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To Display a Clearly Dramatic Talent: The Théâtre Historique of Alexandre Dumas

Jennifer Robin Goodman

Dans les romans, il faut des digressions; c'est indispensable, mais ennuyeux à faire.... Les pièces de théâtre sont plus faciles à composer.... Pas de sites à peindre, pas de portraits ni de toilettes à décrire.... Les décorateurs sont là pour ça.

Alexandre Dumas [1]

TODAY only specialists in nineteenth-century French theatrical history and the most assiduous readers of Alexandre Dumas the elder are aware that he had any connection with the theatre at all. In English-speaking countries, he is chiefly remembered for *The Three Musketeers* and *The Count of Monte Cristo*. In fact, that indefatigable novelist began his literary career as a playwright. The period 1847–1850 saw him in his glory, not only as playwright, but as the mastermind and artistic director of a theatre created especially for him.

In 1976 the Harvard Theatre Collection acquired the original drawings by Charles Séchan of his plans for Dumas' Théâtre Historique.[2] These designs were executed for presentation to the Duc de Montpensier, the theatre's political and financial patron, presumably at the opening performance, 20 February 1847. Since the building was de-

[1] "In novels, you must have digressions; they are indispensable, but tiresome to write. . . . Plays are easier to compose. . . . No settings to sketch, no portraits or costumes to describe. . . . That's what scene designers are for." — André Maurois, *Les Trois Dumas* (Paris: Hachette, 1957), p. 305. As his source, Maurois cites Françoise Moser, *Vie et Aventures de Céleste Mogador* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1935), p. 182; but the lines are in fact adapted from a passage on pp. 183–184 of this work. All English translations in this article are by the author.

[2] Charles Polycarpe Séchan, *Théâtre Historique: plans, coupes, élévation*. Inaugural date, 20 February 1847. Harvard Theatre Collection, pfMS Thr 314. I am extremely grateful for the help and encouragement of Dr. Jeanne Newlin, Curator of the Harvard Theatre Collection, and of the staff of the Collection.

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molished in 1862, these five pencil and watercolor drawings may provide our best remaining evidence of the Théâtre Historique's appearance (see Plates I, II, IV, and V).

For most of his life, Alexandre Dumas was fascinated by the idea of possessing his own theatre. He is quoted in a letter from Nestor Roqueplan to his brother (c. 1846):

> Here is what he says; "In seventeen years, the theatres have made ten million [francs] from my works; in five years, four newspapers earn three hundred thousand francs apiece from my novels. I want to own the theatre that brings in these millions, the paper that will earn these twelve hundred thousand francs by itself. . . ."[3]

For another writer this might have been an impracticable day-dream; but for Dumas at the height of his career, anything seems to have been possible. Antoine d'Orléans, Duc de Montpensier, the fifth son of Louis-Philippe, had begun to take an interest in the author of *The Three Musketeers*, his late brother's protégé. Dumas proposed to him the erection of a new theatre to present national historical dramas, especially his own and those of that other national dramatist, Dumas' hero, Shakespeare. The Duke was new to literary patronage; in 1846 he was twenty-two years old and about to be married. Still, he was able to use his influence as a royal personage with the government to obtain a patent (*privilège*) for the establishment of such a theatre. Madame Cavé, the wife of one of the ministers concerned with awarding these rare marks of official approval, may also have spoken in behalf of the charming young prince who had waltzed with her. The Duke also helped the new venture financially; Dumas, the presiding genius, had other outlets for his income. A group of investors under the leadership of Védel, a former director of the Comédie-Française, purchased a site for the building in the theatre district of the Boulevard du Temple. The grateful directors of the infant theatre offered to name their building "Théâtre Montpensier," but the Duke declined the honor, perhaps on the advice of his father. The King is reported to have observed: "Watch out, Montpensier, you are not rich. Indulge

[3] Unedited letter from Nestor Roqueplan to Camille Roqueplan cited in Maurois, pp. 201–202: "Voilà ce qu'il dit: 'Depuis dix-sept ans, les théâtres ont gagné dix millions avec mes œuvres; depuis cinq ans, quatre journaux gagnent chacun trois cent mille francs avec mes romans. Je veux avoir le théâtre qui rapporte ces millions, le journal qui gagne seul ces douze cent mille francs . . .'" Dumas was to return to this economic theme in his campaign literature of 1848.

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yourself in the whim of a theatre, if you like, but remember that a prince of the royal family may not go bankrupt." [4] This was a prophetic remark, perhaps the only one ever attributed to Louis-Philippe. Charles Séchan's fine, finished drawings, delicately colored in pink and grey, were made for the Duke in recognition of his patronage. The directors could not name their building after him, but they could present it to him in another form.

The license to build and operate a theatre was not issued in the name of Dumas, but in that of Hippolyte Hostein, who was to manage the enterprise. Hostein had managed several other theatres. Dumas made his acquaintance at the Ambigu-Comique, where Hostein was directing a version of *The Musketeers*. A lively account of the construction and operation of the theatre is given in Hostein's book of reminiscences.[5] He had taken on a difficult task. Dumas hovered over his theatre like the statue of "the Spirit of Modern Art" surmounting its façade, and, on occasion, he impeded matters exceedingly. Their method of choosing an architect foreshadowed the manner in which the theatre would be run.

Hostein had chosen Dedreux — a professional architect — to design the building, which was to fit into the very awkward space purchased for it on the Boulevard du Temple. Dumas père saw fit to engage Séchan, his favorite scene designer, for the same office. The design that Séchan drew for the Duke is the product of their collaboration.

> The façade of the Théâtre Historique springs up, narrow and triumphant, between two huge houses, on the site where formerly stood the Hôtel Foulon and the famous tavern of *l'Épi-Scié*. . . . Its appearance is original and striking. The first virtue that we find in it, is that it does not look like either a stock exchange or a temple, a guard-house, or a museum, like most buildings in the classical style . . . [6]

[4] Henri Beaulieu, *Les Théâtres du Boulevard du Crime (1752–1862)* (Paris: H. Daragon, 1905), p. 156: "Prends garde, Montpensier, tu n'es pas riche. Donne-toi la fantaisie d'un théâtre, si bon te semble, mais songe qu'il n'est pas permis à un prince de la famille royale de faire banqueroute."

