

Province, Paris, World: Forging Spatial Relationships through Theatrical Performance in Nineteenth-Century French Spa Towns

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Introduction

The plot of Eugène Scribe's play *La Calomnie*, which was set in the spa town of Dieppe and premiered on 20 February 1840 at the Théâtre Français in Paris, takes a surprising turn in the final scene of Act 2.¹ The play revolves around the spread of gossip concerning Cécile, a "provincial beauty" from rural Normandy who visits Dieppe in order to be married to Lucien, the deputy Prime Minister of France.² In the opening scenes, naïve provincial spa manager Coquenot misreads Cécile's closeness to her guardian, Prime Minister Raymond, as indicating a liaison. In act 2, scene 8, this suspicion is then expanded into a full-blown rumour that Cécile has had several lovers, following a moment where Coquenot and others watch her perform an extract from an Italian opera as part of an evening of amateur entertainment in the spa's salon. In this pivotal scene, the assembled spa goers' initial impression of Cécile as a country innocent is irrevocably upturned through the immoral implications of her singing in a quartet from Giacomo Rossini's Italian opera *La Donna del Lago* (1819), known in French as *La Dame du Lac*.³

The spa scene depicted by playwright Scribe was a recognisable one for his intended Parisian audiences, and one in which they had most likely themselves participated. Every summer, the capital's residents left the city *en masse* and flocked to spa centres across France for the healing waters of mountain resorts or the fresh sea air of coastal towns, both of which formed the backbone of a booming nineteenth-century European spa industry.⁴ Beyond the

1 Eugène Scribe, *La Calomnie* (Paris: Imprimerie Mme de Lacombe, 1840), 19–20.

2 Ibid., 9.

3 The opera's plot was inspired by Sir Walter Scott's poem *The Lady of the Lake* (1810).

4 Léon Escudier, "Vivier à Plombières," *La France musicale* (7 Sep. 1856): 290. On spa culture in France and Europe, see Géraldine Baglin and Nicolas Meynen, "Introduction au dossier 'Les stations thermales secondaires en France aux XIX^e et XX^e siècles. Une autre histoire du thermalisme?'," in *Les Cahiers de Framespa*, 38 (2021), <https://journals.openedition.org/framespa/11518>; Matthieu Magne, "Une scène en Bohême: mobilités et performances artistiques dans la ville d'eau de Teplice au tournant des XVIII^e et XIX^e siècles," *Diasporas* 26 (2015), <https://journals.openedition.org/diasporas/414>; Marie-Reine Jazé-Charvolin, "Les stations thermales: de l'abandon à la renaissance. Une brève histoire du thermalisme en

purely medical benefits of time spent in one of these resorts, attending musical and theatrical performances lay at the heart of the spa-going experience, whether these were amateur productions like Cécile's or evenings staged by professional companies. Indeed, throughout the century, town councils or individual entrepreneurs who managed resorts invested in larger and more lavish entertainment infrastructures to appeal to their visitors, creating dedicated theatre buildings to host a professional acting and singing troupe, as well as new casinos where orchestras often played.⁵ The real-life spa in Dieppe, where Cécile's story takes place, for example, progressed from hosting performances in the general purpose *grand salon* in the early nineteenth century to a dedicated theatre by 1826, demonstrating the increased importance placed on providing specific spaces in which socialising, pleasure-seeking and performance mingled and took centre stage.⁶

It is the circumstances and repercussions of the theatrical performance culture of mid-nineteenth-century French spa towns and its interaction with transnational elements, as glimpsed by Cécile's Italianate Rossinian performance, that I examine in this chapter. I take Scribe's *La Calomnie* as one of two case studies, alongside my exploration of the real-life spa culture of the time in towns such as Dieppe, Saint-Malo, Pau and Bagnères-de-Bigorre, via archival and primary sources. I examine this context first, demonstrating the relationship between cosmopolitan audiences and professional theatre companies and the impact of transnational influence upon spa theatrical life and the function of theatre troupes in small-town society. Second, I return to *La Calomnie* to analyse Scribe's depiction of Italian and German

France depuis l'Antiquité," *In Situ* 24 (2014), <https://journals.openedition.org/insitu/11123>; Carole Carribon, "Villes d'eaux, villes de loisirs: L'exemple des stations thermales françaises de la fin du XIX^e siècle aux années trente," *Histoire urbaine* 41, no. 3 (2014): 83-103; Ian Bradley, *Water Music: Making Music in the Spas of Europe and North America* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010); Géraldine Baglin, "Les petites stations thermales des Pyrénées centrales: des investissements privés au service d'une offre thermale de proximité," *Les Cahiers de Framespa*, 38 (2021), <https://journals.openedition.org/framespa/11705>; Viviane Delpech, "Dans l'ombre du prestige: Établissements de bains isolés et micro-stations thermales des Pyrénées occidentales," *Les Cahiers de Framespa*, 38 (2021), <https://journals.openedition.org/framespa/11533>.

5 Constant Taillard, *Guide résumé du voyageur aux environs de Paris, suivi d'un itinéraire aux principales eaux minérales de France* (Paris: Verdet et Lequien fils, 1826); Jean-Baptiste Pirault des Chaumes, *Voyage à Plombières en 1822* (Paris: A. Belin, 1823), 33-36; Jean Benoît Désiré Cochet, *Étretat, son passé, son présent, son avenir: archéologie, histoire, légendes, monuments, rochers, bains de mer* (Dieppe: E. Delevoye, 1857), 120-22; Hyancinthe Audiffred, *Quinze jours au Mont-Dore: souvenir de voyage* (Paris: Dawin et Fontaine, 1853); Marie-Eve Férérol, "Lust, Tranquillity and Sensuality in French Spa Towns in the Heyday of Balneotherapy (the Belle Époque and the Roaring Twenties)," *Via* 11-12 (2017), <https://journals.openedition.org/viatourism/1763>.

6 Taillard, *Guide résumé du voyageur*, 196-97.

music making in Dieppe around 1840 and his characterisation of Parisian and provincial figures in light of these European elements. In both case studies, the region, as embodied by Dieppe (Normandy) and Pau and Bag-nères (the Béarn/south-western Pyrenees) remains at the same time specific and broad, in line with contemporary writers and artists' perceptions of 'les provinces / la province' as both a series of specific historical territories that made up modern France and, at the same time, a more general term signifying all of the the nation except the capital.⁷ This dual identity was enabled by the fact that, between 1790 and 1954, there was no official administrative unit for the French regions. With the nation subdivided politically only into departments, with the identity of the *ancien régime* provinces persisting primarily through common parlance, artistic representation and social discourse.⁸ In this chapter, I suggest that Scribe's play and the contemporary spa-going theatrical environment together characterise a complex representation of regional France articulated through regional-transnational encounter. I argue that the resulting depiction of transnational influence over the regional, in Scribe's play and in real spa contexts, is significant in that it moves away from the more traditional configuration of spatial relationships between the French centre and peripheries glimpsed in other artistic representations, cultural systems, and discourse at this time.

