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Staging Lotteries in the Age of the Loterie de France (1776–1836)

Lotteries have a long history in France, going back at least to the reign of François 1.[1] The second part of the eighteenth century constitutes a particularly important moment in this history, notably because of the introduction in France of the Genoese lotto: the establishment of the Loterie de l'École royale militaire in 1757, followed by the Loterie royale de France in 1776, gave life to a French lottomania. As a *de facto* state monopoly, the lotto became an important fiscal instrument for the monarchy, as well as for the (many) following regimes, in a particularly turbulent period of French history. Save for a four-year absence between 1793 and 1797, the Loterie de France secured a steady income to the state for six decades, before it was finally abolished in 1836.[2] The financial importance of this institution was accompanied by a strong cultural presence, with lotteries being a recurring topic in art, prose fiction, poetry, and popular songs. Arguably, its most prominent presence was on stage: the period from 1776 to 1836 produced an astoundingly rich array of what we might term *lottery comedies*, i. e. plays staging various forms of lotteries. Such comedies not only reflect the contemporary fascination for these games but also provide insight into the various issues and debates connected to them.[3]

The interest in lotteries among comic playwrights can largely be explained by the comedy genre's preoccupation with topicality and newsworthiness. Lotteries were *à la mode*, with a strong impact on the urban landscape and in the collective consciousness, which the comedy could readily exploit and further contribute to.

1 For the early history of French lotteries, see Claude Bruneel, "Les Loteries de l'Europe méridionale", in *Loteries en Europe: Cinq siècles d'histoire*, ed. Bruno Bernard and Michel Ansiaux (Loterie nationale; Snoeck-Ducaju & Zoon, 1994), 100–104.

2 On the history of the French royal lottery, see Elisabeth Belmas, *Jouer autrefois: essai sur le jeu dans la France moderne (XVIe–XVIIIe siècle)* (Editions Champ Vallon, 2006); Francis Freundlich, *Le Monde du jeu à Paris: 1715–1800* (Albin Michel, 1995); Marie-Laure Legay, *Les Loteries royales dans l'Europe des Lumières: 1680–1815* (Presses Universitaires du Septentrion, 2014); Jean Léonnet, *Les Loteries d'État en France aux XVIIIe et XIXe siècles* (Imprimerie Nationale, 1963); Stephen M. Stigler, *Casanova's Lottery. The History of a Revolutionary Game of Chance* (The University of Chicago Press, 2022); Robert D. Kruckeberg, "The Wheel of Fortune in Eighteenth-Century France: The Lottery, Consumption, and Politics" (Ph.D. diss., University of Michigan, 2009).

3 For a study of lottery plays in Britain in the same period, see Paul Goring's forthcoming book *Spectacular Gambling: Lotteries and the Theatre in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (under contract with Cambridge University Press).

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Following Thomas M. Kavanagh, the theatre is arguably a highly revelatory object of study when it comes to understanding "a society's changing attitudes towards an activity like gambling", since the theatre is an art form that must "express both the playwright's individual vision and the audience's more widespread assumptions and prejudices".[4] The interaction between the artistic and the social allowed the comedy to play a key role in reflecting, transmitting, and producing perceptions of lotteries as games, financial institutions, and social practices. What can we learn from transversally examining these numerous and diverse lottery comedies? What do they reveal about the cultural perception of lotteries in the age of the Loterie de France?

This chapter examines a corpus of twenty-six plays (see table below) that were staged, (re)published, written in or translated to French in the period between 1776 and 1836, and where lotteries are represented, in one way or another. The corpus consists of both published plays and manuscripts. It has been established by using the general catalogue and the archives and manuscript catalogue of the Bibliothèque nationale de France, in addition to doing full-text searches in Gallica, BnF's digital collection. Although not necessarily exhaustive, this corpus is sufficiently large to be representative.[5] The engagement with a corpus of this size requires a "middle-distance" reading of the plays (as opposed to a close or distant reading): the goal has been to present an overall picture of how the comedy genre responded to the lottery phenomena, rather than providing in-depth analysis of each play. This is a way of writing literary history through the lens of a particular motif, and of structuring this history based on the chronological framework of an institution, in this case the Loterie de France, rather than on conventional historiographical temporalisations.