[5] Hippolyte Hostein, *Historiettes et Souvenirs d'un Homme de Théâtre* (Paris: E. Dentu, 1878). For a comprehensive account of the Théâtre Historique and its productions, see L.-Henri Lecomte, *Histoire des Théâtres de Paris: Le Théâtre Historique* (Paris: H. Daragon, 1906), pp. 1–120.

[6] Théophile Gautier, *Histoire de l'art dramatique en France depuis vingt-cinq ans* (Leipzig: Hetzel, 1859), V, 41: "La façade du Théâtre-Historique jaillit, étroite et triomphante, entre deux énormes maisons, aux lieux où furent l'hôtel Foulon et le célèbre estaminet de l'Épi-Scié . . . L'aspect en est original et saisissant. Le premier

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Théophile Gautier's review of the opening production of the Théâtre Historique includes this assessment of the architectural structure. Besides Gautier and the Duc de Montpensier, Janin, Ingres, Auber, Halévy, and Victor Hugo attended the first performance.

Séchan's drawings show the theatre as it would have appeared on that occasion. They testify to the ingenuity of the architect, who had been asked to build a theatre that would hold close to two thousand spectators (according to Hostein [p. 16], who may exaggerate) on a site with street frontage of approximately twenty-four feet. The first drawing of the set shows the narrow façade, which managed to be distinctive in such small compass (Plate I). Both Galignani's *New Paris Guide* and Gautier explained the complicated iconography of the lavish ornament to their readers. Galignani's account is the more comprehensive of the two.

> The front is narrow, but tastefully designed. The entrance is flanked by two couples of fluted Ionic columns; the flutes interrupted by a broad sculptured band; two caryatides, representing Tragedy and Comedy, support the flat architrave of the entrance. Above the entablature a vast semicircular niche occupies the front; it is flanked by two coupled caryatides, representing, to the right, Hamlet and Ophelia; to the left, the Cid and Chimena [sic]; they support an interrupted circular pediment, adorned with a winged statue of the Genius of History [sic]; at his feet are the emblems of the drama. All these sculptures are by the hand of M Klagmann. The frieze and semicupola of the niche are painted in fresco by Guichard. In the latter is a central group of fine execution; Poetry leading by the hand Comedy and Tragedy, bearing their respective attributes, the comic mask, and the classic poniard. Around, doing them homage, are twenty-six of the most celebrated tragedians, musicians, and comedians of different nations and ages.[7]

Again because of the shape of the lot (as Séchan's view of the theatre from above, the second drawing in the series — *Plan à hauteur des 1ères et des 2èmes* [Plate II] — clearly points out), the theatre had to be entered through a passage which met the main hall at an unaccustomed angle.

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mérite que nous lui trouvons, c'est de ne ressembler ni à une bourse, ni à un temple, ni à un corps de garde, ni à un musée, comme la plupart des monuments en style classique . . ."

[7] The first portion of this description is from *Galignani's New Paris Guide for 1851* (Paris: Galignani, n.d.), pp. 490–491, which will be cited hereafter as *Galignani 1851*; the last two sentences are from *Galignani's New Paris Guide* (Paris: Galignani, 1848), pp. 462–463, which will be cited hereafter as *Galignani 1848*. The topmost figure is identified by Hostein as the Spirit of Modern Art.

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In spite of these contortions, the theatre itself was laid out with grace. It had exceptional sightlines, witness *Galignani 1851*, p. 491:

> The most striking feature of this theatre is the interior, consisting of an elliptical amphitheatre in front of the stage, twenty metres in breadth, and only sixteen in depth; by which means the stage is viewed from any point under equally favourable conditions. (See Plate III.)

Evidently the acoustics were good enough to permit later transformation of the building to an opera house without drastic alterations. The three final designs show cross-sections of the theatre from three different angles (*Coupe suivant le grand axe* [Plate IV], showing the stage-box "meublée avec un luxe royal" from which the Duc de Montpensier watched the first production, *La Reine Margot;*[8] *Coupe du coté des Amphithéâtres*; and *Coupe du coté de la Scène* [Plate V], complete with chandeliers and an elaborate scene design sketched on the proscenium stage). Dumas and Hostein had made provision for a large audience, if not for the two thousand spectators that Hostein had hoped for when the building was being erected.

> Three tiers of spacious galleries occupy the whole perimeter intended for the public, and are flanked by two elegant pavilions of Corinthian architecture, and surmounted by highly ornamented circular pediments; these pavilions contain the stage-boxes . . . The other boxes of the galleries are accommodated with small sitting-rooms behind . . . Lastly, above the third gallery are yet two lateral balconies for the *gods*.[9] Two large and splendid candelabra (lustres) descend from the extremities of the ceiling, and distribute light equally around. (*Galignani 1848*, p. 463)

Galignani also lists admission prices for these seats in 1850, when the theatre was about to close its doors for the last time under the aegis of Dumas.

We are fortunate that the guidebook provided the English-speaking tourist with a description of the theatre's ceiling, as that feature is totally omitted from Séchan's designs. Its absence seems the more perplexing because that obliging designer was involved in its design and execution.

> The general decoration consists of garlands of fruits and flowers on a white ground. The ceiling, painted by MM. Séchan, Dieterle, and Desplechin, is

[8] Henri Clouard, *Alexandre Dumas* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1955), p. 336.

[9] The "gods" are the "gallery gods" who frequented the topmost seats of the theatres. See Georges Cain, *Anciens Théâtres de Paris* (Paris: Charpentier et Fasquelle, 1920).

