**
Taylor & Francis Group
LONDON AND NEW YORK

First published 2000 by Ashgate Publishing

Reissued 2018 by Routledge

2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN

52 Vanderbilt Avenue, New York, NY 10017

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

This edition copyright © David Charlton and Mark Ledbury, 2000

David Charlton and Mark Ledbury have asserted their moral right under the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act, 1988, to be identified as the editors of this work.

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reprinted or reproduced or utilised in any form or by any electronic, mechanical, or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including photocopying and recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publishers.

Notice:

Product or corporate names may be trademarks or registered trademarks, and are used only for identification and explanation without intent to infringe.

Publisher's Note

The publisher has gone to great lengths to ensure the quality of this reprint but points out that some imperfections in the original copies may be apparent.

Disclaimer

The publisher has made every effort to trace copyright holders and welcomes correspondence from those they have been unable to contact.

A Library of Congress record exists under LC control number:

ISBN 13: 978-0-367-13479-2 (hbk)

ISBN 13: 978-0-367-13480-8 (pbk)

ISBN 13: 978-0-429-02673-7 (ebk)

Contents

List of Illustrations		vii
Acknowledgements		ix
Notes on Contributors		x
Abbreviations		xii
Introduction:	Researching Sedaine <i>Mark Ledbury, David Charlton</i>	1
Part I	Genre and Representation	
1	Sedaine and the Question of Genre <i>Mark Ledbury</i>	13
2	<i>Les Philosophes</i> and <i>le savoir</i> : Words, Gestures and Other Signs in the Era of Sedaine <i>Sophia Rosenfeld</i>	39
3	The Representation of the Female in the Dramas of Sedaine <i>John Dunkley</i>	52
Part II	Transformations	
4	<i>Aline, reine de Golconde</i> : une bergère d'opéra-comique à l'Académie Royale de Musique <i>Manuel Couvreur</i>	71

5	Quatre rois à la chasse: Dodsley, Collé, Sedaine, Goldoni <i>Michel Noiray</i>	97
6	‘Risquer un genre nouveau en musique’: l’opéra-comique de Sedaine et Monsigny <i>Raphaëlle Legrand</i>	119
Part III The Public Image		
7	Sedaine et les images <i>Martine de Rougemont</i>	149
8	Un jugement de François Benoît Hoffman sur Sedaine en 1812 <i>Patrick Taïeb</i>	173
9	Sedaine’s Prefaces: Pretexts for a New Musical Drama <i>David Charlton</i>	196
Part IV Sources		
10	An Iconography of Sedaine and his Works <i>Mark Ledbury</i>	275
11	A Sedaine Bibliography <i>David Charlton, Mark Ledbury</i>	288
	Index	315

List of Illustrations

- Fig. 1 Attributed to Jean Baptiste Siméon Chardin, presumed portrait of Sedaine. Oil on canvas, c.1745–50. 151
Private collection. Cliché Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris
- Fig. 2 Gabriel de Saint-Aubin, portrait of Michel-Jean Sedaine. 152
Black chalk, c.1752–4.
Private collection. Photo: Audap, Godeau, Solanet
- Fig. 3 Gabriel de Saint-Aubin, portrait of Sedaine. 154
Sanguine, 1771.
Paris, Archives de l'Institut. Photo: Mark Ledbury
- Fig. 4 Pierre-Charles Levesque, after Jacques-Louis David, 155
portrait of Michel-Jean Sedaine. Engraving, 1772.
Cliché Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris
- Fig. 5 Augustin Pajou, portrait bust of Michel-Jean Sedaine. 157
Terracotta, 1775.
Photo: V&A Picture Library
- Fig. 6 C. Lingée, after C.-N. Cochin, frontispiece to *Les Femmes* 162
vengées. Engraving, 1775.
Cliché Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris
- Fig. 7 Anon. (Grangeret, C. L. Desrais, J. V. Dupin, Thérèse 164
Martinet), illustration for sc. X of *Blaise le savetier*.
Engraving, c.1762.
Musée Carnavalet. © Photothèque des Musées de la Ville de Paris.

- Fig. 8 François Boucher, *Les Sabots*. Oil on canvas, 1768. 167
 Art Gallery of Ontario. Purchase, F. Wood Endowment, 1978.
 Photo: © Art Gallery of Ontario
- Fig. 9 Pierre Alexandre Wille (fils), scene at the Comédie- 168
 Italienne: *Le Roi et le fermier*, Act III (?). Drawing, 1767.
 Cliché Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris
- Fig.10 Attributed to both Pierre Alexandre Wille (fils) and Gabriel 169
 de Saint-Aubin, scene at the Comédie-Italienne: *Le Roi et
 le fermier*, Act III (?). Ink, wash, black chalk, 1772.
 Bibliothèque de l'Opéra. Cliché Bibliothèque Nationale
 de France, Paris
- Fig.11 Dambrun, after Quéverdo, illustration to Act II, sc. v 170
 of *Le Déserteur*. Engraving, c.1770.
 Musée Carnavalet. © Photothèque des Musées de la Ville de
 Paris
- Fig.12 Augustin de Saint-Aubin, after Gabriel de Saint-Aubin, 241
 frontispiece to *Le Jardinier et son seigneur*.
 Engraving, 1761.
 Cliché Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris
- Fig.13 Jacques-Louis David, portrait of Henri Sedaine. 276
 Oil on canvas, c.1774–5.
 Private collection. Photo: Etude Couturier-De Nicolay, Paris
- Fig.14 Jacques-Louis David, portrait of Jeanne-Suzanne Sedaine. 277
 Black chalk and plumbago, 1783.
 Paris, Musée du Louvre, Département des Arts Graphiques.
 © Photo RMN–Michèle Bellot

Acknowledgements

The editors would like to thank all who made possible the Sedaine bicentennial conference in London, 1997, and who have helped to make the present book. The conference enjoyed the financial support of the British Council (Brussels), the *Music & Letters* Trust, Cambridge University Press, the History Research Centre of the University of Portsmouth and the Department of Music, Royal Holloway, University of London. Its success and conviviality would not have been possible without essential practical help by Helen Burke Ledbury, Hannah Godfrey-Mahapatra and Patricia Scholfield.

The fortunes of this project would have been very different without the enthusiasm of Rachel Lynch at Ashgate Publishing, and her colleagues. In the various stages of book preparation we have, moreover, profited from the expertise, patience and goodwill of all the contributors. Further help or advice of various kinds has generously been given by Mlle Monique Abud, Ms Annette Beckmann, Dr Annegret Fauser, Ms Barbara Lasic, Professor Neil McWilliam, Dr Sophia Rosenfeld and Dr Nicole Wild. Mr Robert Wells was responsible for creating the music examples. Ms Jan Hart has played an extensive and invaluable role in both formatting and editing the book's contents. Thanks are due to all those librarians and picture librarians who co-operated in the gathering of visual and bibliographical materials for the volume. Ongoing financial support has been forthcoming from our respective institutions, the Department of Music, Royal Holloway, University of London, and the Department of Art History and Archeology, University of Manchester. The Humanities Research Board of The British Academy is also thanked for its provision of a Research Leave award to David Charlton.

