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ABBREVIATIONS
MMA The Metropolitan Museum of Art
MMAB The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin
MMJ Metropolitan Museum Journal

Height precedes width and then depth in dimensions cited.
A Tale of Two Chapeaux: Fashion, Revolution, and David’s Portrait of the Lavoisiers

KIMBERLY CHRISMAN-CAMPBELL

Off with her hat? A conservator, two scientists, and a curator at The Metropolitan Museum of Art recently discovered a fashionable hat hidden under the surface of Jacques Louis David’s portrait of Monsieur and Madame Lavoisier, raising a number of questions about the complex interplay of fashion, politics, and portraiture in the ancien régime, and the practice of updating portraits to reflect rapidly changing social and sartorial mores (figs. 1, 2). An investigation into the origins and reception of Madame Lavoisier’s hat—a style known as the chapeau à la Tarare—reveals a powerful partisan message rooted in the turbulent political landscape of pre-Revolutionary France, and a possible explanation for the portrait’s alteration, beyond aesthetic or compositional concerns.
The chapeau à la Tarare took Paris by storm after the opera for which it was named premiered at the Académie royale de musique on June 8, 1787, only to be hopelessly outmodeled less than a year later (figs. 3, 4). What comes into fashion must go out of fashion, and the short life span of the chapeau à la Tarare was not unusual in the fast-paced fashion climate of the late eighteenth century. Today, the hat is one of many colorful footnotes in fashion history, remembered only (if at all) because its distinctive silhouette was preserved in several portraits, genre scenes, and fashion plates. But an investigation into the origins and reception of the chapeau à la Tarare reveals a more complicated tale of history repeated and rewritten.

Tarare, with a libretto by Pierre Augustin Caron de Beaumarchais and music by Antonio Salieri, was not the only theatrical event to alter the course of French fashion. Several operas, plays, and ballets of the eighteenth century lent their names to articles of dress as the marchandes de modes (fashion merchants) of Paris mined popular culture for fashion inspiration. As the baron de Frénilly noted, “new plays were rare.” Parisians accustomed to the standard repertory of Christoph Willibald Gluck and Niccolò Piccinni at the Opéra and Pierre Corneille, Jean Racine, and Molière at the Comédie-Française were delighted by any novelty, whether a new piece or a fresh interpretation of a familiar one. The royal family’s enthusiastic patronage of the performing arts ensured that sartorial tributes to popular plays and performers were doubly fashionable; new productions often premiered at court before transferring to Paris, buoyed by royal applause. “The theater thus set the tone for fashions, and the Court was the first to receive them from the theater,” Paul François Jean Nicolas, vicomte de Barras, remembered. In some cases, these theatrical fashions imitated the costumes worn on stage. In others, however, the styles had very little to do with individual characters or costumes, but testified to the popularity of the piece as a whole. They might also show loyalty to the author or composer, as in the fierce rivalry between the Gluckistes and Piccinnistes. Stage performances usually inspired women’s hats, headaddresses (called poufs), and hairstyles, which could respond quickly and relatively inexpensively to trends only to be discarded when the vogue had passed, or the production had closed. Various headgear à l’Iphigénie appeared as the perennially popular myth was told and retold on stage. André Ernest Modeste Grétry’s La caravane du Caire of 1783 inspired veiled coiffures and chapeaux à la caravane, loosely inspired by the opera’s Egyptian setting.

And his 1784 opera Richard Cœur-de-lion produced the peaked, plumed bonnet à la Richard, a hat imitating the medieval hennin headresses worn by the cast.

But it was Grétry’s operatic Chinese fantasy Panurge dans l’île des lanternes of the following year that fully exploited the range of possibilities for theatrically inspired fashions and fabrics, sparking a brief but widespread vogue for Chinese-style costumes and accessories. According to the baronne d’Oberkirch, Panurge was a “spectacle singular for the many and rich Chinese costumes and decorations. . . . In a word its success was due more to the props than to the piece itself.” The Gallerie des modes et costumes français illustrated a gauze apron trimmed à la Panurge; a chapeau à la Panurge appeared in a 1785 collection of fashion plates. Marie Antoinette’s dressmaker, Rose Bertin, designed Panurge ball gowns for court masquerades. As late as August 1786, the fashion magazine Cabinet des modes reported that men were wearing their hair in Chinese-style queues, or plaited à la Panurge. All of these fashions à la Panurge vanished within a year of the opera’s premiere.

Occasionally, though, the stage made more enduring contributions to fashion. Tight, wrist-length sleeves were known as amadis sleeves in the eighteenth century, thanks to a production of Jean-Baptiste Lully’s 1684 opera Amadis in which they had been worn by a prima donna who, it was alleged, wished to hide her unattractive arms. And the lévite—a loose, open gown fastened by a fringed sash—echoed the robes of the Levite priests in Racine’s Old Testament play Athalie. Both of these styles were distinct from the mainstream fashions of the time, yet wearable enough to assimilate into everyday dress.

The second half of the eighteenth century saw a movement toward naturalistic acting combined with historically and geographically accurate costumes. Traditionally, performers had worn formal French court dress regardless of the role. As Madame de Genlis explained: “Respect for our kings made us think that no costume could be more majestic and more handsome.” Historical accuracy was neither attempted nor expected. When the actor Lekain performed the role of Orestes in a long black wig, tricorn hat, and three-piece suit of brown velvet, “this costume surprised no one,” the baron de Frénilly testified. “It was the tradition and one would have been scandalized to see him in a toga and brodekins.” Similarly, Mademoiselle Dumesnil played Clytemnestra “in a farthingale . . . and chopines.” Along with this standardized dress, actors employed a monotone voice and fixed, artificial gestures.
In 1750, however, Mademoiselle Clairon of the Comédie-Française shocked and delighted audiences when she played Electra in Prosper Jolyot de Crébillon’s _Oreste_ wearing realistic Greek slave dress—complete with chains—rather than the sumptuous but stylized hoops and hair powder usually worn by actors, singers, and dancers, whether portraying male or female characters. Her highly emotional declamation was equally shocking; credible costumes were an integral part of this new style of acting. The dramatist Jean-François Marmontel testified:

> Paris, like Versailles, recognized in these changes the true tragic accent and the new degree of verisimilitude that well-observed costume gave the theatrical action. Thus from then on, all the actors were forced to abandon those tonlets, those fringed gloves, those voluminous wigs, those plumed hats, and all that fantastic paraphernalia which for so long had offended the sight of people of taste.\(^{15}\)

It was a sign of the times that the *Mercure galant*’s critic complained when the Paris Opéra presented Lully’s *Armide* in a rich but historically inaccurate mixture of ancient Greek and medieval dress in 1761.\(^{16}\) Where theater costumes had once been generically opulent, they were increasingly specific and realistic, and audiences and critics adjusted their expectations accordingly. At the same time, comic plays and operas dealing with the lives of ordinary, modern-day mortals began to eclipse mythological and historical subjects in prestige and popularity. The characters in these plays were much more accessible to audiences, partly because they wore fashionable contemporary dress.

