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## ***Comédien – Actor – Paradoxe: The Anglo-French Sources of Diderot's Paradoxe sur le comédien***

The ideas at the heart of Diderot's *Paradoxe sur le comédien* have extraordinary conceptual reach. It is my contention that they owe this reach, in part, to the work's sources. Although some research has been done into the origins of the *Paradoxe*, it is dwarfed by the quantity of writing which deals with the work's reception or its broader implications. After all, the *Paradoxe*, an open-ended dialogue that Diderot wrote and re-wrote for almost a decade, invites such treatment. Specifically, the thoughts of this text extend themselves in two ways. Firstly, beyond the figure of the actor, comparing the performer to the author or the statesman, so that it is now almost as common to find writing about the socio-political dimensions of the *Paradoxe* as it is to see it discussed as acting theory.<sup>1</sup>

Diderot's ideas, however, also possess a second kind of scope, one that is now harder to appreciate in a world where theories of performance, be they Brecht's or Stanislavski's, are used by companies and critics all over the world, but which soon becomes clear when we look at the work's predecessors. Diderot's *Paradoxe* is remarkable as a piece of eighteenth-century writing about acting which aims to give an authoritative account of both the importance of a nation's own theatrical culture and those qualities common to great actors that precede localisation. To speak, in other words, as clearly about the mental processes of David Garrick at Drury Lane as it does about those of La Clairon (Claire Joséphe Hippolyte de La Tude) at the Comédie française. This is different from the comparisons between the English and French stages that predate the *Paradoxe*, one of which constitutes the work's starting point.

Premier begins the dialogue by being coaxed into naming the flaws of Antoine-Fabio Sticotti's *Garrick, ou les acteurs anglois*, first published in 1769, and dismantled by Diderot for the *Correspondance littéraire* in his 'Observations sur Garrick...' (1770), a short piece that would grow through the 1770s into the full *Paradoxe*. What Diderot soon shows with Sticotti's text is that its way of comparing English and French acting is inadequate, since it has failed to find a language for describing the actor's craft that takes into account the differences between the two countries' theatrical cultures. As Premier puts it, Sticotti was blind to the fact that "the technical terms of the stage are so broad and so vague that men of judgment, and of diametrically opposite views, yet find in them the light of conviction."<sup>2</sup> The new ideas of the *Paradoxe* – that the best actors have "no sensibility" and that they perform according to a *modèle idéal* of their rôle – are announced soon after this passage and represent not only a departure from the idea that the best actors are the most feeling but also a higher order approach to the question of how a performer performs, one that avoids the errors of Sticotti. Thinking in terms of emotional constitution and the reflexivity it permits reveals to the reader that while Garrick and Clairon do not act in the same way or in the same context, they nevertheless both possess the mark of the great performer, rigorous self-control and the ability to form and act out a *fantôme* of their part. Such thinking gives the *Paradoxe* part of its grand scope, its ability to make repeated and unstrained references to Clairon and to Garrick throughout the dialogue, for both the English actor and the French actress possess what Diderot claims as the "qualities above all necessary to an actor": to have inside oneself "an unmoved and disinterested onlooker" and to possess "penetration and no sensibility" (7).<sup>3</sup>

The originality of Diderot's arguments has been the subject of some debate. A 2009 article by Michael Shortland describes, for example, the shortcomings of eighteenth-century acting theory to deal with new developments in performance style, resulting ultimately in what he calls "Diderot's break with the recent past, that is, specifically with 'Sir' John Hill's text and those written within the same framework."<sup>4</sup> Against

this comment, we might set Sabine Chaouche's argument, in her *La philosophie de l'acteur* (2007), that there is no originality in Diderot's "*modèle imaginaire*", as French theoreticians had been urging the actor to imagine his character with a cool head since the 1740s.<sup>5</sup> Both arguments have merit: Chaouche is right to connect Diderot with his predecessors, if wrong to do so exclusively within a French context. Shortland, on the other hand, correctly identifies that the framework for discussing actors was present in England as well as France, but, by describing a "break" between Diderot and John Hill, simplifies what is in fact a complex relationship.

Research conducted by Jacques Chouillet in the 1970s shows that the work of the ex-actor and botanist John Hill was connected to the *Paradoxe* through a remarkable chain of Anglo-French transmission, starting with a work by Rémond de Sainte-Albine called *Le comédien*, which was published in 1747 and translated by Hill into English as *The Actor* in 1750.<sup>6</sup> Hill then reworked the text five years later and republished it under the same title. This 1755 version of *The Actor* was translated by Sticotti as *Garrick, ou les acteurs anglois* so that Diderot's *Paradoxe*, by responding to Sticotti, appears to construct its remarkably wide-ranging ideas as a wholesale rejection of common-places passed between England and France for thirty years. While it is certainly true that Diderot brought much that was new to thinking about performance, the importance of Sticotti should not be underestimated, since his work presented Diderot not with common-places but with a provocative translation of a fusion between Hill's thinking and Sainte-Albine's. It is the contention of this article that the passage of French ideas about acting through England on their way to Diderot was an important contributing factor to the genesis of the *Paradoxe*, and particularly to the scope of the work. To do this, it will first be necessary to show that Diderot was responding to Sticotti with greater precision than the rapid dismissal at the opening of the *Paradoxe* would have us believe. After this, three important changes made by Hill, and relayed to Diderot through Sticotti will be studied: first, a change in the way the topic of an actor's "sensibility" is approached; second, Hill's proposal of a "general sensibility"; and third, a shift in the understanding of the relation between actor and author. The first two of these points connect with the way in which, by building a new language for describing the actor's craft, Diderot is able to theorise at a level above national boundaries. The third innovation of Hill, regarding the author, anticipates and illuminates the *Paradoxe's* conceptual capacity to reach beyond the figure of the actor as well as beyond its immediate cultural context.