The comedies examined here belong to a tradition going back to the mid-seventeenth century,[6] and continuing beyond 1836.[7] In the following, comparisons

4 Thomas M. Kavanagh, *Dice, Cards, Wheels: a Different History of French Culture* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005), 110.

5 On 29 October 1789, the *Chronique de Paris* reviewed the comedy *L'Homme en loterie*, staged at the Théâtre de Monsieur. I have been unable to retrieve the manuscript.

6 I have found nine comedies pre-1776 that include a lottery motif: *Le Ballet de la loterie* (1658); Jean Donneau de Vizé, *Les Intrigues de la lotterie* (1663); Montfleury fils, *Le Gentilhomme de Beauce* (1670); Laurent Bordelon, *La Lotterie de Scapin* (1694); Dancourt, *La Lotterie* (1697); *Le Gros lot de Marseille* (1700); Charles Dufresny, *La Coquette de village, ou le Lot supposé* (1715); Jean-Antoine Romagnesi, *La Fille arbitre* (1737); Charles-Simon Favart, *Le Cocq de village* (1743). For studies of these earlier comedies, see: Michael J. Call, "Fortuna Goes to the Theater: Lottery Comedies in Seventeenth-Century France", *French Forum* 40, no. 1 (2015), https://doi.org/10.1353/frf.2015.0012; Spire Pitou, "A Financial Success: *Le Gros lot de Marseille* (1700)", *Romance notes* 8, no. 1 (1966); Guy Spielmann, "Mise (s) en jeu: loteries, brelans et spéculations, chevilles dramatiques

will be made with earlier comedies, to identify continuities and ruptures in the theatrical imagination of lotteries. To a certain extent, the comedies in the corpus recycle plot structures, figures, themes, and motifs from the earlier plays. But they also introduce new elements, especially when staging Genoese lotto schemes. A premise of the current study is, moreover, that the sixty-year period between the establishment and the abolition of the Loterie de France appears as remarkably and comparatively rich, both quantitatively and in terms of variety. If this can be explained by the financial, cultural, and social impact of the state lotto, the chapter also shows how various lottery forms coexisted on stage in the period. The lotto figures in only half of the twenty-six plays, whereas the remaining half feature various forms of blanks and prizes lotteries.[8] The age of the Loterie de France seems not only to have provoked an extensive cultural response in the form of topical literature, but also to have spurred the interest in lotteries as a comic motif and a plot device.

The use of the French state lottery's lifespan as the chronological framework for this study is justified by the historical importance of the institution, but also by the formal variety of the comedies in question: the different lottery schemes are represented through a large diversity of comic subgenres, from one-act harlequinades, vaudevilles, and *opéra-comiques*, to "grand" classical comedies in three or five acts, in verse or prose, and even a puppetry play (*L'Amour et le hasard*, 1826). This formal variety suggests that the staging of lotteries reached a sociologically diverse audience, which is supported by the variety of theatres where the plays were staged, from the bourgeois Théâtre du Vaudeville to the more popular Théâtre des Variétés.[9] Like the lottery itself, lottery comedies were for everyone.

The lottery is a versatile comic motif serving diverse functions. It can be a primary element or an element among others. It can be a major theme, a practice and/or institution put to the fore for satire or scrutiny, or it can function primarily

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dans la comédie", in *Art et argent en France au temps des premiers modernes (XVIIe et XVIIIe siècles)*, ed. Martial Poirson (Voltaire Foundation, 2004).

7 For purposes of textual economy, the present study will not refer to post-1836 plays, but these offer a rich corpus for future studies. Some examples are: Victor Gaffé, *Le Château en loterie* (1856); Émile Souvestre, *La Loterie de Francfort* (1866); Prosper Barthélémy, *La Loterie* (1862); Camille de Roddaz, Alfred Douane, and André Messager, *La Fiancée en loterie* (1896).