**FASHIONS À LA FIGARO**

These parallel trends converged in Beaumarchais’s 1784 comedy *Le mariage de Figaro*, which represented a turning point in theater and fashion history, as well as a milestone on the road to the French Revolution. The play did not just inspire specific garments, but an entire style of dressing *à la Figaro*. Beaumarchais was instrumental in creating the *Figaro* style; he had specific ideas about what his characters should wear on stage, which he outlined in the illustrated 1785 edition of the play. Among his many careers, the playwright had spied for Louis XV in Spain, and his trio of *Figaro* plays drew upon his knowledge of Spanish culture, customs, and costume.

At the same time, however, Beaumarchais deliberately dressed some of *Figaro*’s characters in modern French fashions. The overall effect was a giddy mix of the familiar and the exotic, the old and the new, which enhanced the playwright’s vision of a society turned upside down, where it is impossible to tell boy from girl or maid from mistress; in other words, it was a society much like the turbulent, transitional France of the 1780s. Beaumarchais set *Figaro* in Spain to distance the controversial subject matter from the court of Louis XVI, but calculated touches of French high fashion anchored it firmly in the playwright’s own Paris. (Government censors were not fooled; the play was suppressed for six years before it could be performed publicly.) If stage costumes based on court dress showed respect for the king, then the new preference for costumes ripped from the pages of fashion magazines signified a corresponding rejection of royal authority, entirely in keeping with the radical themes of the play.

Compared to other theatrical productions of its era, *Figaro* was unique in the quantity and character of the
fashions it spawned, a measure of its immense success as well as its fortuitous timing. The *Cabinet des modes* even credited *la mode* with popularizing *Figaro*, rather than the other way around, asking: “Has it not informed all Europe of the success of *Figaro*?” The inflammatory play was widely banned outside of France, but the fashions it inspired became known across Europe through fashion magazines. Although fashions labeled *à la Figaro* disappeared from their pages after 1785, the play’s sartorial legacy lived on, as short petticoats, jackets, redingotes, detachable sleeves, and other garments inspired by Spanish rural and working-class dress became firmly established in the fashionable woman’s wardrobe, along with the stylish brimless hats (called toques) and lévites worn by the female characters. In fashion as in politics, *Figaro* seized the public imagination so successfully that it quickly became difficult to tell whether it was reflecting or directing public opinion. The play’s success on both fronts emboldened Beaumarchais and paved the way for him to conquer the world of fashion once again with his opera *Tarare*.

**THE CHAPEAU À LA TARARE**

Beaumarchais completed *Tarare*’s libretto in 1784 and spent the next three years promoting it while Salieri worked on the score, staging private readings and leaking details of the sets, costumes, and cast to the press. “*Tarare* became the sole subject of all conversations,” the *Correspondance littéraire, philosophique et critique* reported. “Never has any of our theaters seen a crowd equal to that which besieged all the avenues of the Opéra, the day of the first performance of *Tarare*; barriers erected for the purpose and defended by a guard of four hundred men could barely contain them.”

But though “the talk of the city” was “excellent before the performance,” according to the *Chroniques de l’oeil-de-boeuf*, “the event did not justify these brilliant hopes.” *Tarare* would not match the success of *Figaro*’s one hundred performances; it was performed only thirty-one times between June 1787 and February 1788. Nevertheless, its receipts accounted for about one-quarter of the Opéra’s annual income, and it even inspired a parody, *Lanlaire*. Moreover, *Tarare* was judged to be Salieri’s masterpiece, and its exotic costumes captured the public’s imagination. As the *Magasin des modes nouvelles* observed, “it would have been very astonishing if *Tarare* had not given rise to some new fashion” matching the “glory” of the fashions *à la Figaro*, “being written by the same Author. . . . This astonishment will not take place; *Tarare* has given birth to a hat of the same name.”

An accompanying plate illustrated the chapeau *à la Tarare*, characterized by a tall, cylindrical crown encircled by ribbons and trimmed with a spray of feathers. The hat’s arresting vertical silhouette marked a radical departure from the full, rounded toques and wide, flat hats of the 1780s, and literally changed the shape of French fashion. The magazine pointed out that the hat should have been called the chapeau *à l’Astashie* after the heroine of the opera, who wore it on stage:

A reproach that we must make here to the authors of fashions, is that they never name the new fashion by the name of the person who wears it in the Play, and that they always give it, on the contrary, a generic name. For example, in *Tarare*, it is the divine Astasie who should have given her name to the hat, since she is the heroine, as, in *Figaro*, it should have been Suzanne, as, in *Les amours de Bayard*, it should have been Madame de Randan. On the contrary, the names are taken from the heroes of the Plays, and given to the fashions; there are hats *à la Tarare*, there are bonnets *à la Figaro*, there are coiffures *à la Bayard*. Have men and heroes ever dared to appear on the stage wearing women’s bonnets or hats? This is an inconsistency that we have always been indignant about.

Fashions inspired by the theater were not necessarily named for the characters who wore them on stage—if they were worn on stage at all. This is especially true of the chapeau *à la Tarare*, which is not only named for a different character, but also strikingly different in appearance from the stage costume that inspired it.

The text—and subtext—of the opera suggests an explanation, and offer clues as to why the eponymous hat achieved unprecedented popularity in the fickle fashion climate of the 1780s. Loosely based on a Persian folktale, *Tarare* is set in the sixteenth-century kingdom of Ormus, or modern-day Iran. Beaumarchais embellished the story with anecdotes drawn from the writings of European travelers to the region, including Jean Chardin’s *Voyage de Paris* of 1686. The opera’s hero, Tarare, is a virtuous general married to the beautiful Astasie; the fact that he has only one wife is cited as evidence of his virtue. The sultan of Ormus, Atar, is the villain of the piece, an unreconstructed tyrant jealous of Tarare’s happiness and popularity, who kidnaps Astasie and tries to seduce her with riches. When that fails, he attempts to kill Tarare, but his soldiers and slaves revolt, demanding Tarare’s release. Tarare intercedes, reminding the soldiers of their oath of allegiance to Atar. But Atar is so humiliated by Tarare’s defense that he commits suicide, allowing the people to crown a somewhat
reluctant Tarare their king—one who reigns because of his noble character rather than an accident of birth.