## I

How closely was Diderot reading Sticotti? There are, after all, sufficient parallels between many of the ideas in the *Paradoxe* and other texts by Diderot from the last decades of his life to make it plausible that no more than a cursory reading of *Garrick, ou les acteurs anglois* was necessary to set things in motion. The *Neveu de Rameau* has a critique of Clairon's "artificial" style, as well as a brief passage connecting pantomime on stage and in society.<sup>7</sup> The *Rêve de d'Alembert* describes a state analogous to that of the performing actor, wrapped in the colossus of his or her conception, and even points out that keeping one's self-possession is the mark of "a great king, statesman, politician, artist and especially a great actor".<sup>8</sup> In spite of these connections and others between the *Paradoxe* and Diderot's writing, there is nevertheless strong evidence for a careful reading of Sticotti's work as well, one that would be sensitive to the kind of tensions that the preceding Anglo-French transmission had encoded within it. This evidence is clearest with regard to love.

Love appears again and again in the *Paradoxe*. When Diderot began the process of expanding his 'Observations sur *Garrick...*', he replaced, for example, the assertion that the best actor is "one who is cold, who is self-possessed, who is master of his face, voice, actions and movements" (my translation), with a

passage in which Premier sketches a particular version of a scene from Molière's *Le Dépit amoureux*.<sup>9</sup> In this version, we read not only the lines from Molière's play but also a whispered dialogue carried on between the two actors playing the lovers Eraste and Lucile. These actors are married, and their relationship is so different from that of Molière's characters that, in order for this scene to work, both actors must have such total control over themselves that all their mutual animosity does not disturb the performance.

THE ACTOR No, no, madam, do not think that I have come to speak to you again of my passion...

THE ACTRESS I advise you to.

THE ACTOR ...it is all over...

THE ACTRESS I hope so.

THE ACTOR ...I am resolved to cure myself. I know how little share I have in your heart.

THE ACTRESS More than you deserve.

...

THE ACTOR But no matter, since your hatred repulses a heart which love brings back to you, this is the last time you shall ever be troubled by the man you so much despise.

THE ACTRESS You might have made the favour complete, sir, and spared me also this last trouble.

THE ACTOR *Sweetheart, you are insolent, and you shall live to repent this.* (32-34, modified)<sup>10</sup>

A little after this, Premier tells us of how the furious actress gets back at her husband by organising a date with her lover, another actor, whilst she and he perform a scene from later in the same play. Both episodes are prefaced with an insistence on how much the audience, ignorant of the actors' own intrigues, enjoys this performance of Molière's text. The actors, we are told, "surpassed themselves", while "continual bursts of applause from pit and boxes" interrupted the scene ten times (32).<sup>11</sup> As Pierre Frantz has argued, this passage is part of a larger interest in the role of the audience, since here it is the warm credulity of the spectators that is as much the subject of observation as the cool feelings of the actors.<sup>12</sup> Yet this does not explain why Diderot continues to return to love elsewhere in the *Paradoxe*, this time describing the opposite situation to that of those behind Eraste and Lucile:

An actor has a passion for an actress; they come together by chance in a stage scene of jealousy. If the actor is poor the scene will be improved; if he is a great player it will lose out... (48, modified)<sup>13</sup>

This amounts to a paraphrase of the central thesis of the *Paradoxe*: a great actor would be unable to undertake his usual excision of all personal feeling when performing such a scene with his beloved and so the spectacle would suffer; meanwhile, the actor who relies on emotion will benefit from his personal feelings to create a better show than usual. More than another example of the reiterative tendency of Diderot's dialogue, however, these examples based on love respond to a specific topos of acting theory, which goes back at least as far as Sainte-Albine, and, crucially, is rendered by Sticotti in terms that both take into account and accentuate Hill's infusion of his thought into the topic.

Rémond de Sainte-Albine produced in 1747 what Daniel Larlham has called “the first practical-theoretical treatise in the French language devoted entirely to the art of the theatrical performer.”<sup>14</sup> The fourth chapter of the work informs us that “persons born to love should solely have the privilege of performing the roles of lovers” (my translation).<sup>15</sup> Love, in Sainte-Albine's view, is distinct from other emotions performed on the stage, since it is impossible to act it “without being sensitive to its moments of weakness” (103).<sup>16</sup> When someone who knows love performs love, it adds beauties to the physiognomy and corrects its faults (106), but anyone who tries the part of a lover without such sensitivity to love's effects will not achieve this and so fail, producing nothing more than the “cold simpering” of a prostitute (103).<sup>17</sup> Love is then a key example for Sainte-Albine in a work which, to quote Allison Grear, “represents the apogee of ... emotionally-based theory of acting in its sustained and nearly exclusive emphasis on the role of feeling in acting”.<sup>18</sup> Given this, it is hardly surprising that Diderot would illustrate the cold self-control of the great actor with anecdotes and thoughts about love on stage: the *philosophe* is showing his ability to challenge the established thinking at what should be its strongest point.

