

MICHEL-JEAN SEDAINÉ  
LE PHILOSOPHE SANS LE SAVOIR  
A CRITICAL ANALYSIS

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By  
BARBARA JOAN WEBER, B.A.

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AUTHOR: Barbara Joan Weber, B.A. (Carleton University)

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SCOPE AND CONTENTS: This thesis is a study of Sedaine's Le Philosophe sans le savoir by a critical analysis of the plot and characters, preceded by a short biography of the author. It gives a history of the play and through an examination of Sedaine's dramatic style seeks to establish the individual merit of the play as well as its place in the movement of the 'drame' which it represents.

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## INTRODUCTION

Michel-Jean Sedaine's Le Philosophe sans le savoir is the best manifestation of a dramatic genre born in the mid-eighteenth century, that of the 'drame'. In fact, it is the only play representative of that new movement which is still being read and produced in the twentieth century. Theorists agree that the 'drame' is the precursor of some aspects of modern comedy, the 'comédie de mœurs et à thèse' of Augier and Ibsen, but it would have been ignored in the eighteenth century if the public had had to depend on the extravagant, and at the same time inconsequential, plays which Diderot and others produced to exemplify the new-born theories. Sedaine's play is vibrant and durable perhaps for the very reason that the author was not making a conscious effort to transform a certain number of set ideas into a literary work, as Diderot was doing in his Fils Naturel and Père de famille. In both of these latter plays the reader is constantly aware that the characters are only mouthpieces for the author, while in the Philosophe we can see a true work of the theatre by a man with a real instinct for the stage. Furthermore, because he was not earnestly striving to weave the largest possible number of philosophic notions into the best possible play, Sedaine produced a literary masterpiece almost without knowing it.

The Philosophe can best be seen in detail as a piece of

dramatic art when it is separated from its eighteenth-century context and the movement it represents. A brief study of the author's life helps to explain how Sedaine was oriented towards the genre to which the Philosophe belongs, and also shows the influence his personality and life may have had on his work. The history of the play, from the time of its conception to its eventual production, is an interesting one both because of the circumstances of its composition and for the severe censorship to which it was subjected.

From an examination of the plot and characters emerges the play's theatrical merit. The modifications imposed by the censors, seen in the light of a close analysis of the action, reveal to what extent they misunderstood Sedaine's purpose in writing the play and how they deformed the nature of the Philosophe.

The characters of the play fall very clearly into three categories. Vanderk père, emerging both as a 'philosophe' and as a 'père de famille', has the largest and most important role. The second group of characters, who also have some part to play in the action, is comprised of Vanderk fils, Antoine and Victorine. Finally, there are the episodic characters who have only minor functions not related to the development of the plot. This group is composed of the Aunt, Sophie and her mother, and the two Esparville.

However, because the Philosophe represents the theories of the 'drame', it must be situated in the dramatic and philo-

sophic movements which were the very reason for its creation. This will show Sedaine's dramatic art in relation to contemporary trends and theories in the theatre. Eventually, the twentieth-century reader must admit that, as well as the many merits of Sedaine's dramatic style which caused it to be such a success in the eighteenth century, the play has definite faults of dramaturgy.

The enthusiastic reception of the Philosophe at its première on December 2, 1765, showed that it incorporated the elements the audience desired to see. Its long history of subsequent performances, plus the imitation and continuation it inspired, prove that the Philosophe was not only favourable to the taste of Sedaine's contemporaries, but that it is also a work of high dramatic stature.



## I. BIOGRAPHY

Michel-Jean Sedaine was born June 2, 1719 in Paris, the son of an architect. He was only fifteen when his father was financially ruined, and the family moved to Berry. Upon his father's death Sedaine returned to Paris and took up the profession of stone-cutting. Far from being defeated by the poverty in which he lived, Sedaine took courage from it and devoted his rare hours of leisure to reading and study; elementary education had passed him by, and he felt the need to make up for its absence. One day his employer, the architect Buron, surprised him with a book in his hand. He questioned Sedaine curiously, sympathised with his lively intelligence, and relieved his work burden. Shortly afterwards Buron made Sedaine a partner in his business. Freed from material worries, Sedaine became a member of literary circles and his first compositions were songs, where wit and comedy were not lacking. He became known to the public in 1752 by the publication of his Poésies fugitives, among which figured the delightful Épître à mon habit. This volume already contained the marks of his later dramatic works: the rather bad versification of a man not formally educated, and on the other hand, a bright inventiveness. His originality was to remain his most charming quality.

Sedaine's dramatic career began in 1756 at the Opéra-

Comique, or rather at the Foire Saint-Laurent (the Théâtre de la Foire and the Comédie Italienne joined to form the Opéra-Comique only in 1762) with Le Diable à quatre, followed by Blaise le Sabatier. Other comic operas followed in quick succession: L'Huître et les Plaideurs (1759), Le Jardin et son seigneur (1761), Le Roi et le Fermier (1762), Rose et Calas (1764). There is no doubt that his operas owe their success to the music of Philidor, Monsigny and Grétry with whom Sedaine collaborated. For all that, Sedaine composed good texts with some of the same qualities that we shall see in the Philosophe sans le savoir. The success of his comic operas inspired Sedaine to turn his talent to the Comédie-Française.

The year to note is 1765, when the Philosophe was performed at the Comédie-Française. Perhaps Sedaine did not feel that he had found his true medium in writing this play which was not combined with music, for after the remarkable success of the Philosophe he wrote only three other plays to be presented without music: Le Gageure Imprévue, a comedy performed in 1768 at the Comédie-Française; Maillard ou Paris sauvé, a tragedy in prose accepted in 1771 by the Comédie-Française but forbidden by the censors; and Raymond V, comte de Toulouse, or le Troubadour, a comedy in five acts given in 1789 at the same theatre. Auguste Rey argues convincingly that Sedaine wrote two prose plays at the gracious request of Catherine II, the apparently good-hearted benefactress of impoverished authors; one of these plays was Raymond V and the second might possibly

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have been Les Journalistes.

Sedaine's decision to return to comic opera has never failed to perplex the critics, for in the Philosophe he had written the play which saved the 'drame' as a genre and which was easily the outstanding work of the author's career. In the thirty-two years following the Philosophe Sedaine produced nothing of comparable brilliance, and literary critics question whether this fact can be attributed to the material problems he encountered at that time: his marriage in 1759, the burden put on his shoulders by the dissipation of his brothers, and the four adopted children he added to his own family. Sedaine produced some clever comic operas, in particular Le Déserteur of 1769, Le Mort marié (1777), Richard coeur de lion (1784), Amphitryon (1788), Guillaume Tell (1791), La Blanche haquenée (1793), but the success of these plays was again due to the music rather than to the text. These 'comédies à ariettes' were all produced at the Opéra-Comique, and their success is not to be treated with disdain. However, the acclaim received by the Philosophe and by the Gageure imprévue at their performances at the Comédie-Française was greater than the acclaim of the audiences for his work at the Opéra-Comique. If Sedaine did ever actually hesitate on his choice of theatres, the intense vanity

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Auguste Rey, Notes sur mon village: la vieillesse de Sedaine (Paris: Champion, 1906), p.18.

of the actors at the Comédie-Française soon drove his abundant and easy verve back to the Opéra-Comique. The Comédie-Française was clearly the loser in this matter. They refused to recognize Sedaine's instinct for the stage and in humiliation he had to take his talent elsewhere, while Diderot was honoured by the acceptance of his obviously inferior Père de famille.

In 1786 Sedaine was elected to the Académie Française. This account of his election is quoted by Auguste Rey:

La Harpe nous donnera cette nouvelle: "Il s'agit actuellement de remplacer M. Watelet, que l'académie vient de perdre, et, pour cette fois, il est probable que ce sera Sedaine qui obtiendra enfin le prix de la persévérance. Je ne sais s'il en eut jamais une pareille: c'est la 14e fois qu'il se présente." Sedaine fut élu, en effet, à 67 ans; il était arrivé à 37 à la scene; à 48 ans au mariage, tard partout. 2

At this date Sedaine had for twenty years been the permanent secretary of the Académie des Beaux-Arts. His last years were spent in sickness and misery. He was impoverished by the Revolution, deprived of his title of academicien when the Académie-Française was replaced by the Institut de France in 1795, and died in Paris on May 18, 1797.

## II. HISTORY OF THE PLAY

It is important to examine the events that led Sedaine to compose the Philosophe. Ira Wade indicates that on May 2, 1760, Sedaine was present at the first performance of Palissot's Les Philosophes, and was shocked at the contempt heaped upon certain men of letters, in particular Diderot.<sup>1</sup> Voltaire set himself up as general of the philosophic army and his Ecossaise was chosen as a revenge play which was performed on July 22, 1760. The play proved successful, but its importance must not be exaggerated: Voltaire was more interested in throwing mud at his enemies than in opening a new road in French theatre. The following year Diderot's Père de famille, written in 1758, was performed; it was regarded as a conclusive reply to Palissot. However Sedaine was still dissatisfied and decided upon a last attempt to justify his friends. He tells us personally of the circumstances of the composition of his play in an article he published in a volume of Pixérécourt's plays:

"En 1765, m'étant trouvé à la première représentation des Philosophes, raconte Sedaine, (mauvais et méchant ouvrage en trois actes), je fus indigné de la manière dont étaient traités d'honnêtes hommes de lettres que je ne connaissais que par leurs écrits. Pour réconcilier le public avec le mot philosophe, que cette satire pouvait dégrader, je com-

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<sup>1</sup> Ira O. Wade, "The title of Sedaine's Le Philosophe sans le savoir", PMLA, XLIII (1928), 1031.

posai Le Philosophe sans le savoir." 2

The plot and characters of the play were drawn from several sources. Wade tells us that the work was begun in the closing months of 1763, and that Sedaine decided to base the situation of the play on an incident of the day: a young noble had recently fought a duel on the road to Sèvres, and this incident was causing quite a stir in the public.<sup>3</sup> Using this event as the central situation, Sedaine went on to make a general adaptation of Diderot's Père de famille. Petit de Julleville firmly maintains this view:

Le Philosophe sans le savoir, en effet, qui enthousiasme Grimm, Diderot, Collé même, n'est rien autre en réalité que le Père de famille de Diderot refait par un homme qui a su mettre en pratique, en les corrigeant, les théories de l'auteur du Fils naturel.<sup>4</sup>

However, Sedaine was not merely borrowing from Diderot in the sense of pure plagiarism, for he hoped to render Diderot a service. He openly used the same theme as Diderot had employed, and he set out to build the structure of his play around Diderot's theories. As Wade says, Sedaine believed that the success

<sup>2</sup> Théâtre choisi de Pixérécourt, précédé d'une introduction par Ch. Nodier, et illustré par des notices littéraires dues à ses amis, (Nancy, l'auteur, 1841-43, 4 vol.); quoted in: Ladislav Günther, L'Oeuvre dramatique de Sedaine (Paris: Larose, 1908), p.216.

<sup>3</sup> Op. cit. p.1032.

<sup>4</sup> Petit de Julleville, Histoire de la littérature française (Paris: A. Colin, 1896-99), p.612.

of his own play would necessarily entail the success of Diderot's original play: "Thus by using the new rules of the 'drame', by imitating the theme of the Père de famille, and by exonerating the philosophic party, he sought to vindicate Diderot the theorist, the playwright and the Philosophe."<sup>5</sup> Shortly after completing the play Sedaine gave it to his good friend Diderot to read, and as was his custom, Diderot responded with exaggerated enthusiasm. Here is Grimm's account of Diderot's reaction:

J'écrivis à M. Diderot le lendemain...Il avait lu la pièce plus de huit mois auparavant (donc, vers le mois de mars 1765.) La lecture achevée, Diderot se leva avec la véhémence qui lui était naturelle et se précipitant dans les bras de Sedaine, s'écria: "Ah! mon ami, si tu n'étais pas si vieux, je te donnerais ma fille!"...Il m'en avait parlé avec enthousiasme et je m'étais un peu moqué de lui; non que je n'eusse bonne opinion des talents de M. Sedaine, mais je connaissais encore mieux la fatalité de mon philosophe à créer de très belles choses et à croire ensuite de la meilleure foi du monde les avoir vues dans l'ouvrage qu'on lui a montré. 6

The play was ready for performance by November 1764, but Sedaine had to wait a whole year to obtain official permission.

The reasons for this delay are complex. Unfortunately, not everyone, especially the censors, shared the views of Diderot and Sedaine on the enlightenment of the 'philosophes'.

The play was to have been performed October 21, 1765, under the title of Le Duel; this title and other rumours concerning the

<sup>5</sup>  
Op.cit. p.1032

<sup>6</sup>  
Grimm, Correspondance littéraire (Paris: F. Buisson, 1812), VI, 438.

play resulted in a severe examination by the police, who came to the astonishing conclusion that Sedaine had written an apology of the duel.

The new title which Sedaine gave his play was Le Philosophe sans le savoir. Literary critics have argued at length about the original title, but it may be concluded that it was Le Duel. Although Sedaine himself refers to the play as Le Philosophe, he does so because he was writing in 1765 and he had<sup>7</sup> already been pressed by the censors to make certain changes. The title was already established as Le Philosophe and there is no reason why Sedaine should refer to his play under a previous title. La Harpe, Petitot, Petit de Julleville, Lenient, Günther, all support the theory that the original title was indeed Le Duel.