This was dangerous ground in 1787. The parallels between Atar and Tarare and Louis XVI and the marquis de Lafayette—the French general who heroically defended the American colonies against a British tyrant—were obvious to contemporary audiences. Beaumarchais had been an active supporter of the American Revolution; furthermore, he had openly courted royal displeasure with his equally anti-monarchist play *Figaro*. Beaumarchais later admitted that he deliberately chose a geographically and temporally distant setting for *Tarare* because it gave him creative and political freedom, much as he had attempted to sanitize *Figaro*’s incendiary class warfare by transplanting it to rural Spain.²⁴

Typically, eighteenth-century entertainments set in the Middle East exploited the erotic as well as the musical possibilities offered by the harem.²⁵ But *Tarare* is not concerned with sexual titillation or exotic local color; it is devoid of eunuchs, hookahs, and janissaries. Its model is not Mozart’s fanciful “Turkish” opera *Die Entführung aus dem Serail* of 1782, but Montesquieu’s 1721 novel *Lettres Persanes*, a critique of French society dressed up in “Persian” garb. In this context, the chapeau à la *Tarare* of popular fame was not only a fashion statement, but also a pointed political statement.

But what was its relation, if any, to the stage costume? While many fashion plates and portraits of 1787 and 1788 depict the fashionable version of the hat, images of the hat Astasie wore on stage are vanishingly scarce. The collection *Costumes et annales des grands théâtres de Paris* includes a plate of Astasie’s costume in her first scene—act 1, scene 3—when she is enslaved to Atar. She wears a sacrificial white gown with recognizably Asian details such as short oversleeves, an asymmetrically draped petticoat, and a sash.²⁶ As specified in the libretto, Astasie, played by Mademoiselle Maillard, is “covered with a long black veil, from head to toe,” which doubles as a blindfold during her abduction, but she wears no hat.²⁷

Afasie is not seen again until act 3, scene 3, when she reappears, according to the libretto, “in the costume of a Sultana,” and Atar crowns her with “a diadem of diamonds.”²⁸ A rare French fan in the British Museum, London, depicts this sultana costume; one side is decorated with scenes from *Tarare*, while the reverse bears portraits of Beaumarchais and the title character (fig. 5). Astasie appears to the right of the central text panel. But her curious golden headdress
looks nothing like the chic chapeau that subsequently appeared in fashion magazines. In fact, it is not really a hat at all, but something much more specific and more surprising: a mural crown, a crenellated circlet resembling a walled city.

MURAL CROWNS

Mural crowns are traditionally found in depictions of Fortuna, the ancient Greco-Roman goddess of chance, who is variously known as Tyche, Tutela, or Cybele (fig. 6). These goddesses usually personified and protected cities, whether symbolically or physically, as statues placed at city gates. But they also represented fertility, success, and guidance. From the fourth century B.C. through the Middle Ages, Fortuna was worshipped by those who hoped to win her protection and favor.29 Crowned a sultana, Astasie becomes something much more, symbolically assuming the power, protective role, and feminine virtues traditionally associated with the goddess.

There is a long tradition of orientalism in French art and theater, ranging from pure fantasy to serious antiquarian research. Claude Gillot, a costume designer for the Paris Opéra in the early eighteenth century, created a Turkish sultana costume for an opera-ballet of 1714 that was a faithful copy of the Grand Dame Turque from Nicolas de Nicolay’s 1757 costume book Les navigations, peregrinations et voyages, faicts en la Turquie (fig. 7).30 (The same source inspired a tray in The Met, with a similarly vertiginous headdress.)31 It is a very early example of historically and geographically accurate Asian costume in the French theater, and indicates the extent to which primary sources such as eyewitness travelogues and costume books by the likes of Nicolay, Jean-Baptiste Vannour, and Cesare Vecellio were available to and used by stage designers. Gillot’s sultana does not wear a mural crown, but the silhouette of her high, crownlike headdress is close enough that it might suggest just such an idea to an imaginative designer.

The mural crown was common currency in late eighteenth-century art. Louis-Simon Boizot’s relief The Elements Paying Tribute to Friendship depicts Cybele (representing the element of earth) wearing one.32 This relief was displayed at the Salon of 1783 at the Louvre, just as Beaumarchais was writing Tarare. The monumental Fountain of Cybele, conceived by Ventura Rodríguez and sculpted by Francisco Gutiérrez Arribas, had been unveiled the previous year in Madrid, Beaumarchais’s home from 1764 to 1765. In an undated drawing, Jean-Baptiste Marie Pierre depicted Cybele wearing a low mural crown while transforming ships into sea goddesses.33 As the technically and historically precise neoclassical style flourished in France in the second half of the eighteenth century under the leadership of Joseph Marie Vien, Jean Antoine Houdon, and David himself, several garments and accessories not seen since antiquity—from cameos to sandals—crossed over from ancient history into modern art, and from art into the fashionable wardrobe.

However, it is possible that the mural crown Astasie wore onstage referenced a civilization even more remote than ancient Greece. As archaeologist Dieter Metzler has shown, the mural crown of classical iconography has its origins in the ancient Near East, and specifically in Persia, the setting of Tarare. There, mural crowns were worn by royal women as early as the seventh century B.C.—hundreds of years before the first
known representations of Fortuna in a similar crown. Astasie’s headdress, then, may not be merely a striking visual motif or even a coded reference to fickle, formidable Fortuna, but an effort to re-create the real, historical dress of Persian queens. There was considerable antiquarian interest in Persian manuscripts in eighteenth-century France; the prominent collector and scholar Jean-Baptiste-Joseph Gentil supplied Louis XVI with several for the royal library. The noted architect and theatrical designer Pierre-Adrien Paris created *Tarare’s* sets, but the costumes remain unattributed. Unsigned costume drawings preserved in the Bibliothèque-Musée de l’Opéra depict all of the opera’s major characters except Astasie; the drawings correspond closely to the figures depicted on a second *Tarare* fan in the British Museum, particularly a “Grand Prêtre de Brahma.”