Patrick Tort has shown, however, that Diderot did not know the arguments of Sainte-Albine first-hand, and so must have instead received this target from Sticotti after its transmission via England.<sup>19</sup> In his 1750 edition of *The Actor*, John Hill translated chapter four of *Le comédien* faithfully under the title “Players who are naturally amorous, are the only ones who should perform the parts of lovers upon the stage”.<sup>20</sup> Hill's only change is to add the example of Susannah Cibber as Juliet, for whom “all that tenderness Shakespeare has put into the mouth of this favourite character” (116) offers an exceptional opportunity for the expression of her natural disposition to love. Following this, there are no major changes to the treatment of lovers on stage in the 1755 text of *The Actor*. Hill does, however, add the reflection that “husband and wife have seldom been observed to play the lovers well upon the stage”.<sup>21</sup> Of course, this mention of a married couple performing lovers badly immediately brings Diderot's example of Eraste and Lucile to mind. It suggests that Diderot may have taken from Hill (via Sticotti) the idea of off-stage marital disharmony and turned it to his own ends with a differently-pointed anecdote. As for Hill, both the additions of 1750 and 1755 are the result of this author's intense efforts to keep his book up to date: Susannah Cibber was in her prime in 1750, while the mention of married couples on the stage may glance either at her own unhappy marriage to Theophilus Cibber or at other actor-couples such as Sarah and Henry Ward. Similarly, Hill's praise, here, of Shakespeare and, elsewhere, his increasing focus on Garrick (to the detriment of James Quin and John Milton) also reflect shifts in the theatrical firmament of the mid-eighteenth century in England.

When Sticotti put Hill's 1755 text into French, he clearly struggled with Hill's extensive examples from the London stage. Although the core thought of the chapter on lovers is translated (as “On the disposition to love” (my translation)), including the example of a married couple that Diderot reverses, Sticotti cuts out any mention of Susannah Cibber.<sup>22</sup> This cut is part of a wider trend that has the effect of exaggerating Garrick's prominence even further, as is aptly shown in the metonymic implications of Sticotti's new title for his translation, *Garrick ou les acteurs anglois*. As well as removing Cibber, a footnote attempts a contrast between Englishwomen who are “miracles in conjugal love” and Frenchwomen who are “prodigies in little love affairs”.<sup>23</sup> It is the kind of note that Diderot may well have had in mind when criticising Sticotti's blindness to the national context of an actor's work, and the need for theory that thought about the relation between performance and situation in a more sophisticated manner. Similarly, Sticotti's last addition to this transmitted topos of the lovers, a couplet from Boileau's *Art Poétique*, hints at the potential scope for reaching beyond the figure of the actor that Diderot will exploit: the actor should be, for Sticotti, like Boileau's author, and realise “But well these Raptures if you'll make us see, / You must know Love, as well as Poetry”.<sup>24</sup>

In this brief analysis of each text's discussion of the lovers, Diderot's close attention to Sticotti's work and its Anglo-French contents becomes clear. In choosing to reiterate the central thesis of the *Paradoxe* in terms of on-stage lovers, Diderot attacks the emotionally-based theories of acting at what, since Sainte-Albine, was supposed to be their strongest point, and twists it to his own ends. The *Paradoxe* even reverses the example of the unhappy married couple that Hill institutes in 1755 and Sticotti relays. On top of this, the changes Sticotti makes to Hill all seem rich with a potential Diderot exploits: cross-cultural comparison leads to the need for a way of understanding the actor that does not hide behind vague language for its parallels between Drury Lane and the Comédie française, and the quotation from Boileau points to a way of reaching through and beyond the figure of the actor to that of the poet. The passage of Sainte-Albine's ideas through England and then Sticotti did more, however, than complicate the topos of the lovers, for Hill's translation and adaptation of the French original also questioned the concept upon which the discussion of love was based: sensibility itself. Diderot, as he wrote the *Paradoxe*, was just as sensitive to this as well.

## II

Joseph Roach has shown that when John Hill translated Sainte-Albine, he was forced to deal with a confusion in the French text between “*sensibilité*” and “*sentiment*”.<sup>25</sup> The former is defined at the opening of a section on an actor's interior gifts as “in actors the facility of making all the diverse passions to which man is susceptible succeed one another in their souls”.<sup>26</sup> However, this opening chapter is entitled as concerning “What *sentiment* is”. The problem is that while *sensibilité* is clearly defined as how something is felt, *sentiment* can be taken to mean either what is felt (as in ‘*avoir le sentiment que...*’) and how it is felt (as in ‘*perdre le sentiment*’). This leads to such ambiguous sentences as when Sainte-Albine writes of the strictness with which we judge how the tragic actor is able to “show in each of his positions the type and degree of the *sentiment* that he must make appear to us”.<sup>27</sup> Hill's response to this problem is symptomatic of his approach to Sainte-Albine as a whole. In a move that draws on his own scientific knowledge and a larger desire for clarity in what he calls the “science” of acting, Hill replaces all instances of “*sentiment*” with “*sensibility*”. According to Roach, this change of terms fits with medical thought of the time, since Haller in England and Fouquet in France had both used ‘*sensibility*’ (or ‘*sensibilité*’) to define the innate process by which matter registers impressions.<sup>28</sup> Further, this harmonisation makes Sainte-Albine's implicit assumption of “*sensibilité*” as something innate, explicit. One simple consequence of this alteration is that neither Sticotti nor Diderot use the word “*sentiment*” as ambiguously as Sainte-Albine, and instead lay out their ideas with regard to “*sensibilité*” only.

Hill's clearer emphasis on sensibility as an innate process has broader consequences too. These become visible in the 1755 version of *The Actor*, where, still under the aegis of scientific precision, Hill pushes beyond Sainte-Albine's ideas with a much enlarged chapter on sensibility. Although his source had, for example, already emphasised the importance of “*esprit*” (translated by Hill as “Understanding”) to the player as a way of regulating excessive *sensibilité*, Hill adds both the idea that one might train one's “*sensibility*” through the reading of Milton, exercising one's constitution into emotional suppleness, and that the best actors would ultimately achieve a kind of scientific detachment from themselves when performing, even though they remain “affected” by the “words of [the] author”.