DC, ML

Notes on Contributors

David Charlton is Reader in Music at Royal Holloway, University of London. Among his recent publications are the collection *French Opera 1730–1830: Meaning and Media* (Ashgate, 2000) and an account of nineteenth-century French works in *The Oxford Illustrated History of Opera* (1994). He is currently editing the *Cambridge Companion to Grand Opera* and, with Nicole Wild, the *Répertoire musical du Théâtre national de l'Opéra-Comique, 1762–1971*.

Manuel Couvreur is *chercheur qualifié* with the FNRS, and teaches at the Université Libre de Bruxelles in literature and in art history. His numerous publications include the book *Jean-Baptiste Lully* (1992) and various contributions to *Etudes sur le XVIII^e siècle*, for which he has guest-edited three issues. He is director of the research team working on the Théâtre de la Monnaie and edited *Le Théâtre de la Monnaie au XVIII^e siècle* (1996) and *La Monnaie wagnérienne* (1998).

John Dunkley is Reader in French at the University of Aberdeen. His interests include French social history, education and the theatre. He has published *Gambling in France, 1685–1792* (1985) and editions of eighteenth-century plays: Crébillon, *Electre* (1980), Regnard, *Le Joueur* (1986), Sedaine, *Le Philosophe sans le savoir* (1993), Destouches, *L'Irrésolu* (1995) and Boindin, *Quatre Comédies, 1701–1707* (1997). He co-edited *Culture and Revolution* (1990) and *Voices in the Air: French dramatists and the resources of language* (1992).

Mark Ledbury is Lecturer in Art History at the University of Manchester. His research focuses on relationships between the visual arts and theatre in eighteenth-century France, and his thesis on Greuze and Sedaine is to be published as *Fusing Genre. The Artistic Experiments of Greuze and Sedaine* by the Voltaire Foundation. He currently has articles in press on David and his pupils, and is researching a new book on melodrama and visual representation in France, 1780–1820.

Raphaëlle Legrand is *maître de conférences* at the Université François-Rabelais, Tours. She has made a particular study of the operas of Rameau, especially *Dardanus* (the subject of her doctoral dissertation) and also works on Lully. Her writing on opéra-comique includes 'La scène et le public de l'Opéra-Comique de 1762 à 1789' for *L'Opéra-comique en France au XVIII^e siècle* (1992) and her *Forms and Figures in Baroque Music*, with two compact discs, was translated and published in 1998 by Harmonia Mundi.

Michel Noiray is *chercheur* at the Institut de Recherche sur le Patrimoine Musical en France (Centre national de la recherche scientifique / Bibliothèque nationale de France). His publications have specialised in studies of Gluck, of *opéra-comique* and Italian opera, more recently those by Mozart, with guides to *Così fan tutte* (1990) and *Don Giovanni* (1996) for *L'Avant-Scène Opéra*. His edited translation of Charles Burney's *The Present State of Music* was issued in 1992 and he is currently writing a handbook of musical terminology.

Sophia Rosenfeld is Assistant Professor of History at the University of Virginia, Charlottesville. She is the author of articles on the deaf and the legal system, censorship, and language theory in eighteenth-century France. Her forthcoming book is entitled *A Revolution in Language: the Problem of Signs in late Eighteenth-Century France*.

Martine de Rougemont is Professor at the Institut des Etudes Théâtrales at the Université de Paris III. She specialises in eighteenth-century French theatre, and her book *La Vie théâtrale en France au XVIII^e siècle* (1988) is well known to all scholars in the field. She is also the author of *Paradrames* (1998) and of many articles and essays on French theatre. She has edited a diverse array of texts relating to theatre, including Restif de La Bretonne's *Le Mimographe*.

Patrick Taïeb is *maître de conférences* at the Université de Rouen, whose doctoral dissertation concerned the *opéra-comique* and its overtures, 1781–1801. He has published articles on Henri-Montan Berton and, with Raphaëlle Legrand, 'L'Opéra-Comique sous le Consulat et l'Empire' in *Le Théâtre lyrique en France au XIX^e siècle* (1995).

Abbreviations

(a) Bibliographical abbreviations

- Charlton, *Grétry* David Charlton, *Grétry and the Growth of Opéra-comique* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986)
- Collé, *Journal et mémoires* Charles Collé, *Journal et mémoires sur les hommes de lettres, les ouvrages dramatiques et les événements les plus mémorables du règne de Louis XV (1748–1772)* ed. Honoré Bonhomme (3 vols, Paris: Didot, 1868, repr. Geneva, 1967)
- Correspondance littéraire* *Correspondance littéraire, philosophique et critique par Grimm, Diderot, Raynal, Meister, etc.*, ed. Maurice Tourneux (16 vols, Paris: Garnier frères, 1877–82)
- Grétry, *Mémoires* André-Ernest-Modeste Grétry, *Mémoires, ou Essais sur la musique* (3 vols, Paris: Imprimerie de la République, An V [1796–7]; repr. New York, 1971)
- Ledbury, ‘Greuze and Sedaine’ Greuze, Sedaine and Hybrid Genre in Late Eighteenth-Century France’, D.Phil. dissertation, University of Sussex, 1996
- Mémoires secrets* [Louis Petit de Bachaumont et al.], *Mémoires secrets pour servir à l’histoire de la République des lettres en France, depuis 1762 jusqu’à nos jours* (36 vols, London: John Adamson, 1777–89)

- Sedaine, 'Quelques réflexions' Michel-Jean Sedaine, 'Quelques réflexions inédits de Sedaine sur l'opéra-comique' in René Charles Guilbert de Pixérécourt, *Théâtre choisi* (4 vols, Paris and Nancy: Chez l'auteur, 1841-3), IV, pp. 501-16
- Rayner, 'Sedaine's Dramatic Work' 'The Social and Literary Aspects of Sedaine's Dramatic Work', M.A. dissertation, Westfield College, University of London, 1960

(b) Library abbreviations

FRANCE:

- BNF Bibliothèque Nationale de France
 F-B Besançon, Bibliothèque Municipale
 F-CH Chantilly, Musée Condé
 F-Pa Paris, Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal
 F-Pcarn Paris, Musée Carnavalet
 F-Pcf Paris, Comédie-Française
 F-Phvp Paris, Bibliothèque Historique de la Ville de Paris
 F-Pm Paris, Bibliothèque Mazarine
 F-Pn Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale
 F-Pn (Est) Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, Département des Estampes
 F-Pn (Mus) Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, Département de la Musique
 F-Po Paris, Bibliothèque-Musée de l'Opéra
 F-Psc Paris, Société des Auteurs, Compositeurs et Editeurs de Musique
 F-Psg Paris, Bibliothèque Sainte-Geneviève

GREAT BRITAIN:

- GB-Lbl London, British Library
 GB-Lpro London, Public Record Office
 GB-Lu London, University Senate House Library
 GB-Lv London, Victoria and Albert Museum

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA:

- US-NYpm New York, Pierpont Morgan Library



Taylor & Francis

Taylor & Francis Group

<http://taylorandfrancis.com>

Introduction

Researching Sedaine

Mark Ledbury, David Charlton

This book arises from a conference organised to commemorate the bicentenary of Sedaine's death in 1797, an occasion which might otherwise have passed unnoticed. Sedaine's is still not a familiar name, even in the circles of *dix-huitièmistes*. However, the nine chapters in Parts I–III of this book all point to the interest Sedaine's life and work is now provoking in many scholarly disciplines. It is regrettable that, as the writer of some of the most important *livrets* for *opéra-comique*, and the most innovative drama, in later eighteenth-century France, he should have taken so long to become an object of serious study among musicologists, literary scholars and historians.