One must not underestimate the influence of the opposition party led by Palissot. Sedaine had already aroused suspicion by his staunch friendship with Diderot, and the censors grew over-cautious when they realized that his play was actually a defense of the philosophic party. Torn between the two parties and knowing that they could not make any decision that would please both sides, they bowed before the opposition group, but in such a way as not to arouse the philosophic party more than necessary. If Richelieu had condemned Le Cid because of a duel,

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See above, p.9



why should they not be equally cautious? This father who permitted his son to fight and who even found valid reasons for doing so appeared intolerable on the stage. Anger rose against Sedaine for expounding theories contrary to accepted notions of justice and honesty, and he was accused of protecting the duel, a plague of society. The censors did not understand that Sedaine was in fact showing how a duel could ravage a family. Sedaine finally agreed to change the title, and suppressed key passages which will be examined later.

It was sacrilegious, in Sedaine's opinion, that he should be obliged to change certain scenes as well as the title. These modifications necessarily involved changing the characters, and the author's greatest complaint was this:

De tous les défauts de la pièce, celui qui n'échappe pas à la plus légère attention est qu'elle ne remplit pas son titre; j'ai été le premier à le dire après les changements. Mon Philosophe sans le savoir était un homme d'honneur, qui voit toute la cruauté d'un préjugé terrible, et qui y cède en gémissant. 8

However, it will be seen later that there is no real discrepancy between the title and the interpretation of the main character.

Finally on November 10 the revised text of the play was declared acceptable by the censors, and on the 13th its performance was authorized by the police. For all that, the play had still to be performed before a commission of magistrates from

the Châtelet on November 29. Bachaumont gives the following account of this performance:

Le Philosophe sans le savoir, ci-devant intitulé Le Duel, ayant occupé depuis longtemps l'attention des magistrats, sans avoir rien arrêté de fixe sur le sort de ce drame, on en a, pour terminer le comité, donné aujourd'hui une représentation à huit clos. Tous les gens à simarre y étaient convoqués; et la pièce a enfin passé au moyen des corrections faites: elle doit être jugée lundi. 9

Sedaine insisted that Madame de Sartines, wife of the head of police in Paris, be present at this critical performance.

"- Mais, répondait M. de Sartines, les femmes n'entendent rien à cette partie de la législation! - Elles jugeront le reste, répondait Sedaine."<sup>10</sup> She attended indeed, and instead of judging, she wept. Her tears reputedly won over the magistrates, and it was thus to her that we owe the conclusive authorization of this comedy. Finally on December 2, 1765, the play was performed at the Comédie-Française.

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<sup>9</sup> Louis Petit de Bachaumont, Mémoires secrets, ed. P.L. Jacob (Paris: Garnier, 1921), p. 165.

<sup>10</sup> Jules Janin, Histoire de la littérature dramatique (Paris: Michel Levy Frères, 1854), p. 55.

### III. THE PLOT

The Philosophe reveals Sedaine's true dramatic instinct and shows that he is not simply a pale reflection of Roderot. He has produced a play that is alive and individual, and not merely the dramatic form of a careful list of theories handed him by Roderot.

The censorship in this part of the eighteenth century was rigorous, as will be seen by the number of scenes Sedaine was forced to cut or change. The middle class was beginning to make itself heard and its strongest medium was the bourgeois literature on the rise at this time. The nobility still had the power to crush the bourgeoisie by exerting its influence through the censorship, and it did so at every opportunity. In a play such as Sedaine's where the author appeared to be voicing ideas which were too advanced, the censors imposed their restrictions.

The plot of the play is fairly simple. The curtain opens upon Antoine, valet and confidant to Vanderk. Antoine surprises his daughter Victorine, who is in tears for some reason she will not divulge to her father. Antoine's first words are: "Quoi! je vous surprends votre mouchoir à la main..." to which Victorine replies: "Don, mon papa! les jeunes filles pleurent quelquefois pour se désennuyer" (1,1). These first lines of dialogue set us in the midst of an intimate family scene and establish the tone for the whole play. Emphasis is not upon the family's position

in society and the conflict it may encounter with other social classes, but upon relations within a family. Victorine confesses she suffers because there are rumours about an armed quarrel between two officers, and she fears that one is Vanderk fils. At this point a servant arrives with a letter for Vanderk père and insists on delivering it to him personally. There follow a series of scenes which are but episodic in their content. The lack of coherence between these scenes is so striking that La Harpe was prompted to say:

Sedaine n'a jamais l'enflure de Diderot, mais il tombe souvent dans l'excès contraire, dans l'insipidité des petits détails. Les premiers actes de son drame en sont remplis, ce qui ne contribue peu à les refroidir. 1

Victorine's anxiety for Vanderk fils is apparent even in her words describing the beauty of Sophie, the daughter of the house who is about to be married. Vanderk père appears and discusses wedding arrangements with Antoine. A fine example of the ideal enlightened relationship between master and servant in the eighteenth century is given in Vanderk's words: "Que la table des commis soit servie comme la mienne " (I,4). Scenes 5, 6 and 7 are gentle comedy scenes between members of the family, including Madame Vanderk and her future son-in-law. However, this last scene becomes heavy when Sophie insists upon talking to her father alone, and the dramatic movement which Sedaine assigns to

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Jean-Francois de la Harpe, Cours de littérature (Paris: H. Agasse, 1813), VII, 177.

her fiancé to get him off-stage is awkward and abrupt. Vanderk père gives Sophie some gentle fatherly advice about the ties which bind parents and children. After these incidental scenes, which have no bearing on the actual plot, the thread of the intrigue is picked up by the arrival of Vanderk fils. His coming is announced by a rather distracted Victorine, and we feel that she is indeed in love with the young man. There are again some short, tender scenes between family members; Sophie chides her brother for being late and gives him her watch "comme un reproche éternel de ce que vous vous êtes fait attendre" (I,11). In the closing scene Victorine timidly tells Vanderk fils that she knows he has quarrelled, and at his vehement denial she becomes truly worried.

In assessing the entire first act, the reader realizes that he has in fact learned very little. The act has been instructive in giving realistic scenes of life in a bourgeois family, and it is evident that the action will revolve around the portrayal of professions and family relations, but what indeed is this action? We are aware of all the stormy controversy over the play's original title Le Duel, but a whole act has passed and this duel has only been briefly mentioned. We are not much wiser, either, as to why Vanderk is a "philosophe sans le savoir". Bachaumont wrote of this:

Le premier acte est absolument ou presque tout à fait isolé des autres; et dans cet acte même, chaque scène est si peu liée aux suivantes, qu'on les supprimerait toutes

successivement sans que la machine s'écroulât... 2

Act II finds Vanderk fils in despair. Alone on stage, he laments that he should never have gone out for he had a feeling that something would happen, and he announces enigmatically: "...un commerçant...c'est l'état de mon père, et je ne souffrirai jamais qu'on l'avilisse " (II,3). We finally see that he is in the unfortunate position of having to fight a duel on his sister's wedding day because he defended his father's profession when he heard it insulted. At the sudden arrival of his father the young man resumes a gay expression. Vanderk père, sensing that something is amiss, attempts to question his son, but to no avail. Then Vanderk fils takes on the role of interrogator. Why, in signing the marriage contract, did his father sign himself as a noble, "titré de chevalier, d'ancien baron de Salvières, de Clavières, de...etc?" (II,4). Vanderk père replies that he is in fact a gentleman and tells his son why he went into trade. His story begins rather sententiously with the words: "Mon fils, lorsqu'un homme entre dans le monde, il est le jouet des circonstances." Thereupon follows the romanesque story of his life: as a young noble he too was obliged to fight a duel, in a situation not dissimilar to that of his son, and he was forced to go into exile in Holland. There he was adopted by an

aging Dutch merchant, who gave Vanderk his name, his commerce, and his niece in marriage. Vanderk is proud to belong to the body of merchants, and seeing his son unconvinced, he goes on to speak in defense of commerce, which is respectable to the highest degree because it has its roots in "la droiture, l'honneur, la probité." Finally he discloses that his son was born a gentleman and he had always withheld this information for fear that "l'orgueil d'un grand nom ne devînt le germe de vos vertus; j'ai désiré que vous les tinssiez de vous-mêmes " (II,4). An unknown servant enters abruptly and insists that Vanderk see his master, Monsieur d'Esparville, the following day - the day of Sophie's wedding. Vanderk consents to do so. The real interest in this scene (scene 5) is the words of the servant describing the military service of his master: "Oui, il a la croix; c'est bleu, c'est un ruban bleu; ce n'est pas comme les autres, mais c'est la même chose." This reply was cut by the censors because the blue ribbon represented the newly-formed order of Mérite militaire and was for Protestant officers of the reformed religion, whereas Catholic officers wore the red ribbon. The servant's words give equality to the two religions, and the police were not authorized to accept such a broad statement.

The following scenes are taken up by the arrival of Vanderk's sister, a comical old lady who is ashamed of her brother's profession and does not mince words about her feelings. Hers is the only comic role of the play. She haughtily maintains the name of her ancestors and would never have come

to the wedding had Sophie not been marrying a man of quality; she had even written to ask if she could not pretend to be a distant relation. The Aunt passes from disdain of her professional brother to amusing exuberance at the sight of her nephew in a military uniform, for she approves of these marks of social distinction. The act concludes by Victorine's timid avowal to Vanderk fils that she knows what he will be going on the morrow. He entrusts her with the watch just given him by his sister and emphasizes mysteriously that she is to return it to no one but himself. As the curtain falls, Antoine is summoned by his master.

In sum, this act also does little to advance the action of the play. In fourteen scenes we are given only one new piece of information: namely, that Vanderk père is a gentleman. We gradually grow more certain about the duel and about Victorine's love, but no definite details are given. The purpose of the act considered as a whole seems to be a defense of the bourgeois gentleman, with the eloquent and positive words of Vanderk on the one hand, contrasting with the narrow, prejudiced attitude of his sister on the other.

The third act is given over entirely to the development of the plot. The first scene is one of physical action and this quick tempo is kept up throughout the act. The curtain rises upon Vanderk fils attempting to open a window as if to escape, but he cannot find the keys because Antoine has taken them from the porter. He must have the keys, for his arms are ready and the horses are waiting below. He decides to waken Antoine what-



ever the cost may be, but the servant has in turn given the keys to Vanderk père, and the young man begs Antoine to get them. It is obvious to the audience that Vanderk père suspects something.

Scene 8 is a crucial one, both for advancing the action and for providing controversial material for the censors. At this point begin the really serious and vital differences between the original and censored versions. In giving the content of both texts, it will be impossible to avoid a certain amount of repetition.

The action resumes with Vanderk in a dressing gown, surprising his son about to make his early-morning escape from the house. Vanderk fils is very apologetic. He excuses himself for having awakened his father, and is so confused that he forgets to wish his father a good morning. In trying to explain his peculiar behaviour the young man mumbles an excuse about simply wanting an early-morning ride. Vanderk père points out that the horses have been ready since the previous day. Here the censors intervened on the script and omitted the next few phrases of Vanderk's speech: "Victorine l'a su de quelqu'un, d'un homme de l'écurie, et vous aviez l'idée de sortir." Vanderk père says sorrowfully that he exacts no embarrassing confidence from his son and that he will give him the keys, remarking apprehensively: "Mais, mon fils, si cela pouvait intéresser votre repos et le mien et celui de votre mère..." The young man is conscience-stricken and confesses everything to his father. The older man

leans heavily on a chair and his son cries: "Mon père, voilà ce que je craignais." In his original version Sedaine had the father reply firmly: "Je suis bien loin de vous détourner de ce que vous avez à faire. Vous êtes militaire, et quand on a pris un engagement vis-à-vis du public, on doit le tenir, quoi qu'il en coûte à la raison, et même à la nature." Vanderk fils replies to this: "Je n'ai pas besoin d'exhortation." These two speeches were cut because according to the censors, the duel could not be condoned on any grounds. It seems evident, however, that Vanderk père is not supporting the institution of the duel but insisting that one must fulfil the promises one makes. His son's duel is absurd and threatens to split the family, but the young man is responsible for his irrational actions and must take the consequences by keeping his word. Vanderk fils admits that he will be fighting a total stranger, who did not insult his father personally but only casually said: "Oui... tous ces négociants, tous ces commerçants sont des fripons, sont des misérables." Thereupon his father says bitterly: "Et vous cherchiez querelle! Je n'ai rien à vous prescrire." To this the son replies: "Mon père, soyez tranquille." The last half of the father's speech which has just been quoted, and the son's reply, were cut by the censors. The reason for the young man's giving his watch to Victorine and his insistent words that she return it to him alone are clarified: in returning the watch Victorine would have seen a letter written by Vanderk fils to his father and left on the dressing-table to

be found by Victorine.

The following conversation was imposed upon Sedaine by the censors, and the several speeches he was forced to insert are significant enough to reproduce in their entirety. The original version runs thus:

Vanderk père- Et quelles précautions aviez-vous prises contre la juste rigueur des lois?

Vanderk fils- La fuite.

Between these lines Sedaine under pressure wrote:

Vanderk fils- La juste rigueur!

Vanderk père- Oui: elles sont justes ces lois...Un peuple... je ne sais lequel...les Romains, je crois, accordaient des récompenses à qui conservait la vie d'un citoyen. Quelle punition ne mérite pas un Français qui mérite d'en égorger un autre, qui projette un assassinat.

Vanderk fils- Un assassinat?

Vanderk père- Oui, mon fils, un assassinat. La confiance que l'agresseur a dans ses propres forces fait presque toujours sa témérité.