Here is the great perfection of the science: we would have [the actor], while he feels all this, yet command his passions, so that they do not disturb his utterance; and yet we would not have that expression he keeps for himself take away the pain of it from us; we would have his manner of pronouncing the words take all that effect upon us, which the passage has on the most sensible reader; but we would not have it take that effect on himself. (54-5)

Hill's emphasis on acting as a science and the strict separation possible between innate sensibility and mental control of it leads here to a passage that appears to anticipate Diderot's own ideas about the great actor's coldness and self-control. Careful reading shows, however, that what Hill instead offers is a middle position between Sainte-Albine and Diderot, that of, to use his own words, "regulated" sensibility (79). The actor still "feels all this", yet – and this is what Hill calls "the great perfection of the science" – the innate, bodily feeling of these emotions is kept separate from the actor's understanding, allowing the actor to manage the projection of his feelings into the audience. In Diderot's model, there is no feeling in the performer on stage, just the careful execution of his or her *modèle idéal* for the rôle.

Between Hill and Diderot, there is Sticotti's text, which mangles Hill's thoughts on "the perfection of the science" in an extremely provocative manner.

The perfection of the art demands that the actor speak clearly and at the same time persuade us that he is deeply penetrated by what he says; we want above all that, in the development of his well ordered sensibility, ours loses nothing. Weak articulation is, however, permitted in the actor when extreme pain disturbs his speech: in such cases, this is a great beauty. (my emphasis)<sup>29</sup>

The second sentence of this passage is anathema to Hill's science. The idea that bursts of uncontrolled emotion might make articulation more moving even if they render it incomprehensible has no place here. Sticotti's insertion ends up creating a visible tension in the text, a tension between the importance of controlling feeling and the potential for a particularly strong emotion to overwhelm the speaker. While this tension is implicit in Hill and Sainte-Albine, both of whom carefully order their argument so that this question never arises directly, Sticotti's phrasing here seems almost to invite Diderot's criticism. In response to the inconsistency that the actor should both control emotion and receive applause for letting it overwhelm him, what other option is there than to suggest that feeling does not offer an adequate basis for discussing the actor's performance? Sticotti's unwieldy, Anglo-French, presentation of Hill's model calls out for the new approach of the *Paradoxe*.

"Regulated sensibility" is not, however, the only departure from Sainte-Albine in the 1755 version of *The Actor*. Building on *Le comédien*'s call for comic actors to be able to perform a wide range of emotions, Hill also proposes the idea of a "general sensibility", something which again appears to anticipate certain features of the expansive way Diderot sees the great actor's craft.

... any particular turn of mind, far from qualifying a person for playing, is rather a disadvantage.

This ductility of mind ... is the only true, as it is the only general sensibility. It were best that the heart of the player had no reigning passion of its own with this ready sensibility of all. Then he would receive them all as the writer offered them, in an easy and unconstrained fashion. He would be the body, the author for the time the soul. And thus he would represent all well, because he would first feel all properly. Few enjoy this sensibility perfect; all are excellent, very nearly in proportion to the degree in which they enjoy it; and it is like the understanding, one of these qualifications the player must have from nature; for art will never give it. (61)

This description of "general sensibility" is tied to Hill's efforts to keep his acting treatise up to date. It appears in 1755 to explain a criticism first made of Garrick and Barry in 1750, namely that "whether we see Mr Garrick in Richard or in Osmyn, still [we see] Mr Garrick" (60), with the same being true for Barry in Othello. Simply put, Garrick and Barry lack "general sensibility" and thus will always retain a little of their own self visible when performing another character's emotional responses. Sticotti's version of this passage

makes several striking changes. In place of Hill's advice that "any particular turn of mind, far from qualifying a person for playing, is rather a disadvantage" (61), Sticotti has the reformulation, "We feel that the proper character of a great actor is to have none (*aucun*)".<sup>30</sup> As well as contracting Hill's argument, the construction using "*aucun*" also brings to mind one of the key phrases of the *Paradoxe*, Second's "A great actor's soul ... affects no (*aucune*) single determined form, and, capable of assuming all, keeps none (*aucune*)." (61).<sup>31</sup> This similarity is noted by the 1975 editors of Diderot's *Œuvres*, but only with regard to Sticotti and Diderot. It also, however, depends both on Hill's modification of Sainte-Albine's ideas about actors' suitability for parts and the processes of translation back from Hill into French, where Sticotti, seeking a striking articulation of "general sensibility", anticipates Diderot's own penchant for a negative formulation. Such negative formulations contribute to the conceptual reach of the *Paradoxe*, for, more than anything positive, it is above all the absence of strong sensibility that great actors, statesmen, authors and others are shown to have in common.

Sticotti makes one other significant change to Hill's 1755 description of "general sensibility". Having translated the criticism that "Garrick would easily take the prize for perfect sensibility, if he put a little less vivacity into his action",<sup>32</sup> Sticotti then caps his description of the *grand acteur* by informing us that "If the actor had no passion particular to the performer" then "he would reach that degree of perfection Garrick has arrived at in so many different roles."<sup>33</sup> The juxtaposition of these contradictory assessments of Garrick is important in the same way Sticotti's inopportune mention of the potential benefits of excessively emotional articulation was: it focuses the issue to a single point, in this case, Garrick. It is, of course, with his friend Garrick as an example that Diderot elaborates many of his ideas in the *Paradoxe*, so much so that Marian Hobson has argued that it is "round the figure of Garrick that the recognition that the art object is imaginary crystallises",<sup>34</sup> while Anthony Strugnell has also named the actor himself as another "English source" for the *Paradoxe*.<sup>35</sup> Further, Diderot's pairing of Garrick and Clairon builds on Sticotti's focus to allow for a demonstration of the international reach of his model for the art of performance. What Diderot takes from Sticotti's version of Hill's ideas about sensibility – the problems of separating feeling out from thought, the possibility of understanding general sensibility in a negative way – is deeply connected to Garrick, while the addition of Clairon as an example exploits the potential unrealised by Sticotti for the elaboration of Hill's ideas into a conceptually rigorous, and more international approach.