If Sedaine speaks today to literary history, theatre history and opera studies, it is because he possessed a multivalent vision, one which accounts for both his past neglect and his present rediscovery. Like many others, he believed that the established, 'official' genres needed to be reformed; unlike many, he made it his business to transform the actual language and operation of the theatre arts he practised. Until later eighteenth-century opera and drama in France become better understood, Sedaine's immense importance for the development of Romantic opera and theatre risks remaining generally concealed; to reveal something of this importance is one main reason for publishing the present volume.

Another aim has been to gather in one place both research tools and research texts designed to facilitate future work: for example a general bibliography of Sedaine editions, manuscripts and research literature as well as the edited texts of seventeen of his prefaces. The chapters in this book cover a range of disciplines, and contribute to the third aim of this work, which is the encouragement of further interdisciplinary thinking as such. Sedaine's work was, like that of many French writers, influenced by English trends and traditions: a fourth aim of our volume is to bring together French and English research, experience and systems of analysis, hopefully to the mutual benefit of those working in each language and tradition.

One inherent difficulty lies in explaining Sedaine's achievement in tidy phrases. Another such difficulty relates to our misunderstanding of the oxymoronically labelled '*opéra-comique*', which merely means opera with spoken dialogue. Yet another originates in tracking Sedaine's work and influence across different disciplines, not forgetting his poetry. Nevertheless we might say that his

business in these domains was ‘fusing the arts’, which was the title of the original 1997 bicentennial conference.

Some past critical neglect can better be understood in the light of the particular history of Sedaine scholarship, which tells us much about the nature of academic enquiry more generally. When George Sand asked herself why she could not study Sedaine, she came to a simple conclusion:

Pourquoi ne me fut-il possible d'étudier Sedaine? Est-ce parce que je ne sais pas étudier? Ou parce que Sedaine n'est pas à étudier? ... Je crois que Sedaine ne l'est guère.¹

For her, Sedaine was an exceptional (and, by implication, marginal) individual; her view encapsulated a persistent nineteenth-century belief, which took root even from the first obituary notices, and stressed the exceptional early life and virtuous personality of Sedaine, together with his innate gifts, rather than analysing the particular qualities of his dramatic experiments.² It was this focus on the ‘natural’ and particular virtues of the man which helped to fuel the revival, in the nineteenth century, of interest in Sedaine and his work. Here was a charming oddity – a naive mason poet, self-taught, supposedly following and giving no example – inimitable, in George Sand’s words. The revival of interest in him formed part of that cosy mythology of virtuous *ancien régime* living that was so vital to late nineteenth-century conservative nostalgia. Certainly the biographies of Sedaine which have come down to us are deeply influenced by it, and have consequently been more of a hindrance than an aid to scholarly understanding of Sedaine’s life and work.³ It was no coincidence that Gautier and others associated Sedaine with Greuze, who was of course being rediscovered and recreated in much the same way by the

¹ George Sand, ‘Avant-Propos’, *Le Mariage de Victorine* (Paris: Blanchard, 1851), p. 7.

² Evidence of the nineteenth-century construction of Sedaine can be found in *opéra-comique* itself. Sedaine was the hero of *Poète et maçon, comédie vaudeville en un acte*, written by de Leuven, Roche and Antonin (Paris: Barba, 1833), first performed at the Théâtre du Palais-Royal on 3 August 1833, in which Sedaine’s popular origins and protective nature are stressed, as the virtuous man of the people shields various artisans from unpleasant employers. The most important obituary notices are: Constance-Marie Pipelet, *Eloge historique de M. J. Sedaine ... Lu par l'auteur à la 54^e séance publique du lycée des arts, le 30 Messidor an V* (Paris: Desenne, 1797); Angélique de Vandeuil, ‘Notice historique sur Sedaine’ in *Correspondance littéraire*, XVI (1797), pp. 234–46; anon. (Jean-Nicolas Dufort de Cheverny), ‘Notice sur la vie de Sedaine’, Blois, Bibliothèque Municipale, Ms. 98–9, published in Mark Ledbury, ‘Greuze, Sedaine and Hybrid Genre in Late Eighteenth-Century France’, D.Phil. dissertation, U. of Sussex, 1996, hereafter ‘Greuze and Sedaine’.

³ Emile Guieysse-Frère, *Michel Sedaine. Ses protecteurs et ses amis* (Paris: Flammarion, 1907); Renée de Mont-Louis, *Sedaine, sa vie, anecdotes* (Limoges: Ardant, 1879 etc.).

Goncourt brothers.⁴ At least George Sand and the Romantic generation recognised Sedaine's dramatic talent. One striking reference in Delacroix's journal makes this very clear:

24 avril [1846]. – J'ai vu hier soir le *Déserteur* de Sedaine: voici un genre qui semble bien près de la perfection de l'art dramatique, si ce n'est pas la perfection même.⁵

This was, of course, partly because the innovations, preoccupations and experiments of Sedaine's work so clearly prefigured those of the early nineteenth-century Romantic generation, and to some extent it is still true that where Sedaine has been accorded importance, it is as a precursor of later and seemingly more important work, whether this be the Romantic *drame*, grand opera or the melodrama.⁶

However, the tone for much of the serious critical commentary on Sedaine in the later nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was set by Sand's famous correspondent Gustave Flaubert.⁷ His contempt for Sedaine was fuelled by a passionate concern for the precise and correct use of language, and his scorn for Sedaine's incorrections soon became an orthodoxy among scholars (with the notable exception of Félix Gaiffe).⁸ Brunetière, for example, could write: 'Jamais homme n'eut moins que lui cette faculté du véritable écrivain, qui est comme de changer ce qu'il touche en universel.'⁹

When Ladislas Günther wrote the first major thesis in French on Sedaine in 1907, its review by one of the giants of the French university world, Daniel Mornet (who, with Gustave Lanson, was to a great degree responsible for the re-creation of the literary and intellectual canon of eighteenth-century literary study in early twentieth-century France), contained a damning verdict on the object of Günther's thesis. Mornet expressed the view that Sedaine did not repay study, and

⁴ For Théophile Gautier's comments, see *Le Moniteur universel*, 9 March 1863. For the Goncourts' views on Greuze, see Edmond and Jules de Goncourt, *Greuze* (Paris: Dentu, 1863).