Vanderk fils- Et vous-même, mon père, lorsque autrefois...

Vanderk père- Le ciel est juste: il m'en punit en vous. Enfin, quelles précautions aviez-vous prises contre la juste rigueur des lois?

In the original version Vanderk père then orders his son to his room to wait while he writes letters of safety for him, although he refuses to embrace him. There is no question of the rendezvous not being kept. The censors attacked this scene in the manuscript, and after their revision the father orders his son to unharness the horses and go to his room while he is going to "réfléchir aux moyens qui peuvent vous sauver et l'honneur et

la vie." However the young man dashes off the stage and it is perfectly obvious that he is going to keep the appointment. The scene has been considerably weakened by the censors; by making a strong attack on the duel, likening it to murder, and forbidding Vanderk fils to leave the house, the censors alter not only the father's character but also the son's, for he disobeys and goes to the duel.

Antoine enters briefly, and his affection for his young master is proven by his spontaneous wish to go out and defend Vanderk fils himself. In the following scene where Vanderk père is alone on the stage, he delivers a monologue on honour and shows scorn for the duel which completely disregards the feelings and honour of the family. In this particular speech the following underlined phrases were cut by the censors:

Préjugé funeste!...tu ne pouvais subsister qu'au milieu d'une nation vaine et pleine d'elle-même, qu'au milieu d'un peuple...Et vous, lois sages, mais insuffisantes, vous avez désiré mettre un frein à l'honneur; vous avez ennobli l'échafaud, votre sévérité n'a servi qu'à froisser le coeur d'un honnête homme entre l'infamie et le supplice.

In the final scene Vanderk père tells Antoine distractedly that his son has departed, while in the censored version it is Antoine who breaks the news that the son has disobeyed orders and has rushed away, crying out: "Antoine, je te recommande mon père."

The fourth act reveals a growing precision in the characterization, as well as a strong progression in the action. The introduction to the act is a lonely Victorine, still tor-

mented by the evasive words pronounced so intensely by Vanderk fils. She hesitantly tells Vanderk père of her fears, and reminds him that he has a rendezvous for the following afternoon. Into the midst of these people whose lives are being torn apart by the folly of the son sweeps the old Aunt, as comical as ever in her own person as she works herself into a state of fervour in wanting to rescue Vanderk fils from his father's working profession. The irony is enormous between the inanity of the Aunt and the deathly tenseness of the family situation. Then it is Antoine who captures the spotlight when he remarks enigmatically: "Oui, ma résolution est prise: comment! peut-être un misérable! un orôle..." (IV,4). He becomes irritated with his daughter for no reason and finally blurts out his plan to Vanderk père: he plans to kill the other man before his young master has a chance to arrive at the scene of the duel. In contrast to his determined tone comes the gentle reply of Vanderk père, that his son must fight for himself. Then Vanderk entrusts his loyal servant with the role of reporter. Antoine in disguise is to observe the duel, and if it is Vanderk fils who is fatally wounded, Antoine is to knock three times at the door. The intensity of these preparations is interrupted by the arrival of Madame Vanderk. She has not the slightest idea of the circumstances and only hopes her son will not be late for the wedding. As a concluding irony, the family goes away to the happiest event of Sophie's life while her brother is perhaps dying in a duel.

The fifth and final act is somewhat rushed. The three

main threads of the plot - the duel, the marriage, and Victorine's budding love for Vanderk fils - must here be tied together and resolved in a single dénouement. The act gives an impression of being chopped up into episodic scenes so that the various problems can be hastened to their resolution.

With the arrival of Monsieur d'Esparville, to whom Vanderk has accorded a three o'clock appointment, there is a short monologue. Esparville complains about Vanderk having to marry his daughter on just the day when he has to see him, and he makes several reflections on the ingratitude of children. Esparville is making this visit to take care of some money matters; he possesses a "lettre de change" for which he needs the money urgently, and Vanderk concludes the transaction with much good grace. Esparville is so moved by this businessman's honesty that he confides he needs the money for the flight of his son, a cavalry officer, who is at the present moment involved in a duel. Vanderk is stupefied by this news, for the duel is of course the one in which his own son is taking part. Just as Esparville is saying confidently: "...je ne crains rien; mon fils est brave; il tient de moi, et adroit, adroit..." (V,4), the three fatal knocks are heard at the door. Vanderk's emotion is not shown by any degree of incoherence in his words, and at no point during the death knell does he lose control. This dramatic scene moved to tears the audiences of Sedaine's time.

At this point arrive the musicians who have come to play for the wedding, but Antoine furiously hurries them away

at this inopportune moment, crying to Vanderk: "Mort! mort! j'ai vu sauter son chapeau. Mort! " (V,8). Victorine in her turn learns that her father has seen Vanderk fils die, and can only say tremulously: "...non, je ne pleurerai pas, je ne pleurerai pas." Antoine, however, has surveyed the duel from a distance and is mistaken about the outcome. While Victorine is trying to be as brave as Vanderk père, Vanderk fils walks into the house. After the violent emotions caused by the announcement of the young man's death, his arrival comes somewhat as an anti-climax. With him is Esparville fils, and they explain how they mutually decided on the folly of a duel. Everyone is happy, the Esparville are invited to stay for the wedding, and Antoine concludes pensively: "Ah! jeunes gens, jeunes gens, ne penserez-vous jamais que l'étonnerie, même la plus pardonnable, peut faire le malheur de tout ce qui vous entoure?" These are serene words for an audience worn out by the intense emotions of the final scenes.

Has the action been brought to a successful conclusion? The three mainsprings of the plot - the duel, the marriage, and Victorine's love - are united at the end to be resolved together. It is true that young Vanderk's duel is the unifying action in the plot, and it is dominant enough that it always overshadows the wedding; but it is equally true that this theme is responsible for bringing to light Victorine's naive love. Bachaumont says:

Le duel, qui n'est qu'épisode dans la pièce, l'occupe tellement toute entière que le mariage et la noce ne sont

que le cadre où il est enchassé. 3

His words are true, but their tone is rather disparaging. If it is agreed that Sedaine originally entitled his play Le luel, it is reasonable to grant that the dramatist should be writing principally about a duel and its immediate effects upon the lives of the people it touches. The second title, Le Philosophe, is not as inappropriate as Sedaine believed, for the dominant character in the play in either case is Vanderk père. Even through the duel which actively involves only Vanderk fils, it is the father who emerges as the moving force. This can be attributed to the fact that it is in the power of Vanderk père to bring about or cancel the duel, and consequently the happiness of Victorine and that of his daughter on her wedding day is in his hands. Thus the main action and the principal character are in harmony with either title.

It has been seen that the duel is resolved peacefully after all, with both young men admitting in embarrassment that what they are fighting over is complete folly. Indeed, after the way Vanderk père has instilled ideas of honour and of station in life into his son throughout the play, the cancellation of the duel is the only outcome which would be compatible with the father's practical nature and the son's native intelligence. Secondly, Sophie's marriage took place as planned. It would have

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3 Mémoires secrets, p.267/.



taken place in any case - Vanderk would have waited till after the wedding to announce the injury or death of his son - but thanks to his wisdom and to his son's tardy flash of good sense everyone could attend in peace. The play, which has been a series of intimate scenes of family life under the strain caused by the contrasting emotions of two elements, a wedding and a duel, is brought to a happy close. Victorine has always felt a tenderness for Vanderk fils, but it needed the duel and the risk of his life to grow into love. It would be much too strong, and too indelicate, to say that her feelings developed rapidly into a passionate love, for she admits it to no one save herself. Upon hearing the word 'duel' she knows instinctively that it involves Vanderk fils and this image of death stirs the awakening love within her. For this reason Victorine's extatic words: "Ah! ciel! ciel! Ah, monsieur!" (IV,12) at seeing Vanderk fils alive are all that are needed to complete this part of the action. Whether or not the two ever marry is neither our concern nor Sedaine's. The author kept the promise of love he hinted at throughout the play and that is enough. George Sand successfully brought the two young people together in Le mariage de Victorine performed in 1861, but Sedaine did not leave his play unfinished in not doing so.

In conclusion, it can be said that the Philosophe is not a definite unit divided organically into acts and scenes in which each situation results directly from the preceding one to carry on regularly to the dénouement. Sedaine gives us in-

stead a series of pictures, sometimes naive, of ordinary life. He has been compared to Greuze for the feeling and delicate way he wields his literary paintbrush. Even the many scenes which add little to the general design of the plot are valuable as observations of the characters and as lively sketches of their intimate lives. The analysis of this life was Sedaine's main preoccupation, thus adhering to the principal exigency of the new 'drame'.

#### IV. THE CHARACTERS

Sedaine had received no formal education, and hence the 'philosophe' he gives us in his play embodies his own personal idea of good sense, rather than the cultivated ideal of Man put forward by the Encyclopaedists. He drew his education from his age, and surrounded by men very often pretentious and immoderate in proclaiming their views, Sedaine understandably fell into affectation and declamation from time to time. Therefore the two forces forming him as a dramatist - the philosophy sounding loudly around him, and his own unbiased self-education - are present in his creation of the 'philosophe', fortunately with his own good sense gaining the dominant position. Vanderk père reflects Sedaine in that he is head of a family, devoted to his wife and children, concerned with their happiness and tranquility, extremely conscientious of his duties towards them. Certainly Vanderk is a 'philosophe' by these qualities, as well as in the eighteenth-century sense of the word by his humanity and tolerance. In Vanderk père Sedaine simply wanted to paint a sensible man, honest and virtuous and unpretentious, as opposed to the irascible 'philosophe' of the time who was quick to act and judge in accordance with principles already established. In order to call his character a "philosophe sans le savoir" Sedaine had to be convinced that a natural, innate philosophy was worth more than an acquired one. An examination of Vanderk's

character will show that it does indeed justify the title of the play, and that Vanderk's humanistic qualities transcend his ideal philosophic ones.

Diderot said of the 'drame', the genre of which Sedaine was seeking to give an example: "C'est la condition, ses devoirs, ses avantages, ses embarras, qui doivent servir de base à l'ouvrage." Then he went on to speak enthusiastically about the domestic aspect of this 'condition': "Ajoutez à cela, toutes les relations: le père de famille, l'époux, les soeurs, les frères. Le père de famille! Quel sujet, dans un siècle tel que le nôtre, où il ne paraît pas qu'on ait la moindre idée de ce que c'est qu'un père de famille."<sup>1</sup> It was Sedaine who went on to give his century this touching portrait of the ideal father who proves to be a 'philosophe' without knowing it.

There are several obvious characteristics which distinguish Vanderk père as a 'philosophe'. He has certain ideas in accord with the eighteenth-century philosopher concerning honour, prejudice, reason, tolerance. Honour, in the sense of maintaining the highest esteem for the dignity of his rank, is one of Vanderk père's most obvious features. He feels strongly the worth of his 'condition' and his pride in being a merchant is reflected in the words: "Nous sommes, sur la surface de la terre, autant de fils de soie qui lient ensemble les nations, et les ramènent

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<sup>1</sup> Diderot, Oeuvres, texte établi et annoté par André Billy (Paris: Gallimard, 1951); Entretiens sur le Fils Naturel, Troisième Entretien, p. 1288.

à la paix par la nécessité du commerce; voilà, mon fils, ce que c'est qu'un honnête négociant " (II,4). In a long, serious sermon to his son in favour of commerce, he concludes: "Il n'y a peut-être que deux états au-dessus du commerçant...le magistrat, qui fait parler les lois, et le guerrier, qui défend la patrie " (II,4). Vanderk believes that men in all stations of life are equal as long as they feel pride in doing well the job they have to do. To him, "la droiture, l'honneur, la probité" are the essence of every man and the universal marks of equality.

There is another side to Vanderk's views on honour, more directly concerned with his personal relations with his family. To begin with, he proclaims: "Le compte le plus rigide qu'un père doive à son fils est celui de l'honneur qu'il a reçu de ses ancêtres " (II,4). He thus underlines the necessity for a father to keep the family name untainted, and to raise his children to uphold the dignity of the family name. The children in turn are responsible for doing so. However, in this age when philosophers were attacking all prejudices, that is, all a priori opinions, Vanderk prefers his son to observe a prejudice and preserve honour rather than break a prejudice and lose all honour. The first remark that he makes to his son when he becomes aware that the young man is planning to steal off to a mysterious rendezvous is: "Il n'est pas possible qu'il y ait rien de déshonorant dans ce que vous allez faire " (III,8). His first reaction, then, is one of preservation of family honour at all costs. When he learns that the cost is the highest there

can be, that human lives are hanging in the balance, Vanderk is stricken, yet announces firmly: "Je suis bien loin de vous détourner de ce que vous avez à faire " (III,8). Vanderk is only too aware that the honour he insists his son maintain by the duel is a false one, as seen by his tormented words: "Ah! mon fils, fouler aux pieds la raison, la nature, et les lois! Préjugé funeste! abus cruel au point d'honneur!" (IV,12). The duel is destructive and unpatriotic, but the promise is sacred. Honour is the foremost consideration in Vanderk's mind, and even in instructing Antoine to survey from a distance the scene of battle, he emphasizes his position in the words: "...tu ne connais pas toutes les entraves de l'honneur." He adds: "Ne passez mes ordres en aucune manière, songez qu'il y va de l'honneur de mon fils et du mien: c'est vous dire tout " (IV,9). Honour is absolute.