### III

The scope of the *Paradoxe* lies not just in its ability to describe aspects common to performance in different countries. It also appears in its capacity to reach through the figure of the performer to other professions. For the most part, these wider, socio-political implications of the *Paradoxe* are the result of far more than the tensions caused by the Anglo-French provenance of those ideas found in Sticotti. Nevertheless, those connections Diderot draws between actor and author can be better understood with reference to the thinking of Sainte-Albine, Hill and Sticotti. One way, for instance, in which Diderot parallels performer and poet is the language used to describe each of them. Just as Clairon, in performance, "repeats her efforts without emotion" (11) so too does the playwright Sedaine stay "reserved and still" (40) as an overexcited Diderot recounts the success of *Le philosophe sans le savoir*.<sup>36</sup> In addition to this, both actor and author are described as producing "*ouvrages*". Premier describes Madame Riccoboni as the author of "a great number of charming works" (84),<sup>37</sup> and elsewhere mentions how his literary friends have occasionally "deigned to consult me as to their work (*ouvrages*)".<sup>38</sup> As for the actor, the word *ouvrage* occurs during one of the most explicit parallels between the performer's craft and other artistic disciplines.

And pray, why should the actor be different from the poet, the painter, the orator, the musician? It is not in the stress of the first burst that characteristic traits come out; it is in moments of stillness and self-command. Who can tell whence these traits have their

being? They are a sort of inspiration. They come when the man of genius is hovering between nature and his sketch of it, and keeping a watchful eye on both. The beauty of inspiration, the chance hits of which his work (*ouvrage*) is full, and of which the sudden appearance startles himself, have an importance, a sureness very different from that belonging to the first fling. Cool reflection must bring the fury of enthusiasm to its bearings. (13)<sup>39</sup>

In his next speech, Premier uses *ouvrage* again to describe how performers “dart on everything which strikes their imagination; they make, as it were, a collection of such things. And from these collections, made all unconsciously, issue the grandest achievements of their work (*ouvrages*)”.<sup>40</sup> The word is useful as it puts a name to the actor's performance that allows it to be connected to more permanent artistic productions. In addition, an *ouvrage*, as a distinct object, stands slightly separate from its creator, a necessary thing for a model in which the performing actor is presented as reflexive, “hovering between nature and his sketch of it”. This conception of the double performer is a more sophisticated version of Hill's separation between innate sensibility and the understanding's direction of it. What can be added now is that the idea that both actor and author are producers of an *ouvrage* is something Sticotti brings out of a particular set of tensions in his English source.

Throughout both versions of *The Actor*, Hill maintains a conflicting attitude over the relationship between actor and author. While Sainte-Albine had permitted the actor to make changes to his author's text with the aim of removing those parts that “slow down the scenes and cool the spectator”,<sup>41</sup> Hill informs us in 1750 that he will not be using the same editions of plays as those used in Drury Lane, preferring “passages from plays ... as the author gives them, not as the blockhead prompter may have lop'd them.” (67) By 1755, Hill ignores what was still the common stage practice of the time by removing any suggestion that the actor might alter the text. Whilst doing this, however, Hill also argues for the possibility of particular affinities between actors and authors in many of the examples he uses in 1750 and updates in 1755. In 1750, as regards Milton and Quin, “their turn of soul seems much the same” (99); and in 1755, keeping pace with cultural developments, it is Garrick's affinity to Shakespeare that receives most attention, particularly concerning *King Lear* where “there never was enough [fire] till this great player gave life to the character” (113). On top of this, Hill pushes the question of affinity so far as to suggest that Shakespeare may well himself have been a skilled performer, arguing in 1755 that although “they say Shakespeare acted ill”, it was more likely that “a debauched taste in the age” (245) condemned Shakespeare for speaking in a way that Hill would have approved.

The workmanlike opening of Hill's 1755 chapter on sensibility reveals many of these conflicting attitudes.

Of the general requisites it is most natural to treat first, as they lead to the others; and of these the two capital are understanding and sensibility. The business of a dramatic writer is to excite the passions, and that of the player is to represent in the most forcible manner what the other has written (48)

There is something of a hierarchy here, in that there is a clear division of tasks between the writer who lays out the material for exciting the passions and the player who must “represent ... what the other has written”. This recalls the way Hill writes about “general sensibility” too, as a situation where the actor “would be the body, the author for the time the soul”. That said, there is also a measure of mutual dependency, especially in the implication that the player can give the “most forcible” version of what was written to “excite the passions”. This sentence is translated by Sticotti as follows:

It is proper to speak first of general qualities, since they lead to the others. A performance is a sublime tableau, the work (*ouvrage*) of two great artists: the poet and the actor. Their principal goal is to excite the passions.<sup>42</sup>

The crucial alteration here is the move away from Hill's vaguely hierarchical division of tasks towards the suggestion that both poet and actor are creators of an *ouvrage*. This is not yet quite the argument of the *Paradoxe*. For now, poet and actor contribute, as equal "great artists" to the same object, and it is left to Diderot to argue that the actor creates an *ouvrage* of his or her own when they perform. Still, Sticotti's use of the same word as Diderot, one capable of paralleling the efforts of poet and actor is striking indeed. Although it took the complex articulation of the *Paradoxe* to truly reach through the actor to an understanding of other professions and crafts, Sticotti's translation of Hill hits upon one important piece of vocabulary for achieving such scope. Even Hill's own texts of the 1750s might also be said to have begun this movement, since his expression of affinities between Garrick and Shakespeare or Quin and Milton already imply a deeper concern for the creative process than Sainte-Albine's pragmatic concern for a text that should be cut by the actor to remain interesting.