8 Two of the charitable and so-called "petites loteries", all blanks and prizes lotteries, were allowed to continue after the establishment of the Royal lottery. Kruckeberg, "The Wheel of Fortune", 177. On the difference between lotto and blanks and prizes lotteries, see, *infra*, Johanne Slettvoll Kristiansen, Marius Warholm Haugen, and Angela Fabris, "A Cultural History of European Lotteries".

9 Gérard Gengembre, *Le Théâtre français au 19e siècle* (Armand Colin, 1999), 42.

as a plot device, enabling peripeties and driving the action forward. The lottery can be read as a metaphor, signalling the role of chance and randomness in human existence. It can be examined as a structural device, enabling farces where lottery tickets circulate, are stolen or misplaced, or "king for a day"-plots in which false prizes and the prospect of sudden wealth serve as tests of character. The main focus of this chapter is how comedies represented lottery play as a social practice and the lottery as an institution. Staging the lottery meant engaging, directly or indirectly, with contemporary debates about the moral and political validity of the Loterie de France. By extension, the lottery often also enabled the representation of broader social and economic issues, such as the increasing importance of money as a universal measure of value, or the perception of shifts in the established social hierarchies.

1 Categorising lottery comedies

This first section establishes a categorisation of the comedies in the corpus, which will serve to structure the analysis of the remaining sections. We can divide the comedies into three main categories, based on the criteria of the lottery form being represented and the function it plays in the plot. The first category is the *marital lottery play*, comprising nine comedies, in which a young man or woman becomes the prize in a lottery, organised to determine by chance the choice of spouse, either in a blanks and prizes drawing organised solely for that purpose (*Le Cocq de village*, 1822 [1743]; *L'Isle des mariages*, 1809; *Ma sœur en loterie*, 1810; *Le Valet intendant*, 1821; *Un jour à Rome*, 1821), or as a subsidiary play on the state lotto (*La Loterie*, 1798; *Le Hasard corrigé par l'Amour*, 1801; *Le Jeune homme en loterie*, 1821). This category belongs to a tradition predating the establishment of the Genoese lottery in France: the marital lottery plot is found in Bordelon's *La Lotterie de Scapin* (1694), Romagnesi's *La Fille arbitre* (1737), and Favart's *Le Cocq de village* (1743).[10] This is also a highly transnational motif, found, for instance, in Dutch and English literature.[11] Applying the principle of aleatory distribution to love and marriage, the marriage lottery plot also engages with the topic of marriage as a financial transaction. Although not new, the number of marital lottery comedies in this period nonetheless illustrates a surge in popularity. We also find certain clusters, notably in 1821 and 1822, when four of

10 The latter was reedited in 1822 and is therefore included in the corpus.

11 See, *infra:* Jeroen Salman, "The Political, Socio-Economic, and Cultural Impact", section 2; Paul Goring, "The Lottery in British Prose Literature", section 1.

Table 1: French-language lottery comedies, 1776 – 1836.

Title	Year published/staged	Lottery type/category
La Coquette de village, ou le Lot supposé	1715 [reedited 1804, 1818, 1822, 1830]	blanks and prizes
Le Cocq de village	1743 [reedited 1822]	blanks and prizes/marriage lottery
La Docte intrigante, ou La Femme accorte et de bon sens	1783 [translation from Italian]	lotto
Les Deux billets	1784/1779	lotto
Le Billet de Loterie	1785 [translation from German]/n.a.	blanks and prizes
Les Châteaux en Espagne	1790/1789	lotto
La Loterie	MS./1798	lotto/marriage lottery
Le Faux billet de loterie	MS./1801	blanks and prizes/merchandise lottery
Le Hasard corrigé par l'Amour ou La Fille en loterie	1801	lotto/marriage lottery
Les Petites marionnettes, ou La Loterie	1806	lotto
Le Garçon de cinquante ans	1808/1806	lotto
L'Isle des mariages ou les Filles en loterie	1809	blanks and prizes/marriage lottery
Ma sœur en loterie	MS./1810	blanks and prizes/marriage lottery
Le Billet de loterie	1811	lotto
La Maison en loterie	1818/1817	blanks and prizes/property lottery
Le Valet intendant et ami de son maître, ou La Fille en Loterie	1821	blanks and prizes/marriage lottery
Le Jeune homme en loterie	1821	lotto/marriage lottery
Un jour à Rome, ou Le jeune homme en loterie	1821	blanks and prizes/marriage lottery
Le Bureau de loterie	1823	lotto
Le Billet de loterie ou L'Amour et le hasard	MS./1826	lotto
L'Agiotage ou Le Métier à la mode	1826	lotto