Vanderk realizes, however, that reason is not all-powerful in its fight against prejudice, and he exclaims: "Vous êtes militaire, et quand on a pris un engagement vis-à-vis du public, on doit le tenir, quoi qu'il en coûte à la raison, et même à la nature " (III,8). In putting reason second to honour he shows that he is not completely a 'philosophe' in his attack against prejudices.

In the true eighteenth-century sense Vanderk practises tolerance. After the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1685 Protestants were widely persecuted throughout the country, although the preaching of the 'philosophes' on religious tolerance

was beginning to be heard and understood. Still, Catholics and Protestants who had orders of merit were separated by the necessity of wearing the coloured symbol of their religion. The fact that Esparville wears the blue ribbon of the Protestant Ordre de Mérite militaire rather than the red ribbon of the Catholic Ordre de Saint-Louis, is not even considered by Vanderk when he is arranging an interview through Esparville's servant. Red ribbon or blue ribbon, Catholic or Protestant, if a man wants to see Vanderk he will accord him an interview.

Besides possessing these fundamental characteristics of the 'philosophe', Vanderk has a code of ethics to which he adheres very closely. He was born a gentleman but through a twist of fate reduced to the bourgeoisie. He no doubt felt much humiliation before he was able to realize that his new station in life had value, and for this reason he is in a much better position to sympathize with those people 'beneath' him in life. Equality is observed everywhere in his home, with regard to both servants and guests. When he is making plans for the wedding feast he says to Antoine: "que la table des comais soit servie comme la mienne " (I,4). He treats servants with the same courtesy he would his own equals. At Antoine's reminder that a servant has been waiting for three hours to see him, Vanderk says reproachfully: "Pourquoi faire attendre? Pourquoi ne pas faire parler? Son temps est peut-être précieux; son maître peut avoir besoin de lui " (II,5). The moderation of Vanderk's tone and attitude is further emphasized by the rudeness and disrespectful yawning

manner of the servant.

Vanderk insists strictly that the behaviour of his family be at all times above reproach. Concerning the wedding reception he says emphatically: "Je ne veux pas de débauche "(I,4). Being quite aware of the weaknesses in human nature he does his best to keep people from indulging them. Thus he insists, on the same occasion: "La table des domestiques sans profusion du côté du vin."

As well as possessing an extraordinarily profound sense of honour, Vanderk is also scrupulously honest. He insists upon advancement by merit for his son in the army and says sharply to the Aunt, in reply to her question on the promotion of Vanderk fils: "Lorsque, par ses services, il aura mérité la faveur de la cour, je suis tout prêt " (II,9). Vanderk hides his illustrious title from his son so that he will not be content to rest upon his father's achievement. Vanderk says wisely: "J'ai craint que l'orgueil d'un grand nom ne devînt le germe de vos vertus; j'ai désiré que vous les tinssiez de vous-mêmes " (II,4). The same utter honesty in dealings with money is shown in his financial transaction with Esperville, where Vanderk could have taken advantage of the total ignorance of his visitor and made a considerable profit on the exchange.

Vanderk is a very prudent and observant man, attentive to the slightest details. When planning the festivities for the evening before his daughter's wedding, he says thoughtfully: "Les magasins fermés...que personne n'y entre passé dix heures..."



Que quelqu'un reste dans les bureaux et ferme la porte en dedans." (I,4). He even arranges for there to be a handy supply of water at his son's display of firecrackers.

From this examination of Vanderk's personality two aspects of his character have emerged: firstly, that he is a man who professes the opinions of his century, and secondly, that he is an upright man in every sense of the word. Throughout the play is it evident that he is above all a 'père de famille', and this quality constitutes the third and most complex aspect of the man. Only in this latter capacity is Vanderk a "philosophe sans le savoir" for only as father and husband does he unknowingly practise his own individual philosophy. As the tolerant, upright man of the eighteenth century he consciously exercises the philosophy of his time, but as a man closely tied to members of his family he lives according to a natural, inborn philosophy that he does not even recognize as such. He is able to face every situation with a rare courage and a total devotion, conscious of his multiple duties as father, husband, brother, head of the household.

Petit de Julleville remarks very aptly:

Il demeure avant tout un père de famille. C'est cette qualité, cette condition qui affirme et précise son caractère. Ce Vanderk est bien le chef de famille respecté et aimé tout ensemble, protecteur-né des siens, qui leur donne à chaque instant par sa vie et par ses paroles l'exemple de la vertu. Et ainsi Sedaine faisait vivre à la fois et le type rêvé par Diderot et la tragédie domestique. 2

A study of Vanderk within his home will show that he fulfils the title of the play. His first appearance is with Antoine when both are preoccupied with preparing the house for the wedding of the next day. The audience is immediately impressed with the firm, decisive manner of Vanderk, and this impression does not weaken under any of the circumstances of the play. The second scene reveals his tender love for his daughter Sophie and his concern for her happiness.

His affection for his son also is given occasion to manifest itself. Vanderk is never the commanding father, the stern man who orders his children to do as he says, but instead one who grants them freedom in their movements. He senses something peculiar in his son's behaviour, but tells him nevertheless: "Taites, si cela vous amuse: mais il faudrait quelques précautions; dites-le-moi: et s'il ne faut pas que je le sache, je ne le saurai pas " (II,4). Vanderk knows his children, and he understands his son sufficiently well to be able to guess when there is something out of the ordinary, as when he surprises his son with the words: "Vous ne représenteriez pas demain quelque pièce de théâtre, une tragédie?" (II,4). Vanderk's love for his son is revealed when he turns on Antoine and, anguished with the knowledge that his son is fighting, says: "Croyez-vous que je n'aime pas mon fils plus que vous ne l'aimez?...N'est-ce pas mon fils? n'est-ce pas lui l'avenir, le bonheur de ma vieillesse?" (IV,9).

Vanderk does not devote himself to his children to the

exclusion of his wife, and whatever sentiments he does demand from them are not simply for his own advantage but also for the benefit of their mother, as when he says: "Ma fille, épargne à ta mère et à moi l'attendrissement d'un pareil moment " (I,8). He makes clear to his son, when explaining the circumstances of his life, that Madame Vanderk was his only love. He warns his son ominously: "Mais mon fils, si cela pouvait intéresser votre repos et le mien et celui de votre mère..." (III,8), thereby putting above all else his wife's peace of mind. Vanderk does his utmost to spare his ailing wife the sorrowful news of their son's folly and he bears the whole burden himself. He says affectionately to her: "Laissez-moi respirer, et permettez-moi de ne penser qu'à votre satisfaction; votre santé me fait le plus grand plaisir: nous avons tellement besoin de nos forces, l'adversité est si près de nous..." (IV,2).

Vanderk has not neglected his brotherly duties toward his sister, the cantankerous old Aunt whom we see haughtily arrive for the wedding. He only says rather sadly: "Elle jouit de tous les revenus des biens que je vous ai achetés, et je l'ai comblée de tout ce que j'ai cru devoir satisfaire ses vœux; cependant, elle ne pardonnera jamais l'état que j'ai pris; et lorsque mes dons ne profanent pas ses mains, le nom de frère profanerait ses lèvres " (II,6). Vanderk shows an enormous capacity for forgiveness and a rare insight into the weakness of his sister's nature.

Vanderk's psychological struggle when he is confronted

with his son's duel reveals very successfully the most profound part of his nature, and his innate philosophy emerges. When his son first breaks the disastrous news of the duel, Vanderk's initial reaction is the firm decision to maintain honour, and he is quick-thinking enough to write letters of safety for his son should he need to escape quickly. We cannot believe that he acts coldly, for his voice breaks slightly and he falters over the words: "Ah! ciel! Je me suis couché le plus heureux des pères, et me voilà " (III,9). Upon questioning by Antoine, Vanderk can only cry: "Ce que je veux? Ah! qu'il vive! " (III,10). Vanderk struggles to maintain his lucidity through this time when the duel threatens the happiness of his whole family. His extreme self-control is shown in the grotesque situation where Antoine knocks the three fatal blows during Vanderk's interview with Asparville. His torment is not even manifested by incoherence, for he says quite evenly: "Ah! monsieur, tous les pères ne sont pas malheureux!...Voilà votre somme! partez, monsieur, vous n'avez pas de temps à perdre!" (V,4). Finally, when Antoine proves to have made a mistake and Vanderk fils arrives shameful but unscathed, Vanderk père appears emotionally exhausted by his appalling experience: "Ah! messieurs, qu'il est difficile de passer d'un grand chagrin à une grande joie!" (V,7). His practical philosophy consists of bearing the trials of fortune by the energy of his will.

A close analysis of many of Vanderk's often sententious speeches shows that a large part of his philosophy consists of

complacent sayings. He falls into banality when he says: "Ne perds jamais de vue, ma fille, que la bonne conduite des père et mère est la bénédiction des enfants " (I,8). Vanderk's long, solemn account to his son of his past life is sprinkled with such maxims as: "...dans un siècle aussi éclairé que celui-ci, ce qui peut procurer la noblesse n'est pas capable de l'ôter " (II,4). When Vanderk assures his wife that nothing is amiss, he cannot resist pronouncing the aphorism: "La plus grande félicité est si peu stable, si peu " (IV,12). The expression "c'est la vie" is a strongly determining factor of Vanderk's philosophy.

The changes in the play imposed by the censors did in some respects weaken the character of Vanderk. In the first text Vanderk not only allowed his son to fight a duel, but almost ordered him to uphold his word. Although he was nearly overcome by anxiety he showed an interest in the weapons his son had chosen, and had the foresight to arrange for his son's flight. Sedaine had to suppress most of the passages which thus accented the personality of his 'philosophe'. The words which Sedaine, under pressure, was obliged to give Vanderk père in Act III scene 7 are in fact totally contrary to Vanderk's character.<sup>3</sup> In the censored version he tells his son pedantically that no punishment can be too great for a Frenchman who meditates the murder of another; and if Vanderk does not actually forbid his son to go to the duel, he makes it very clear that he does not

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<sup>3</sup> See above, p.22.

give his permission. This speech shows a remarkable lack of consistency between the man believing so firmly in honour and the father requesting that his son break a promise. The fault lies not with Sedaine, of course, but with the censors.

Vanderk's character is depicted in constant contrast with the sketch of the 'philosophe' in Palissot's play. Les Philosophes illustrates the evil effects caused by the conversion of the head of the family to philosophy, whereas Vanderk as a 'philosophe' heads a contented family.<sup>4</sup> Wade summarizes his character saying: "Vanderk has all the qualities which Palissot judged essential to a 'philosophe' but failed to recognize in the members of the philosophic party."

Beside Vanderk père, whose personality is so vividly painted, the other characters are almost mere black-and-white sketches. Let us first consider Vanderk fils. The light domestic scenes of the first act illustrate the sense of devotion to the family which he has received from his father. He gives hearty approval to his sister Sophie when she disguises herself, saying: "Et! c'est ma soeur! Ah! Elle est charmante!" (I,9). But if Vanderk fils contains the germ of the 'philosophe' that his father is, it is buried fairly deeply at this point in his life. He will

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<sup>4</sup> Wade, "The title of Sedaine's Le Philosophe sans le savoir", p. 1036.

have a long struggle with pride before reaching his father's degree of tolerance. He laments that he has committed himself to a duel in the words: "Un commerçant...c'est l'état de mon père, et je ne souffrirai jamais qu'on l'avilisse. J'ai tort tant qu'on voudra, mais..." (II,3). He is ashamed of not being noble, and at the same time furious with anyone who should suspect that shame. Even when fired by the will to defend his father's position, he is sensible of the chaos the duel will cause in the family circle: "Ah, mon père, mon père! un jour de noces! je vois toutes ses inquiétudes, toute sa douleur, le désespoir de ma mère, ma soeur, cette pauvre Victorine, Antoine, toute une famille " (III,3). His impetuosity and refusal to budge from a decision he has arrived at too quickly are revealed when he says of his disdainful Aunt: "Moi, mon père, à votre place, je ne lui pardonnerais jamais." (II,6). His father's tolerance is an essential quality that he is lacking. Shortsightedness underlies his inability to make plans, for he has not made proper arrangements for the keys which open the windows and he is unable to steal from the house without being caught by Antoine. The crowning example of his rashness is the duel he is to fight with a total stranger who only seems to have insulted his father.

Vanderk fils finally displays some good sense when at the duel he whispers to his opponent: "Écoutez, j'ai cru que vous insultiez mon père, en parlant des négociants. Je vous ai insulté, j'ai senti que j'avais tort; je vous en fais excuse. N'êtes-vous pas content? Eloignez-vous, et recommençons " (V,11).

This is a large slice of humble pie for the young man, and a fine example of his awakening sense of proportion regarding station in life.

Unlike his father, Vanderk fils cannot quickly perceive unspoken emotions in the people around him. He seems totally unaware that Victorine's sentiments for him are not quite sisterly. Returning from the duel he says casually to Victorine, who has been in as much anguish as Vanderk père: "Que je suis aise de te revoir, ma chère Victorine " (V,12). He neither hints that he is pleased to see her as one of the family nor suggests that he is suddenly noticing her as a young woman. However, the audience suspects that his words do contain some significance, and certainly Victorine takes them as encouragement, for on this almost unspoken emotion she permits her sentiments to continue. Vanderk fils displays here a sensitivity rarely seen in his character, even if it is only a brief glimmer.

When the censors trimmed Sedaine's original play and had the father order his son to his room rather than to the duel, they introduced a false note into the character of Vanderk fils as well as to that of his father. According to the censored version, Vanderk fils would have disobeyed and gone to the duel at any rate. This would make him rather a despicable person, exaggerating too much his hot-headedness and giving a side to his personality not at all in keeping with the young man we have seen thus far in the play.