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oval, and represents, first, a colonnade of double Corinthian columns, surmounted by arches, intersected with rich festoons and hangings. By an effort of perspective a second colonnade is seen behind the first, and considerably aids the illusion. Painting, Comedy, Music, and Tragedy occupy four thrones at four different points of the periphery of the principal colonnade. The centre of the ceiling represents the progress of Apollo in his chariot, followed by Aurora, the Hours, the Muses, Arts and Sciences, etc. (*Galignani 1848*, p. 463)

The iconography of these paintings and Klagmann's statues may be compared with similar ornamentation in Dumas' remarkable château, Monte-Cristo, which was built in 1844–47. This bizarre mansion, which devoured most of Dumas' earnings, could only have been imagined by its owner — Gothic vaults, a Turkish ceiling, and a pack of thirteen dogs are listed among its charms. It, too, was decorated with numerous statues of authors of the past. (A friend is said to have protested to Dumas, "But you're not there!" to which the proprietor of the château replied "Oh, I'll be inside.") There may be certain parallels. Dumas had been absent from the country when the theatre's construction was begun, but he plunged into the preparations with enthusiasm on his return. In both cases, Dumas seems to have been a demanding client with definite architectural ideas.[10]

The letters of the poet Marceline Desbordes-Valmore to her husband Prosper Valmore, a theatre manager at this period, testify to the politics of organizing a theatre company in 1846. Mme. Valmore, anxious to obtain a position for her husband at the Théâtre Historique, kept an eye fixed on her friend Dumas' proceedings, and those of that parsimonious villain, his director, Hostein. Admittedly, she was appalled herself by the extravagant scale of Dumas' expenditures.[11] Dumas seemed to be hiring every actor he met. His company included some of the most brilliant performers of the *théâtre du boulevard*. Mélingue, induced to desert the Ambigu-Comique along with Hostein, was to become famous for his portrayals of Monte Cristo, d'Artagnan, and Lorin in *Le Chevalier de Maison-Rouge* [Plate VI], before he went on after the decline and fall of the Théâtre Historique to

[10] For Monte-Cristo see "Le Château Monte-Cristo," *The Dumasian*, No. 4 (Spring 1957), 13–17; and Charles Glinel, *Alexandre Dumas et son œuvre* (Reims: F. Michaud, 1884), pp. 407–413.

[11] Marceline Desbordes-Valmore, *Lettres à Prosper Valmore*, ed. Boyer d'Agen (Paris: Editions de la Sirène, 1924), v. 2. Marceline chronicles a tangle of frantic intrigues. Hostein's efforts to keep the theatre solvent frustrated her.

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triumph elsewhere as Benvenuto Cellini and the original Fanfan la Tulipe.[12] He was to be joined by Laferrière as *jeune premier*,[13] by the erratic Rouvière, an actor of two roles, Charles IX in *La Reine Margot* and Dumas' Hamlet. (Baudelaire's biographical article on Rouvière describes his interpretation of Shakespeare's hero, as modified by Dumas.)[14] Bignon, Lacressonnière, Boutin, Saint-Léon, Lefebvre, and Colbrun were also among Dumas' company. The actresses he engaged seem to have been equally outstanding; Dumas was to take a personal interest in a number of them. Atala Beauchêne, Mme. Lacressonnière, Hortense Jouve, Mlle. Person, and Mme. Perrier all appeared in various roles at the Théâtre Historique.[15]

It is difficult to compile a chronological list of the theatre's productions, even over an active period that lasted only from 1847 to 1850. Gautier did not include reviews of all Dumas' efforts in his *Histoire de l'art dramatique*, and accounts in other sources tend to conflict. Most of the plays presented were by Dumas; he had promised not to write for any other theatre. Earlier in his career, Sainte-Beuve had chided him for straying from the drama to write novels:

> M. Dumas' vocation for the theatre is so clearly settled that there is reason to be astonished that he should ever turn aside from it for writing whose only interest is another reflection of that talent for the stage which has been given to him.[16]

Dumas would never have a better chance to display his dramatic talents. Among his theatre's most notable performances was the first staging of Dumas' adaptation of *The Count of Monte Cristo*, which occupied

[12] Jules Truffier, *Mélingue: Le comédien, L'homme* (Paris: Félix Alcan, 1925) gives an account of this actor's career.

[13] For quotations from Laferrière, see Marie-Antoinette Allevy, *La Mise en Scène en France dans la première moitié du dix-neuvième siècle* (Paris: E. Droz, 1938).

[14] Charles Baudelaire, "Rouvière," in *Nouvelle Galerie des Artistes Dramatiques Vivants*, peints et gravés par Ch. Geoffroy, No. 61 (Paris: Librairie Théâtrale, 1855), reprinted in Baudelaire's *Œuvres Complètes* (Paris: Gallimard—Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1963), pp. 571–576; see also H. Blaze de Bury, *Alexandre Dumas: Sa vie, son temps, son œuvre* (Paris: Calmann Lévy, 1885), pp. 188–190; Hostein (note 5 above), pp. 207–210.

[15] For a complete list of the company see Hostein (note 5 above), p. 20.

[16] Charles-Augustin Sainte-Beuve, *Premiers Lundis*, 2nd. ed. (Paris: Michel Lévy, 1875), II, 390–391 (15 April 1839): "La vocation dramatique de M. Dumas est si nettement décidée, qu'il y a lieu de s'étonner qu'il s'en détourne jamais pour des écrits dont l'intérêt unique est encore un reflet de ce talent de scène qui lui a été donné."

Harvard University - Houghton Library / Harvard University. Harvard Library bulletin. Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Library. Volume XXVI, Number 2 (April 1978)

the entire evenings of 3 and 4 February 1848, followed by a London run in June. Dumas' productions were invariably long and spectacular. This famous version of *Monte Cristo* in two consecutive sessions took nearly twelve hours to perform, and yet it covers only the first third of the novel; at the final curtain the Count of Monte Cristo has rewarded his benefactors, but not punished his enemies. The cartoonists of Paris, led by Daumier, became adept at depicting an exhausted audience hobbling down the front steps of the Théâtre Historique.