Given their sophistication and specificity, it is tempting to speculate that *Tarare’s* costumes are at least partly the work of the multitalented Beaumarchais, who had been so involved in creating the costumes for the *Figaro* plays.

**PORTRAITS À LA TARARE**

Retaining only the elongated silhouette of the mural crown, the *Marchande de modes* of Paris translated the carefully researched historical costume into a contemporary idiom. *Tarare* may have spawned just one hat in comparison with the multitude of fashions à la *Figaro*, but that hat is disproportionately represented in French portraits, prints, and fashion plates of 1787 and 1788. The novelty, charm, and visual impact of the style—with or without the feathers that further augmented its height—proved irresistible to artists. Pietro Antonio Martini captured its ubiquity in his panoramic engraving the *Exposition au Salon du Louvre en 1787*. The Salon coincided with *Tarare’s* run and included Antoine Vestier’s portrait of the Chabanel family, whose composition—both the original and Martini’s compressed rendering of it—likely inspired David’s portrait of the Lavoisiers. But David may have seen the style even closer to home, in his own studio. In a portrait of about 1787–88 attributed to his student Marie Guillaume Benoist, an artist—thought to be another one of his students, Mademoiselle Duchosal—is depicted at her easel, fashionably (if improbably) dressed in a white gown and an exuberantly feathered chapeau à la *Tarare*.

An undated portrait attributed to English painter Richard Cosway depicts a woman presumed to be the artist’s wife holding a chapeau à la *Tarare*. Although the identities of both artist and sitter are open to debate, the woman strongly resembles Maria Cosway, who lived in Paris from August to December 1787, at the height of *Tarare’s* success. She is dressed completely à la française in garments considered to be typically French at the time, including a white muslin chemise gown and gold hoop earrings. Regardless of her identity, then, her hat can be read as a calculated statement of fashionability in a specifically French context, rendering the small-scale portrait as elegant and ephemeral as a fashion plate. With two wide ribbons circling the base and the top of the crown, a large bow filling the space between, and a spray of feathers, the hat closely resembles the one originally worn by Madame Lavoisier (fig. 2).

The life of the chapeau à la *Tarare* was so short that it can be used to pinpoint many heretofore undated portraits, such as Marguerite Gérard’s *An Architect and His Family.* The hat is modeled by no less a fashion authority than Marie Antoinette in François Dumont’s miniature; a blue satin chapeau à la *Tarare* is prominently displayed in the foreground, at the queen’s feet, which are shod in matching slippers. The presence of the chapeau à la *Tarare*—virtually identical to the “simple” satin one trimmed with a “large ribbon” and “five large white feathers” depicted in the *Magasin des modes nouvelles* on January 10, 1788—suggests that the...
A Tale of Two Chapeaux

made its Paris debut on September 11, 1787.43 The , which
Le Roi Théodore à Venise Giovanni Paisiello’s chapeau undoubtedly owed part of its success to this royal endorsement.

The chapeau à la Tarare was soon joined by the chapeau à la Théodore, named for a different opera, Giovanni Paisiello’s Le Roi Théodore à Venise, which made its Paris debut on September 11, 1787.43 The two were easily confused. The Magasin des modes nouvelles admitted:

Images of the chapeau à la Théodore suggest that it had a funnel-shaped brim rather than a flat one, but they are relatively scant.45 The Tarare hat both eclipsed and outlasted its rival; Théodore closed December 6, after only thirteen performances at the Académie royale de musique.

Although the term “chapeau à la Tarare” disappeared from French fashion magazines around the time Tarare closed in February 1788, variations on its extreme vertical silhouette continued to appear in quick succession over the next few years. The late 1780s were notable for the quantity and variety of hats worn by women; fashion magazines even began to publish issues devoted exclusively to hats. As the Magasin des modes nouvelles explained, “every year there is a super- fetation of these bonnets and hats”—using the medical term for conception during pregnancy to describe fashion’s rapid cycle of regeneration. “We submit ourselves to this obligation all the more willingly, since bonnets and hats are the objects of finery for which the Ladies are the most voracious.”46 As late as March 1789, the Magasin des modes nouvelles compared new hat styles to the chapeau à la Tarare, indicating that it still loomed large in fashion’s collective memory.47 The high-crowned hats and bonnets that became wildly popular in the early 1790s could not have existed without the chapeau à la Tarare.

There are people who still call the chapeaux à la Théodore “à la Tarare”: very evident proof that the chapeaux à la Tarare haven’t disappeared yet. This sort of confusion in the names comes, it seems to us, from these two types of hats . . . being almost the only ones to prevail, and neither having a very distinct character, a very different shape, it is almost impossible not to give them both the same name.44

Fashion and Portraiture

These frequent changes in fashion—amplified and accelerated by the bimonthly fashion magazines that emerged in France in the late 1770s—created significant problems for artists. Clothing helped to construct a calculated image of style and gentility, but it could also render a portrait hopelessly out of date within a few years. Fashions in hats and hairstyles changed even faster than fashions in clothes, and never more rapidly or radically than between the 1760s and the 1790s. From heavily powdered curls worn close to the head, women’s coiffures grew steadily higher, finally reaching their apex in poufs, the pneumatic arrangements of flowers, feathers, and ribbons characteristic of the late 1770s. By 1780, however, these “high heads” had lost their novelty, and they were replaced by soft clouds of crimped and frizzed hair, worn low but wide, and topped by enormous hats with similarly topical monikers. These hats and hairstyles were not just elegant, expensive, and eye-catching, but physically imposing; along with wide hoops and high heels, they underscored French women’s unprecedented advances in society, politics, and the arts during the reign of Louis XVI. In the painter Elisabeth Vigée Le Brun’s famous phrase, “women reigned then, the Revolution dethroned them.”48 Big hair went out of fashion altogether after 1789; along with other kinds of cosmetics, hair powder, pomade, and wigs were deemed unnatural and even deceitful, as well as inappropriately luxurious. While this new asceticism applied to men as well as women, women had much farther to fall.

It was not unusual to have portraits repainted in the eighteenth century—especially portraits of women. A portrait represented a substantial investment of time and money; even the very wealthy might have one painted only a few times in their lives. Portraits were updated for many reasons: to include new family members and possessions, for example, or to reflect an elevation to or within the peerage or the military.49 Shifts in fashion were considered perfectly valid reasons for altering a portrait; showing off one’s taste and affluence in the form of expensive, fashionable dress was often more important to sitters than achieving a good likeness. More and more of these modifications have come to light in recent years thanks to the development of non-destructive analytical techniques like the Macro-X-ray-fluorescence (MA-XRF) and Raman spectroscopy used on the Lavoisiers’ portrait.