French Spaces: The Provinces and Paris

Before moving on to my case studies centred on transnational influence, it is important to first contextualise the normative configuration of French hierarchical power that lay at the centre of the country's cultural infrastructure and imagination during the mid-nineteenth century, and how *La Calomnie* and provincial spa environments related to this conception. The provinces were typically depicted as firmly secondary to the nation's centre (Paris) throughout the period, and well beyond, in various types of cultural representation, and in artistic and social discourse, as well as in many centralised administrative actions.⁹ The capital was understood to be at once

7 Alain Corbin, "Paris-Province," in *Lieux de mémoire*, ed. Pierre Nora, vol. 2 (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1997), 2851-88. Philippe Martel, "Province/Provincial," *Le 'Théâtre provincial' en France (XVIe-XVIIIe siècle)*, ed. Bénédicte Louvat and Pierre Pasquier (Toulouse: Presses Universitaires du Midi, 2018), 25-34.

8 *Collection générale des décrets rendus par l'Assemblée Nationale* (Paris: Badouin, 1790), 11:16; Marcel Roncayolo, "Le département" in *Les lieux de mémoire*, ed. Pierre Nora, vol. 2 (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1997), 2937-74; Jacques Revel, "La region" in *Les lieux de mémoire*, 2907-36.

9 Corbin, "Paris-Province," 2851-88; Hervé Lacombe, "Introduction," in *Histoire de l'opéra français: Du Consulat aux débuts de la IIIe République*, ed. Hervé Lacombe (Paris: Editions Fayard, 2021), 14-15.

the head of the nation, but also itself representative of the entire national space.¹⁰ Such dual status was exemplified in the nineteenth-century provincial theatrical environment that, like schooling, education and linguistic policy, among other issues, was controlled centrally by the French government between 1806 and 1864.¹¹ During this period, in terms of artistic and musical education, for example, both provincial conservatoires and regional troupes were set up as satellite bodies of the capital, considered to be the first steps in training performers for eventual careers, success and status in Paris.¹² At the same time, the hundreds of professional companies working throughout France were required by law to programme the latest Parisian plays, operas and vaudevilles.¹³ With little funding or infrastructure to establish a sustainable tradition of local creation in the regions, provincial companies were instead tasked with the essential duty of circulating the capital's repertoire and, in doing so, establishing it as a national tradition.¹⁴ Many cultural representations also mirrored the power dynamics inherent within theatre's ministerially determined infrastructure at this time. In literary and theatrical portrayals of regional figures and spaces, writers from Honoré de Balzac to Jules Michelet and Stendhal, among others, portrayed the regions as subservient and secondary spatial units that symbolised backwardness, marginality and absence, in direct comparison with the capital's embodiment of the nation's progression, power and presence.¹⁵

There was also nuance, however, in these relationships, in which the negative and positive aspects of each space were partially reversed. Stéphane

10 Martel, "Province/provincial," 25–34; Katharine Ellis, *French Musical Life* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2021), 2–20.

11 Cyril Triolaire, *Tréteaux dans le Massif: Circulations et mobilités professionnelles théâtrales en province des Lumières à la Belle Époque* (Clermont-Ferrand: Université Blaise Pascal Clermont-Ferrand, 2022); Romuald Féret, *Théâtre et pouvoir au XIXe siècle: L'exemple de la Seine-et-Oise et de la Seine-et-Marne* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2009); Robert Gildea, *Education in Provincial France, 1800–1914* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983); Stewart McCain, "The Language Question under Napoleon" (PhD diss., University of Oxford, 2014).

12 Sophie Horrocks, "Performing for the Provinces: Travelling Theatre Troupes and the French Political Imaginary, 1824–64" (PhD diss., Durham University, 2024), 134–83.
<https://etheses.dur.ac.uk/15414/>.

13 J. B. Duverger, *Collection complète des lois, décrets, ordonnances, réglemens, et avis du Conseil-d'État* (Paris: Guyot et Scribe, 1826), 16, 139.

14 There were rare provincial premieres throughout the century and these were hailed as disrupting the centrality of Paris in terms of French theatrical power, especially when in *grand opéra*: see Horrocks, "Performing for the Provinces," 27.

15 Philippe Martel, "Province/provincial," 25–34; Stéphane Gerson, "Une France Locale: The Local Past in Recent French Scholarship," *French Historical Studies* 26, no. 3 (2003): 539–59; Corbin, "Paris-Province." Sylvain Nicolle describes the prevalence of this dynamic in parliamentary debates about French theatre in "La Tribune et la Scène: Les débats parlementaires sur le théâtre en France au XIXe siècle (1789–1914)" (PhD diss., Université Paris Saclay, 2015), 127–33.

Gerson, for one, has highlighted a concurrent pervading nostalgia for a pre-Revolutionary and pre-Industrial past evident in literary depictions of the provinces, in which lay a simplistic life and primal morality,¹⁶ while many playwrights also displayed the capital as a place of decadence and potential immorality.¹⁷ Similarly, aspects of provincial theatrical practice also worked to partially erase Parisian control and influence, for example in the adaptation of certain genres such as *grand opéra* away from the capital's norms to fit the much-reduced conditions of smaller towns,¹⁸ or in the resistance of certain local prefects in borderlands such as Alsace to accept centralised theatrical repertoire, official troupes, and even the primacy of French onstage in their department.¹⁹

La Calomnie offers an intriguing case study that aptly encapsulates these complex contradictions within mid-century Paris-provincial relationships. The backwards province, for example, is showcased in the characterisation of Coquenot, the gossiping spa manager who has never left Dieppe and who misinterprets the actions of his Parisian guests, provoking the rumour. This feature is also prevalent in the character of Mme de Savenay, Cécile's co-guardian:²⁰ although the play is set in 1840, this woman and her morals are firmly stuck in the Napoleonic period, speaking of the "the usurper" and the "Corsican ogre" and, in doing so, symbolising a past generation drawn from and characteristic of her native Normandy.²¹ As Gunilla Anderman suggests, *La Calomnie* can be read as a play that showcases "the devastating effect of malicious gossip on a small town," with the emphasis on the representation of a non-metropolitan environment in which inhabitants behave in a peculiar fashion, or at least peculiar to the intended audience of Paris' Théâtre français.²² Indeed, elements of the play's plot and characters certainly portray how, in a Norman provincial setting, people's habits can be far removed from the contrasting implied modernity and sensible behaviour of the capital and its inhabitants.