Dumas did make great use of "les décorateurs"; Séchan was responsible for the scenic effects praised by Théophile Gautier, and repeated innumerable times in other nineteenth-century dramatizations of Dumas' novel. The final scene on the first evening was especially vivid:

> This set is lighted by a blue, silvery, and aerial moon, of a startling realism; the waters quiver beneath the glimmering track that the orb casts on the sea with the mobility and the sparkle of quicksilver . . . and, when Dantès, having slit open the funereal sack in which he had plunged to the depths of the abyss, rises in triumph to the surface and cries, "Saved!" you seem to see, streaming across his hair and shoulders, the foam and water of an actual sea.[17]

The epic scope of scene and action, combined with the familiar characters of Dumas' novels, reminded Gautier of an earlier form of drama:

> In our opinion, if anything can give an impression of those mystery plays that were performed in the Middle Ages, in settings with divisions, and whose action, ranging across heaven, earth, and hell, lasted several days in succession, it is unquestionably the production of *Monte-Cristo*.[18]

Monte Cristo was not Dumas' only experiment. Dumas' and Paul Meurice's verse translation of *Hamlet* was performed with Rouvière as the Prince of Denmark (15 December 1847), fulfilling the promise of the theatre's façade to be "un temple dont Shakspeare est le dieu."

[17] Gautier, *Histoire* (note 6 above), V, 224–225: "Cette décoration est éclairée par une lune bleue, argentée et vaporeuse, d'une vérité étonnante; les eaux tremblent sous la traînée lumineuse que l'astre projette sur la mer avec la mobilité et l'éclat du vif-argent . . . et, lorsque Dantès ayant fendu le sac funèbre dans lequel il descendait au fond de l'abîme, remonte triomphant à la surface et crie: 'Sauvé!' on croirait voir ruisseler sur ses cheveux, sur ses épaules, l'écume et l'eau d'une mer véritable."

[18] *Ibid.*, V, 221: "A notre avis, si quelque chose peut donner une idée de ces mystères qui se jouaient au moyen âge dans des décorations à compartiments, et dont l'action, traversant le ciel, la terre et l'enfer, durait plusieurs jours de suite, c'est assurément la représentation de *Monte-Cristo* . . ."

Harvard University - Houghton Library / Harvard University. Harvard Library bulletin. Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Library. Volume XXVI, Number 2 (April 1978)

This was to remain the standard French stage version of the play for close to a century; it is perhaps the only reworking of the plot in which Hamlet survives. *Urbain Grandier* (30 March 1850), *La Reine Margot* (20 February 1847), and *Le Chevalier de Maison-Rouge* (3 August 1847) — all by Dumas, with some assistance from his collaborator Maquet — were long remembered. Ironically, the last-named play gave the Parisians their theme-song for the Revolution of 1848, the Song of the Girondins from the last act. In the following year, Dumas' audience was to be too busy singing "Mourir pour la patrie . . ." at the barricades to attend the theatre.

Dumas took an active part in all of these productions. Laferrière described his method of directing in his memoirs. The great man would leave the earlier rehearsals of a play to his confrère, Hostein.

> As soon as the parts had been learned and we could rehearse from memory, Dumas appeared, and it was Jove the Thunderer emerging from the clouds. To hear him, nothing had been done, everything must be done again, and, a point to be noted, M. Hostein, as soon as Dumas appeared, reverted to a systematic silence and reserve that was strongly reminiscent of wounded dignity." [19]

He evokes a memorable picture of the playwright chivvying across the stage a mob of three hundred "extras" gathered from the streets for *Le Chevalier de Maison-Rouge*. At the time, the Théâtre Historique was regarded as the pinnacle of Romantic theatre technique, though after its disappearance, critics were to reclassify its style as melodrama. Laferrière looks back on Dumas' titanic efforts to coordinate scenery, costumes, and acting in a single realistic spectacle, with more respect:

> There is really an art in that, a particular art, perhaps a new arrival in the history of the theatre, but which has become the indispensable adjunct of modern dramatists: the art of the *mise en scène*.[20]

The year 1847 proved to have been a rather unfortunate time to open a theatre. In February 1848 there were brigades of national

[19] Allevy, *La Mise en Scène* (note 13 above), p. 120: "Aussitôt que les rôles étaient sus et que l'on pouvait répéter de mémoire, Dumas paraissait, et c'était Jupiter tonnant sortant des nuées. A l'entendre rien n'était fait, tout était à refaire et, chose à noter, M. Hostein, dès que Dumas paraissait, rentrait dans un silence systématique et une abstention qui ressemblait fort à de la dignité blessée."

[20] *Ibid.*, pp. 120–121: "Il y a bien là véritablement un art, art spécial, nouveau venu peut-être dans l'histoire du théâtre, mais devenu l'indispensable collaborateur des dramaturges modernes: l'art de la mise en scène."

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guards instead of box office queues in the Boulevard du Temple; Paris was in revolt once again. Dumas endeavored to stay in business. Maurois reports that he planted a tree of liberty in front of the theatre, remarking to the director:

"Hostein, let's stay popular. There will still be a great people in France when there are no longer any princes left anywhere." [21]

Neither this notion nor his others — closing the theatre the evening of the revolution, offering the mob an orchestra so that it could dance all night — had any noticeable success. Dumas campaigned for election as a popular representative from the district, pointing out in his campaign literature how many Parisian actors and theatre workers of all sorts his plays helped to employ (by his estimate, 347 for ten years in Paris and 1,458 throughout France). He even proposed that the state support a coalition of expiring theatres with Alexandre Dumas as head of the group. He assured the government that the plays produced would be entirely correct politically, and might even be useful for inspiring patriotism. Neither the Parisian citizens nor their new leaders responded to this indefatigable activity; they had other problems.