The simplest way to update a portrait was to alter the hair. While an eighteenth-century sitter might
choose to be painted in uniform, regalia, classical drapery, masquerade costume, or historical dress that would not look outmoded within weeks, it was difficult to avoid fashions in hairstyles and wigs. Much more than the body, the head lent a portrait the desired quality of likeness, while also anchoring it in a narrow time period. Inevitably, many portraits of women were updated in the 1770s and 1780s, whether to attain the extreme silhouette of 1770s hairstyles or to efface it. Sometimes, the alteration was done by another hand many years later. Sir Joshua Reynolds’s 1777 portrait of Lady Henrietta Herbert, for example, was cleverly updated a decade later by an unidentified artist. The sitter’s towering hairstyle was covered by a wide-brimmed hat perched at a jaunty angle—reflecting the fashions for large hats in the 1780s—while her dated dress was softened by a fichu. In the case of the Lavoisiers, however, the canvas was completed and paid for by December 18, 1788, and there is no evidence that the painting was reworked after that date, or by a different hand. It was updated—substantially—even as it was being finished.

The practice of altering portraits for fashion-related reasons seems to have been more common in England, where it is evident in works by Thomas Gainsborough, Allan Ramsay, and George Romney as well as Reynolds. The French were, presumably, less concerned with timelessness in portraiture, preferring fashionable dress to historicized costumes or uniforms. One French portrait in The Met, François Hubert Drouais’s portrait of Marie Rinteau, has undergone a comparable transformation. The portrait is signed and dated 1761, but the sitter’s hair is dressed in an enormous pouf of the mid-1770s (fig. 8). A miniature copy of the 1761 version of the portrait in the Musée Carnavalet, Paris (fig. 9), and a contemporary sketch of it by Gabriel de Saint-Aubin confirm that the hair was originally dressed close to the head, in the fashion of the early 1760s. More than a decade later, the portrait was altered to bring the coiffure up to date, as was a pendant portrait of Marie’s sister, Geneviève. David’s portrait of the Lavoisiers had never undergone in-depth imaging or chemical analyses before the Museum’s recent technical study; indeed, no work by this important artist has been subjected to such scrutiny. David may well have made significant alterations to other paintings, yet to be uncovered.
REDRESSING THE LAVOISIERS

The hat’s discovery provides new context for the yawning void over Madame Lavoisier’s head—and Monsieur Lavoisier’s bemused side-eye (fig. 1). But the hat was not the only highly finished aspect of the portrait’s composition obscured by David’s abrupt “about-face.” The artist’s interventions changed the setting from a library to a laboratory, and transformed the couple from a wealthy fermier général (tax collector) and his fashionable wife to a scientist and his collaborator at work—a democratizing agenda belied by the portrait’s impressive full-length format. David Pullins has argued that “the late addition of the armchair, shawl, and portfolio . . . insist on Madame Lavoisier as an active participant in this shared scientific pursuit”; this “active” role might well have been rendered unconvincing by a high-maintenance hat.

But Pullins’s suggestion that the hat detracted from the “seriousness” of the work is less persuasive. Fashion and frivolity (légèreté) did not have the negative associations in eighteenth-century France that we might ascribe to them today. The language of fashion and the language of science overlapped in popular par- lance. Frances Crewe, an English visitor to Paris, observed in 1786 that the French are much more familiar with Scientific Terms than we are, and that Expressions which the common People here frequently use, are such as would be thought with us strangely affected and pedantic. For Instance, they are for ever disputing about le Physique and la morale—then a Milliner will tell you that your Ribband is not analogque [sic] to your Gown.

In the same year, the October 1 issue of the Cabinet des modes asserted:

Fashion, which its Detractors have called slight, inconstant, fickle, frivolous, is, however, fixed in its principles; & we believe, in truth, that there is injustice in treating it . . . so harshly. We see how constant it is in seizing all remarkable events, adapting them, recording them in its annals, IMMORTALIZING them in memory. . . . We flatter ourselves that no one can deny that the Cabinet des modes could even become useful to Historians.

With its stylistic and sociopolitical ties to both global history and contemporary French political discourse, the chapeau à la Tarare proves this point, and illustrates that, in the 1780s, a hat was rarely just a hat. However, it is likely that Madame Lavoisier’s hat was a casualty of the swift fashion cycle as well as ideological concerns; if fashion was a serious matter, then so was keeping up with it. After Tarare closed in February 1788, the hat quickly disappeared from fashion magazines, and, presumably, the portrait.

The hat was not the only thing to go, however. Madame Lavoisier’s sash and the ribbons on the virago sleeves of her robe en chemise were originally red, to match the ribbons on her black hat. Black, white, and red clothes were part of the vogue for Spanish dress inspired by Beaumarchais’s Le mariage de Figaro, and they appear in several portraits and fashion plates of the late 1780s, overlapping with the trend for chapeaux à la Tarare. But instead of leaving the sash and ribbons alone when he painted over the hat, David made them blue—as they are in many portraits of the 1780s depicting women wearing muslin chemise gowns, including the comtesse de Provence, Madame Du Barry, the princesse de Lamballe, and Marie Antoinette, who first popularized the style in 1783. Intentionally or not, the blue hue gives the gown a more traditional and conventional femininity, as well as aligning the portrait with several well-known images of royal and aristocratic women (and distancing it from Beaumarchais’s controversial play).

Monsieur Lavoisier’s clothes were altered as well. His suit was originally brown with seven gold-colored buttons, instead of black with three buttons, and his jacket slightly longer, with an “aggrandising and retardataire” red mantle draped over his shoulders and proper left arm. The mantle, like the hat, was likely removed once the scene shifted from writing letters to the more active, trailblazing pursuits of a scientist. While the matte black suit is less flashy than the gold-buttoned version, it is also more fashion-forward. Black wool suits, previously reserved for mourning in France, came into style in the late 1780s as part of a general vogue for sober, English-style dress. A fashion plate of “Modes Anglaises” that appeared in the Magasin des modes nouvelles in November 1786 included a man in a coat of “the color of London chimney soot.” In 1787, the baron de Frénilly observed that black suits had replaced colorful silks for men, while women dressed in white, the color of half-mourning—a trend illustrated by the Lavoisiers’ portrait. Frénilly correctly surmised that this stark tableau was a “sinister omen,” though others considered it democratic. Indeed, Lavoisier’s head-to-toe black anticipates the plain black suits and black stockings worn by the delegates of the Third Estate when the Estates General opened on May 4, 1789. Lavoisier would serve as an alternate delegate to
the assembly; however, he represented the Second Estate, the nobility, who wore much more splendid suits of gleaming black silk trimmed with gold braid, lavishly accessorized with matching cloaks, fine lace cravats, plumed hats, pristine white stockings, and swords, accoutrements reserved for the aristocracy.