Table 1 *(Continued)*

Title	Year published/staged	Lottery type/category
Les Brigands de Schiller	1828	blanks and prizes/property lottery
Le Barbier châtelain, ou La Loterie de Francfort	1828	blanks and prizes/property lottery
La Loterie à la mode	1835	blanks and prizes/merchandise lottery
Plus de loterie!	1836	lotto
Le Château en loterie, ou Le Savetier propriétaire	1836/1835	blanks and prizes/property lottery

the nine plays were staged or reprinted, suggesting that playwrights were influenced by each other and sought to capitalise on previous successes.

The second category, significantly smaller, is the *property lottery play*, which includes four comedies where the prize is either a château (*Les Brigands de Schiller*, 1828; *Le Barbier châtelain*, 1828; *Le Château en loterie*, 1836) or a house (*La Maison en loterie*, 1818). This category is more clearly topical than the former, referencing an existing and well-documented lottery form.[12] Foreign property lotteries were advertised in the French press, although they may not have been widespread in France, as is reflected by the geographical settings of the plays: of the four, two are set in Germany and a third based on an idea taken from a German play. The château lottery comedies in particular engage with a specific version of the lottery fantasy, where social mobility and aspiration are key elements.

The third category, the *lotto play*, stages the Genoese lotto scheme used by the Loterie de France.[13] This is by far the largest category, although it partly overlaps with the marital lottery play. Within this category, we can distinguish between those comedies where the lotto is the main topic or serves a major function in the plot (*Les Deux billets*, 1784; *La Loterie*, 1798; *Les Petites marionnettes*, 1806; *Le Billet de loterie*, 1811; *Le Jeune homme en loterie*, 1821; *Le Bureau de loterie*, 1823; *L'Amour et le hasard*, 1826; *Plus de loterie!*, 1836), and those where it is an element among others (*La Docte intrigante*, 1783; *Les Châteaux en Espagne*, 1790;

12 Manfred Zollinger, "Loteries de châteaux", in *Créateurs de chances. Les loteries en Europe*, ed. Ulrich Schädler (Le Musée Suisse du Jeu, 2012), 88–91.

13 Note that, in the following, the terms *lotto comedy* and *lotto play* refer to this specific category, while *lottery comedy* and *lottery play* refer to the entire corpus.

Le Garçon de cinquante ans, 1806; *L'Agiotage*, 1826). This category is highly topical. Whereas the two other categories continued to provide new examples beyond 1836, the lotto comedies are inextricably linked to the era of the French state lotto. Certainly, there are significant overlaps with earlier lottery comedies, notably in the use of the lottery as a plot device and in thematising fantasies of social ascension. However, the lotto comedies largely appear as responses to the Genoese lotto as a historically specific phenomenon, all of them engaging more or less explicitly with the Loterie de France.

Four comedies fall outside of these categories. Both Dufresny's *La Coquette de village* (1715, reedited several times in the period) and Gellert's *Le Billet de Loterie* (1785; translation from German; original title: *Das Los in der Lotterie*, 1746) stage blanks and prizes lotteries without attaching them to the marital or the property plot.[14] As for *Le Faux billet de loterie* (1801) and *La Loterie à la mode* (1835), they represent merchandise lotteries, a form that is otherwise absent from the corpus but had constituted the most common motif of the seventeenth-century lottery comedies.[15] To some extent, these four plays reveal the limits of the categorisation, as they share important features with the rest of the corpus. As such, they also show how playwrights, when using the generic term of "loterie", could in fact be referring to a whole array of different schemes and forms, with overlapping functions and significations within the plays. Thus, the corpus as a whole indicates primarily that the lottery was a fashionable motif on the late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century French stage.