The Duc de Montpensier had fled to England in February 1848, leaving his pregnant wife, and, presumably, his set of plans for the Théâtre Historique, behind him. His theatrical company was to follow shortly. In June 1848 Hostein arranged for the company to visit London. They were to present the famous two-day production of *Monte Cristo* at Drury Lane Theatre. At this period that establishment was devoted to concerts and circuses under the enterprising management of M. Jullien; it was vacant for the moment when Hostein proposed to bring his actors across the Channel. The fracas his project aroused is among the most famous in London theatre history. The performance on 12 June was disrupted by various unemployed English actors and their allies. There are lively accounts of the proceedings in *Punch*, *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, *The Dumasian*, Hostein, and the *Illustrated London News*.[22] This last account outlines the course of the evening more lucidly than the others:

[21] Maurois, *Les Trois Dumas* (note 1 above), p. 236: "Hostein, restons populaires. Il y aura encore un grand peuple en France quand il n'y aura plus de princes nulle part."

[22] *Punch*, XIV (1848), 246, 257, 260, 263; R. S. Garnett, "Dumas at Drury-Lane in 1848," *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, CCXXVII (April 1930), 568–584; Malcolm Morley, "Monte-Cristo at Drury Lane: A Riot in two Parts," *The Du-*

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The house was very full soon after the doors opened, but there was that preponderance of coats and hats, and restless movement of the audience, which usually foretells a theatrical row. 'God Save the Queen,' played by the band, and lustily encored by the audience, was received with loud cheering; but immediately this was finished, before the first bars of the overture had been played, the hooting, whistling, and shrieking began, and lasted without intermission for three hours, the whole of the drama — for it was played through to the end — passing in dumb show. . . . We should state that the management, evidently expecting an opposition, had caused small bills to be distributed about the house before the doors opened, entirely denying that they had for their object any interference with the interests of the profession in London, and stating that they merely felt desirous of presenting to an English audience a few representations of the most celebrated works of M. Dumas, in the hope that a public so alive to the excellences of literature and the arts would witness their efforts with curiosity, if not with the favour which it would be their endeavour to merit. . . . This was an honest and respectful appeal, and alone should have turned away the storm of ruffianly abuse that afterwards broke upon them. . . . We regret that English actors of any class, were they no better than supernumeraries, should have placed themselves in a position so little creditable to them, or so likely to sink them in the eyes of the respectable portion of their patrons.

The Drury Lane engagement had to be abandoned after the second night. The manager of the St. James's Theatre offered his house to Dumas' company for two evenings, 21 and 24 June. The *Illustrated London News* gave the company, especially Mélingue, a favorable review on this occasion (the critic does remark that the play is a trifle long for English taste). But this effort, aside from provoking a regrettable display of chauvinism, was hardly the sensation that Hostein had envisioned. His reminiscences indicate how close to failure the theatre was at that time; after London he began to lose hope.

In November 1850 the Théâtre Historique closed its doors after a protracted struggle under several successors to Hostein. Various reasons have been given for its lack of success — the madness of the original concept, justifiable boredom of the Parisians with Dumas' plays, which they already knew as novels, the lavish scale on which Dumas was accustomed to do things and the vast expenditure that this entailed. Unquestionably the Revolution of 1848 had an adverse effect upon theatre receipts everywhere in Paris (except possibly at the

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masian, No. 4 (Spring 1957), 2–5; Hostein (note 5 above), pp. 55–58; *Illustrated London News*, XII (17 and 24 June and 1 July 1848), 392, 407, 424 (the quotation in the text is from 392).

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Comédie-Française, where Rachel had the presence of mind to recite the *Marseillaise* at each performance). For whatever reason, Alexandre Dumas the elder was bankrupt. The period of his greatest magnificence was to end with the failure of his theatre, and the sale of his château Monte-Cristo with all its contents.[23]

From 1851 to 1862 the theatre functioned as an opera house. Renamed the Théâtre Lyrique, it enjoyed a new burst of glory under the direction of Léon Carvalho. He devised a repertoire divided equally between the works of new French composers, and some daring revivals. Galignani's *Guidebook* of 1858 indicates that the upper galleries were no longer in use at this time: the acoustics at that height may not have been adequate. Carvalho was to produce the first performances of Gounod's *Faust*, Berlioz' *Les Troyens*, and Reyer's *Statue*, among others, and revived *The Marriage of Figaro*, *Fidelio*, Glück's *Orphée*, and Weber's *Oberon*.[24] M. Georges Cain obtained an account of life as a member of the orchestra there from his friend, the composer Massenet:

> I was fifteen years old; I was a student at the Conservatory, and, at night, in order to live, tympanist at the Théâtre Lyrique. . . . This modest employment brought me forty-five francs a month! . . . I lived at number five, Rue de Ménilmontant, in a little room at the top of a strange house almost completely occupied by the acrobatic staff of the Circus. . . . After having spent the day at the Conservatory, at five-thirty I went to the Rue Basse-du-Temple, a sunken alley parallel to the boulevard; the stage doors opened onto it. At that time the performances began at six o'clock: What a mob, what a crowd, what a Court of Miracles! imagine the entire casts, back-stage crews, dressers, and choruses of the ten theatres clustered along the Boulevard du Temple mingled in that narrow, muddy little street hampered by winesellers, sausage vendors, and hawkers of apple-puffs . . . it was filthy, it was infested with vermin, and it smelled of garlic . . . But how delightful, picturesque, and lively it was! . . . In my orchestra-pit, I used to work during the dialogues. . . . I had drawn musical staves on the heads of my drums, and there I worked out my fugue assignments . . . In the intermission we gathered in the old stable of the Théâtre Historique, which the good Dumas had built to house the horses of d'Artagnan and Bussy d'Ambois; M. Réty, the Director, had converted it into our green-room, a miserable green-room lit by two smoky candle-ends.[25]

[23] For different views of the failure, compare Maurois (note 1 above), pp. 237, 246; Clouard (note 6 above), pp. 337–339; Arthur Pougin, *Acteurs et Actrices d'autrefois* (Paris: F. Juven, [1897]), pp. 209–213.

[24] Beaulieu (note 4 above), pp. 160–163.