16 Gerson, "Une France Locale."

17 None the more so than in plays such as *Trent ans ou la vie d'un joueur* (1831) where a young man is repeatedly corrupted by several vices of the capital, particularly the gambling hall. Victor Ducange, *Trente ans ou la vie d'un joueur* (Paris: F. Canongette, 1831).

18 Sophie Horrocks David, 'A Genre in Flux: Touring Grand Opéra in Northern France 1830-1860', *Cambridge Opera Journal*, 37, no. 1 (forthcoming 2025).

19 Horrocks, "Performing for the Provinces," 238-79.

20 Scribe, *La Calomnie*, 2.

21 Neil Cole Arvin, *Eugène Scribe and the French Theatre, 1815-1860* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 1924), 97. See also Margaret Cohen, *The Sentimental Education of the Novel* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999).

22 Gunilla Anderman, *Europe on Stage: Translation and Theatre* (London: Oberon Books, 2005), 35.

This representation of the province/provincial, though, mingles with others within *La Calomnie*. For one, Cécile's distance from the capital is also presented as the heroine's strength: she is portrayed as an unsullied aristocratic beauty holed up in a Norman castle who takes Paris by storm when she is thrust into the sensual world of "brilliant" Parisian men who fall at her feet.²³ For another, Scribe also represents two types of Parisians. First, there is the decadent philanderer Viscount Saint-André, who boasts, but is growing tired of spending his time seeking pleasure in the capital instead of conducting business:

rather than going to my Ministry of Foreign affairs, where my uncle found me a job, I spend all the time in the Bois de Boulogne, at the Jockey-Club or at the balcony of the Opéra [...] obliged to admire, adore the women and to fight for them.²⁴

Second, there is the protective Prime Minister Raymond, representing the capital's order and authority, as he alone will believe the truth about Cécile's innocence and promise to stand by her when everyone else abandons the young woman.²⁵ Parisian influence is thus not always depicted as corruptive.

The play does make clear, however, that the provincial setting of a spa in a town such as Dieppe enabled new societal bonds and forms of behaviour due to its distance from Paris. The social structure of a spa resort, for example, is depicted in *La Calomnie* as more flexible than in the capital. Cécile's acquaintance Herminie de Guibert suggests, for one, that Dieppe is a place where it is possible for Parisians to make connections with those who might otherwise be inaccessible due to class separation in the capital:

Herminie [to the Vicomte Saint-André]: We have reason to come to Dieppe, sir, if only to see you [...] because in Paris we do not see you anymore [...] it's disgraceful.²⁶

Moreover, spas also provided an arena for the provincial middle classes to mingle with Parisian visitors and ascend society's ranks. Provincial beauty

23 Scribe, *La Calomnie*, 4-5. Lucien, her fiancé, was one of the men who saw Cécile during her winter stay in Paris and decided to marry her, an action that symbolises the taking of an attractive provincial object by a figure from Paris for the capital's gain.

24 Ibid., 6.

25 Scribe, *La Calomnie*, 39-40.

26 Ibid., 7.

Cécile, for example, is brought to Dieppe by her guardians to marry Lucien, with the town acting as a gateway for her to ascend into the higher-ranking society of the capital.²⁷ At the same time, for Parisians, the remoteness of a spa town was also depicted as allowing and/or concealing types of behaviour that might be frowned upon in the capital. Viscount Saint-André justifies an amorous encounter he had with a woman in Rouen, for example, by stating that it happened because they were: “Two Parisians ... in a foreign country ... I meant to say, in the provinces.”²⁸ Above all, then, as a place that is shown to be foreign to Parisian ways of life and where the capital’s social boundaries can be reformed and perhaps equalised, the spa town in *La Calomnie* is seen as a socially unmoored place. This depiction continues a long-running trope already evoked by Scribe in two earlier spa-town plays that also involve false identity, mistaken accusations, and liaisons in Pyrenean spa towns: *La Dugazon* (1833) and *Madame de Saint-Agnès* (1829).²⁹ The dislocated, and potentially troubling, nature of spa life is accentuated, in particular, in depictions of performers and performances: in all three plays, it is interaction with artists or with performances that brings to the fore mistrust of a character, including in the case of Cécile, which I will discuss shortly. Overall, then, *La Calomnie* is a play rife with complex, and at times contradicting, portrayals of Paris-provincial relationships, and I return to deal with how transnational theatricality affects these connections in my later section on this case study.

Bringing to light the contemporary spa culture across France that inspired Scribe’s play also reveals evidence of a real-life dislocated society whose temporary move to the regions had repercussions for the way in which a range of individuals, from spa-goers to journalists and town mayors, understood the relationships between Paris and the provinces. The rhythms of the nation’s natural and societal seasons dictated that regions such as Normandy and the Pyrénées could, momentarily, subvert the centrality of Paris. With the heat of summer came every year an exodus of the capital’s well-to-do inhabitants towards the provinces, especially to spa resorts in France and across Europe, dispersing the social centre of the nation away from the capital.³⁰

27 Although Lucien is originally from Villefranche in southern France, he is treated as a Parisian throughout the play, because he lives and works in the capital and is Deputy Prime Minister, a political representative of the dual symbol of the nation and capital.

28 Scribe, *La Calomnie*, 35.

29 *La Dugazon* (1833) is set in Bagnères, and *Madame de Saint-Agnès* (1829) in an unnamed Pyrenean spa town.

30 “F.M.,” “Théâtre de Dieppe,” *La Vigie de Dieppe* (16 Jun. 1838): 3, referring to the “guests from Paris” present at the spa; “I. C.,” “Théâtre de Pau,” *La Constitution* (25 Nov. 1849): 4, “the winter guests [...] for the season of mist and snow”; William Degouve-Denunques, “Théâtre de Pau,” *La Constitution* (10 Nov. 1850): 1.