2 Satire and institutional critique in the lotto comedy

The debate about the morality and social legitimacy of the lottery accompanied the game from its earliest inception. Already in the early modern period, the lottery's promise of sudden, effortless wealth was presented as detrimental to the general work ethic and as luring players into ruin and misery.[16] The introduction

14 Gellert's comedy was also translated to Dutch in 1778. See Salman, "The Political, Socio-Economic, and Cultural Impact", section 2.

15 Merchandise lotteries are found in *Les Intrigues de la lotterie* (1670), *Le Gentilhomme de Beauce* (1670), *La Lotterie de Scapin* (1694), and *La Lotterie* (1697).

16 Bruno Bernard, "Aspects moraux et sociaux des loteries", in *Loteries en Europe: Cinq siècles d'histoire*, ed. Bruno Bernard and Michel Ansiaux (Loterie nationale; Snoeck-Ducaju & Zoon, 1994), 57.

of the Genoese lotto in France gave new life to the debate, due to its combination of a particularly strong allure and an increased inequity in favour of the organiser, i. e. the state. The Loterie de France even had a greater allure than its precursor, the lotto of the French military school, because of lower entry barriers and new possibilities for number combinations. The most improbable of these, the *quine* (a bet on all five numbers drawn), promised a return of 1,000,000 times the wager.[17] Following the crisis of the French monarchy and the subsequent political turmoil in and after the Revolution, the royal lottery was to an increasing degree perceived as a political problem, disruptive to the relationship between the sovereign and his subjects.[18] Finally, there was a renewed moral and political critique of the institution in the decades leading to the 1836 abolition, resulting from the conjunction of an increasing religious piety with the emergence of progressive movements.[19]

To what extent did the staging of lotteries echo these debates? As one might expect, any direct critique of the state lottery appears only in the lotto comedies, examined in the current section. However, because of the strict censorship of the theatre that, with a few exceptions, characterised this entire period,[20] few plays engaged directly with the state lottery institution as a political issue. Moreover, in those plays where the lotto is an element among others, it is usually embedded in a more general social satire, targeting harmful obsessions (*La Docte intrigante*), delusional daydreaming (*Les Châteaux en Espagne*), dishonest transactions (*Le Garçon de cinquante ans*), or speculation (*L'Agiotage*). Where the lotto is the primary topic, on the other hand, there is an increasing degree of institutional critique, notably in the 1820s and 1830s. Whereas the earliest lotto plays, most of them harlequinades, primarily use the game as a plot device, later lotto plays have a more direct engagement with the political debate on the state lottery, coinciding with the aforementioned renewal of the debate in the decades before the abolition. This development is also partly linked to aesthetic changes, especially with the shift from stock characters (Arlequin, Gilles, Colombine, etc.) towards more individual and sociologically determined characters – such as the lottery office manager Agathe Desroues in *Le Bureau de loterie* (1823) or the Lyonnais silk worker Michel Guérin in *Plus de loterie!* (1836).

17 Kruckeberg, "The Wheel of Fortune", 187.

18 Robert D. Kruckeberg, "The Royal Lottery and the Old Regime: Financial Innovation and Modern Political Culture", *French Historical Studies* 37, no. 1 (2014); "'A Nation of Gamesters': Virtue, the Will of the Nation, and the National Lottery in the French Revolution", *French History* 31, no. 3 (2017), https://doi.org/10.1093/fh/crx035.

19 Bernard, "Aspects moraux", 80.

20 Gengembre, *Le Théâtre français*, 12–25.

Another significant difference between lotto plays from the turn of the century and later plays resides in whether they allow for the characters to win the big prize, an element touching at the heart of the lotto debate. A major argument against the state lottery was its fundamental inequity, staggering low probabilities for winning the biggest and most alluring prizes (the *terne*, *quaterne*, and *quine*), and the alleged incapacity of players to grasp these probabilities.[21] Thus, in those plays where a character wins such a prize (*La Loterie*; *Les Deux Billets*; *Le Hasard corrigé*), the happy denouement clearly subverts any critical potential. By contrast, the later, more satirical plays (*Le Bureau de loterie*; *Plus de loterie!*) tend to emphasise the players' fundamental misunderstanding of the odds. As such, these comedies in fact bring back a key aspect of the seventeenth-century comedies, where players frequently misunderstand the very principle of the lottery by disregarding all risk.[22]