⁵ Eugène Delacroix, *Journal*, ed. André Joubin (3 vols, Paris: Plon, 1932), III, p. 441. This revival at the Opéra-Comique lasted from 1843 to 1849, and from 1853 to 1857.

⁶ For Sedaine as a precursor of the melodrama, see especially the comments of Guilbert de Pixérécourt in 'Dernières réflexions de l'auteur sur le mélodrame' in *Théâtre choisi* (4 vols, Paris and Nancy: Chez l'auteur, 1841–3), IV, pp. 493–500.

⁷ See Gustave Flaubert, *Correspondance* (Paris: Club de L'Honnête Homme, 1975), XV, pp. 442–4.

⁸ Félix Gaiffe, *Le Drame en France au XVIII^e siècle* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1910).

⁹ Ferdinand Brunetière, *Les Epoques du théâtre français (1636–1850)* (Paris: Hachette, 1909), p. 301.

that he would never be a major figure.¹⁰ The neglect of, even scorn for, Sedaine in early twentieth-century literary criticism in this respect merely echoed the commentaries of the more conservative eighteenth-century journals, which seized on the lack of beauty and correctness in Sedaine's writing style. Commentators on French drama, then and now, have cherished the poetic beauty of the language of its major canonical figures, and the experiments of an author who was prepared at all times to sacrifice a notion of poetic beauty to the imperatives of naturalistic dialogue, stage effect and collaborative musical innovation was bound to fall foul of what Voltaire called 'la police de Parnasse'.¹¹

Although he was perceived by his contemporaries from the earliest stages of his career as a talented creator of stage effects,¹² his place in the canon of French dramatic literature has been only a minor one. By many scholars of spoken drama he is still seen as an imitator – a more or less successful, but more or less slavish follower of Diderot, a mere *metteur en scène* of the dramatic ideas of the *philosophe*. This view has prevailed through much scholarship, down to one recent edition of *Le Philosophe sans le savoir*.¹³ It is a view which Gaiffe saw as incomplete many years ago, but which only the work of Pierre Frantz appears bold enough to recognise as profoundly false: recent work has attempted to show that *Le Philosophe sans le savoir* was not an imitation but a collaboration, and one which is significant not so much for Sedaine's application of Diderot's theory as for Diderot's conscious borrowing of the special individual talent of Sedaine for his own ideological and aesthetic purposes.¹⁴ Sedaine's writing was highly diverse, as George Sand recognised long ago, and no reader who seriously engages with, say, *Le Philosophe sans le savoir*, *La Gageure imprévue* or *Félix ou l'Enfant trouvé* can sustain the view that Sedaine was a derivative or univocal talent.

This persistent reputation as a naive and clumsy, technically deficient writer has begun to be seriously reexamined in the light of the new understanding of Sedaine's intentions and priorities that research into *opéra-comique* has brought.¹⁵ Even at the beginning of the century, some scholars began to diverge from the

¹⁰ Daniel Mornet, review of Ladislav Günther, *L'Œuvre dramatique de Sedaine* (Paris: Larose, 1908) in *Revue de l'histoire littéraire française* (1909), pp. 827–9.

¹¹ See for example Julien Geoffroy, *Cours de littérature dramatique* (2nd ed., 6 vols, Paris: Blanchard, 1825), I, p. 307.

¹² See for example Grimm's judgements of Sedaine in the *Correspondance littéraire*, III (August 1761), pp. 457–8.

¹³ Günther, *Sedaine*, p. 258: 'Les théories de Diderot sont donc pour Sedaine une espèce de catéchisme qu'il cherche à appliquer à sa pièce.' See also Robert Garapon, 'Introduction' to Sedaine, *Le Philosophe sans le savoir* (Paris: Société des Textes Français Modernes, 1990), p. xxvi and *passim*.

¹⁴ Ledbury, 'Greuze and Sedaine', pp. 100–34.

¹⁵ Dufort's obituary notice makes it clear that Sedaine's grammatical errors were often deliberate and part of a dramatic strategy. See Ledbury, 'Greuze and Sedaine', pp. 358–69.

prevailing view and found renewed interest in Sedaine's work: many of these scholars, interestingly, were not French, and their work to some extent filled gaps left by neglect in the French academic establishment.¹⁶ It was a real pleasure to have among us at the conference one of the most important and unsung of an earlier generation of Sedaine scholars, Margaret Rayner, whose dissertation of 1960 remains an important work.¹⁷ Spurred by the work of Rayner and others, more recent generations of scholars have sought to investigate Sedaine and his work in new ways, and to reestablish his importance, to the extent that, in a recent literary encyclopedia, Pierre Frantz has written that: 'L'influence de Sedaine dans l'histoire du théâtre français a été au moins aussi grande que celle de Diderot.'¹⁸

It is worth dwelling for a moment on the reasons for this change in critical fortune. First, the *opéra-comique* as a genre and an institution has come under renewed critical attention in recent years from musicologists, literary historians and cultural historians. Much of this renewed interest has been stimulated by the research into what has become known as popular culture.¹⁹ The *opéra-comique*, from its origins in fair theatre through its transformation into semi-official genre and its influence over the development of dramatic discourse, is being reappraised in the context of the creation of a sophisticated public sphere in eighteenth-century France.²⁰

The *opéra-comique* as a genre has also become the object of serious musicological study, and it is from musicology that much of the current revival of interest in Sedaine has taken its lead. Building on work done in the earlier part of this century, recent studies have brought to light the innovative complexity of later eighteenth-century *opéra-comique*, and much recent writing has been devoted to all aspects of the genre in France.²¹ From Louise Parkinson Arnoldson on, the

¹⁶ In addition to Günther, see especially Martin Gisi, *Sedaine, sein Leben und seine Werke* (Berlin: Weidmann, 1883); Louise Parkinson Arnoldson, *Sedaine et les musiciens de son temps* (Paris: L'Entente Linotypiste, 1934).

¹⁷ Margaret Rayner, 'The Social and Literary Aspects of Sedaine's Dramatic Work', M.A. dissertation, Westfield College, U. of London, 1960, hereafter 'Sedaine's Dramatic Work'.

¹⁸ Pierre Frantz, 'Sedaine' in Jean-Pierre de Beaumarchais, Daniel Couty, Alain Rey (eds), *Dictionnaire des littératures de langue française* (3 vols, Paris: Bordas, 1987), III, pp. 2316–18 [2318].

¹⁹ For an overview of the growth of the study of popular culture, see Peter Burke, *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe* (rev. ed., Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing, 1996), pp. 1–64.

²⁰ For a history of *opéra-comique* which places it in a directly political context, see Robert M. Isherwood, *Farce and Fantasy. Popular Entertainment in Eighteenth-Century Paris* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986).

²¹ Some of the most important early work on *opéra-comique* was: Georges Cucuel, *Les Créateurs de l'opéra-comique français* (Paris: Félix Alcan, 1914); Arthur Pougin, *Monsigny et son*

important relationships between Sedaine and three musicians, Philidor, Monsigny, and Grétry, have given him prominence, and the contributions from musicologists in this collection reflect the continuing central role of music historians in the reappraisal of Sedaine's *œuvre*.