As the editor Léon Escudier wrote in his Parisian magazine *La France Musicale* in 1856, “it is to Ems, in Spa, in Vichy and in Bagnères, that the elegant world and our elite artists have gone to find freshness, distraction, and success.”³¹ Provincial resorts provided political opportunities for administrators to do and discuss business in leisured surroundings,³² but they also became seasonal cultural hubs, as Parisian theatre companies largely ceased productions during the summer. Since regional companies continued to perform and tour, and with the capital’s stars descending on various provincial towns to appear as guest stars with these local companies, much of the draw of a resort such as Bagnères, in the south-western Pyrenees, or Dieppe was thus that, during this period, they became vibrant seasonal centres of French performance culture.³³ As noted by the Viscount in *La Calomnie*, the entertainment on offer in a spa went at least as far as equalling the capital’s offerings throughout the rest of the year:

There are too many pleasures [...] I will think that I am in Paris! And I who was ordered to leave [the capital] to rest and diet [...]³⁴

The social, political and cultural importance of the spa season allowed critics to frequently assign these regional spaces a momentary national importance level with Paris.³⁵ The south-western town of Pau, for example, was described by painter-poet William Degouve-Denunques as a ‘petit Paris’ in 1850,³⁶ while an anonymous journalist made sure to specify that it was “tout Trouville, c’est à dire tout-Paris” that celebrated actress Mlle Dupont in the Normandy resort in 1862.³⁷ Spas, and their troupes, therefore enabled Pau to Plombières to act as provincial cultural hubs in the season of social and artistic exodus from the capital, subverting the usual centre-periphery dynamics between the province and the capital. In the summer, Paris was simply out of season, whereas spas gained national centrality.

31 Léon Escudier, “Vivier à Plombières,” *La France musicale* (7 Sep. 1856): 290.

32 Bradley, *Water Music*, 4–8. Cécile’s marriage is an example in *La Calomnie* of a politico-social deal made between her guardian the Prime Minister of France and Lucien, his deputy, to be finalised in Dieppe.

33 Anon., “Théâtre de Bagnères-de-Bigorre,” *L’Echo des Vallées* (19 Jun. 1851): 2; Anon., “Chronique départementale,” (24 Jul. 1851): 2. One exception was the capital’s Opéra-Comique, which continued to perform during this period.

34 Scribe, *La Calomnie*, 18.

35 Anon., “Théâtre de Bagnères,” *L’Echo des Vallées*, (5 Oct. 1861): 1; Anon., “Chronique locale,” *L’Echo des Vallées* (15 Sep. 1862): 3.

36 Degouve-Denunques, “Théâtre de Pau,” *La Constitution* (10 Nov. 1850): 1.

37 Anon., “La Musique et la Comédie à Trouville,” *Le Ménestrel* (14 Sep. 1862): 333.

As I have already mentioned in the case of *La Calomnie*, though, these power dynamics between region and capital had the potential to be extended, or changed, through foreign influence. Accordingly, in the following section, I move on to exploring the way in which transnational musico-theatrical experience played a role in spa environments during this era and its repercussions for French society and its spatial relationships.

Performing for Foreigners: Transnational French Spa Culture

Foreign music was not out of place in the repertoire of theatrical companies performing during the summer season in Dieppe or in any other regional resort, such as Pau and Bagnères.³⁸ Professional performers were used to staging mixed-genre programmes that featured translations of Rossini's operas, alongside certain pieces by Mozart and Weber, as well as diverse French theatrical traditions, stretching from *opéra-comique*, across *grand opéra* and *vaudeville*, to spoken plays that were performed with music, such as *drame* and *comédie*.³⁹ Performers came to spas in different guises. In places such as Dieppe, spa managers invited artists from the capital each summer, to coincide with Parisian companies' annual holidays, as a sure way of promoting their town as a "satellite" of the French centre via the imported workforce.⁴⁰ In many other towns, though, such as Pau, Bagnères or even Saint-Malo, in Brittany, audiences applauded the regular *troupe d'arrondissement*, a year-long, regional touring troupe established to travel between different towns in several departments.⁴¹ French spas were geared around tourism, and it was widely acknowledged that stage performances produced by either type of troupe were as integral to drawing in visitors as the promise of healing waters. As demonstrated by the text of a southern spa guide from 1865, theatre was positioned at the very centre of visitors' pleasure-seeking experience: "the tourist enjoys himself in Bagnères, which has a well-made casino, [and] a theatre served by a good troupe."⁴² Indeed, performances were considered integral to the running of a successful spa enterprise: as a journalist for the paper *La Vigie de Dieppe* declared,

³⁸ Pau also had an important winter spa season.

³⁹ Horrocks, "Performing for the Provinces," 148-51.

⁴⁰ Charles Deslys, "Théâtre," *Journal de Trouville et de ses Environs* (23 Jun. 1861): 2. Eugène Chapus, *Dieppe et ses environs* (Paris: L. Hachette, 1853), 58; Anon., untitled column, *Le Journal des dames et des modes* (30 Jun. 1825): 283.

⁴¹ On this system, see Triolaire, *Tréteaux dans le Massif*, 96-110; Horrocks, "Performing for the Provinces," 22-23.

⁴² J.-A. Lescamela, *Guide du touriste et du baigneur à Caudebec, à Saint-Sauveur et à Barèges* (Tarbes: J.-M. Dufour, 1865), 117.

“the theatre is part of the most important pleasures that Dieppe is obliged to offer to strangers in its baths.”⁴³

While many members of the French leisured classes vacated Paris or provincial cities to attend spas such as Bagnères, the above-quoted “strangers” coming in droves to these resorts made for a distinctly transnational group of visitors.⁴⁴ Pau and Bagnères were both described by critics as filled with “foreigners” during the spa months, a term used to describe both Parisians and Europeans visiting the south of France.⁴⁵ Both towns were especially popular with English travellers,⁴⁶ and an 1831 record of a stay in Bagnères written by English traveller “D.V.” gives greater insight into the assembly of nations at the spa: he observed “the grave Catalonian [...] the elegant Parisian; the lively brunettes of Castille; the Englishwoman fair and cold.”⁴⁷ The origins of the groups of spectators gathered in theatrical performances were expanded even further, if hyperbolically, in the recollection of a critic from the Bagnères paper *L’Écho des vallées* attending a vaudeville performance by Roland’s 16th *troupe d’arrondissement* in 1841: he remembered a theatrical “public, come from the four corners of the world.”⁴⁸ While the journalist likely exaggerated, his recollection captures the scintillating feeling that, for local figures at least, spa performances were the centre of a cosmopolitan world where a Pyrenean town and its inhabitants were brought into direct contact with the world far beyond its doorstep.

This transnational breadth of visitors was not unique to the southwest. On the northern coast, too, spa centres such as Saint-Malo and Dieppe regularly welcomed “lots of foreigners during the summer season,”⁴⁹ particularly

43 Anon., ‘Théâtre de Dieppe’, *La Vigie de Dieppe* (25 Jun. 1836): 4.

44 Archives nationales de France, F/21/1258, letter from the Mayor of Mulhouse to the Minister, 28 Feb. 1826; F/21/1260, letter from the Prefect of the Haute-Saône, to the Minister, 6 Aug. 1851.