If somebody (seemingly) wins the big prize in the nineteenth-century lotto plays, it always turns out to have been a false prize, the result of a ruse, upon which the duped "winner" is chastised for having counted the chickens before they were hatched (*Les Petites marionnettes*; *Le Bureau de loterie*; *Plus de loterie!*). What is also being condemned here is the lottery fantasy itself, more specifically its promise of upward mobility. These comedies transmit a conservative view of social hierarchies, by asking disappointed players to stay in their place.

However, there are important nuances to how the lotto comedies in general represent the lottery fantasy, not all being equally critical. In *Les Châteaux en Espagne* (1790), for instance, the manservant Victor dreams of winning the big prize that would allow him to stop a life of wandering and settle at a farm. The comedy uses this personal version of the fantasy, extensively depicted, to explore the mechanism of daydreaming, of building castles in the air. The representation is less critical than benignly amused, creating sympathy for the dreamer.[23]

The fantasy is more negatively represented in *Les Petites marionnettes* (1806), where the hopeful players are ridiculed for betting on the Imperial lottery to fulfil their pipedreams: "Truly you were great fools / To have counted on the lottery".[24] This is perhaps less a critique of the institution than a satire on the vanity and disloyalty of a group of servants who dream of becoming masters. If the lottery

21 Stigler, *Casanova's Lottery*, 177–180.

22 Spielmann, "Mise (s) en jeu", 201. See also Call, "Fortuna Goes to the Theater", 5.

23 Jean-François Collin d'Harleville, *Les Châteaux en Espagne, comédie en cinq actes et en vers* (Moutard; Desenne, 1790), 3, VIII, 258.

24 Charles-Augustin Sewrin and René Chazet, *Les Petites marionnettes, ou La Loterie, comédie en un acte et en prose, mêlée de vaudevilles* (Madame Cavanagh, libraire, 1806), XVII, 28. Unless otherwise stated, all translations are mine.

fantasy is construed here as a negative force that goes against the established social order, the flaw already lies with the characters, and the lottery functions primarily as a device to have them reveal their true nature. This comedy makes use of elements found in *La Coquette de village, ou le Lot suppose* (1715), reedited only two years before: it makes fun of a servant fooled into believing he has won the big prize and who begins acting above his class.[25] As such, *Les Petites marionnettes* appears as a variation over a more general trope of sudden wealth as a test of character, as well as a social satire attacking social pretensions and the figure of the *parvenu*.

The critique of the lotto in and of itself is more clearly pronounced in *Le Garçon de cinquante ans* (1808), where the game is presented as a corrupting vice that turns honest men into thieving and malcontent rogues: to procure money for playing the lotto, the footman Picard embezzles money from his employer.[26] This comedy plays on a recurring motif in the critique of the lotto institution, namely its responsibility for widespread domestic theft and the moral corruption of the serving class.[27] The lotto is presented as both an individual and a social problem, one that particularly affects the lower classes, but with consequences for the entire social fabric.

Domestic theft is far from the only negative social consequence being denounced. In *Le Bureau de loterie*, one of the comedies that deal the most directly and adversely with the Loterie de France, lotto playing is presented as a "sad spectacle" that affects all levels of society, leading to vice and corruption. This "spectacle" includes everyone from the beggars who scrape their pennies together to bet on the highly improbable *quaterne*, via the worker who squanders his wages while his wife and children go hungry, to members of the higher classes whose sacrifices are comparatively much smaller, but who take the stake from their servants' salaries.[28]

Certainly, satires of lottery frenzies and their social consequences can also be found in seventeenth-century comedies, notably in *Les Intrigues de la lotterie* (1670) and *Le Gentilhomme de Beauce* (1670),[29] pointing to a certain historical con-