Sedaine's own role in the development of *opéra-comique* was at least recognised by Cucuel, Pougin and early pioneers of *opéra-comique* research, but it is only in recent years that he has begun to feature prominently in the history of spoken drama. This is partly because in recent years there have been significant changes in the way in which French drama is studied and appreciated. Martine de Rougemont's *La Vie théâtrale en France au XVIII^{ème} siècle* shifted the emphasis in study from text to dramatic apparatus, audience, stage and genre.²² John Lough, Henri Lagrave and others have also contributed to this major shift, which has allowed Sedaine's own important place as a radical innovator to be restored.²³ The research set out in the present collection, dealing with many aspects of Sedaine's stagecraft, will make a further contribution to this realignment.

The chapters which follow also bear witness to the increasing interest in Sedaine as an interdisciplinary figure. Rather than being a recapitulation of the nineteenth-century view of Sedaine as the naive mason poet, they represent a recognition that Sedaine's work and career brought him into contact not only with other writers but with a whole series of figures in other fields. Art historians are increasingly turning their attention to Sedaine's role in the early life and career of Jacques-Louis David.²⁴ Some interest is being shown in his role at the Académie Royale d'Architecture.²⁵ He was, as was recognised by Henri Stein, 'mêlé à toute la vie intellectuelle de son temps',²⁶ and his role in certain key developments in

temps (Paris: Fischbacher, 1908). Modern studies include: Corinne Pré, 'Le Livret d'opéra-comique en France de 1741 à 1789', thèse de Doctorat ès Lettres, U. de Paris III, 1982; David Charlton, *Grétry and the Growth of Opéra-comique* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), hereafter Charlton, *Grétry*; Philippe Vendrix (ed.), *L'Opéra-comique en France au XVIII^e Siècle* (Liège: Mardaga, 1992).

²² Martine de Rougemont, *La Vie théâtrale en France au XVIII^e siècle* (Geneva and Paris: Champion, 1988).

²³ See especially Henri Lagrave, *Le Théâtre et le public à Paris de 1715 à 1750* (Paris: Plon, 1972); John Lough, *Paris Theatre Audiences of the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1957); Jacqueline de Jomaron (ed.), *Le Théâtre en France* (2nd ed., Paris: Armand Colin, 1992); Pierre Peyronnet, *La Mise en scène au XVIII^e siècle* (Paris: Nizet, 1974).

²⁴ Thomas Crow, *Emulation. Making Artists for Revolutionary France* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1995), pp. 5–30; Ledbury, 'Greuze and Sedaine', pp. 279–322.

²⁵ See for example the excellent thorough study by Wolfgang Scholler, *Die Académie Royale d'Architecture. Anatomie einer Institution* (Köln and Weimar: Böhlau, 1993); Jacques Guillerme, 'Über einige Wandlungen des Wahren in der Architektur', *Daidalos. Berlin Architectural Journal*, VIII (1983), pp. 38–47.

²⁶ Henri Stein, *Augustin Pajou* (Paris: Librairie Centrale des Beaux-Arts, 1912), p. 58.

stage design, painting and architecture will be an important part of the rehabilitation of Sedaine as a significant figure in eighteenth-century French cultural history.

There remains also the important question of how Sedaine can be mapped onto our understanding of the political culture of *ancien-régime* France. Both Emile Maude and, more recently, Karin Pendle have termed Sedaine's work Revolutionary.²⁷ However, the question regarding the extent to which he was engaged or otherwise in a pre-Revolutionary or bourgeois struggle, a point which has caused controversy in the interpretation of *Le Philosophe sans le savoir* and other plays, is being superseded by more subtle and less teleological questions.²⁸ In this new climate, more attention is given to Sedaine's concepts of patriotism, virtue and citizenship in spoken and sung dramas, and his experiments in putting controversial and topical themes centre-stage in periods of political tension, whether these be the aftermath of the Seven Years' War, the Maupeou revolution or the French Revolution itself.²⁹ Historians are beginning to look at the *drame* afresh to see that the epithet *bourgeois* is not merely misleading but limiting, and are turning to wider questions of theatrical representation (of women, of dissenting religion, of conflict, etc.) to determine the political and public import of drama in

²⁷ Emile Maude, 'Les Deux Sedaine', *Le Censeur* (2 Feb. 1907), pp. 152–5 [153]; Karin Pendle, 'L'Opéra-comique à Paris de 1762 à 1789' in Vendrix (ed.), *L'Opéra-comique en France*, pp. 79–117 [104].

²⁸ On the 'bourgeois or not' debate, see especially Elisabeth Guibert-Sledziewski, 'Le Spectacle bourgeois des antagonismes des classes: *Le Philosophe sans le savoir* de Sedaine', *Dix-huitième siècle*, VII (1975), pp. 259–74; Haydn Mason, 'Le *Philosophe sans le savoir* de Sedaine: an aristocratic *drame bourgeois*?', *French Studies*, XXX (1976), pp. 405–18.

²⁹ Sedaine himself has left ample evidence of his interest in political issues, but to generalise about his political views is still difficult. *Guillaume Tell* (composed under exceptional political circumstances) is the best evidence of direct Revolutionary sympathies, but it must be remembered that, in their way, *Le Philosophe sans le savoir*, *Maillard ou Paris sauvé*, *Raimond V* and *Félix ou l'Enfant trouvé* also engaged directly with issues which were, in the terms of the *ancien régime*, explicitly political (commerce, the duel, patriotism, virtue, court corruption, etc.). Sedaine was accused fairly frequently of anti-court or even Revolutionary sentiment, and has left some telling remarks about political life both in his correspondence and more specifically in his prefaces. However, to decide whether Sedaine was Revolutionary or not should not be the main question: what is more important is the fact that Sedaine felt that drama could and should be political in a wider sense, dealing directly with moral issues: in this way, to examine *Maillard* in the context of the *parlements* crisis, for example, might give us a more nuanced view of Sedaine's 'politics'. On Sedaine and the Revolution, see Auguste Rey, *Notes sur mon village. La Vieillesse de Sedaine* (Paris: Champion, 1906); Stanislas Rzewuski, 'Sedaine et la Révolution', *Le Gaullois*, 16 January 1907; Emile Maude, 'Les deux Sedaine'; for Sedaine's own political comments, see for example his letter of 4 February 1793 to the Comédie-Française in F-Pcf, *dossier Sedaine*, on the subject of the meanings of *Le Philosophe sans le savoir*.

general and Sedaine's drama in particular in a century in which theatricality was one of the pillars of public and political life.

But in this area, as in many others, much needs to be done in the domain of Sedaine research. Perhaps the most telling sign of his neglect is that there is still no scholarly biography of Michel-Jean Sedaine. Only the work of Auguste Rey has helped map some of Sedaine's late life.³⁰ There still remain large gaps in our knowledge, which only the discovery of more reliable biographical and other documentation will allow us to fill. Mark Ledbury has endeavoured in 'A Sedaine Bibliography' (Chapter 11) to point out the locations of such material as may be needed for the beginnings of such a study.