45 C. Kingsley, “From the Ocean to the Sea,” *Good Words* (2 Jul. 1866): 494–504; “La légende du lac bleu,” *La France Musicale* (14 Aug. 1859): 345. Anon., “Bagnères-de-Bigorre, 1^{er} Septembre,” *La Gazette des Théâtres* (14 Sep. 1834): 4; A. Aldini, Anon., “Nouvelles diverses,” *La Gazette des Théâtres* (23 Jul. 1835): 261. Mountain spas such as Plombières also attracted this diversity of visitors. See Archives nationales de France, F/21/1260, Letter from the Prefect of the Vosges to the Minister, 24 Feb. 1862, describing its recent transformation into a seat of European society after a visit by Emperor Napoleon III.

46 Alexander Taylor, *On the Curative Influence of the Climate of Pau* (London: J.W Parker, 1845) and “On the Curative Influence of the Climate of Pau, and the Mineral Waters of the Pyrenees,” *The Medico-Chirurgical Review* 40, no. 79 (1844): 49–60.

47 D.V., “Recollections of the Pyrenees,” *The World of Fashion and Continental Feuilleton* (1 Oct. 1831): 221–22.

48 Anon., “Théâtre,” *L’Écho des vallées* (12 Aug. 1841): 2. The performance was of the vaudevilles *La Lectrice* by Bayard and *L’Article 960* by Ancelot.

49 Richard [Jean Marie Vincent Audin], *Guide classique du voyageur en France dans les Pays-Bas et en Hollande* (Paris: Reichard, 1827), 89; Anon., “Théâtre de Dieppe,” *La Vigie de Dieppe* (31 Jan. 1838): 2. Eugène Auriac, *Guide pratique, historique et descriptif aux bains de mer de la Manche et de l’Océan* (Paris: Garnier Frères, 1866), 279.

English audiences, thanks to frequent ferry connections across the Channel.⁵⁰ What made a spa town different to other provincial spaces close to a border or international travel connection, as well as different to Paris, which was, arguably, constantly open to the transnational in cultural and political terms,⁵¹ was the sudden vibrancy and visibility of foreign visitors at this particular time. As noted in the accounts quoted above, during spa periods these towns were defined by and known for their overwhelmingly cosmopolitan populace, which was not present during the rest of the year, except perhaps in Saint-Malo, which had ongoing social links with its cross-channel neighbour, Britain.⁵² As stated by the Bagnères critic in 1841, though, stage culture had the power to disrupt the normatively closed experience of regional life and throw it open, momentarily, to the “four corners of the world.”⁵³

I argue that the transnationalism of spa visitors who were also spa theatre audiences fundamentally affected the understanding of regional identity and spatial relationships in nineteenth-century France, as articulated in the work of local critics from the towns of Saint-Malo, Pau and Bagnères. Journalists from each of these centres discussed the link between foreign tourists and performance culture in different ways, yet all highlighted that international audiences fundamentally influenced spa identity and function. This can at first be seen in journalists’ conception of theatrical repertoire. Throughout the century, the town of Saint-Malo regularly received visits from its regional troupe, the 6th *troupe d’arrondissement*, during the spa season. As was customary for these travelling groups, troupe directors presented a wide range of stage genres. As already mentioned, performers across France appeared in vaudeville and opera, plus spoken genres such as *comédie* and *drame*, the same repertoire that they staged in all the towns on their year-long regional network.⁵⁴ Throughout the nation, the most recent premieres from Paris were the most popular, and government censorship

50 Firmin Didot frères (ed.), *Panorama pittoresque de la France* (Paris: Cie. Bibliopéon, 1839), vol. 5: 26-7; Anon., *The Dinan and Saint Malo Guide: With Excursions in the Surrounding District, Including Saint-Servan, Dol, Becherel, St.-Juvat and Jugon, the Roman Station at Corseul, and the Castles of Leguillo, La Hunaudais, and Montafilant* (Paris: J. Smith, 1843), 91; Guillaume-Louis-Gustave Belèze, *Dictionnaire universel de la vie pratique à la ville et à la campagne* (Paris: L. Hachette, 1859-72), vol. 2, 1859. In *La Calomnie*, Coquenot also recognises the importance of British visitors, pressing his staff to run to meet tourists off the Brighton ferry, *La Calomnie*, 3.

51 See Anselm Gerhard, *The Urbanization of Opera: Music Theater in Paris in the Nineteenth Century*, trans. Mary Whittall (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1998).

52 See for example the Archives municipales de Saint-Malo, 204/32W/778, which detail several English inhabitants of Saint-Malo participating in local dramatic and musical societies.

53 Anon., “Théâtre,” *L’Echo des vallées* (12 Aug. 1841): 2.

54 Archives nationales de France, F/21/1251, itinerary (Besombes), 13 Aug. 1853.

ensured that what directors chose to stage in the provinces was already pre-approved at a central level. At the end of one spa season in 1839, though, director Robin's choice of theatrical pieces was subject to increased local scrutiny by a Saint-Malo critic because of the presence of British visitors that year. Writing to the national paper *La Gazette des Théâtres*, an unnamed Saint-Malo journalist suggested that Robin would do better to refine his choices according to the transnational nature of this spa town environment:

I will submit one observation to the amiable director. The English contribute much to the ticket sales, especially on Tuesdays [...] one should therefore not stage pieces where they are presented in an ultra ridiculous light.⁵⁵

The critic alluded to the depiction by Robin's troupe of two English characters, "Milord of backstage, an English character in good taste" in the vaudeville *Le Bénéficiaire*, and Lord Cockburn, a hapless English traveller in the *opéra-comique Fra Diavolo*.⁵⁶ National stereotypes or the characterisation of a comic 'other' hailing from a different country were common to both vaudeville and *opéra-comique* at this time.⁵⁷ The critic's sensibility to Robin's programming, though, emphasised the local influence of a transnational public over French theatrical tradition which, in his eyes, needed to be modified because of Saint-Malo's reliance on tourism. Indeed, the critic feared that an injuring of English tastes on the stage might compromise the visitor's experience, which he considered already threatened by the high prices of French wine:

Is it not enough that our neighbours across the channel pay a ridiculous price for the bad wine of the Hotel-de-France, without seeing themselves ridiculed again in our theatres?⁵⁸

The Saint-Malo's critic's column reveals that, in a spa context, performance culture not only attracted transnational visitors, but had the potential to be subject to their influence. Here, unlike in other provincial towns served by the same troupe, the choice of theatrical repertoire needed to not only circu-

55 "Saint-Malo," *La Gazette des Théâtres* (13 Sep. 1835): 384.

56 Ibidem.

57 Scribe was particularly fond of Scottish and English characters. Hugh Macdonald, *Beethoven's Century: Essays on Composers and Themes* (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2008), 195.