[25] Georges Cain, *Promenades dans Paris* (Paris: Flammarion, [1906]), pp. 333–

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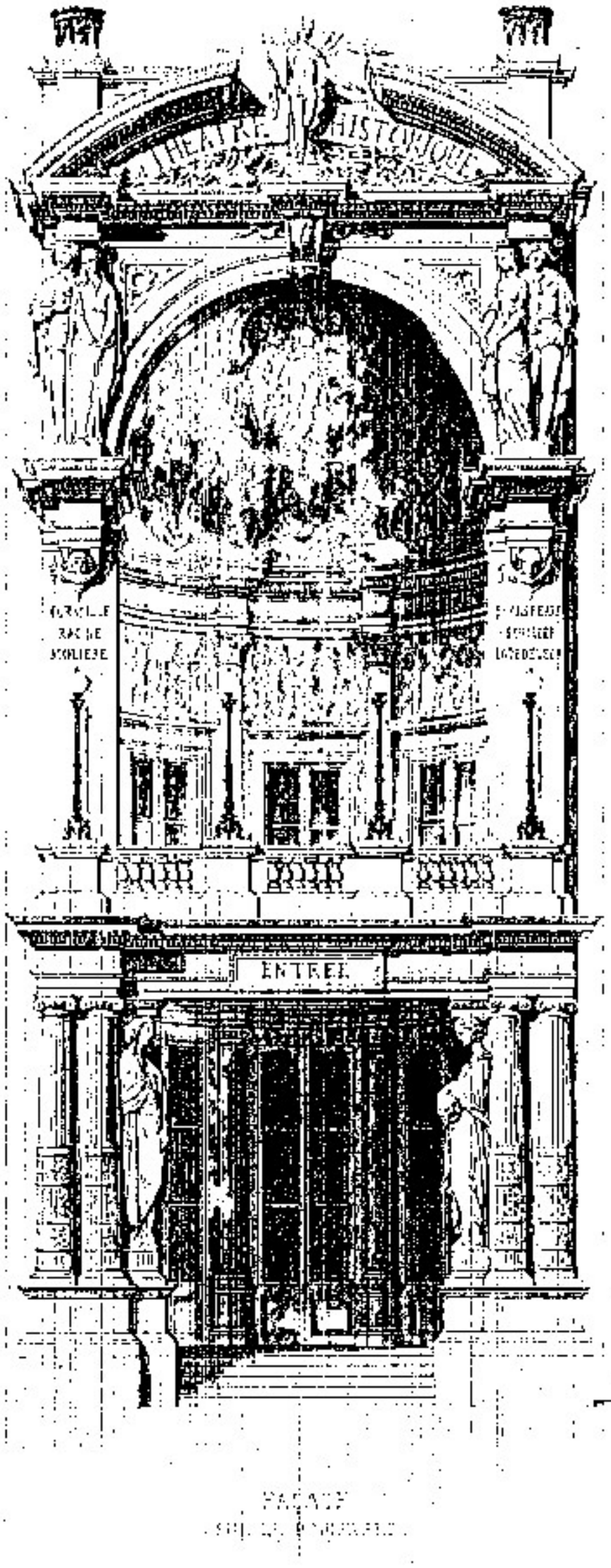

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PLATE I
Théâtre Historique: Façade
(on Boulevard du Temple)

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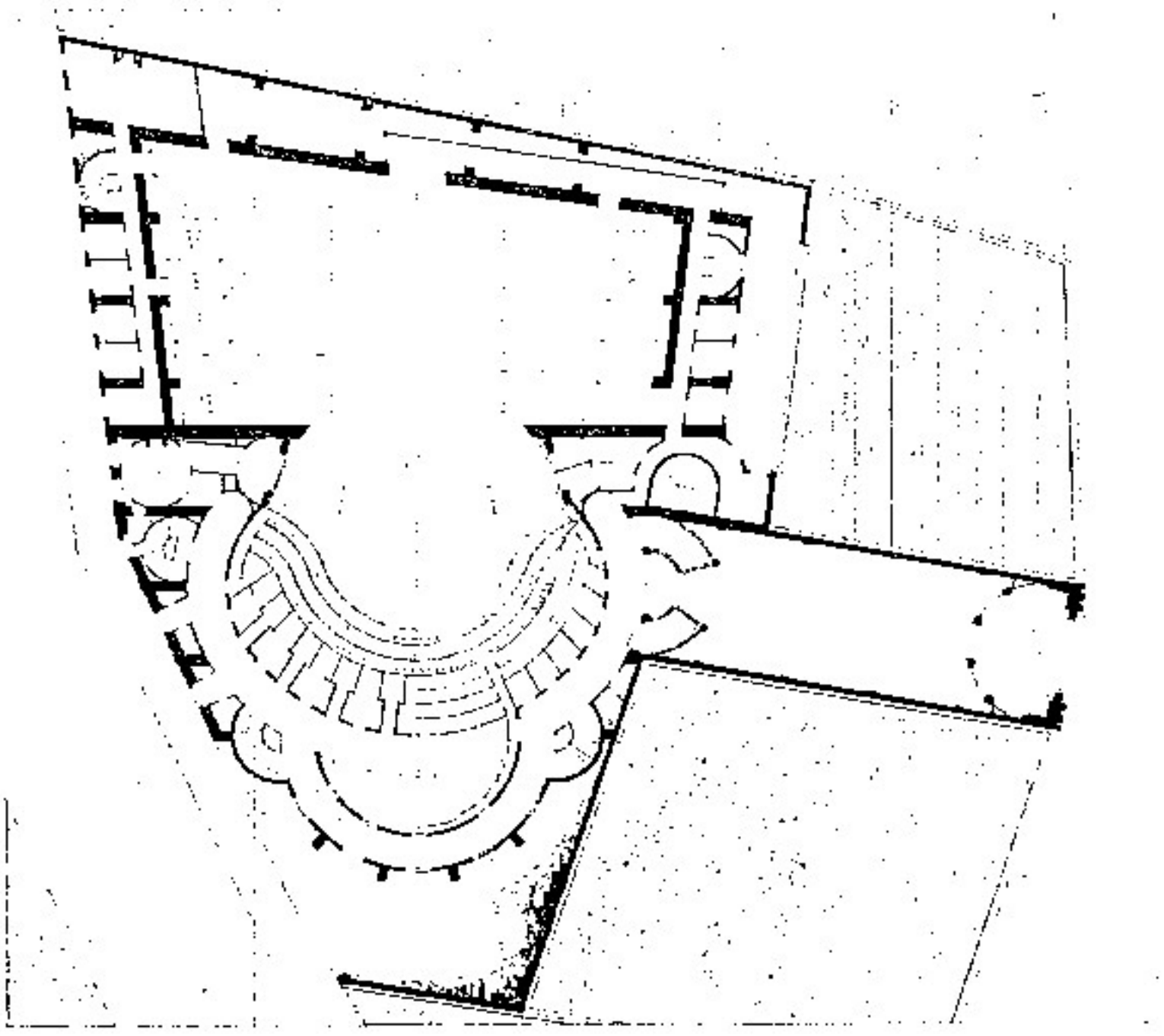