Antoine, Vanderk's 'homme d'affaires', is as devoted to



the family as is Vanderk himself, but he hides his tenderness under a gruff manner. He is the personification of the faithful servant. He wishes to relieve his master of as many of the details of Sophie's wedding as possible.

Antoine is ready to sacrifice even his life if he can restore happiness to the Vanderk family. He says passionately to Vanderk père: "Non, monsieur, il ne le tuera pas...j'y ai regardé...je sais par où il doit venir, je l'attendrai, je l'attaquerai, il m'attaquera, je le tuerai, ou il me tuera..." (IV,9). Antoine is so upset at the thought of his young master fighting a duel that he alternates, without realizing it, between exaltation and bewilderment: "...les clés du magasin! je les emportais. Ah! j'en deviendrai fou. Ah! dieux!" (IV,9). In this nervous state he obviously should not be trusted to give an accurate report of the duel, but Vanderk has a great deal of faith in his servant, and believes his cries of: "Mort! Mort! J'ai vu sauter son chapeau. Mort!" (V,8). Antoine is the cause of the family's greatest sorrow because his vision becomes obscured at the fatal moment.

Antoine does not spend all his affection on Vanderk's children. He is a devoted father to Victorine, although he seems to feel that to show love is to display a weakness, and he hides his sentiment under brusque words such as: "Va-t'en, va-t'en! Ecoute, sois sage, et vis toujours honnêtement..." (IV,7). Antoine adds an element of comedy to the Vanderk household, although the comedy is achieved largely by the contrast

of his abruptness with the seriousness of situations he interrupts. His disgust at the Aunt's servants is also rather amusing: "Quatre ou cinq misérables laquais de condition donnent plus de peine dans une maison que quarante personnes. Nous verrons demain: ce sera un beau bruit " (II,13)

Sedaine's most delicate creation is Victorine. Rather than painting her with the bold strokes he uses for Vanderk père, he gives us a charming pastel of ripening love. Victorine is not even really aware of her sentiments for Vanderk fils which are the natural continuation of a childhood friendship. She does not dare hope to marry the young man and she is not the slightest bit coquettish with him. The idea of calculating does not enter her mind. At the beginning of the play Victorine is in tears, and will only say evasively that young girls often cry to break the monotony. She is never more precise than that, never more willing to admit to herself or anyone that she is in love. In her eyes, whatever she feels for Vanderk fils is a result of circumstances: "Et! mon papa, après vous, qui voulez-vous donc que j'aime le plus? Comment! C'est le fils de la maison; c'est mon frère de lait..." (I,1). With mounting fear Victorine realizes that the dispute in which she correctly guessed Vanderk fils to be involved would plunge the whole family into deep unhappiness. The significant word "duel" made the idea of love dawn upon Victorine. If life had not been at stake, she never would have realized her naive feelings. The ingenuous Victorine has always been studied with generous approval. Girardin

says:

Peindre un sentiment qui commence à naître, et le peindre dans sa première fleur, montrer ce que c'est qu'une amitié de jeune fille et laisser à cette amitié la pureté et la douceur qu'elle perdrait à devenir l'amour, voilà le mérite de Sedaine dans Victorine, qui est un personnage à part et qui ne ressemble à personne, ni à la Nanine de Voltaire, ni à la Pamela de Richardson. 5

Girardin's words here describe exactly the characters and situations used by Marivaux. The analogy between Marivaux and Sedaine is so striking that the reader cannot help but question the originality of the 'drame' as proclaimed by its creators.

The other characters in the play are barely even sketches. They are silhouettes without detail. The Aunt, Vanderk's very snobbish sister, is a comic creation. Sedaine does not give her qualities which build up a personality but uses her as the type of intolerant nobility who cannot bear to mingle with the bourgeoisie. She is the epitome of those who, respectful of traditional notions, believe that a person must be titled to have any worth. As such she is a complete contrast to Vanderk with his emancipated, tolerant ideas. Impressed by military men in general and not understanding any other kind of merit than that of the sword, she is far from satisfied that her niece is marrying a magistrate. However, she is quickly consoled on seeing in her nephew the martial air of his grandfather. Her whole attitude

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Saint-Marc Girardin, Cours de littérature dramatique  
(Paris: Charpentier, n.d.), IV, 58.

is resumed in her words: "Moi, je me serais peu embarrassée de cet amour-là, et j'aurais voulu que mon gendre eût un rang avant de lui conner ma fille " (II,9). Each time that the Aunt appears her reasoning is so absurd that the audience cannot help but laugh. Since she is meant as a contrast with Vanderk in ideas and in way of life, she is deliberately made ridiculous. Her role in the play is functional rather than individual. The ironic contrast between this narrow-minded, selfish woman and the dead seriousness of the family situation is overwhelming.

Sophie and her mother, in the little that is seen of them, possess a selflessness in keeping with the tone of the play. Sophie, for example, in reproving her brother for being so late, uses the situation to give young Vanderk the gift of a watch (I,11). The two women are mainly preoccupied with the wedding of the following day and we see them only with reference to this event. Vanderk protects them from any idea of his son's duel, and so their happiness is never touched and the audience never knows how they would react under stress. Sophie is gay, content to play happy little games with her family on the eve of her wedding day. She loves her parents and brother very much and the only cloud on her horizon is the thought of leaving them. Madame Vanderk's only concern is for her children's happiness and well-being, even in the slightest matters: "Ah! mon cher ami, tout le monde est prêt: voici vos gants, Antoine. Eh! comme te voilà fait! tu aurais bien dû te mettre en noir, te faire beau le jour du mariage de ma fille. Je ne te pardonne pas cela "

(IV,10). Sedaine uses Sophie and her mother primarily to illustrate the love in a family.

The Esparville père and fils add again to the general impression of the play, for they stress the honour, courage and generosity which characterize the Vanderks. Esparville père, in his total incomprehension of financial affairs, provides an occasion for Vanderk to display his wisdom and scrupulous honesty. Young Esparville, as impulsive as young Vanderk, shares in creating the duel which brings out all the finer qualities of the main personalities.

In summary, Sedaine's characters are sensible and natural people, from the complex personality of Vanderk père through to the brief outlines of Sophie and Madame Vanderk. Vanderk is not intended to represent the merchant in general any more than his son is meant to typify all children. Sedaine's characters are no longer the universal 'types' that were dramatized in the seventeenth century but are individuals representing a certain class of people in a specific period of the eighteenth century. Sedaine manipulates them in a study of the reaction and interaction of personalities in a unique set of circumstances.

## V. DRAMATIC ART

Preceding an examination of Sedaine's play as a manifestation of the 'drame', the birth and characteristics of the new genre will be briefly examined. Classical French comedy as represented by Molière was born of the farce which he raised from a coarse image of the people to a universal portrayal of 'types' without breaking the farce's ties with the popular mood. His design was to paint a way of life without touching on individuals. The classical tragedy of Corneille and Racine was, broadly speaking, the painting of passion, whether it was the lofty passions of glory and ambition as depicted by Corneille or the desperate emotions revolving around love as painted by Racine. From this classical comedy and tragedy emerged the 'drame', which was to put professions and family relations on the stage. The 'drame' preserved several classical characteristics: the realistic portrayal of bourgeois milieux relates it directly to comedy, while the seriousness of tone and the dangers which menace the heroes show it to be a child of tragedy. The new genre did not, of course, spring into being overnight. Despite Voltaire's efforts, classical tragedy of the previous century gradually fell into decadence. Even Voltaire, while trying to renew it, changed its nature to some extent, for he made tragedy a means of propaganda, exactly what the 'drame' was from the moment of its birth. Classical comedy too had

been slowly changing. The hearty laughter of Molière was replaced by the more cynical, tongue-in-cheek tone of Regnard and Le Sage, and succeeding them was the smiling sensibility of Marivaux. Destouches limited comedy to a moral lesson and Nivelle de La Chaussée opened floodgates of tears with his 'comédie larmoyante'. The reasons for the changes in dramatic significance melt into the social organization of the period; this was the age of the philosophic struggle and the bourgeoisie was only beginning to feel its increase in power. Previously the bourgeoisie had been to a great extent the butt of comedy. The dramatists associated with the Encyclopaedists sought to create a new genre which would move the middle class by giving them a touching picture of their own station in life.

It is evident upon examination that the Philosophe incorporated the essential ideas of the 'drame' as presented by L'id-erot in two manifestos: Entretiens sur le Fils naturel of 1757 and De la Poésie Dramatique of 1758. According to the theories outlined in these works, the 'drame' was to be, in sum, a 'tragédie domestique et bourgeoise' which would dramatize an ordinary incident happening to an everyday family. In heroic tragedy kings and princes succumbed to appalling fates, and the middle classes were beginning to feel that they were as capable of deep suffering as was royalty. In addition, dramatists began to extol the bourgeoisie as a class which adhered to a strict code of morality while the upper classes were somewhat loose in their personal ethics. The spotlight was thus on bourgeois virtues

rather than on the decaying morality of the aristocracy or on the prejudices of the nobility. The 'bourgeois gentilhomme' who had for so long been the object of mockery was replaced by the haughty noble.

The 'drame' is founded on reason, nature and sentiment.

Diderot's own words are:

Jusqu'à présent, dans la comédie, le caractère a été l'objet principal, et la condition n'a été que l'accessoire; il faut que la condition devienne aujourd'hui l'objet principal et que le caractère ne soit que l'accessoire... C'est la condition, ses devoirs, ses avantages, ses embarras, qui doivent servir de base à l'ouvrage. Il me semble que cette source est plus féconde, plus étendue, et plus utile que celle des caractères. Pour peu que le caractère fût changé, un spectateur pouvait se dire à lui-même: ce n'est pas moi. Mais il ne peut se cacher que l'état que l'on joue devant lui, ne soit le sien; il ne peut méconnaître ses devoirs. Il faut absolument qu'il s'applique à ce qu'il entend. <sup>1</sup>

It is indeed the 'condition' of the middle-class merchant that is presented in the Philosophe. Vanderk père becomes a 'philosophe sans le savoir' when his station in life throws him into contact with people who scorn his position. He has to have an innate understanding of the value of the merchant in order to bear the derision of the narrow-minded upper classes. His ideas on life, then, are a direct result of his 'condition', and his own individual personality is simply a synthesis of the best characteristics of all intelligent men in the same 'condition'.

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<sup>1</sup> Diderot, Oeuvres; Troisième Entretien, p. 1287.



He is the sum of a number of ideal qualities attributed by Diderot to the enlightened middle-class businessman.

However, if the 'condition' of Vanderk père firmly underlies the play, it is his role as a father which determines the action. On this account, Diderot said that of all the relations, it was a man's position as a parent which was the most worthy of study, particularly in that century when no one seemed to have a clear idea of the importance of the father.<sup>2</sup> The audience actually sees Vanderk as a 'père de famille', and as his 'condition' establishes his behaviour as a father, so his position as the head of the household provides the unity of the play. Diderot had announced that the characters were to be subordinated to the 'condition', in other words, that the portrayal of individual personalities was unimportant. Sedaine wisely saw that drama does not lie in the stage presentation of an abstract situation in life. He saw that the 'condition' must be personified in real characters. If, as Diderot says, the spectator is to recognize himself in what he sees on stage, then the action must be that of a real character reacting to real circumstances where the qualities of his personality have been engendered by his 'condition'.

Vanderk's first appearance in the play is with Antoine,

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<sup>2</sup>  
See above, p. 31.

discussing the intimate details of a family wedding. It is significant that Sedaine chose to impress the audience with Vanderk's role as a father rather than showing him in circumstances revolving around his particular 'condition'. It is perhaps for this very reason, this placing of the emphasis on Vanderk's position as a father, that Sedaine's adaptation of Diderot's Père de famille was a success. Vanderk père emerges as a human being and not just as an animated theory. The contact and conflict of two forces are the essence of true theatre, whether it be classical tragedy or bourgeois 'drame', whether these forces be intellectual or emotional. In the Philosophe Sedaine goes beyond the descriptive analysis of a 'condition' and presents Vanderk père, caught between his love for his son and his high sense of honour. The essence of the struggle is that he must order his son to fight a duel which may bring infinite sorrow to the whole family. It is inevitable that the duel be fought, yet Vanderk's notions of honour do not win over his fatherly sentiments without an intense psychological struggle. In short, Sedaine did not allow the portrayal of the character to be overshadowed by that of the 'condition'.

Another of Diderot's theories which was respected by Sedaine is the following:

Il faut s'occuper fortement de la pantomime, laisser là ces coups de théâtre dont l'effet est momentané, et trouver des tableaux. Plus on voit un beau tableau, plus il plaît. 3

The first few scenes of the Philosophe are a series of these 'tableaux', which may be explained as short scenes giving a delicate picture of an intimate family situation. We are introduced to Vanderk père in his home, in a room called a 'cabinet', a study which also serves as a business office. This is the ideal setting for Diderot, the small room where a man can be surrounded by his books and papers, and yet not so sedate that his family cannot feel comfortable there. Within this homely framework a number of charming 'tableaux' are presented. The guessing game played between Sophie and her parents does nothing more than give us a picture of middle-class life in the eighteenth century, and the tenderness prevalent in the family is typical of the 'drame' and of the 'tragédie bourgeoise'.