58 "Saint-Malo," 384.

late Parisian novelties, but, according to the critic, to also bend to the sensibilities of an English audience. It was not just a national theatrical tradition that was thus formed through *troupe d'arrondissement* performances, but a cross-border tradition that could be cultivated through repertoire curation.

In the south-west, the importance of foreign visitors played out along different lines, that of economic power. Transnational visitors, in general, rather than a specific national group, were discussed by critics here as vital to regional Pyrenean identity for financial reasons. Journalists and officials discussed how, since theatre troupes were essential to attracting these visitors, performers played an integral role in shoring up and developing their towns' economic status. The *Écho* critic did not mince his words, stating that "[Hermant's theatre troupe] is the price of the prosperity of Bagnères."⁵⁹ Similarly, in letters written to the Minister of the Interior in 1856, the Prefect of the Basses-Pyrénées described the centrality of director Hermant's touring company to long-term vitality in the surrounding region. He suggested that, if the *troupe d'arrondissement* could be persuaded to perform in the nearby mountain towns of Eaux-Bonnes, Oloron, and Orthez, this would offer "strangers an agreeable pastime" that would then allow these towns to "become livelier and would see [their] prosperity growing," like Bagnères.⁶⁰ Likewise, in 1849, I.C., a journalist for the Pau newspaper *La Constitution*, understood that performances in the summer and winter spa season ensured the long-term economic stability of his town:

How many material interests are intimately linked to the time that foreigners spend in our town! [...] The theatre is one of these things. [Pau] needs performances for its winter guests, whose presence keeps up types of commerce that wouldn't exist without them, and allows a host of industries to survive that were uniquely created for them.⁶¹

I.C. argued that Pau's "commerce of local consumerism"—that is, the hospitality and tourist industry vital to the town—relied upon the presence of foreign visitors that was, itself, catalysed in large part by stage performances. In this region, the cultivation of a transnational environment, through theatre, was a source of economic stability as well as civic development: in other columns, for example, I.C. advocated for the municipal investment

⁵⁹ "Théâtre," *Echo des Vallées* (5 Sep. 1848): 2.

⁶⁰ Archives nationales de France, F/21/1278, Letter from the Prefect of the Basses-Pyrénées to the Minister, 24 Dec. 1856.

⁶¹ I.C., "Théâtre," *La Constitution* (2 Dec. 1849): 1.

in a year-long opera company and the building of a new theatre, which was completed in 1863.⁶² In both Bagnères and Pau, theatrical transnationalism was seen to affect yearlong economic prosperity and the management of theatrical performance, as well as local understanding of theatre's role within society.

Across France, transnational influence also forged a new understanding, on behalf of critics, of the relationships between provincial spaces themselves. Across the nation, commentators were conscious of the need for spa towns to compete with their provincial neighbours, spa or otherwise. Many local journalists, therefore, positioned the transnational experience of theatre as essential to redefining spatial relationships between provincial hotspots, drawing competitive comparisons between different towns such as Dieppe and Trouville or Le Havre,⁶³ Nice and Pau.⁶⁴ Critics also composed more general statements about the superior worth of the Pau and Bagnères troupes compared to the rest of the provinces.⁶⁵ In September 1848, for example, the critic for *l'Écho* wrote that Hermant's *troupe d'ar-rondissement* was essential because:

For three or four months in the year, Bagnères needs to be the capital of the *midi*. The town must flourish, foreigners must enjoy themselves here.⁶⁶

In this quote, the journalist showed that, through performance culture and its draw of foreigners, his south-western town had the potential to place itself at the centre of the southern ('midi') French region. Such comparisons were significant because they afforded many spa towns a status against other regional places that they could not hope to gain in other terms: Bagnères was not the administrative nor industrial centre of its department, for example, let alone the wider *midi*, yet spa theatricality gave it a right to provincial prominence. In addition, in these moments regional critics did not look to comparative relationships with the capital to make sense of their local place in France: the transnational thus allowed the valorisation of intra-provincial links that, for once, circumvented Paris.

62 I.C., "Théâtre," *La Constitution* (26 Jul. 1851).

63 Anon., "Causeries," *Les Coulisses* (13 Sep. 1860): 4; Anon., "Théâtre de Dieppe," *La Vigie de Dieppe* (10 Mar. 1838).

64 A stranger, "Stations d'hiver: Nice et Pau," *Les Coulisses* (6 Dec 1860): 2; A stranger, "Stations d'hiver: Pau et Nice," *Les Coulisses* (9 Dec. 1860): 2.

65 Anon., "Théâtre," *Echo des Vallées* (5 Oct 1861): 1; I.C., "Théâtre," *La Constitution* (16 Dec. 1849): 2.

66 Anon., "Théâtre," *Echo des Vallées* (5 Sep. 1848): 2.

Through these brief insights into the ways in which critics from Saint-Malo, Pau and Bagnères discussed transnational influences in their regional spaces, I have revealed the profound impact that the presence of foreign visitors had on the repertoire choices of a spa theatre company, the economic power of a town's people, and the regional positioning within France that local critics hoped to establish. Although each town functioned differently, in each of these situations, regional journalists embraced foreign influence to shape their discussion of the importance and social influence of performance culture, and of their town and region's place and standing within France.

Foreign performance in *La Calomnie*

In the following section, I return to the play *La Calomnie* in order to investigate how the transnational music making so evident in the spas of Dieppe, Saint-Malo, Pau and Bagnères was represented by Scribe on stage during the same period. At its 1840 premiere, *La Calomnie* was received by critics largely as a political comedy due to the narrative of the rise of man-of-the-people Raymond to the position of Prime Minister, including his protection of his provincial ward Cécile.⁶⁷ I argue, however, that Scribe's reference to transnational music in two key plot points reveals his use of foreign performance as a means of interpreting regional places and spaces, here Normandy. First, there is the aforementioned performance of Rossini's *La Dame du Lac* in the amateur salon in Act 2. Cécile is coerced by her acquaintances Mme Herminie and M. de Guibert to sing in the quartet from *La Dame du Lac* with them for the assembled spa guests, alongside M. de Sivry, an unknown pianist and tenor pulled from the crowd.⁶⁸ The connection between Rossini and the title of Scribe's play would certainly have been anticipated by audience members: the title recalled Bazile's famous tirade against calumny in Beaumarchais' *Le Barbier de Seville*,⁶⁹ which the Italian composer had set as an opera and which had taken Europe by storm over twenty years earlier.⁷⁰

67 P., "Spectacles: Théâtre français," *Le Moniteur Universel* (23 Feb. 1840): 16; H.L., "Théâtre français," *Le Siècle*, (24 Feb. 1840): 1-2; Théophile Gautier, "Théâtre français," *La Presse* (24 Feb. 1840): 1-2. Neil Cole Arvin, *Eugène Scribe and the French Theatre, 1815-1860* (Cambridge, MA, and London: Harvard University Press, 1924), 97-101; Douglas Cardwell, "The Well-Made Play of Eugène Scribe," *The French Review* 56, no. 6 (1983): 876-84; Paul Bonnefon, "Scribe Sous La Monarchie de Juillet, d'après Des Documents Inédits," *Revue d'Histoire Littéraire de La France* 28, no. 1 (1921): 88-91.