25 Charles Dufresny, *La Coquette de village, ou le Lot supposé* (S.i., S.d. [1715]), 3, III, 69–75.
26 Alexandre Pieyre, *Le Garçon de cinquante ans, comédie en cinq actes, en vers* (Jacob l'aîné, 1808), 2, I, 25.
27 Domestic theft resulting from lotto play became a recurring motif in Honoré de Balzac's novels, for example in *La Cousine Bette* (Gallimard, 2019 [1846]), 234–235.
28 Édouard-Joseph-Ennemond Mazères and Auguste Romieu, *Le Bureau de loterie, comédie-vaudeville en un acte* (J.-N. Barba, 1823), VII, 15.
29 Jean Donneau de Vizé, *Les Intrigues de la lotterie* (Claude Barbin, 1670), 1, IX, 17; Montfleury fils, *Le Gentilhomme de Beauce* (Jean Ribou, 1670), 1, IV, 10–11.

tinuity in the critical staging of lotteries. However, the seventeenth-century plays exclusively address private rather than royal lotteries, and put their focus on the dishonesty and trickery of private operators.[30] By contrast, there is little, if any, indication of foul play targeting the state institution in the lotto comedies, which is perhaps not surprising given the institution's reliance on public trust, combined with the relatively strict censorship of the theatre in the period.[31]

To the extent that the state institution is being targeted in *Le Bureau de loterie*, it is not at the level of the administrators and the state itself, but rather through the figure of "la buraliste", the lottery office manager Agathe Desroues, who profits from the lottomania and the gullibility of players. Running a lottery office conveniently situated next to a pawnbroker, she becomes rich because she never personally wagers, but instead places the income in the savings bank.[32] As opposed to the cheating operators of the seventeenth-century comedies, and in fact also to lottery office managers in eighteenth-century prose fiction,[33] Desroues is not depicted as a cheat, however, nor is the probity of the lotto system put into question; instead, both she and the system she represents appear exploitative and hypocritical.

The satire of *Le Bureau de loterie* includes the dupe who buys his numbers from an old fortune-teller, thus addressing the topic of magical thinking that was (and still is) essential to lottery playing.[34] The topic of divination plays an important role in this comedy, incarnated by a recurring figure in the lotto plays, the lottery prognosticator seeking to predict the winning numbers. In a series of lotto comedies, the representation of divinatory practices satirises this magical thinking, which was an important cultural aspect of lotto play, mediated through dream books, almanacs, and astrology manuals (*La Docte intrigante*; *Le Hasard corrigé*; *Le Garçon de cinquante ans; Le Bureau de loterie*; *Plus de loterie!*). Again, we find precursors in seventeenth-century lottery comedies,[35] but the

30 In *Le Gentilhomme de Beauce*, Montfleury even invents a manual for organising a corrupt lottery. See also Call, "Fortuna Goes to the Theater", 7–9. Cheating (private) operators also figure in *Les Intrigues de la lotterie* and in Dancourt's *La Lotterie* (Thomas Guillain, 1697).

31 For more on the lottery's reliance on public trust, see, *infra*, James Raven, "Imagining Trust and Justice".

32 *Le Bureau de loterie*, XII, 24.

33 See, for instance, the lottery office manager portrayed in Nicolas-Edme Rétif de la Bretonne, "La Jolie loterière", in *Les Contemporaines, ou Aventures des plus jolies femmes de l'âge présent*, ed. Pierre Testud (Honoré Champion, 2017 [1780–1785]), 4016.

34 Paola De Sanctis Ricciardone, *Il tipografo celeste. Il gioco del lotto tra letteratura e demologia nell'Italia dell'Ottocento e oltre* (Bari: Edizioni Dedalo, 1987); Charles Clotfelter and Philip Cook, "The 'Gambler's Fallacy' in Lottery Play", *Management Science* 39, no. 12 (1991).

35 *Les Intrigues de la lotterie*, 2, IX, 37. See also Call, "Fortuna Goes to the Theater", 6–7.

unique structure of the Genoese lotto, which encouraged personalised tailoring of bets, gave accrued importance to divinatory practices, thus also giving greater poignancy to the comic figure of the prognosticator.