Diderot said emphatically:

Je n'y veux point de valets: les honnêtes gens ne les admettent point à la connaissance de leurs affaires; et si les scènes se passent toutes entre les maîtres, elles n'en seront que plus intéressantes...<sup>4</sup>

One of Diderot's greatest merits was this emptying of the stage of those valets and servants of classical tragedy and comedy. Sentiments seem more sincere when they can be expressed between members of a family without intermediaries. Antoine and Victorine are the only two characters of the Philosophe who can be classified as servants, and even they are considered almost as

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<sup>4</sup>

Ibid. p. 1276.

family members, judging by the trust placed in Antoine by Vanderk père and in Victorine by Vanderk fils. Nor do they serve only to explain to the audience emotions and scenes which have not been shown on the stage, for they play an active role in the play. Sedaine's play opens with a confidential scene between Antoine and Victorine where the valet is not in the least considered for his station in life or his rank in society, but as a man equal to all other men and placed in a situation common to all fathers who care for their children. Sedaine is dealing with individuals and insists that a valet can experience as profound emotions as anyone else.

In spite of these changes, Diderot and the authors who made use of his theories remained classical in several ways. Diderot would not permit a mixture of the genres, that is, an alternation of tragic and comic scenes. The 'drame' was a totally new genre with a uniform tone which was really neither comic nor tragic. Diderot believed that the three classical unities of time, place and intrigue were logical and should be observed. Thus the action of the Philosophe takes place in the twenty-four hours of classical tradition and always in the same room of Vanderk's house. The action is centred around young Vanderk's imminent duel, with Sophie's wedding serving as a contrast and Victorine's realization of love emerging as a result.

Diderot was in favour of monologues, and Sedaine accordingly applied this idea to his play, as in Act V where the first and third scenes are both short monologues by Victorine and

Esperville respectively. Act III is composed of thirteen scenes, of which no fewer than five are monologues. Both Piderot and Sedaine, then, would keep the general form of the classic theatre.

Classical too is the 'coup de théâtre' in the form of the three knocks at the door by Antoine announcing the death of Vanderk fils. This brings the sorrow in the household to its height. The physical noise in the silence of Vanderk's spent emotions never loses its effect in performance.

The common denominator of all the theories characterizing the 'drame' was the imitation of nature. The dramatist was endeavouring to put on the stage an exact representation of a bourgeois situation; he was making a theatrical adaptation of incidents borrowed from life. The production had to be as close an imitation of life as possible. Therefore in the name of reason and of nature Piderot attempted a technical revolution. He wished the stage setting to be precise, even realistic. Thus in the Philosophe, Sedaine gives a specific setting: "Le théâtre représente un grand cabinet éclairé de bougies, un secrétaire sur un des côtés; il est chargé de papiers et de cartons." Stage directions within the play are numerous so that the actors will always do the correct thing at the right moment: for example, at a certain point it is indicated that Vanderk père must put down his cane and hat and open his desk. (I,4) Similarly, when Sedaine wishes Victorine to whisper in her father's ear, he writes these directions in his text. (I,5) Characters are

constantly making signs to each other. Specific directions are even noted for facial expressions, as when Vanderk fils, after his monologue bemoaning his folly, catches sight of his father and resumes a gay expression: "Il aperçoit son père. Il reprend un air gai." (II,3) Costumes too are indicated precisely: when Vanderk fils is preparing to slip out of the house, Sedaine notes that he must be in overcoat and boots. (III,1) Material details are given even at the most pathetic moments. In the last act Vanderk has just heard the three knocks which announce his son's death, and a servant enters with the money demanded by Esparville, precisely 2400 'livres'.

As well as these visual and technical innovations, the style and play of the actors was changed. Yet the most obvious change was the abandoning of verse and the use of prose as the dramatic medium. In normal conversation people do not speak in verse, so prose had to be adopted in order to reproduce a natural conversation. Sedaine adopted this simple, direct language, of which Beaumarchais says:

Si la tragédie doit nous représenter les hommes plus grands, et la comédie moindres qu'ils ne sont réellement, l'imitation de l'un et de l'autre genre n'ayant pas une exacte vérité, leur langage n'a pas besoin d'être rigoureusement asservi aux règles de la nature...Mais le genre sérieux, qui tient le milieu entre les deux autres, devant nous montrer les hommes absolument tels qu'ils sont, ne peut pas se permettre la plus légère liberté contre le langage, les mœurs, ou le costume de ceux qu'il met en scène...Or, le premier effet de la conversation rimée, qui n'a qu'une vérité de convention, n'est-il pas de me ramener au théâtre, et de détruire par conséquent toute l'illusion qu'on a prétendu me faire? C'est dans le salon de Vanderk que j'ai tout à fait perdu de vue Prévillle et Brizard, pour ne voir que le bon Antoine et son excellent maître, et m'attendrir

véritablement avec eux. Croyez-vous que cela me fût arrivé de même, s'ils m'eussent récité des vers? 5

In moments of intense emotion people do not pronounce long, literary tirades, but rather reveal joy and despair by sighs, silences and incoherence. Victorine is left breathless by the sight of Sophie in her wedding jewels and cries: "Ah! Ils sont beaux! il y en a un gros comme cela...et mademoiselle, ah! comme elle est charmante!" (I,3). Sentences are often left half-finished and exclamatory remarks are very common. Vanderk père's words at hearing Antoine's knocks at the door are an excellent example of the half-finished sentences typical of the genre: "Monsieur, je suis flatté de votre...Je suis flatté de ce que..." (V,4). Sedaine was equally fond of simulated conversations spoken aloud, as when Esparville père pondered over the exchange of words he had had with his son (V,3). Sedaine believed that we naturally repeat important conversations in our minds, and that their portrayal on stage would render a play an even closer imitation of reality. The conversation must obviously be repeated aloud so that the audience may participate.

One of the main claims of the 'drame' was a strong morality. Diderot wrote of this:

Le parterre de la comédie est le seul endroit où les larmes de l'homme vertueux et du méchant soient confondues. Là, le

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Beaumarchais, Essai sur le genre sérieux, in Oeuvres complètes de Beaumarchais, ed. Louis Moland (Paris: Garnier, n.d.), pp. 5-6.

méchant s'irrite contre les injustices qu'il aurait commises, compatit à des maux qu'il aurait occasionnés, et s'indigne contre un homme de son propre caractère. Mais l'impression est reçue; elle demeure en nous, malgré nous; et le méchant sort de sa loge, moins disposé à faire le mal, que s'il eût été gourmandé par un orateur sévère et dur.

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After the first performance of the Philosophe, Diderot said:

"...je lui disais: "Il faut que je sois un honnête homme, car je sens vivement tout le mérite de cet ouvrage..."<sup>7</sup> This statement quite represents the ideal result of the 'drame' whose object was to touch the bourgeoisie by a tableau of its own 'condition' and to reach the good-at-heart by a display of worthy sentiments. Diderot's reaction is a stereotype: if one is an honourable man then one must be stirred by honour, and vice versa. Diderot said that this penetrating moral must be "générale et forte".<sup>8</sup> Sedaine too, despite his feeling for the theatre, fell at times into these moralising tendencies. He was keenly preoccupied with raising the bourgeoisie to its deserved level of respect, as well as displaying the high quality of morals in a bourgeois father. Consequently one of the main ideas underlying the play is the rehabilitation of work be-

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Diderot, De la poésie dramatique, in Extraits, notes par Joseph Texte, (Paris: Hachette, 1909), p. 96.

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Diderot, Correspondance, ed. Georges Roth (Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1959), V, 206.

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Troisième Entretien, p. 1277.



cause this will give the hard-working bourgeoisie the admiration it deserves; the second is the portrayal of a duel, during the course of which the strong character of a middle-class father will be developed. Speaking through Vanderk père, Sedaine gives a discourse on the merit of commerce and the important place in society of the honest merchant. This discourse has the ring of a sermon, and is too didactic and moralizing to appear very natural, and therefore convincing. On the other hand, his attack on the duel is handled with discretion and is the background for the character development of the main persons. Sedaine obviously was not defending the duel, as the undiscerning censors mistakenly believed. He was showing how a foolish institution could ravage a family who believed in the sacredness of a promise. One of the two main intentions accomplished by Sedaine in the play is, therefore, a heavy-handed portrayal and defense of a middle-class 'condition', while the other is the skilful painting of a father's character through a seeming attack on the duel.

It would have been easy for Sedaine to have made of Victorine a romanesque heroine and to attack, in the name of the love between Victorine and Vanderk fils, the prejudices of birth and fortune. The son of a merchant would have married the daughter of a valet and this would have been a homage to equality. We have instead a delicate sketch of ingenuous love and Sedaine stops at the point where this love could be used for moralizing purposes. The reader feels, on the whole, that if

Sedaine often adopted a moralising tone, he did so unconsciously, for in the case of *Victorine* and *Vanderk* fils the author intentionally stopped himself from becoming didactic.

The reasons for the success of the Philosophe deserve discussion. Its outstanding success rests largely not on Sedaine's faithful adherence to the rules outlined for the genre in which he was writing, but on the individual merit of the play. Sedaine's flair for the theatre, his instinctive feeling for drama, separates the Philosophe from the many other plays of the same period which were written according to the same rules yet emerged dull and lifeless. The remarkable achievement of the play, then, is due to the dramatic art of the author. To study Sedaine's art is to dissociate the Philosophe from the movement it represents and to examine its merit as it stands alone. Sedaine's dramatic style, of course, has its faults as well as its merits. Eighteenth-century audiences were almost oblivious to the weaknesses of the Philosophe, so that broadly speaking its success can be attributed to Sedaine's style.

Diderot sought to illustrate his theories by two plays, the Fils Naturel of 1757 and the Père de famille of 1758, yet it was Sedaine's play which created the domestic tragedy and ensured the success of the 'drame' as a genre. Part of its value can be attributed to the fact that the play is very representative of its period. The revolution of the eighteenth-century way of life is apparent in the importance given to

commerce and in the emphasis placed on the good sense of the principal character. The Philosophe announced the emancipation of the bourgeoisie while also offering a sort of bourgeois poetry in the uprightness of a merchant and in the serious love of a young servant girl. In short, the play contained what the audience wanted to see and hear.

Other plays representing the 'drame' also played directly to the middle classes by claiming to be a life-like picture of their society, yet the public realized that Diderot's two plays, for instance, were even further from nature and reality than was the tragedy whose seeming artificiality the new dramatists were trying to combat. Classical tragedy at least portrayed emotional conflict with a great deal of truth, whereas Diderot's characters waver through a series of romanesque coincidences. Alexandrines were often more natural than the unintelligible declamations one was liable to find in the 'drame', and a straightforward discourse on morality more worthy of a place on stage than moral digressions. In the Philosophe Sedaine adopts the principles of the 'drame' as proclaimed by La Chaussée and Diderot, but he excludes from his play the pathos, most of the homilies on philosophy and morals, and the sentimental verbosity which stifled other plays, leaving only simplicity and good sense.

This simplicity is the outstanding feature and the merit of the Philosophe. In this century of wit and declamation Sedaine represents something that does not become outmoded - Nature. Vol-

taire recognized this trait and wrote to Sedaine:

Je ne connais personne qui entende le théâtre mieux que vous, et qui fasse parler ses acteurs avec plus de naturel. C'est un grand art que de rendre les hommes heureux pendant deux heures. Car, n'en déplaise à MM. de Port-Royal, c'est être heureux que d'avoir du plaisir: vous devez aussi en avoir beaucoup en faisant de si jolies choses. 9

Sedaine's people do not content themselves with parading their sentiments; they act and live their feelings instead of talking about them. They have their own originality. The dry and ungrateful Aunt, and the gay Sophie may be only puppets, but other characters are individual and natural. There is the faithful and devoted Antoine, tender and gruff at the same time, with delicacy of heart if not sharpness of wit; Victorine, naïve and tremulous and not daring to analyse her own feelings. Original too is the unity of the character of Vanderk père, serenely and discreetly the bourgeois, the 'philosophe' and the father. It is not that the author is an acute psychologist or eloquent writer, but his characters breathe sincerity. Sedaine was able to attain this simplicity because he stayed within the world he knew. He cast his play with people among whom he lived and adhered to the small daily events with which he was acquainted.

During his lifetime Sedaine was often praised beyond his merit, but any criticism he bore was mainly for his style. It was because of his style that he failed fourteen times his can-

didacy to the French Academy, and again for his style that his inaugural address to the Academy was severely criticized. Auguste Rey tells us that Sedaine was not far from considering style a useless ornament, and he would take a year to think about a play and only a month to write it. Rey adds:

Le talent de Sedaine, si original en sa nouveauté, n'avait rien d'académique. Il ne se tirait point du développement sans peine et sans heurts, comme il l'a reconnu lui-même dans son discours de récipiendaire... Il n'aimait rien tant que remplacer des phrases par des mots, voire par des réticences et des jeux de scène; il ne connut l'abondance que des points suspensifs. Il eut nombre de mots heureux, mais d'autres qui trahissaient son impuissance. 10

Time after time the reader sees speeches trail off in a series of dots, as in Vanderk's lines: "Au milieu de la joie la plus légitime... Antoine ne vient pas... Je voyais devant moi toutes les misères humaines... Je m'y tenais préparé... La mort même... Mais ceci... Et que dire? Ah! ciel!" (IV,3). Yet it may well be argued that Sedaine was merely reflecting the banality of the language which most people speak. He was striving to put natural characters on the stage, and the average person very rarely speaks eloquently. Sedaine's style certainly is not academic, but one hardly expects a middle-class merchant to speak at all times as though he were addressing an assembly of the Academy. Sedaine's refusal to place smooth-flowing phrases in the mouths of his characters may in fact figure largely in the success of

the play. The best-known example of Sedaine's lack of desire to express himself concisely in a complete sentence is Vanderk père's expression: "Je me suis couché le plus tranquille, le plus heureux des pères, et me voilà!" Vanderk's tragic line is not grammatically complete but it reveals the intensity of his emotion far better than a perfectly constructed, well-planned sentence would have done. The audience realizes it is facing people whose language, sometimes careless and often incoherent, is the same as its own. It is not important whether Sedaine was frustrated by language, as he was accused by the Academicians, or whether he chose to express himself in this manner. In any case, he achieved the style which best suited his subject.

