

SCOPE AND CONTENT

This collection contains an original autograph manuscript, typescripts, translation, and supplementary documents relating to the French Revolutionary play entitled *1789 & 1790 son fils*. The play was written ca. 1790 and is dedicated to the Marquis de Lafayette, Commander of the National Guard of Paris. The identity of the playwright is not indicated on the original manuscript, although research in the 1990s suggests that it may have been written by French author Charles Jacob Guillemain (1750-1799). Guillemain's body of work primarily involved single act plays in the genres of comedy, morality plays, shadow theater, marionette plays, and vaudeville.

The manuscript of *1789 & 1790 son fils* consists of 24 pages of autograph manuscript script in French, presumably in the hand of the playwright. The inside of the final page is written in pencil in a different hand, "Pièce Revolutionnaire inédite [dedicated to] La Fayette commandant de la garde Nationale de Paris 1789-1793?" There are ten characters in the play, including the two main characters named *1789* and his son, *1790*. The first scene commences with the god Jupiter resurrecting the character *1789* from the dead in order to advise his son, *1790*. The choice of the year 1789 as a main character is significant for a number of reasons. Lafayette organized and commanded the National Guard of Paris in 1789. This was also the year that the storming of the Bastille occurred, an event that heralded the start of the French Revolution.

The play consists of a prologue, one act, and fourteen scenes. The prologue establishes the connection with the Marquis de Lafayette and sets the laudatory tone of the play. His name is only directly mentioned three times; first in the prologue, and thereafter in the airs of the musical interludes of scenes eight and thirteen. Scene eight refers to the "good Lafayette" and scene thirteen states in musical verse how Lafayette ought to be portrayed. The play itself is dedicated to Lafayette and praises his patriotism and devotion to liberty and equality through the use of allegory and symbolism. The playwright included several classical allusions to Greek and Roman mythology in his manuscript. The prologue compares Lafayette to Adonis (symbol of masculine beauty) and to Mars (God of War). Scenes six, seven, eight, eleven and fourteen exhibit edited passages, which indicates that this may have been a draft.

Research has suggested that *1789 & 1790 son fils* was written as a shadow theater play, a technique of Chinese origin which employs the silhouettes of puppets. The French version of shadow theater was first performed by François Seraphin at Versailles in 1774. The attributed authorship of the play and its relationship to the shadow theater play genre is based on supplementary documents filed at the end of the collection. These include a photocopy of the 1875 book *Feu Seraphin, Histoire De Ce Spectacle* and the 1995 honors thesis by Sukoluhle S. Mhlanga's entitled *Tradition et Innovation dans la Pièce Révolutionnaire (1790)*.

1789 & 1790 son fils
[French Revolutionary Play], ca. 1790

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PROVENANCE

This manuscript was a gift of Stuart Wells Jackson in 1957 (SWJ inventory #32).

INVENTORY

Folder

- 1 original autograph manuscript (24 pages)
- 2 typescript copy in French
- 3 translation by John Gough
- 4 photocopies
- 5 supplementary documents