One last point on authorship and performance. From Sainte-Albine to Hill, the attitude towards an author's text hardens, to the point that the Englishman cannot countenance quoting speeches according to the versions pronounced in performance. Like so much that Hill brings to the thinking of *Le comédien*, this emphasis on a sacrosanct text is likely due to his awareness of contemporary cultural trends in the London literary scene. Garrick produced a new version of *Macbeth* in 1744 to replace Davenant's adaptation from 1664, and its performance was (albeit misleadingly) advertised as presenting the text "as Shakespeare wrote it".<sup>43</sup> Similarly, Bishop Warburton's edition of Shakespeare was published in 1747 and many of the clergyman's footnotes take aim at all the "players' trash" that has crept into the text of the plays.<sup>44</sup> There is admittedly no direct translation of Hill's attitude in Diderot's *Paradoxe*, but it does lead to at least one speculative observation. It is noteworthy that the scene in the *Paradoxe* between Eraste and Lucile features two actors who make absolutely no changes to the text, and this moment is indeed all the better for the way their animosity operates around Molière's writing. If we then think of Diderot's efforts to conceive of the actor as a creator of an *ouvrage*, it would seem that one consequence of his method is a similar emphasis to Hill's on the stability of what is performed. Calling an author's text his *ouvrage* bestows a kind of immutability upon it, as evidenced by the unadulterated version of *Le Dépit amoureux* cited by Premier. With regard to the player's *ouvrages*, one might point to Diderot's allusions to sculpture or a "great basket work figure" (101) to describe the *modèle idéal*, all of which have similar intimations of an object's firmness. If the performer's craft is to be compared to that of the painter's, or the writer's, it seems that an implication of solidity creeps in. This does not come from Hill, but understanding Hill's attitude illuminates this potential in Diderot's description of performance as *ouvrage*, a term, which, as already shown, Sticotti stumbles into and Diderot exploits to the full for its ability to reach through and beyond the figure of the actor. In this way, the performer in the *Paradoxe* becomes not just a subsidiary doomed to "represent what the author wrote" but rather a model for understanding the kind of skilled observation, self-control and lack of emotion that enabled the great author to write in the first place.

#### IV

The themes of authorship and sensibility, traced from Saint-Albine's *Comédien* to Diderot's *Paradoxe*, evolve considerably in a process which depends, in part, on their passage back and forth across the English Channel. It is in Hill's reworking of Sainte-Albine that new scientific thinking about sensibility is applied to the stage and a preoccupation with the author's textual and constitutional connection to the actor first surfaces. It is all too easy to underestimate the significance of such transmission, and ignore the value of these texts. A compelling philosophical context for Diderot's writing on the theatre can be (and indeed has

been) made from exclusively French material.<sup>45</sup> With regard to more practical concerns, recent research into the conditions of performance and rehearsal in France and England now gives a sense of how much all the writers discussed here, for whatever reason, have left out of their works.<sup>46</sup> Nowhere do we find mention of the prompter's place, for instance; while surviving parts – both in French and English – give ample proof that the author's text was far more sacred to Hill than it was to Garrick or Lekain.<sup>47</sup>

Yet the study of Sainte-Albine, Hill, Sticotti and Diderot as a group offers a useful reminder to those who delve deep into the philosophical and practical traditions of specific countries' stages. The connections between these works tell of how alive the culture of each country was to its neighbour's, and it is such an attention, coupled with a whole range of other phenomena of translation and transmission, that underwrites the scope and potential of all these writers, particularly Diderot. What should appear in this analysis, therefore, is something of the breadth of this topic, the capacity for writing about performance in this period to cross both political and aesthetic borders, to write of actors in a way that also entails writing of feeling, authority and the processes of artistic creation. It is thus completely proper – in the light of all that has been argued here – for Diderot, in a letter to Madame Riccoboni on the techniques with which realistic conversation might be produced on stage to turn for his examples to neither a dramatist nor a Frenchman, invoking instead the novels of Samuel Richardson.

See how many rests, points, interruptions, broken speeches there are in *Pamela*, in *Clarissa*, in *Grandison*. Accuse that man, if you dare. Doesn't passion require many of these things?<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> For example: Richard Sennett, *The Fall of Public Man* (New York: Knopf, 1977); or Benjamin R. Barber, 'Rousseau and Brecht: Political Virtue and the Tragic Imagination', in *The Artist and Political Vision*, ed. Benjamin R. Barber et al. (Transaction Publishers: New Jersey, 1982).

<sup>2</sup> Denis Diderot, *The Paradox of Acting*, trans. Walter Herries Pollock (London: Chatto & Windus, 1883), 6. All subsequent references to the *Paradox* in English are to this edition; page numbers will appear in parenthesis after the quotations and the original French will be given in the endnotes.