68 Scribe, *La Calomnie*, 19-20.

69 Arvin, *Eugène Scribe*, 97.

70 Hilary Porriss, *Giacomo Rossini's The Barber of Seville* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021). Late drafts of the play reveal that the decision to reference Rossini's *La Dame du Lac* was taken at the last minute. See *La Calomnie* manuscript draft, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Archives et manuscrits, NAF 22480-22584.

In using the Act 1, Scene 2 quartet from *La Dame du Lac*, though, Scribe additionally played upon the implications of the opening text of this number, which also gives it its title: “Crudele sospetto” or cruel suspicions. In the original opera, the text refers to the wariness that four principal characters have of each other as part of warring clans aiming to control Scotland, and as part of the love quadrangle between heroine Elena, clan chief and her betrothed Rodrigo, her secret lover Malcolm, a rebel chieftain, and King James V in disguise who has fallen in love with Elena at first sight. Thanks to these associations, Scribe’s reference to the quartet in *La Calomnie* places the theme of covert behaviour and possible infidelity at the forefront of the reader’s or audience’s mind as soon as Cécile’s performance is introduced.

The stage directions for the scene describe the spa-goers rehearsing:

[they] *group themselves near Mr de Sivry, who seats himself at the piano, and all four study [their parts] in low voices.*⁷¹

Although Cécile and the others do not discuss their performance, nor is their eventual singing heard before the curtain for the act falls, these stage actions still lead spa worker Belleau to observe a physical closeness between Cécile and de Sivry, which he interprets as signalling her hidden immorality:

Well! How they are looking at each other ... and how they seem to understand each other (*with subtlety, in a low voice*) He’s maybe one of the three [...] it is rumoured that she has already had three adventures.⁷²

Belleau reads a closeness between Cécile and de Sivry’s as a sign of sexual intimacy, Scribe playing upon the age-old trope of the dangers of making music together, and this causes Belleau to inflate a rumour that Cécile may have had a past lover to sure proof that she has had three. Elsewhere in the room, Cécile’s fiancé Lucien and Coquenot also leap to the conclusion that the musical interaction between the youngsters reveals a physical relationship:

Lucien: Sir... One question ... you who were here earlier ... did you hear it said that the young person who is at the piano...?

Coquenot: Silence ... we mustn’t talk about that!... So you are aware of it too?⁷³

⁷¹ Scribe, *La Calomnie*, 20.

⁷² Ibidem.

⁷³ Ibidem.

For Lucien and Coquenot, too, what was previously ephemeral hearsay about Cécile's past is solidified into a damning diagnosis of compromising behaviour due to their interpretation of her participation in a performance of Italian opera. Not only does the rehearsal of *La Dame du Lac* shift their understanding of Cécile's morality and status as a charming provincial ingénue, but it has far-reaching consequences for her marriage prospects and respectability: Lucien soon abandons her, as does her guardian Mme de Savenay, and she is left with only Raymond as her protector. Even though the rumours are eventually revealed to be false, the general opinion of Cécile is never rectified in *La Calomnie*, a plot point that Scribe uses to demonstrate Prime Minister Raymond's own superior morality above the rest of the spa gossips, as he decides to stick with and propose to his ward despite her tarnished reputation.⁷⁴ On a symbolic level, then, it is through contact with foreign performance that the provincial ingénue Cécile has her innocent reputation tarnished largely beyond repair.

The choice of Italian opera as the vehicle with which to pivot the spa-goers' opinions of Cécile could, at first glance, appear inconsequential. As mentioned earlier, Italian opera was present in contemporary provincial performances, and Scribe's plot could simply refer to a trope of musical intimacy signalling something more. Yet a second episode involving foreign music making in *La Calomnie* reveals that it is precisely the implications of foreign musical exposure that are, indeed, significant within Scribe's play. In a second plot twist in Act 4, Scene 9, an actual affair is revealed between Hermine and Viscount St-André through another episode of female corruption by non-French music. They are inculpated, this time rightly, through foreign music: they separately admit to Raymond of "making music ... we sang romances [...] melodies by Schubert" in the Viscount's hotel room together in another Normandy town, Rouen.⁷⁵ This allusion to musical closeness leaves Raymond, like those present at the Act 2 Rossini rehearsal, in no doubt about the more-than-musical intimacy it implies.⁷⁶

This second episode of infidelity via non-French music reinforces the view that the specific foreignness of the musical repertoires is important in *La Calomnie*: it is the transnational encounter that leads to sensual acts between a man and woman outside of marriage in a regional setting. Whether the performance of Italian and German vocal music leads to wrong

⁷⁴ Ibid., 39-40.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 34-35.

⁷⁶ Ibidem.

intimations, as in Cécile's case, or right ones, as in Herminie's, the foreign musical acts featured in *La Calomnie* subvert the spa visitors' initial impression of regional characters and spaces: foreign opera and song shatter the illusion that Cécile is a country innocent and recasts her and Herminie as corrupted women. At the same time, both Dieppe and Rouen are portrayed as spaces where the traditional domestic situation of Paris (where Herminie and her husband live, and where Cécile is expected to relocate for her fiancé) is subverted. In this way, Scribe's depiction of the meeting between regional people and foreign music in provincial spaces challenges the traditional spatial relationship between the French centre and the provinces by reversing the usual mode which contrasts Paris as decadent and the provinces as the moral centre of France. Instead, the capital is cast as the place of structure that spa goers have escaped. In *La Calomnie*, the spa town poses a danger to traditional concepts of the hierarchies in the French nation due to transnational influence encountered through music.

Moreover, I suggest that Scribe's theme of foreign musical corruption gains additional significance when read as a meta-theatrical commentary on contemporary French society's interaction with foreign music, as a way to speak about French spatial relationships. By 1840, Rossini was an Italian composer with an undeniably global reach who had been resident in Paris for twenty years and who had written two operas for the French stage.⁷⁷ Despite his integration into the French musical landscape, though, in the Parisian theatrical context of the mid-century, Rossini's Italian operas such as *La Dame du Lac* represented a style of composition that was distinctive from home-grown French traditions in the eyes of contemporary critics, symbolised by the physical separation between the spaces in which these foreign pieces were staged in the capital: at the Théâtre Italien, rather than the government-funded and dedicated French institutions of the Académie Royale de Musique and Opéra-Comique.⁷⁸ Around the same time, Schubert's songs infiltrated the capital's musical environment during the early 1830s through private concerts of star French singers such as Adolph Nourrit.⁷⁹ Once the composer's *Lieder* were published in translation in 1835 and 1839, they became a regular and celebrated

77 Benjamin Walton, *Rossini in Restoration Paris: The Sound of Modern Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

78 Walton, "Rossini and France," in *The Cambridge Companion to Rossini*, ed. Emanuele Senici (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 25–36.