By the time the Salon of 1789 opened in August—just over a month after the Bastille prison was attacked and dismantled by a mob of sansculottes—the Lavoisiers’ ill-gotten wealth rendered them so unpopular that Joseph Marie Vien, director of the Académie royale de peinture et de sculpture, was advised not to exhibit David’s portrait, lest it exacerbate simmering class tensions.66 Ironically, Madame Lavoisier’s long-gone hat—referencing an opera celebrating a tyrant’s downfall—would have been a less problematic fashion statement than Monsieur Lavoisier’s black suit, which had become heavily politicized in the eight months since the portrait was finished.

**A REVOLUTIONARY STYLE**

Meanwhile, Tarare enjoyed an unexpected afterlife as current events proved stranger than operatic fiction. Tellingly, the pro-military, anti-authoritarian opera was revived no fewer than four times between 1790 and 1795. (The reverse of the British Museum fan [fig. 5] is inscribed: “The Soldier mounts the Throne and the Tyrant is Dead.”) In the 1790 edition of the libretto, pointedly published on the first anniversary of the fall of the Bastille, Beaumarchais added an explicitly republican denouement, clarifying that Tarare is anointed a constitutional monarch rather than an absolute monarch. In the preface to the published edition, he asked: “O citizens, do you remember the time when the voice of concerned thinkers, forced to veil their ideas, hid itself in allegories and laboriously plowed the field of revolution?”67 Certainly, there was an element of self-aggrandizement and self-preservation in this somewhat revisionist history of Tarare’s genesis, but it is true that, in 1787, Tarare’s radical denouement could only be staged behind an exotic mask. By 1790, Beaumarchais could lift that mask and take a very public bow.

In the same year, the Assemblée nationale bowed to public pressure to recognize the 954 “vainqueurs du Bastille” who had torn down the hated prison. On June 19, 1790, it voted to reward each participant in the attack with, among other benefits, the right to wear a special emblem applied to the left arm or lapel of his coat: a mural crown (une couronne murale).68 The certificate that accompanied this privilege was emblazoned with classical motifs including both a laurel wreath and a mural crown bearing more than a passing resemblance to the crenellated and turreted facade of the Bastille. (In the end, the sleeve emblem seems to have been abandoned in favor of a gilded bronze medal in the same shape.) By this time, the Bastille was a Revolutionary icon, immortalized in popular culture through prints, souvenir fans, buttons, shoe buckles, miniature models, and, indeed, hats.69 In December 1789, the Magasin des modes nouvelles had illustrated a bonnet à la Bastille, “whose very high & very large crown of white satin represents a crenellated tower... with a sort of balustrade below the crenellations, made of a very large black lace, & another row of crenellations at the bottom of this balustrade, made, like those at the top, of white satin.” The imposing edifice was festooned with “a very large knot of ribbons in the national colors”: blue, white, and red (fig. 10).70

This modern mural crown inverted the traditional iconography of Tyche, symbolizing destruction rather than protection—or perhaps protection through destruction. Though crenellated chapeaux in the shape of the Bastille were a fleeting fashion, high-crowned hats (often accessorized with tricolor cockades) would become a standard component of the female Revolutionary uniform. Charlotte Corday and Thérèse de Méricourt were often portrayed in them, adorned with tricolor ribbons, cockades, or plumes; Méricourt paired hers with her habitual redingote, a gown resembling (and named for) an English-style man’s riding coat and favored by Revolutionary women.71
“Mlle Nationale allant voir l’Exercice aux Champs Élysées” depicts a similar costume (fig. 11). François Watteau gave his Citoyenne à sa toilette of circa 1792 a whole wardrobe of high-crowned hats, scattered around her boudoir. The style’s prominence in images of exemplary amazones and citoyennes suggests that the high-crowned hat—given fresh currency by Revolutionary-era productions of Tarare—became visual shorthand for female patriotism.

But not for long. As fashion historian Aileen Ribeiro has pointed out, the Revolutionary government discouraged women from wearing masculine clothing, a hallmark of the English-inspired fashions of the 1780s. Redingotes, cockades, and hats in general had played a key role in this trend. With the proclamation of the Republic on September 21, 1792, Frenchwomen began to resume traditional gender roles. They discarded their high-crowned hats, only to see them taken up by men. Shallow-brimmed “chapeaux hauts” became the characteristic male accessory of the 1790s. David’s brother-in-law, Pierre Sériziat, wore one in his portrait by the artist of 1795, accessorized with the tricolor cockade that was no longer a spontaneous expression of patriotism, but one required by law (fig. 12).

By the time David exhibited Sériziat’s portrait at the Salon of 1795, Antoine Lavoisier was dead, convicted of treason and executed on May 8, 1794. The Académie royale de peinture et de sculpture had been disbanded. David had been imprisoned (twice) for his support of Maximilien Robespierre, the Jacobin leader who ordered Lavoisier’s arrest, only to follow him to the guillotine weeks later. But loyalties—like fashions—changed fast in those turbulent times. A year and a half after Lavoisier’s execution, the father of modern chemistry was fully exonerated by the French government. Madame Lavoisier survived the Reign of Terror, dying in 1836, David’s portrait still in her possession.

In his lengthy preface to the published edition of Figaro, Beaumarchais drew a parallel between fashion and the theater: “Because characters in a play show themselves to be morally vicious, should they be banished from the stage? What should we seek at the Theater? Foibles and absurdities? That’s well worth the trouble of writing about! They are like our fashions; we cannot correct them, we can only change them.” Both fashion and the theater reflected the changing face of French society, holding a mirror to human aspirations, fears, and failings. The two chapeaux of this tale—the ancient mural crown and the ultra-fashionable chapeau à la Tarare—were emblems of feminine power, and both were ultimately usurped by men. Long before the conquerors of the Bastille literally wore their politics on their sleeves, the most stylish women in Paris wore them on their heads.