"dans la langue technique du théâtre il y a une latitude, une vague assez considérable pour que des hommes sensés, d'opinions diamétralement opposés, croient y reconnaître la lumière de l'évidence." Denis Diderot, *Paradoxe sur le comédien*, in *OEuvres complètes*, ed. Herbert Dieckmann et al., vol. 20, 24 vols. (Paris: Hermann, 1975), 46-7. All subsequent references to the *Paradoxe* here are to this edition; page numbers will appear in parenthesis after the endnote quotations.

<sup>3</sup> "qualités premières du comédien ... un spectateur froid et tranquille ... de la pénétration et nulle sensibilité, l'art de tout imiter, ou, ce qui revient au même, une égale aptitude à toutes sortes de caractères et de rôles." (48).

<sup>4</sup> Michael Shortland, "Unnatural Acts: Art and Passion on the Mid-Eighteenth-Century Stage," *Theatre Research International* 12, no. 2 (1987): 107.

<sup>5</sup> Sabine Chaouche, *La philosophie de l'acteur : la dialectique de l'intérieur et de l'extérieur dans les écrits sur l'art théâtral français (1738-1801)* (Paris: Honoré-Champion, 2007), 162.

<sup>6</sup> Jacques Chouillet, "Une source anglaise du *Paradoxe sur le comédien*," *Dix-Huitième Siècle* 2 (1970): 209-10.

<sup>7</sup> Denis Diderot, *Rameau's Nephew and D'Alembert's Dream*, trans. Leonard Tancock (Harmondsworth; New York: Penguin, 1976), 77.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 212.

<sup>9</sup> “celui qui est froid, qui se possède, qui est maître de son visage, de sa voix, de ses actions, de ses mouvements”. Denis Diderot, 'Observations sur Garrick', in *Œuvres complètes*, ed. Herbert Dieckmann et al., vol. 20, 24 vols. (Paris: Hermann, 1975), 35.

<sup>10</sup> The actors' words to each other here are a modified version of Pollock's translation (32-3). As Pollock does not translate Molière's speeches, I have used the following English version of *Le dépit amoureux*: Molière, *The Love-tiff*, in *The Dramatic Works of Moliere Rendered into English by Henri Van Laun ; Illustrated with Nineteen Engravings on Steel from Paintings and Designs by Horace Vernet, Desenne, Johannot and Hersent*, trans. Henri Van Laun, vol. 1, 6 vols. (Philadelphia: G. Barrie, 1800), 116-117.

“LE COMEDIEN Non, non, ne croyez pas, Madame,  
Que je revienne encor vous parler de ma flamme...  
LA COMEDIENNE *Je vous le conseille*  
LE COMEDIEN C'en est fait ;  
LA COMEDIENNE *je l'espère.*  
LE COMEDIEN je me veux guérir, et connais bien  
Ce que de votre cœur a possédé le mien...  
LA COMEDIENNE *Plus que vous ne méritez.*  
...  
LE COMEDIEN Mais enfin il n'importe et puisque votre haine  
Chasse un cœur tant de fois que l'amour vous ramène,  
C'est la dernière ici des importunités  
Que vous aurez jamais de mes vœux rebutés.  
LA COMEDIENNE Vous pouvez faire aux miens la grâce tout entière,  
Monsieur, et m'épargner encor cette dernière...  
LE COMEDIEN *Mon cœur, vous êtes une insolente, et vous vous en repentirez.*” (69-70).

<sup>11</sup> “ne parurent jamais plus fortement à leurs rôles ... nos battements de mains et nos cris d'admiration” (68-9).

<sup>12</sup> Pierre Frantz, “Du spectateur au comédien: le *Paradoxe* comme nouveau point de vue,” *Revue d'histoire littéraire de la France* 93, no. 5 (1993): 688.

<sup>13</sup> “Un acteur est pris de passion pour une actrice ; une pièce les met par hasard sur la scène dans un moment de jalousie. La scène y gagnera, si l'acteur est médiocre, elle y perdra, s'il est grand comédien ...” (82).

<sup>14</sup> Daniel Larlham, “The Felt Truth of Mimetic Experience: Motions of the Soul and the Kinetics of Passion in the Eighteenth-Century Theatre”, *The Eighteenth Century* 53, no. 4 (2012): 434.

<sup>15</sup> “Les personnes, nées pour aimer, devraient avoir seules le privilège de jouer les rôles d'amants”. Pierre Rémond de Sainte-Albine, *Le comédien : ouvrage divisé en deux parties*, 2nd ed. (Paris : Vincent, 1749), 100. All subsequent references here are to this edition; page numbers will appear in parenthesis after the endnote quotations. All translations in the text are my own.

<sup>16</sup> “sans être sensible de ses faiblesses” (103).

<sup>17</sup> “froides minauderies” (103).

<sup>18</sup> Allison Grear, “A Background to Diderot's *Paradoxe sur le comédien*: The Role of the Imagination in Spoken Expression of Emotion, 1600-1750,” *Forum for Modern Language Studies* 21, no. 3 (1985): 234.

<sup>19</sup> Patrick Tort, *L'origine du “Paradoxe sur le comédien” : la partition intérieure* (Paris: Vrin, 1980), 17.

<sup>20</sup> [John Hill], *The Actor: a Treatise on the Art of Playing* (London: R. Griffiths, 1750), 115. All subsequent references here are to this edition; page numbers will appear in parenthesis after the quotations.