79 Xavier Hascher, "Schubert's Reception in France: a Chronology (1828–1928)," in *The Cambridge Companion to Schubert*, ed. Christopher H. Gibbs (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 263–69; J.G. Prod'homme and Frederick H. Martens, "Schubert's Works in France," *The Musical Quarterly* 14 no. 4 (1828): 495–514.

part of salon concert repertoire attempted by a wider range of performers, students and amateurs, such as Herminie and the Viscount in *La Calomnie*.⁸⁰

Both Rossini and Schubert's popularity with French music lovers raised some worries among Parisian critics and composers who feared that public enthusiasm for Italian opera or German song might disrupt home-grown traditions in each genre. In terms of opera, for example, a perceived 'culture war' between Italian and French opera felt within the Parisian musical scene was parodied in Fromental Halévy's 1829 opéra-comique *Le Dilettante d'Avignon* and, in 1843, a series of high-profile press debates about the refusal to include Rossini's Italian music in the singing training offered at the Paris Conservatoire, led by Adolph Adam, made it clear that, while Rossini's style could be admired, his Italian operas did not have a legitimate place in a national institution.⁸¹ During the same period, critic Ernest Legouvé, writing in 1837, feared that the popularity of Schubert's songs might "inevitably slay the Romance," the contemporary French song genre also performed in salons.⁸² A similar sentiment was also parodied meta-theatrically by editor François-Joseph Fétis in his newspaper *La Revue et Gazette Musicale* in 1840. As part of a larger sketch for a scene entitled "The musical new year," published in the 31 December issue, comic writer Henri Blanchard voiced the contemporary tussle between the French and German song genres:

THE ROMANCE: I am eminently French, and I've come to beg you to protect me and take sides with me.

1841: Against whom?

THE LIED: Mein Gott! Against me, who come to take herr place. I am faporrous like she, and morre dan she; I haffe morre naiffety dan she. I vos de feifforite tchilt of Schubert and I am now dat of Proch ant Dessauer.⁸³

80 Hascher, "Schubert's Reception in France," 263-69.

81 Stella Rollet, "Les multiples enjeux de la critique musicale: l'accueil de l'œuvre de Gaetano Donizetti en France (années 1830-1850)," *Le Temps des médias* 22, no. 1 (2014): 35-48; Matthieu Calliez, *La diffusion du comique en Europe à travers les productions d'opere buffe, d'opéras-comique et de komische Opern (France – Allemagne – Italie, 1800-1850)*, (PhD diss., Universités de Paris-Sorbonne, de Bonn et de Florence, 2014), 61-62.

82 Ernest Legouvé, "Revue critique: mélodies de Schubert," *La Revue et Gazette Musicale de Paris* (15 Jan. 1837): 27.

83 Henri Blanchard, "Le premier de l'an musical," *La Revue et Gazette musicale de Paris* (31 Dec. 1840): 648, translated by Hascher, "Schubert's Reception in France," 266. The sketch was a parody of the *fin de l'année* revues that were common at this time – see Romain Piana, Olivier Bara, and Jean-Claude Yon, "Introduction: la revue de fin d'année," in "En revenant à la revue. La revue de fin d'année au XIXe siècle," ed. Romain Piana, Olivier Bara, and Jean-Claude Yon, special issue, *Revue d'histoire du théâtre* 266 (2015), <https://sht.asso.fr/introduction-5/>.

The context within which Rossini's operas and Schubert's songs would have been received around 1840 highlights an additional layer of tension embedded within Scribe's reference to foreign music in *La Calomnie*. Not only did the encounter between the regional and the foreign lead to female corruption, his play suggested, but it also hinted at the corruption of a broader national musical tradition taking place in France. At both levels, there was something decidedly uncomfortable, as Scribe represented it, with provincial contact with the transnational in *La Calomnie*. Perhaps Scribe's reference to the threat posed by foreign music to the prominence and survival of French genres can even be extrapolated further: as a commentary on the real-life spa situation described above, the playwright highlights a fear of losing French identity altogether in regional contexts in which transnational audiences abounded, and where they determined the shape and function of spa culture in varying ways.

Conclusion: French Transnational Spa Cultures

I have shown that the influence of the transnational on fictional and real-life spa culture appears significant in the case studies of *La Calomnie* and various provincial towns, yet it is clear that the depiction of the regional in a transnational context offered by Scribe in his play in fact differed in many respects from that formulated by local journalists from places such as Dieppe or Pau in the mid-nineteenth century. In both of my case studies, I suggest that spa towns were seen by Scribe and local journalists as having the ability to reverse traditional hierarchical relationships, at times challenging the top-down influence of the centre over the French peripheries. Ultimately, though, the playwright represented the French regions and their inhabitants as largely corrupted by transnational influence, while regional critics embraced foreign encounters positively in diverse ways.

I argue that these differences point to an inherent tension in defining the place of the regions within the nineteenth-century imaginary that was, in these contexts, worked out through recourse to transnational markers. Indeed, the provincial openness to transnational encounter during this period reveals the growing importance, to writers such as Scribe and to local journalists, of spaces and people outside the French capital as instigators of regional cultural life, a significant force glimpsed in the liminal setting of a spa town. At the same time, central resistance to Italian and German influence in the regions (and, meta-theatrically, within French music life) is suggestive of a desire, at least by writers such as Scribe working in the capital, to continue to perpetuate a deferential relationship to Paris as the most

important spatial relationship for the provinces, potentially in response to the growing transnational importance in regional spas in contemporary society. That said, even with their conflicting aims – Scribe's to shore up the capital's position as central within French cultural life, and local critics' desire to challenge this position through access to external influence – both commentators sought to define the place of the regional in France in a new way that, crucially, did not rely on the region's link to Paris, but that identified the regions and regional people via their engagement with the world. *La Calomnie* and the theatrical culture of Normandy and Pyrenean spas thus embody a significant artistic conception of the region and its relationship to France that differs from traditional Paris-provincial hierarchies, representing the regions as members of a wider global community, while also highlighting how this global community's influence over local French figures and ways of life was an as yet potentially contentious and evolving issue within French society.

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