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fig. 12  Jacques Louis David. Pierre Sériziat (1757–1847), 1795. Oil on wood, 50% × 37% in. (129 × 95.5 cm). Musée du Louvre, Paris (inv. RF 1281)
NOTES

* The scientific study of the evolution of Jacques-Louis David’s Antoine Laurent Lavoisier (1743–1794) and Marie Anne Lavoisier (Marie Anne Pierrette Paulze, 1758–1836) is fully described in Centeno et al 2021 and Pullins, Mahon, and Centeno 2021. The identification of the hat was first made in Pullins, Mahon, and Centeno 2021. 1 See, for example, Marguerite Gérard, Portrait of an Architect and His Family, ca. 1787, Baltimore Museum of Art, 1938.232, and Michel Garnier, The Poorly Defended Rose, 1789, Minneapolis Institute of Art, 64.63.1. 2 Frénilly 1887, 39. 3 "le théâtre donnait alors le ton aux modes, et la Cour était la première à les recevoir du théâtre." Barras 1895, 349. 4 MMA 26.233.24. 5 MMA 27.105.4. 6 "Spectacle singulier par les costumes chinois et les décorations riches et multipliées…. en un mot le succès était plutôt dû aux accessoires qu’à la pièce elle-même." Oberkirch 1889, 594. 7 Engraved by Nicolas Dupin after François Louis Joseph Watteau, "La brilante Raimonde," Gallerie des modes et costumes français 47 (1785), pl. ccc.296. 8 Fondation Jacques Doucet, MS I, Rose Bertin, IV.345, fol. 3472, and VI.571, fols. 5392–93. 9 Cabinet des modes, no. 19 (August 15, 1786): 146. 10 Blum 1882, xiii. See Louis René Boquet, Mademoiselle Marie-Jeanne Fesch Chevallier, MMA 66.91. 11 See Antoine Watteau, The French Comedians, ca. 1720, MMA 49.754, and Nicolas Lancret, Scene from the Tragedy Le Comte d’Essex by Thomas Corneille, 1734, State Hermitage Museum, Saint Petersburg, inv. FJ-1144. 12 "le respect pour nos rois faisait penser que nul costume ne pouvait être plus majestueux et plus beau." Genlis 1818, 1:100. 13 "Ce costume n’étonnait personne; c’était la tradition et l’on eût été scandalisé de lui voir une toge et des brodequins." Frénilly 1887, 21. 14 Bernier 1981, 76. 15 "Paris, comme Versailles, reconnut dans ces changements le véritable accent tragique et le nouveau degré de vraisemblance que donnait à l’action théâtrale le costume bien observé. Ainsi, dès lors, tous les acteurs furent forcés d’abandonner ces tunnelets, ces gants à franges, ces perruques volumineuses, ces chapeaux à plumes, et tout cet attrait fantastique qui depuis si longtemps choquait la vue des gens de goût." Marmontel 1999, 177. 16 Jullien 1880, 187. 17 "N’a-t-elle point appris à toute l’Europe le succès de Figaro?" Cabinet des modes, no. 22 (October 1, 1786): 189. 18 "Tarare devint l’unique sujet de toutes les conversations”; "Jamais aucun de nos théâtres n’a vu une foule égale à celle qui assiégait toutes les avenues de l’Opéra, le jour de la première représentation de Tarare; à peine des barrières élevées tout exprès et défendues par une garde de quatre cents hommes l’ont-elles pu contenir." Grimm et al. 1881, 93, 94. 19 "l’événement n’a pas justifié ces brillantes espérances.” Touchard-Lafosse 1926, 5:481–82. 20 Mercure de France, August 4, 1787, 42. 21 "Il eût été très-étonnant que Tarare n’eût pas donné lieu à quelque mode nouvelle, & n’eût point eu en cela la gloire de Figaro, étant composé par le même Auteur. . . . Cet étonnement n’aura pas lieu; Tarare a donné naissance à un chapeau de son nom." Magasin des modes nouvelles, françaises et anglaises, année 2, no. 27 (August 10, 1787): 209. 22 A. B. Duhamel (French, 1736–after 1800), engraving after a drawing by Jean Florent Defraîne (French, b. 1754), Magasin des modes nouvelles, françaises et anglaises, année 2, no. 27 (August 10, 1787), pl. 1; Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, inv. RP-P-2009-1664A. 23 "Un reproche qu’il faut que nous fassions ici aux auteurs des modes, c’est qu’ils ne nomment jamais la mode nouvelle, du nom de la personne qui la porte dans la Pièce, & qu’ils lui donnent toujours, au contraire, un nom générique. Par exemple, dans Tarare, c’est la divine Astasie qui devroit avoir donné son nom au chapeau, puisqu’elle est l’héroïne, comme, dans Figaro, ç’aurait dû être Susanne, comme, dans les Amours de Bayard, ç’aurait dû être Madame de Randan; eh bien, tout au contraire, ce sont les héros des Pièces dont on prend les noms, pour les donner aux modes; ce sont les chapeaux à la Tarare, ce sont les bonnets à la Figaro, ce sont les coëffures à la Bayard. Est-ce que jamais des hommes & des héros ont osé paroître sur la scène avec des bonnets ou des chapeaux de femmes? C’est une inconscience dont nous nous sommes toujours indignés.” Magasin des modes nouvelles, françaises et anglaises, année 2, no. 27 (August 10, 1787): 209–10. 24 Betzwieser 1994, 92–93. 25 Ibid., 91. Voltaire’s Zaire (1732) and Charles-Simon Favart’s Soliman second sound, ou, Les Trois Sultanes (1761) were also turned into operas. 26 "Mlle. Maillard, dans Tarare,” in Levacher de Charnois 1786–88, année 2, no. 5. 27 "couverte d’un grand voile noir, de la tête aux pieds.” Beaumarchais 1787, 30. 28 "en habit de Sultane; “Il lui attache au front un diadème de diamans.” Ibid., 71, 76. 29 For further discussion of Tyche, see Borromeo 1987. 30 Nicolay 1576, 98; Tonkovich 2005, 250, fig. 39. 31 Attributed to Carl Wendelin Anreiter von Zienfeld for the Doccia Porcelain Manufactory, Tray (one of a set), 1745–47. Hard-paste porcelain decorated in polychrome enamels, gold. MMA 06.372b. 32 J. Paul Getty Museum, 2003.1. 