The language Sedaine gives his characters is more or less indicative of their stations in life. Vanderk père representing the man of commerce speaks with a certain pomposity, as when defending his 'condition', but this tone is an exception in the play. In general the characters use short phrases, words in every-day use, and they do not speak the polished language of the court. In short, they speak as they think, quickly and without considering that a certain phrase would be more sonorous if put in a different way. Their dialogue does not sound as if it had been written. Conversations run naturally, burdened neither with learned expressions nor long digressions.

As well as being attacked for the lack of lustre and variety in his language, Sedaine was criticized for the medio-

crity of his thought. Brunetière writes:

Mais je crains, Messieurs, qu'à la représentation même, vous ne soyez frappés de la faiblesse du style, et surtout de la faiblesse de la pensée de Sedaine. En vérité, vous trouverez son apologie du commerce un peu naïve, un peu puérile, j'en ai peur... Le pauvre Sedaine paie ici les lacunes de son éducation première, et jamais homme n'eut moins que lui cette faculté du véritable écrivain, qui est comme de changer tout ce qu'il touche en universel. 11

Sedaine's pretensions do not go so far as to make of Vanderk père the universal merchant, that is, that Vanderk should be the type and model of every generation. The author really wants only to give us the gentleman of the age he knew, and he succeeds admirably in doing so. Brunetière hastily makes amends saying: "La sensibilité de Sedaine n'a généralement rien de trop déclamatoire, et son naturel, souvent naïf, est d'ailleurs parfait." 12

La Harpe reproaches Sedaine for falling into insipidity with tiny details. 13 Hé finds childish, for example, Sophie's little masquerade before her father on the eve of her wedding day. However, this lightheartedness provides a good contrast with the sorrowful explanation which is going to take place between the father and the son who confesses to a duel. Sedaine

11 Ferdinand Brunetière, Les Époques du théâtre français (Paris: Hachette, 1896), p. 301.

12 Ibid. p. 302

13 See above, p. 15.

purposely opens his play on a note of gaiety and playfulness so that the audience will be all the more impressed by the seriousness of the misfortune about to befall the family. In addition, as has already been pointed out, seemingly useless details and family scenes are a necessary part of the 'tableau' of bourgeois life that Sedaine is painting. These scenes which add little to the general design of the action are important as character observations and as action scenes of intimate family life. We know that Sedaine's greatest preoccupation was the analysis of this life.

Events which initially seem meaningless fall into place and lead to a well-planned ending. For example, at the beginning of the play Esparville's servant announces the arrival of his master. Although the man does not appear until the last act, we await his arrival feeling that his appearance may well provide a 'coup de théâtre'. Thus the first scene loses its episodic character, and also serves to create tension. Similarly, the watch given to Vanderk fils by Sophie in the first act is so slight an episode that it could almost be overlooked, then with the progression of the action Vanderk fils uses the same watch to lead Victorine to his room where she will find a note explaining the circumstances of his duel. The trust built around the incident of the watch is what leads Victorine to realize that she loves Vanderk fils. Sedaine has carefully prepared and combined all the details in advance.

The very event of the wedding is the basis of the whole



play, and though it may seem insignificant in comparison with the intensity of emotion caused by the duel, its presence is very necessary as a background. Young Vanderk's duel would have ravaged the family in any case, but that it should take place on his sister's wedding day makes the situation completely grotesque. Sedaine wisely presents the wedding at the beginning of the play, discreetly giving the audience a happy occasion to which all the events of the play would refer in contrast. Sedaine, then, has cleverly used the wedding for three purposes: as a 'tableau' of a middle-class family, as an ironic contrast to the sorrow caused by the duel, and as an event which remains subtly behind the action of the whole play.

There is no doubt that Sedaine has a gift for the theatre, but that is not to say that his dramatic style is above reproach. Firstly, while his use of the monologue is quite in keeping with the theories of the 'drame', the audience begins to tire of them when subjected to one after another, and Sedaine gives us too great a concentration of monologues. There are three in Act II, five in Act III, three in Act IV, and three in the final act. The play definitely tends toward melodrama with many people coming on stage in close succession to deliver a short soliloquy on their feelings.

While it may be very natural for people to speak in bursts of passion by beginning sentences with "Ah! dieu!" and "Ah! ciel!", the repetition of such exclamatory phrases becomes

very tiresome. The number of times Sedaine uses "Ah!" throughout the Philosophe cannot even be counted; in the first four scenes alone of Act V the word is repeated a dozen times, and even individual speeches of a mere four lines are broken by several exclamatory words. One of the many examples of this misuse of language is Asperville's speech: "Restez, restez, monsieur, je vous en prie, vous avez affaire! Ah! le brave homme! Ah! l'honnête homme! monsieur, mon sang est à vous; restez, restez, restez, je vous en supplie " (V,4). Sedaine does not go so far as to have people dropping on their knees as they incessantly do in the 'comédie larmoyante', but his characters frequently register their emotion by falling into chairs, or having to lean on them. When Vanderk père discovers that his son is about to fight a duel, he can only say: "Ah! mon fils!" and the technical instructions are: "en s'appuyant sur le dos d'une chaise " (III,7). Again, after Antoine's false report of the death of Vanderk fils, Vanderk's reaction to the abrupt arrival of the musicians is the words: "Que voulez-vous? Ah! ciel!" with the stage instructions: "Il les regarde en frémissant et se renverse dans son fauteuil " (V,6). Certainly Sedaine did not descend to the melodrama of Mivelle de La Chaussée, but in these scenes he comes near to it.

Certain incidents which happen in the play are rather exaggerated. Antoine announcing the death of Vanderk fils cries out: "Mort! mort! J'ai vu sauter son chapeau. Mort!" (V,8). A few scenes later the young man walks onstage, quite unharmed

except for a bullet-hole through his hat (V,12). Sedaine has too greatly exaggerated the dramatic potential of this incident and the result is sheer melodrama. The outcome of the play itself is quite incredible. The reader questions the likelihood of Vanderk fils suddenly coming to his senses on the battlefield - after a shot has been fired and conveniently missed its target - and following this situation, the credibility of Esparville's ready assent to cancel the duel.

Although each scene in the Philosophe may not have any bearing on the furthering of the action, scenes such as those which comprise the whole of the first act are important for giving a picture of intimate family life in a normal bourgeois family. However, there are scenes which have nothing to do either with the plot or with the 'tableau' of middle-class life, and the most obvious of these is the final scene in Act V. Sedaine could have, and indeed should have, ended his play on the second-last scene in which the whole family is assembled, exhausted but happy and about to go to dinner. It would be fitting for the play to end on a happy family gathering. Instead, the final words to the audience are those of Antoine: "Ah! jeunes gens, jeunes gens, ne penserez-vous jamais que l'étourderie, même la plus pardonnable, peut faire le malheur de tout ce qui vous entoure?" The audience feels that if Vanderk père sometimes slips into sententiousness when addressing his son, he nevertheless has the right to do so as a father, but for Antoine to stand on stage and address the public at large reveals nothing more

than awkwardness on the part of the author. It is unfortunate that Sedaine terminates his play on the didactic note of the eighteenth-century philosophy which he has managed reasonably well to avoid through the rest of the Philosophe.

There is one final point which, although it cannot exactly be termed a fault, is an issue which Sedaine deliberately avoided. It must be remembered that the bourgeoisie did not by any means constitute the total theatre audience of eighteenth-century Paris. In the actual physical theatre it was still faced with members of a higher social class, and to a great extent the plays it saw on stage were influenced by the taste of a higher class. The date of production of the Philosophe is still twenty-five years before the Revolution and the Comédie-Française was not yet the scene of a clash between bourgeoisie and aristocracy. Sedaine wished to appeal to his middle-class audience by giving them a picture of their own lives, but at the same time he had no wish to displease the large number of nobles viewing his play. As a result the Philosophe is a combination of aristocratic characters in a bourgeois 'condition'. There is something artificial about the representation of the merchant in the person of Vanderk. His son is a naval officer, and not simply a sailor, and Vanderk himself discloses that he is of noble birth. He warmly praises the position of the merchant in society, but tempers the question by his final words: "Il n'y a peut-être que deux états..." (II,4). Lough concludes thus:

It is difficult to decide to what extent Sedaine's rather

curious choice of a nobleman as a representative type of the merchant of his day is due to the technical requirements of the plot of his play which demanded for the duel a character of noble birth, or to the prevailing tendency in comedy to depict characters drawn from the upper classes of contemporary society, but it is none the less clear that the portrayal of Vanderk is considerably modified by the social origins which Sedaine give his hero. 14

Sedaine avoided giving complete support to the bourgeoisie by this convenient arrangement of Vanderk's noble birth so as not to offend any part of his theatre audience. He refused to give an unqualified portrayal of his theory that a man's value does not depend at all on his social position.

Despite the relatively large number of flaws in Sedaine's dramatic style, he succeeded completely in a genre where Diderot and La Chaussée both failed. This was perhaps because Diderot created the bourgeois tragedy in eliminating all the comic aspects of a given situation, while Sedaine searched for what was comic alongside the serious, thus creating the serious comedy. The Philosophe is truly a serious comedy, presenting as it does a family threatened by the horror of a duel, and it is gay through the happiness of Sophie concerning her forthcoming wedding. Sedaine did not break from the traditional conflict of characters, personified by the good and firm father whose character often clashes with that of his impetuous son. In sum, Sedaine translated the mood of a period, but with a natural and moderate tone.

## VI. PERFORMANCES AND PUBLICATION

The first performance of the Philosophe at the Comédie-Française on December 2, 1765 was a memorable one. The play was applauded enthusiastically by the public, who responded to the portrayal of subdued and simple emotions and to the straightforward style. Sighs of appreciation rose in the audience at the words: "Je me suis couché le plus tranquille, le plus heureux des pères, et me voilà!" The critics were not quite as unanimous in their approval as was the public, and Bachaumont was especially spiteful. But what enthusiasm the Philosophe aroused in the camp of the 'philosophes'! Grimm's admiration was relatively mild and reasonable, but Diderot was exuberant. The evening after the première he replied to Grimm's letter<sup>1</sup> in the following effusive words:

...une chose dont vous ne me parlez point et qui est pour moi le mérite incroyable de la pièce, ce qui me fait tomber le bras, me décourage, me dispense d'écrire de ma vie, et m'excusera solidement au jugement dernier, c'est le naturel sans aucun apprêt, c'est l'éloquence la plus vigoureuse sans l'ombre d'effort ni de rhétorique ...Oui, mon ami, oui, voilà le vrai goût, voilà la vérité domestique, voilà la chambre, voilà les actions et les propos des honnêtes gens, voilà la comédie. 2

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<sup>1</sup> See above, p. 10.

<sup>2</sup> Correspondance, V, 205-6.

Palissot, as was to be expected, remarked with disdain:

Il n'est pas impossible qu'entraînées par l'art des acteurs, quelques personnes raisonnables n'aient pleuré, soit au Philosophe sans le savoir, soit au Déserteur, de Sedaine; mais à la réflexion, elles n'ont pas dû se sentir moins étonnées que ne l'est un homme d'esprit qui se surprend à rire d'un mauvais jeu de mots, ou d'un pitoyable calembour. 3

The play was given seven performances during that month of December 1765 and no fewer than twenty-four in 1766, a figure outstanding for the period. During the first half of the eighteenth century the average successful play reached only twenty or twenty-five performances and fifteen to twenty thousand spectators.<sup>4</sup> Voltaire's plays were given a phenomenal reception by the public: for example, his Oedipe was given thirty times in the space of three months in 1718 and attracted twenty-five thousand spectators, and in 1732 Zaire reached thirty performances in the first run with twenty-seven thousand paying spectators. Towards the second half of the century theatre audiences were changing, and in 1763 Grimm spoke thus of the success of La Harpe's tragedy Warwick: "Elle aura vraisemblablement quinze représentations, et c'est aujourd'hui le plus haut degré de gloire auquel un poète puisse prétendre."<sup>5</sup> The only play in

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<sup>3</sup> Palissot, Mémoires sur la littérature; quoted in Classique Larousse, p. 79.

<sup>4</sup> Lough, Paris Theatre Audiences, p. 178.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid. p. 180.

this period of 1750 to 1774 which attained a success anywhere near that of Voltaire's remarkable runs was Inhigénie en Tau-ride of Guimond de la Touche, which between July 1757 and February 1758 was performed twenty-seven times to twenty-seven thousand spectators. Thus Sedaine's Philosophe, seen by twenty-one thousand spectators in its thirty-one performances from December 1765 to June 1766, enjoyed an outstanding run by these standards. It is interesting to note that most other successful plays of the period did far less well than the Philosophe. Palissot's Les Philosophes, often lauded as being a very successful play, was given only fourteen times in 1760 to fewer than thirteen thousand spectators. Voltaire's quick reply to Palissot, L'Ecossaïse, fared better with its twenty-one performances, and Sedaine's play was considerably better again.