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- <sup>21</sup> John Hill, *The Actor; or, a Treatise on the Art of Playing* (New York: B. Blom, 1972), 196. All subsequent references here are to this edition; page numbers will appear in parenthesis after the quotations.
- <sup>22</sup> “Du penchant à l'amour”. Antoine-Fabio Sticotti, *Garrick, ou, les acteurs anglais*. (Paris: Rothe et Proft, 1771), 146. All subsequent references here are to this edition; page numbers will appear in parenthesis after the endnote quotations. All translations in the text are my own.
- <sup>23</sup> “L'auteur anglais semble oublier ici le caractère de sa nation: on sait que les Françaises sont des prodiges en amourettes, & ses Anglaises des miracles en amour conjugal” (146).
- <sup>24</sup> Nicolas Boileau Despréaux, *The Art of Poetry*, trans. John Dryden and William Soames (London, 1683), 18.  
 “Mais pour bien exprimer ces caprices heureux / C'est peu d'être poète, il faut être amoureux” (152 in Sticotti, lines 43-4 in Boileau).
- <sup>25</sup> Joseph R. Roach, *The Player's Passion : Studies in the Science of Acting* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1985), 100-1.
- <sup>26</sup> “dans les comédiens la facilité de faire succéder dans leur âme les diverses passions, dont l'homme est susceptible” (32).
- <sup>27</sup> “montrer dans chacune de ses positions l'espèce & le degré de sentiment, qu'il doit nous faire paraître” (38).
- <sup>28</sup> Joseph R. Roach, *The Player's Passion : Studies in the Science of Acting*, 97.
- <sup>29</sup> “La perfection de l'art veut que l'acteur s'énonce distinctement, & nous persuade à la fois qu'il est bien pénétrée de ce qu'il dit ; nous voulons surtout qu'au développement de sa sensibilité bien réglée, la nôtre ne perde rien. On permet cependant à l'acteur une faible articulation des mots, lorsqu'une extrême douleur intercepte sa voix, c'est alors une grande beauté.” (68).
- <sup>30</sup> “On sent que le caractère propre du grand acteur est de n'en avoir aucun” (71).
- <sup>31</sup> “L'âme d'un grand comédien ... n'affecte aucune forme déterminée, et ... également susceptible de toutes, n'en conserve aucune.” (93).
- <sup>32</sup> “Garrick emporterait aisément le prix de la parfaite sensibilité, s'il répandait quelquefois un peu moins de vivacité dans son action” (70).
- <sup>33</sup> “si l'acteur n'avait aucune passion particulière au comédien, il atteindrait ce degré de perfection où M. Garrick est parvenu dans tant de rôles différents” (71-2).
- <sup>34</sup> Marian Hobson, *The Object of Art: The Theory of Illusion in Eighteenth-century France*, Cambridge Studies in French (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 202.
- <sup>35</sup> Anthony Strugnell, “Diderot, Garrick, and the Maturity of the Artist,” *Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies* 10, no. 1 (1987): 14.
- <sup>36</sup> “se répète sans émotion” (51), and “immobile et froid” (75).
- <sup>37</sup> “un grand nombre d'ouvrages charmants” (114).
- <sup>38</sup> “ils ont daigné quelquefois me consulter sur leurs ouvrages” (74).
- <sup>39</sup> “Et pourquoi l'acteur différerait-il du poète, du peintre, de l'orateur, du musicien ? Ce n'est pas dans la fureur du premier jet que les traits caractéristiques se présentent, c'est dans des moments tranquils et froids, dans des

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moments tout à fait inattendus. On ne sait d'où ces traits viennent, ils tiennent de l'inspiration. C'est lorsque suspendus entre la nature et leur ébauche, ces génies portent alternativement un œil attentif sur l'une et l'autre ; les beautés d'inspiration, les traits fortuits qu'ils répandent dans leurs ouvrages, et dont l'apparition subite les étonne eux-mêmes, sont d'un effet et d'un succès bien autrement assurés que ce qu'ils ont jeté de boutade. C'est au sang-froid à tempérer le délire de l'enthousiasme." (52).

<sup>40</sup> "saisissent tout ce qui les frappe ; ils en font des recueils. C'est de ces recueils formés en eux, à leur insu, que tant de phénomènes rares passent dans leurs ouvrages" (53).

<sup>41</sup> "à la place des comédiens, ... je rayerais de plusieurs pièces un grand nombre de déclamations inutiles, qui font languir les scènes & refroidissent le spectateur." (244).

<sup>42</sup> "Il est à propos de parler d'abord des qualités générales, elles conduisent aux autres. La représentation est un tableau sublime, c'est l'ouvrage de deux grands Artistes : le poète et l'acteur. Leur objet principal est d'exciter les passions" (62).

<sup>43</sup> George Winchester Stone, "Garrick's handling of 'Macbeth'," *Studies in Philology* 38 (1941): 609.

<sup>44</sup> William Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet*, in *The Works of Shakespear in Eight Volumes*, ed. William Warburton, vol. 8, 8 vols. (London: J. and P. Knapton, S. Birt, T. Longman and T. Shewell, H. Lintott, C. Hitch, J. Brindley, J. and R. Tonson and S. Draper, R. Wellington, E. New, and B. Dodd, 1747), 64.

<sup>45</sup> For example: Sabine Chaouche, *La philosophie de l'acteur*.

<sup>46</sup> For example, the chapter on Garrick's theatre in: Tiffany Stern, *Rehearsal from Shakespeare to Sheridan* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

<sup>47</sup> David Golder, "Rehearsals at the Comédie-Française in the Late Eighteenth-Century," *Journal of Eighteenth-Century Studies* 30 (2007): 330.

<sup>48</sup> "Voyez combine de repos, de points, d'interruptions, de discours brisés dans *Paméla*, dans *Clarisse*, dans *Grandison*. Accusez cet-homme-là, si vous l'osez. Combien la passion n'en exige-t-elle pas?" Quoted without comment on the choice of example in Sabine Chaouche, *La philosophie de l'acteur*, 244.