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PLATE II
Plan à hauteur des 1ères et des 2èmes

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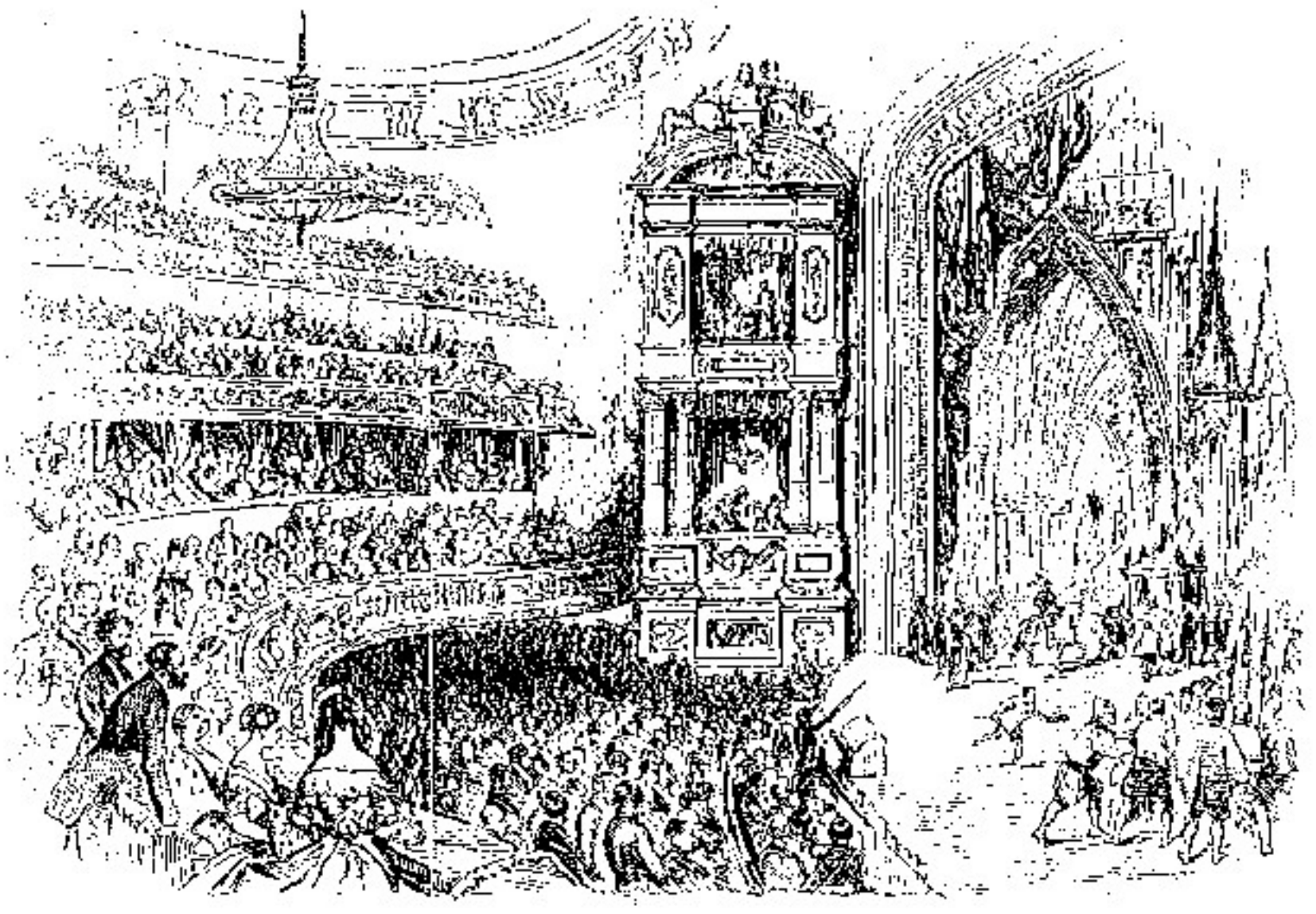

PLATE III
Opening of the Théâtre Historique
(*Illustrated London News*, 27 February 1847)