Research into Sedaine's creative work, although more advanced and copious than biographical studies, is still in fact in its infancy. Much of Sedaine's known output still remains in manuscript form – most notably *Raimond V* among his spoken dramas and the two *opéras-comiques* *Robin et Marion* and *Pagamin de Monègue* still await publication. Recently, Sedaine's last major drama, a substantial, five-act comedy, *Hinkelmann ou les journalistes*, written as a commission for Catherine II of Russia and long thought lost, has been located: consequently it too deserves publication.³¹ Apart from *Le Philosophe sans le savoir*, which is now acknowledged as a key drama of the late eighteenth century, almost all Sedaine's dramas would benefit from more active and detailed scholarly attention. However, it is also likely that future discoveries will oblige us to revise our views on when Sedaine's career started and ended. We may have to envisage the possibility that he contributed anonymously to fair or private theatres early in his career, before he began to work officially for Monnet. There is also evidence that he collaborated on dramas by others later in life than has previously been realised.³²

However, perhaps the single most beneficial step in the restoring of Sedaine to a place of prominence would be the professional revival of performances of Sedaine's plays and of those *opéras-comiques* for which he wrote *livrets*. It was constantly said of Sedaine's plays that their full merit could only be appreciated in performance; and until serious revivals are accorded to his works, we must all depend on the very partial evidence of the texts. It is to be hoped that the recent revival in interest in early opera and period performance might embolden

³⁰ Auguste Rey, *Notes sur mon village. La Vieillesse de Sedaine*; idem, 'Le Mariage de Sedaine', *Revue de l'histoire de Versailles et de Seine-et-Oise*, XI (1910), pp. 5–15.

³¹ F-Pa, Rondel Ms 727: for details of its discovery, see Ledbury, 'Greuze and Sedaine', Appx 1.

³² See the draft letters of 1 Vendémiaire, An IV in the dossier *Sedaine* in F-Pcf, in which Sedaine makes it clear that he is the joint author of *L'espièglerie de garnison*, which is known under the title *Les Espiègleries de garnison* as the work of Favières. See also the drafts of *L'espièglerie* in F-Pan, AJ 13/1102.

musicians and opera companies.³³ When Vadé and Dauvergne's *Les Troqueurs* was recorded in 1994 it was warmly received,³⁴ and this repertoire holds more than historical interest for contemporary audiences.

Sedaine's spoken drama has fared even worse. Directors and actors have inherited a view of the *drame* as wordy and impossible to perform, and this seems to prevent an appreciation of Sedaine's gifts for theatre spectacle, and his modernity. There have, however, been some revivals of his work and *La Gageure imprévue* enjoyed a certain success in 1998 in Paris. It is hoped that *Le Philosophe sans le savoir*, along with Sedaine's other spoken and musical dramas, might also be imaginatively staged for the twenty-first century by theatre and opera groups increasingly aware of the buried treasures of their repertoire.

The chapters in this book will, we hope, forever dispel the notion that Sedaine is not worth studying, and will contribute to a modern, and long overdue, critical reassessment.

³³ *Le Déserteur* was staged at the Théâtre Impériale de Compiègne in October 1993, directed by Pierre Jourdan, conducted by Michel Swierczewski. Sound and video recordings were made.

³⁴ Capella Coloniensis, conducted by William Christie (Harmonia Mundi HMC 901454).



Taylor & Francis

Taylor & Francis Group

<http://taylorandfrancis.com>

PART I

Genre and Representation



Taylor & Francis

Taylor & Francis Group

<http://taylorandfrancis.com>

Chapter 1

Sedaine and the Question of Genre

Mark Ledbury

It has long been asserted that the concept of genre was central to the way in which the arts were understood in *ancien-régime* France: one of the fissures that divide early modern artistic practice from modern practice is seen to be the abandonment of those rigid systems of genre which formed the dominant discourse in the production and reception of all art.¹ More recent research has stressed that generic structures, like other aesthetic discourses, are connected in complex ways to wider social structures. It is certainly true that the need to classify and construct orders was an essential aspect not just of the rationale of academies, but of the politics of the court society which spawned them, and indeed of everyday life.² Félibien's famous pronouncement concerning the hierarchy of genres did more than establish an upward progression of types of painting. It also made clear the philosophical, religious and social bases for this hierarchy, as it classed painters according to the complex and finely graded

¹ On the importance of the concept of genre in painting and drama in early modern and Revolutionary Europe, see especially Rensselaer Lee, *Ut Pictura Poesis: The Humanistic Theory of Painting* (New York: Norton, 1967); Jean Locquin, *La Peinture d'histoire en France de 1747 à 1785* (Paris: Laurens, 1912); Udolpho van de Sandt, "'Grandissima opera del pittore sara l'istoria". Notes sur la hiérarchie des genres sous la révolution', *La Revue de l'art*, LXXXIII (1989), pp. 71–9; Jacques Scherer, *La Dramaturgie classique en France* (Paris: Nizet, 1950); Jacques Chouillet, *L'Esthétique des lumières* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1974); idem, *La Formation des idées esthétiques de Diderot* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1973); Annie Becq, *La Genèse de l'esthétique française moderne* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1994); Marian Hobson, *The Object of Art* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982); idem, 'Genres and Limits: Fielding, Sterne, Diderot', *Rivista di letteratura moderna e comparate*, XLIII (1990), pp. 109–28. For methodological reflection on the nature of genre, see Jean-Marie Schaeffer, *Qu'est ce qu'un genre littéraire?* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1989).

² On the connections between court society and the academies see, for example, Peter Burke, *The Fabrication of Louis XIV* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1992); for other famous classifying and hierarchising systems of painting in French theory see, for example, Roger de Piles, *Cours de peinture par principes*, ed. Jacques Thuillier (Paris: Gallimard, 1989); Charles Batteux, *Les Beaux-arts réduits à un même principe* (Paris: Durand, 1746). Many of the theorists are well anthologised and annotated in Baldine Saint-Girons, *Dictionnaire des sources esthétiques du XVIII^e siècle* (Paris: Philippe Sers, 1990).

systems by which rank was understood at court.³ In literature and drama too, as Bray and others have shown, the progressive emphasis on generic rules as a structure for the production and reception of creative writing was associated with the hegemony of academic thinking.⁴

If hierarchical structures of thought and behaviour were central to the mind-set of the court society and left their mark on its artistic products, the same might also be said of what has come to be known as the 'Enlightenment project'. For many different and often opposite reasons, the *encyclopédistes* and other *philosophes* from Buffon to Diderot all argued for the importance of genre and generic categorisation as a key to organising and understanding the complexity of nature and culture.