The popularity of the play is further attested by its frequent translations. Oliver mentions having seen translations<sup>6</sup> in German, English, Italian and Danish, and there may well be translations in other languages which are difficult to detect because the title of the play was frequently changed or paraphrased.

The actual date of the publication of Sedaine's play has never been successfully settled. For a long time the first edition was believed to have been that of 1765 and this error

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<sup>6</sup>  
Le Philosophe sans le savoir: Variorum and critical edition, ed. T.J. Oliver (Urbana-Champaign, Illinois University Press, 1913), p. 16.



was transmitted even to Gaiffe's Le Drame en France au 18e siècle. Oliver points out that the proof of this error can be found in the Correspondance littéraire of Grimm in a letter dated December 15, 1765: "...cette charmante pièce qui ne sera pas peut-être imprimée si tôt."<sup>7</sup> Hence the play was obviously not printed until after 1765. For his critical edition of the play Oliver bases his research on the first Paris edition of 1766 with appendix and the second Paris edition of 1766 with the same appendix. According to Oliver, the term "appendix" must be used because the editions without it offer only the text forced upon Sedaine by the police censorship, and the appendix contains scenes as they were before cutting or changing, in case the play should be performed outside France. These are the only two editions containing an appendix published in Paris in the lifetime of Sedaine. The only other edition which contains an appendix is a pirated edition published in Geneva prior to 1766. Consequently the reader is faced with choosing between the first Paris edition of 1766 and a pirated edition in Geneva, if he wishes to establish the exact date of the first edition.

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<sup>7</sup> Oliver, p. 49.

## VII. POSTSCRIPT

The popularity enjoyed by the Philosophe is emphasized by a contemporary imitation of the play, the Première Affaire by Merville, and by a suite written fully one hundred years later. The well-known continuation of Sedaine's play is Le Mariage de Victorine by George Sand, first presented November 26, 1861 at the Théâtre du Gymnase and later at the Comédie-Française on March 7, 1876, following a performance of the Philosophe.<sup>1</sup> George Sand made slight changes in some of the characters, but in general the plot of her play is a direct continuation from Sedaine's. The intrigue of Le Mariage de Victorine is as follows: Antoine wishes to marry his daughter Victorine to Fulgence, an employee of Vanderk. Fulgence has a suspicious and jealous nature, and despite his awareness of Victorine's inclination for Vanderk fils, insists that they marry quickly and move far away from the family. Victorine resigns herself sadly to this marriage. Antoine approves heartily of their union but Vanderk père, still keenly perceptive of the emotions in his family, decides to isolate his son from the situation by sending him on a long business trip to Paris. Time passes,

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<sup>1</sup>  
Classique Larousse, p. 85.

and the strength of his passion draws Vanderk fils back from Paris to hide at the home of his sister Sophie. Fulgence discovers him and in a jealous rage assembles the whole family in order to declare his intention to break with Victorine. Despite Antoine's scruples, Victorine and Vanderk fils will be married.

Strictly speaking, all Sand's characters are quite recognizable as those drawn by Sedaine, but minor personality changes have been made. Antoine, for instance, is much more brusque and authoritative than we see him in the Philosophe, and Victorine displays a stronger character than in the glimpse Sedaine gives of the young girl. The characterization of Fulgence is weakly done for the young man is never consistent in his actions: at times the reader feels that he is merely a jealous and spiteful person, while at certain moments one has the impression that he truly loves Victorine and is powerless and desperate against the Vanderk family closing in on him. On the whole, Le Mariage is more melodramatic than the Philosophe. George Sand has provided a charming ending to a love story which Sedaine deliberately left unfinished, but the reader wonders if in Sedaine's century the social barriers between a servant girl and a noble might have been so easily broken down.

An important imitation of the play is the Première Affaire of Merville. Jules Janin believes it is preposterous even to compare this play with the Philosophe:

Autant l'ouvrage de Sedaine est fin, délié, habile, autant la comédie de M. Merville est grossière et brutale. Le duel

de Sedaine est un duel de gentilhomme et de bonne compagnie, le duel de M. Merville est un duel d'estaminet et d'hôtel garni, il sent la pipe et l'eau-de-vie. 2

The principal character in the Première Affaire is a young student, just recently graduated from the Ecole Polytechnique, who is travelling with his infirm mother and his young cousin with whom he is in love. In the hotel where they are staying the family encounters a very disreputable man from the provinces, the very type of the idle gambler, and altogether a man with whom a gentleman would not associate himself. This coffee-house bravo has already slain five or six fine young men and is quite proud of it. He is like a wild beast and deserves to die the kind of death he hands out with such carelessness. It is our young student who takes the law into his hands and kills the brigand.

The lesson and interest of this 'drame' are difficult to uncover. Sedaine admits that a duel promised between two gentlemen must be upheld, but Merville is arguing the necessity of the duel between a respectable young man, loved by his mother and cousin, and the first ruffian who offers an opportunity for some bloodshed. The duel has been dragged down to a level where it is only a caprice between two strangers. Instead of a duel taking place in defense of a promise foolishly made by two headstrong young men, as is the duel in the Philosophe,

Merville reduces it to simple murder. Merville's duel could have been the occasion to degrade the brigand, to distinguish the serious duel from the duel without a basis, to separate the necessary duel from the useless one. The subject could have provided a good 'drame', but it is merely a melodrama.

A survey of reactions of literary critics to the Philosophe from the time of its presentation to the present day shows that the play, while obviously not maintaining its enthusiastic popularity of 1766, has always aroused moderate praise. The response to the play by Sedaine's contemporaries has already been noted through the literary correspondance of Diderot and Voltaire.<sup>3</sup> Bachaumont proved himself to be one of the most discerning of Sedaine's critics for he placed his finger accurately and without hesitation on several of the play's faults, in the words:

Quant aux situations intéressantes qui ont affecté quelques âmes plus susceptibles, elles ont manqué leur objet, en général, parce qu'elles sont forcées, et que n'étant point le résultat du concours et du choc des passions, on y voit perpétuellement l'auteur qui s'efforce et se démène en tout sens pour les amener .<sup>4</sup>

At the same time, however, Bachaumont realized the value of the play and expressed it concisely in a few words:

Le mérite de la pièce est d'avoir des caractères assez soutenus, beaucoup de naturel dans le dialogue, et de

<sup>3</sup> See above, p. 73, and p. 63, respectively.

<sup>4</sup> Mémoires secrets, p. 267.

présenter des images naïves de ce qui se passe dans l'intérieur des familles. Le jeu supérieur des acteurs n'a pas peu contribué à une illusion que doit détruire la lecture. 5

Bachaumont is the first critic to mention the actual performance of the actors, and if the play aroused such unqualified approval on the part of Diderot, it was to a great extent due to the ability of the actors.

Voltaire was slightly more reserved in his praise of the Philosophe and six months after the first performance expressed this careful judgment:

Le Philosophe sans le savoir, mon cher ami, n'est pas à la vérité une pièce faite pour être relue, mais bien pour être rejouée. Jamais pièce, à mon gré, n'a dû favoriser davantage le jeu des acteurs; et il faut que l'auteur ait une parfaite connaissance de ce qui doit plaire sur le théâtre. Mais on ne relit que les ouvrages remplis de belles tirades, de sentences ingénieuses et vraies, en un mot, de choses éloquentes et intéressantes. 6

The nineteenth and twentieth centuries are not lacking in criticism of the Philosophe, proof of the play's continuing ability to arouse comment. After speaking of the weakness of Sedaine's style, Brunetière concludes:

Enfin, Messieurs, et surtout, nous sommes en présence ici non plus d'une imagination d'auteur, mais d'une véritable imitation de la réalité, d'un sujet où le romanesque, s'il est encore dans les sentiments, n'est pas du moins dans l'intrigue ni dans la combinaison des événements. Ce pourrait être notre histoire à tous, aux environs de vingt ans, que celle du jeune M. Vanderk; et, - n'était une espèce de

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Ibid.p. 267.

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Correspondence, LXI, 2: letter to Damilaville, dated April 1, 1766.

de solennité bourgeoise qu'il mêle à tout ce qu'il dit, comme aussi bien à tout ce qu'il éprouve, - nous ressemblons tous plus ou moins à son père. Sedaine était donc dans la vraie voie, dans la bonne, celle de l'imitation de la réalité, en dehors ou à côté de laquelle il ne pouvait pas y avoir de salut pour le drame. 7

Gaiffe, in his detailed study of the 'drame', devoted many pages to Sedaine, and his conclusion again contains the highest praise:

Ce que Marivaux analyse par le menu en de subtils dialogues, ce que Diderot et Mercier délayent en d'interminables tirades, Sedaine le condense en une réplique derrière laquelle l'esprit du spectateur reconstitue toute une suite d'idées qui tourneraient sans doute à la banalité si elles étaient exprimées tout au long, mais à qui le raccourci donne une force et une saveur insoupçonnée. Il peut ainsi faire plus court avec une matière plus abondante; il évite de laisser le drame dégénérer en un cours de philosophie dialoguée, il donne l'impression du concret, du vivant: il fait du théâtre. 8

Gustave Lanson, writing at the end of the nineteenth century, is somewhat less appreciative of the Philosophe than his predecessors:

Avec un peu de complaisance, je mettrais Sedaine en compagnie de Marivaux et de Beaumarchais. Le Philosophe sans le savoir est une bonne pièce, assez vraie, assez vivante, assez tout ce qui peut être une bonne pièce, et rien avec l'intensité qui fait les oeuvres supérieures. Elle n'a point de dessous profonds, et n'est pas matière à de longues rêveries. Cependant le voisinage de Figaro la met en valeur. Sedaine et Beaumarchais ont dressé à la scène deux types qui ne disparaîtront pas de longtemps de notre société:

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Les Brogues du théâtre français, p. 302.

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Félix Gaiffe, Le Drame en France au dix-huitième siècle (Paris: A. Colin, 1910), p. 337.

les gens obscurs, qui travaillent; les gens bruyants, qui parviennent. 9

A modern-day evaluation of the Philosophe is that of Jasinski:

Véritable tragédie domestique, elle glorifiait une grandeur d'âme assez spontanée pour s'ignorer elle-même. Accessoirement, elle plaidait pour le commerce contre la morgue nobiliaire, exaltait l'honneur en suggérant une adroite apologie du duel. D'autre part elle présentait des personnages attachants, avivait le dialogue, créait une atmosphère attendrie et néanmoins pathétique, en ménageant savamment les contrastes et les progressions. A tous égards elle pouvait séduire les contemporains. Sans trop d'éclats mélodramatiques ou moralisateurs, elle peut encore évoquer pour nous les mœurs et les vertus bourgeoises du 18<sup>e</sup> siècle. 10

It is clear, then, that once the immediate quarrels of philosophy, politics and law were left behind, the critics have consistently recognized both the merits and faults of the Philosophe. Each century in turn has seen and praised the essentially theatrical nature of the play which has made it a continuing success in the classic repertoire.

Günther has carefully compiled a yearly list of performances of the Philosophe, giving statistics from 1765 to the early twentieth century.<sup>11</sup> He draws his figures from Joannidès' La Comédie Française depuis 1680 à 1900, and the performances indicate that Sedaine's play has continued to appeal to an

9  
Gustave Lanson, La Comédie au dix-huitième siècle (Paris: Lecène, Oudin et Cie., 1895), p. 249.

10  
René Jasinski, Histoire de la littérature française (Paris: Boivin, 1947), II, 171.

11  
L'Œuvre dramatique de Sedaine, p. 336.



audience through nearly a century and a half. The success of the Philosophe, after its initial remarkable popularity, has not been enormous, but nevertheless the play has not been completely dated. After its thirty-one performances from December 1765 to December 1766, it enjoyed eleven in the following year and from one to six performances yearly until 1800. Some of the years in the nineteenth century were more fruitful than others: for instance, the play was produced nine times in 1810, eight times in 1815, seven times in 1852 and 1855, ten times in 1865, and had a sudden burst of twenty-one performances in 1875. There are years scattered through the century when the play was not produced at all, but these years are in the minority and rarely consecutive. These performances all took place at the Comédie-Française. In the early twentieth century the Philosophe was given once in 1906 at the Théâtre de l'Odéon, and in 1907 three times at the Odéon and five times at the Comédie-Française.

Sedaine's play is attractive to the modern audience mainly as a portrait of an average bourgeois family in the eighteenth century. The social question which it treats, namely, the importance of the merchant and the value of the bourgeoisie, and the author's study of the maintenance of honour in the light of current philosophic ideas, are no longer pertinent to twentieth-century society. This, however, does not reduce their interest, and the principles upheld in the play must always be considered in the context of the eighteenth century. On the other hand, family relations have not changed basically since

Sedaine gave his picture of the Vanderk family, and the modern spectator is aware of the similarity of that family's reactions to those he himself experiences two centuries later. Sedaine's simple and straightforward dramatic style have achieved this permanence. Paul Souday says: "Bref, ce Philosophe sans le savoir est décidément bien suranné...Ce n'est plus qu'un objet de musée."<sup>12</sup> Souday's judgment is an unfair one, for if the play is a museum-piece, it is one which the public still views with pleasure.

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<sup>12</sup>

Quoted in Classique Larousse, p. 84.

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