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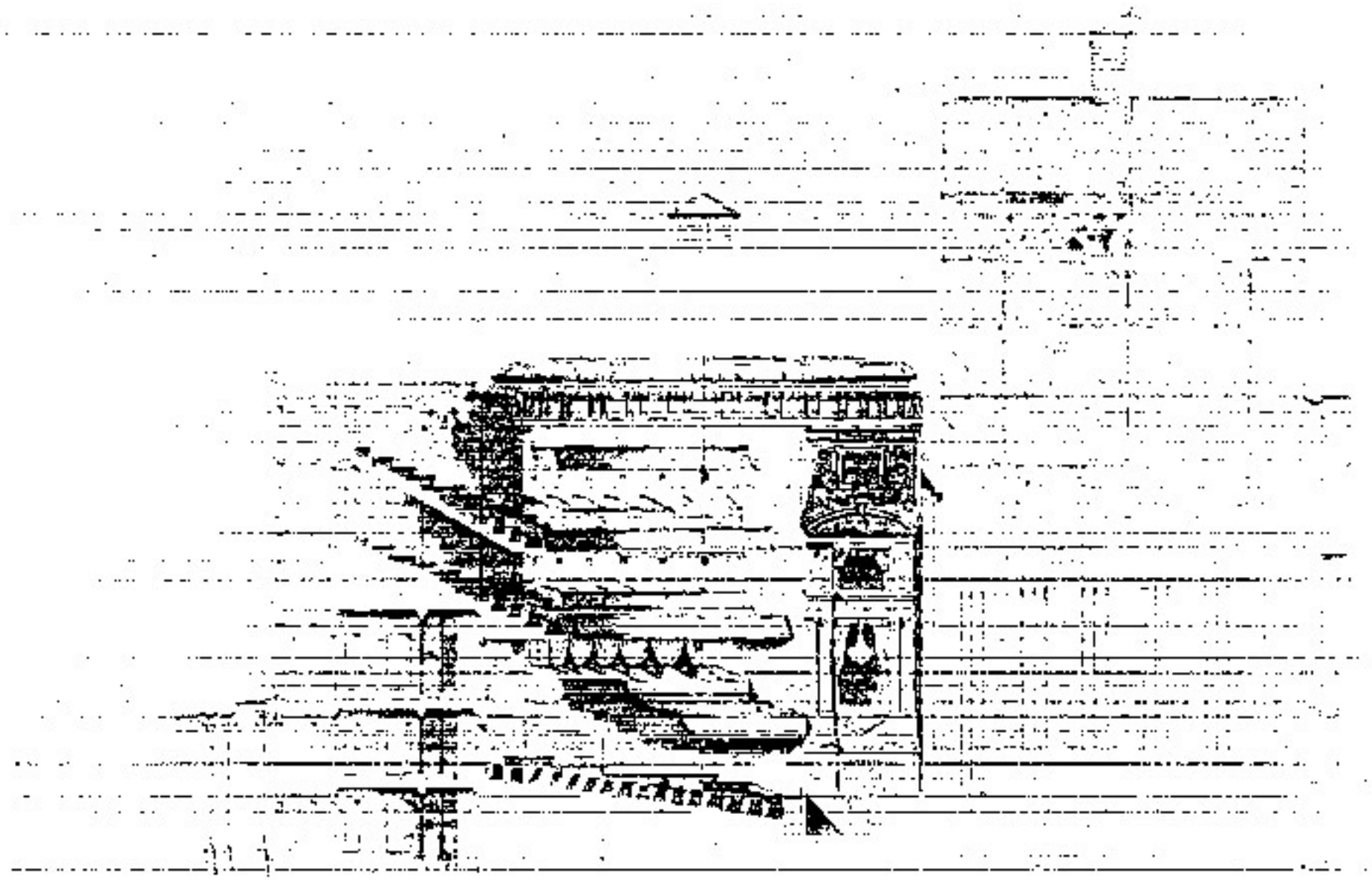

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PLATE IV
Coupe suivant le grand axe

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PLATE V
Coupe du coté de la Scène

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M. MELINGUE.
Rôle de Lorin.

PLATE VI
From *Le Chevalier de Maison-Rouge:*
Portraits et costumes des artistes jouant dans ce drame,
Théâtre Historique, 1847

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Live horses onstage had never dismayed nineteenth-century theatre managers, least of all Dumas.

The theatre building survived as Massenet described it only until 15 July 1862, when it was demolished along with many of the other theatres on the Boulevard du Temple. Despite a campaign of petitions, almost the entire boulevard was torn down by order of Baron Haussmann in the cause of urban development. The métro station at the Place de la République now stands on the site of the Théâtre Historique. "Mourir pour la patrie . . ."

336: "J'avais quinze ans; j'étais élève au Conservatoire, et le soir, pour vivre, timbalier au Théâtre-Lyrique . . . Ce modeste emploi me rapportait tout juste 45 francs par mois! . . . J'habitais rue de Ménilmontant, nº 5, une chambrette haut perchée dans une étrange maison occupée presque totalement par le personnel acrobatique du Cirque . . . Après avoir passé la journée au Conservatoire, je me rendais à cinq heures et demie rue Basse-du-Temple, une ruelle encaissée, parallèle au boulevard; là s'ouvraient les entrées des artistes et du personnel. Les spectacles commençaient alors à six heures: Quelle cohue, quelle foule, quelle cour des Miracles! songez que toute la figuration, tous les machinistes, toutes les habilleuses, tous les chœurs des dix théâtres groupés sur ce boulevard du Temple se trouvaient confondus dans cette petite rue étroite, boueuse, encombrée de marchands de vins, de débitants de saucisses, de chaussons aux pommes ... et c'était sale, c'était vermineux, et ça sentait l'ail ... Mais combien amusant, pittoresque, vivant! ... Une fois dans mon orchestre, j'y travaillais pendant les dialogues . . . J'avais tracé des portées de musique sur les peaux de mes instruments, et c'est là que je piochais mes devoirs de fugue . . . Pendant l'entr'acte nous nous réunissions dans l'ancienne écurie du Théâtre Historique, que le bon Dumas avait construit pour y loger les chevaux de d'Artignan et de Bussy d'Amboise; M. Réty, le directeur, en avait fait notre foyer, pauvre foyer qu'éclairaient mal deux lumignons fumeux ..."

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CORRIGENDA

AN ACCIDENT subsequent to proofreading (discovered in time for correction in offprints of the article) caused two errors in the October 1977 issue (XXV:4), page 425. The second line of footnote 62 was printed upside down, and the last line of footnote 62 was printed as the fourth line of footnote 63.

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