However, as I have argued in other work, discourse on genre mutated in the course of the eighteenth century from a discourse of hierarchy to a discourse of opposition.⁵ Theorists such as Roger De Piles, the abbé Du Bos, Claude-Henri Watelet and Voltaire started to recast the taxonomy of hierarchies of genre in terms of an overarching oppositional structure which, of course, associated the notion of genre with that of gender.⁶ The opposition of genres was the structure around which debate was facilitated, and in aesthetic disputes such as La Font's attack on the Académie Royale de Peinture et de Sculpture in the 1740s, or the long-running Italian/French opera dispute (including the *querelle des bouffons*), or many other eighteenth-century aesthetic disputes, the language of opposition is clear. La Font's critical terminology was specifically derived from gender opposition, as he railed against Boucher's feminised mythologies and demanded a male and noble style.⁷

This shift is related to the re-formation of the political sphere in the course of the eighteenth century, one in which finely divided hierarchies and shades of nobility which dominated the systems of patronage and clientage in the court society themselves become increasingly recast as oppositions, whether in models of government, reason, science or art. Such oppositional

³ André Félibien, *Conférences de l'Académie Royale de Peinture et de Sculpture pendant l'année 1667* (Paris, 1699), 'Préface'.

⁴ See René Bray, *La Formation de la doctrine classique en France* (Paris: Garnier, 1966), pp. 303–6; Jacques Truchet, *La Tragédie classique en France* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1950).

⁵ Ledbury, 'Greuze and Sedaine', pp. 13–44.

⁶ On the gendering of the Enlightenment see, for example, Dorinda Outram, *The Enlightenment* (London: Macmillan, 1995), pp. 80–95. Work in other fields, mainly by feminist historians, has made explicit the relation of dramatic genre to gender. See, for example, Linda Bember, *Comic Women, Tragic Men. A Study of Gender and Genre in Shakespeare* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1982).

⁷ See La Font de Saint-Yenne, *Réflexions sur la peinture* (The Hague: Neaulme, 1747).

thinking was integral to the ideologies of the French Revolution when a succession of oppositions became central to Revolutionary rhetoric.⁸

One brief but central example of this movement from hierarchy to opposition is the treatment of genre in the *Encyclopédie*. Voltaire's article on literary genre begins by asserting the multiplicity of different genres, but later states:

Chaque genre a des nuances différentes; on peut au fond les réduire à deux, le simple et le relevé. Ces deux genres qui embrassent tant d'autres ont des beautés nécessaires qui leur sont également communes.⁹

This tendency to convert a hierarchised taxonomy into an opposition between two separate, even opposed, genres is also evident in Watelet's adjacent article on genre in painting, in which he states: 'Le mot *genre* ... sert à distinguer de la classe des peintres d'histoire, ceux qui, bornés à certains objets, se font une étude particulière de les peindre.'¹⁰ Watelet thus explicitly narrows Félibien's hierarchy into an opposition between history painting and all the rest, now simply defined (by default) as 'non-history'.

Diderot is often credited with a revolution in thinking on genre in painting and drama. However, he too succumbs to the same kind of thinking. At points in the *Entretiens sur le Fils naturel* he, or rather his idealistic partner in dialogue, Dorval, seems to be saying that the opposition that exists between tragedy and comedy might be nuanced by his new genre, the *genre sérieux*.¹¹ One year later, however, Diderot reverted to an oppositional understanding of genre in *De la poésie dramatique*, where his new genres are subsumed into subsections of the most opposed categories of drama.

La comédie gaie, qui a pour objet le ridicule et le vice, la comédie sérieuse, qui a pour objet la vertu et les devoirs de l'homme. La tragédie, qui aurait pour objet nos malheurs domestiques; la tragédie,

⁸ On shifts in the political culture of the *ancien régime*, see Keith Michael Baker (ed.), *The Political Culture of the Old Régime* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988); Dale Van Kley, *The Damians Affair and the Unraveling of the Ancien Régime 1750–1770* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984); Peter Jones, *Reform and Revolution in France. The Politics of Transition 1774–1791* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

⁹ Denis Diderot and Jean Le Rond d'Alembert (eds), *Encyclopédie ou dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers* (Paris, 1751–65), VII (1757), article 'Genre de style (Littérature)', pp. 594–5.

¹⁰ Ibid., 'Genre (Peinture)', p. 597.

¹¹ See Diderot, *Entretiens sur le Fils naturel* in Alain Ménil (ed.), *Diderot et le théâtre. Le Drame* (Paris: Pocket, 1995), p. 113.

qui a pour objet les catastrophes publiques et les malheurs des grands.¹²

In painting too, his interventions are often seen as nuancing the division established by De Piles, Du Bos and Watelet; however, in the *Essais sur la peinture*, his most involved intervention on genre, Diderot's quarrel is not with the fundamental oppositional structure of genre, but with what should be included within this opposition:

Il me semble que la division de la peinture en peinture de genre et peinture d'histoire est sensée, mais je voudrais qu'on eût un peu plus consulté la nature dans cette division.¹³

He goes on to try to recategorise the painters of domestic life as part of the history category. However at no time does he question the need for a fundamental division. If I stress Diderot's conformism rather than his undoubted originality here, it is to demonstrate how even the most brilliant thinkers involved with the *Encyclopédie*, as well as more conservative strains of Enlightenment thought represented by Watelet, tend to assume a 'natural' oppositional order of genre.

Two important aspects of the theoretical reworking of hierarchy as opposition were the difficulty in reconciling and compromising between the opposing poles, and the horror and fascination provoked by the possible products of such a collapse. In the articles referred to above by Watelet and Voltaire there are stark warnings about the danger of overstepping borders and seeking to escape from oppositional structures. Watelet felt that the attempt to cross boundaries between the high and the low would lead to the production of monsters. Even Diderot, who had theorised an intermediate genre, saw some mixtures and hybrids as dangerous and impossible.

Les peintres et les poètes ont le droit de tout oser; mais ce droit ne s'étend pas jusqu'à la licence de fondre des espèces dans un même individu. ... Vous voyez que la tragi-comédie ne peut être qu'un mauvais genre, parce qu'on y confond deux genres éloignés et séparés par une barrière naturelle.¹⁴

It is against this background that some of Sedaine's struggles and innovations in many areas emerge as more widely significant. The history of his practice and much other practice in all the arts in the eighteenth century is in some senses the history of the creative interrogation of systems of genre; although it

¹² Diderot, *De la poésie dramatique* in Ménil (ed.), *Diderot et le théâtre*, p. 163.

¹³ Diderot, *Essais sur la peinture*, ed. Gita May (Paris: Hermann, 1985), p. 65.

¹⁴ Diderot, *Entretiens sur le Fils naturel*, p. 114.

is possible to see the eighteenth century as a conservative one, resistant to innovation and 'playing by the rules', we must also recognise that, often in marginal or undervalued spaces (such as types of lyric theatre) this same eighteenth century saw the gradual erosion of the strict separation and opposition of genres.¹⁵ Such processes and tensions can be seen in perhaps uniquely sharp focus in the work of Sedaine, who was throughout his life actively involved with generic experiment and challenge, from his early poetry right through to the end of his life. This chapter will draw not only on his dramatic ideas and experiments but also his early interventions in poetry and his relatively unknown contribution to debates in architecture and the visual arts, to explore his engagement with the fraught but crucial question of genre.