33 MMA 1981.219. 34 Metzler 1994, 77. 35 British Museum, London, inv. 1891.0713.277; Anon., Esquisse d’un costume du grand prêtre de Brahma, Bibliothèque-Musée de l’Opéra National de Paris, inv. D216 IX-59. 36 Pullins, Mahon, and Centeno 2021, 788; Pietro- Antonio Martini, Esquisse du costume du grand prêtre de Brahma, Bibliothèque-Musée de l’Opéra National de Paris, inv. D216 IX-59. 37 Pullins, Mahon, and Centeno 2021, 788; Pietro- Antonio Martini, Esquisse du costume du grand prêtre de Brahma, Bibliothèque-Musée de l’Opéra National de Paris, inv. D216 IX-59. 38 Associated with a drawing by Jean Florent Defraîne (French, b. 1754), Bibliothèque-Musée de l’Opéra National de Paris, inv. D216 IX-59. 39 Barnett 1995, 102–5. 40 Baltimore Museum of Art, 1938.232. 41 Louvre, inv. RF 28719. 42 Pierrette 1994, 116; Magasin des modes nouvelles, françaises et anglaises, année 3, no. 6 (January 10, 1788), pl. 1. 43 Magasin des modes nouvelles, françaises et anglaises, année 2, no. 33 (October 10, 1787): 259; France d’Hézecques 1987, 86. 44 "De plus, il y a des personnes qui nomment encore à la Tarare les chapeaux à la Théodore; preuve bien sensible que les chapeaux à la Tarare n’ont point disparu. Cette sorte de confusion
“ô citoyens, souvenez-vous du temps où vos penseurs inquiétés,
n’ayant point chacune un cratère bien distinct, une forme bien
différente, il est presqu’impossible que l’on ne donne pas à
toutes les deux le même nom.” Magasin des modes nouvelles,
françaises et anglaises, année 2, no. 33 (October 10, 1787): 259–60.
45 See, for example, MMA 57.559.6(14r); Magasin des modes
nouvelles, françaises et anglaises, année 2, no. 33 (October 10,
1787), pl. 1; and année 3, no. 4 (December 20, 1787),pls. 1–3.
46 “Il y a toutes les années une superfétation de bonnets & de
chapeaux . . . Nous nous soumettons à cette obligation d’autant
plus volontiers, que les bonnets & les chapeaux sont les objets
de parure dont les Dames sont le plus avides.” Magasin des
modes nouvelles, françaises et anglaises, année 4, no. 9
(February 21, 1789): 65.
47 Ibid., année 4, no. 11 (March 11, 1789): 83.
48 “Les femmes régnait alors, la Révolution les a détrônées.”
Vigée Le Brun 1986, 1:122.
49 See, for example, Thomas Gainsborough’s portrait The Byam
Family (The Holburne Museum, Bath, inv. L.2001.1), which was
altered to include the couple’s young daughter and a more fash-
ionable gown and hairstyle for Mrs. Byam.
50 Chrisman-Campbell 2013.
51 National Trust, Powis Castle, Welshpool, United Kingdom,
invt. NT 1181064.
52 Graves and Cronin 1899–1901, 2:460.
53 Centeno et al. 2021, 9; Pullins, Mahon, and Centeno 2021, 780.
54 Centeno et al. 2021, 1.
55 Pullins, Mahon, and Centeno 2021, 789.
56 Ibid., 784.
57 Ibid., 780.
58 Chrisman-Campbell 2015, 6–8.
59 “Windham Papers,” vol. 85, British Library, Add MS 37926,
fol. 47.
60 “La Mode, que ses Détracteurs ont appelée légère, inconstante,
vogage, frivole, est pourtant fixe dans ses principes; & nous
croyons, en vérité, qu’il y a de l’injustice à la traiter, . . . avec
autant de dureté. Nous la voyons constante à saisir tous les événements remarquables, à se les approprier, à les consigner
dans ses annales, à les ÉTERNISER dans la mémoire. . . . Nous
nous flattons que l’on ne nous resusera pas l’aveu, que le
Cabinet des Modes peut devenir utile, même aux Historiens.”
Cabinet des modes, no. 22 (October 1, 1786): 169–70.
61 See, for example, Magasin des modes nouvelles, françaises et
anglaises, année 2, no. 34 (October 20, 1787), pl. 3, and année 2,
o. 36 (November 10, 1787), pl. 1.
63 Pullins, Mahon, and Centeno 2021, 784–85.
64 “couleur de sue des cheminées de Londres,” Magasin des
modes nouvelles, françaises et anglaises, année 2, no. 1
(October 20, 1786): 7.
65 “un sinistre augure.” Frénilly 1887, 41.
66 Pullins, Mahon, and Centeno 2021, 789.
67 “à citoyens, souvenez-vous du temps où vos penseurs inquiétés,
forcés de voir leur idées, s’enveloppaient d’allégories et
laboraient péniblement le champ de la Révolution.” Quoted in
Grimm and Diderot 1813, 503.
68 Collection générale 1790, 102.
69 Diplôme de Vainqueur de la Bastille, 1790, Centre historique des
Archives nationales, inv. A/II/3641.
70 “la calotte de satin blanc très- élevée & très- large représente une
tour garnie de crênaux, . . . d’une sorte de balustrade au dessous
des crênaux, faite d’une très- large dentelle noire, . & d’un autre
rang de crênaux au dessous de cette balustrade, faits, comme
ceux du faîte, de satin blanc”; “très- gros noeud de rubans aux
couleurs nationales,” Magasin des modes nouvelles, françaises et
anglaises, année 4, no. 34 (December 1, 1789): 267–68.
71 See, for example, Anonymous, Françaises devenues libres,
1789, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Cabinet des Estampes,
inv. Reserve GB-370(10)-FT 4, t. 10.
72 François Watteau, Une Citoyenne à sa Toilette, ca. 1792, Musée
des Beaux-Arts, Arras.
73 Ribeiro 1988, 88–89.
74 Pullins, Mahon, and Centeno 2021, 791.
75 “Mais, parce que les personnages d’une Piece s’y montrent
sous des moeurs vicieuses, faut- il les bannir de la Scène? Que
poursuivrait- on au Théâtre? les travers & les ridicules? cela vaut
bien la peine d’écrire! ils sont chez nous comme les modes; on
ne s’en corrige point, on en change.” Beaumarchais 1785, vii.

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