In broad terms, one might say that Sedaine's thinking on genre evolved from a dependence on the structures and modes of thinking on genre mapped out by Boileau and seventeenth-century theorists, through subsequent engagement with Enlightenment models of genre to a finally more radical and less comfortable interrogation of genre which was to have a profound impact on his own career, and which I believe constitutes one reason for his enduring importance as a writer and man of the theatre.

The lower, comic and marginal genres of poetry and drama became the focus of Sedaine's attention from the time of his first poetry, which is, incidentally, critically underexplored.¹⁶ It cannot be stressed enough that Sedaine was not a naive or uneducated talent but a fiercely autodidactic one; his poetry, with its mixture of translations and renditions of ancient poetry, its songs and dramatico-musical *essais*, is clear evidence of a sophisticated, literary intelligence learning from a wide variety of sources. The urbane ironic 'faux-naïf' style which Charlton has analysed as an important part of the rhetoric of his dramatic prefaces is also powerfully present in his early verse collections.¹⁷ His early poetic interventions on genre are also laced with this irony, as Sedaine engages with the didactic texts by Boileau and Horace which provide him with points of departure.

One of the longest and most significant of these early poems on genre was the *Satyre contre le goût des ouvrages poissards*. This curious poem aimed criticism at the works of the dramatist Jean-Joseph Vadé (1720–57), who was Sedaine's friend and one of the promoters of his early career.¹⁸ In this work,

¹⁵ See Hobson, 'Genres and Limits', pp. 109–11.

¹⁶ What commentary there is tends to be split between dismissive surveys, for example in Emile Faguet, *Histoire de la poésie française de la renaissance au romantisme*, IX, *Les Poètes secondaires du XVIII^e siècle* (Paris: Boivin, 1935), pp. 28–34, and philological work, for example Theodore Kant, *Die Sprache in Sedaines 'Recueil de poésies'* (Hamburg: Lütcke & Wolff, 1901).

¹⁷ See Chapter 9 of the present work.

¹⁸ On Vadé, see Alexander Parks Moore, *The 'Genre Poissard' and the French Stage of the Eighteenth Century* (New York: Columbia University Institute of French Studies,

Sedaine rather ironically set himself up as a new Boileau ('Prête-moi s'il se peut, contre un nouvel affront/Les traits dont tu flétris le burlesque Scarron')¹⁹ and goes on to denounce the vogue for *poissard* plays. After describing a time when

Aux plus exactes moeurs ta muse fut fidelle,
Jamais un mot hardi dans tes tableaux divers
Ne souilla tes sujets aussi purs que tes vers

he regrets that

Cet heureux temps n'est plus; les marchés et les halles
Infectent les esprits des jargons les plus sales:
C'est un marais bourbeux que ce sacré vallon
La fange y cache aux yeux les trésors d'Apollon.²⁰

This alignment of the city, corruption and bad writing, and the horror of mixture evident here, seemed to imply that Sedaine argued as a purist, an upholder of the traditions of rules and the strict separation of high and low genres, who objected to fair cultures permeating wider artistic realms. However, in the articulation of what seem like fairly orthodox, even clichéd views of the infection of drama by street slang, there is in Sedaine's own poetic tone some lingering metaphorical enjoyment of the combination of the mud and slime of *les halles* with the sacred ground of the muses, which is at least a renegotiation of the boundaries of criticism.

Sedaine's longest and most ambitious single poem, *Le Vaudeville*, a history and defence of *opéra-comique*, also stressed the problematic evolution and categorisation of low or popular genres:

Il est un genre au dessous du Burlesque
Phoebus honteux ne peut le nommer presque

1935). Vadé is himself an important and neglected writer. In the third edition of the *Recueil de poésies* (London [Paris]: Chez l'auteur etc., 1780), p. 81, Sedaine wrote of the circumstances of writing and publishing this work: 'Je n'ai fait imprimer cette satyre qu'après la mort de Vadé. Je ne l'avois fait voir qu'à lui, alors il me pria de la donner au public, ce que je crus ne devoir pas faire.' This hints that Sedaine perhaps believed that, as a piece of mock-didactic writing, his *satyre* might be misunderstood if published, and that he saw it rather as a kind of ironic experiment for a more private circle. For evidence of Sedaine's involvement in the Vadé circle, see Jean-Nicolas Dufort de Cheverny, 'Notice sur la vie de Sedaine' in Ledbury, 'Greuze and Sedaine', p. 360: 'Sedaine ... lié avec le chansonnier Vadé et une société de jeunes gens aimables faisoit des pièces ...'.

¹⁹ Sedaine, *Satyre contre le goût des ouvrages poissards* in *Recueil de poésies* (2 vols in 1, Paris: Duchesne, 1760), II, p. 72.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 73.

Enfant du peuple, et du peuple chéri
Il prit naissance au pied du pilori.²¹

At the end of the second *chant*, he warns against *amphigouri*, playing on the fact that this was both a poetic term for a deliberate nonsense and a familiar one for unintentionally confused, unconnected writing.²²

Là, pour donner des plus burlesques loix
De Melpomène il contrefait la voix
La croassant ses phrases imbéciles,
Il confond tout, les genres et les styles.
[...]
Défiez vous, auteurs de chansonnettes
De son jargon, de ses graves sornettes.²³

Sedaine's work seemed thus to reinforce prevalent discourse on genre, taking its cue from the seventeenth century and following taste in his aversion to mixture of genres and crossing of boundaries. This may be the autodidact's attempt to show himself to be well versed in the rules of genre decorum, but even in his most Boileau-esque passages, Sedaine's didacticism is suffused with a deep irony and mock-seriousness, as if he wished subtly to acknowledge his own partiality to those registers and vocabularies which were prohibited or shunned.

Consequently, there are hints even within these didactic works of his experiments to come: he places heavy emphasis on the possibilities of the lower genre in *Le Vaudeville*, rejects *parades*, and combines eulogy of Favart as reformer with evident belief in the possibilities of *opéra-comique* which he praises as a newly legitimate genre.²⁴ For Sedaine, the experiments of Favart had shown that *opéra-comique* could relinquish its dependency on parody of classical models and become an independently creative genre. It is in this context that we must understand his later, very contentious claim that comedy is more relevant to the spirit of his century than tragedy.²⁵ In this attack on the relevance and importance of tragedy, the seeds of Sedaine's later and more challenging work are sown. For he seems to argue that comedy is not an amusing but always inferior genre, but rather a more appropriate, more culturally and socially alert mode than its superior, tragedy, and that

²¹ Sedaine, *Le Vaudeville* in *Recueil de poésies* (1760), I, p. 179.

²² One of the most famous French *amphigouris* is contained in Rabelais's *Pantagruel*, chapters 11–13. Dramatic *amphigouris* were written by Paul Scarron (with whose work Sedaine was very familiar) and Charles Collé.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 172.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 193: 'ainsi ce siècle a fixé les destins / d'un joli genre ignoré des latins'.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 210–11.