Furthermore, this figure often incarnates an antagonistic attitude towards the state institution, which subtly addresses the political issue of the state-citizen relationship disrupted by the state lottery. These characters seek to ruin the institution, or even, by extension, the state itself, by calculating the winning numbers and placing an exuberant bet that they believe will "break the bank". The ridiculousness of this endeavour does not simply condemn the individual characters as deluded fools but can also be seen as directing the public's attention to the profound inequity between the institution and the players, thus indirectly criticising the institution: the prognosticator is all the more ridiculous precisely because of the fundamental iniquity of the lotto scheme.

The most overt institutional critique comes with the final play of the corpus, staged the same year as the abolition and topically entitled *Plus de loterie!* (No more lottery!). The compulsive player (and divination practitioner) Roussillon voices frustration over the government's decision to abolish: "No more lottery! [...] O France, o fatherland! / For you, no more freedom. / Certainly, the most beautiful, / Is the freedom of money; / I must have [the freedom] / To enrich the government".[36] The irony of the song, unbeknownst to the character himself, but bluntly obvious to the spectators, strikes at the lottery institution just as much as at the player, exposing the argument of the lottery as a voluntary contribution to the state finances. At this point, however, the critique seems pointless, as the institution had effectively been abolished. The question becomes, therefore, whether the full critical potential and sociological relevance of the lottery comedies must be examined through a broader approach, by studying them as cases of *economic fiction.*

3 The lotto comedy as economic fiction

Eighteenth- and nineteenth-century theatre was a privileged place for the creation of an economic imaginary and for the staging of economic discourses and practices.[37] Most, if not all, lottery comedies can be described as economic fiction,

36 Hippolyte Cogniard and Théodore Cogniard, *Plus de loterie! Vaudeville en un acte* (Imprimerie Dondey-Dupré, 1836), XV, 13. For more on this comedy, see, *infra*, Marius Warholm Haugen, "Plus de loterie".

37 See, for instance: Martial Poirson, *Spectacle et économie à l'âge classique: XVIIe–XVIIIe siècles* (Classiques Garnier, 2011), third part, 283–517; *Fiction et économie: représentations de l'économie*

in the sense of literature that represents, reappropriates, and transforms – playfully or critically – contemporary economic discourses, preoccupations, and practices.[38] Studying the corpus through such a lens allows us to tease out issues that do not necessarily read as institutional critique, but still convey a critical view of the lottery and the culture in which it was embedded. If, in this respect, we find common issues across the three categories, there are important differences that justify a separate analysis, beginning with the lotto play.

In one of the earliest lotto comedies, *Les Deux Billets* (1784), we find a motif that was also recurrent in the marital lottery comedies: the play with, and conflict between, monetary and sentimental value. Here, the two forms of value are mediated respectively by the two tickets of the title, Arlequin's lotto ticket and a love letter from his beloved Argentine. The lotto ticket is established already in the second scene as a winning ticket and a document of real monetary value. As a result, there is no suspense attached to the outcome of the lottery, and no real interest in the topic of chance and probability, in contrast with later, more overtly satirical plays. The primary function of the lotto in this comedy is to offer a possibility for enrichment, enabling Arlequin to overcome the difference of economic status separating him from Argentine, and thus realising, in a certain sense, the lottery fantasy.

The plot is primarily based on the repeated imbroglio of the two tickets, which, in the terms of Martial Poirson, "induces a mediation between fortune [wealth] and good fortune [luck]".[39] Arlequin's rival Scapin tries to get his hands on the winning *terne* by stealing the lotto ticket, but accidentally steals the love letter instead. He then uses the letter to portray Arlequin as disloyal and to disgrace him in the eyes of Argentine. The scoundrel finally falls into his own trap, however, when choosing the lotto ticket over Argentine's hand, thus revealing his true, greedy character. In addition to construing the tickets as symbols of value, the comedy's dialogue systematically plays with the polyvalence of the terms *valeur* (value, worth) and *valoir* (to have worth, to be worthy, to cost): "since I missed the Lottery ticket, I will make worth [ferai valoir] of this [the love letter]".[40] The happy denouement is the result of Arlequin proving *his*

dans la littérature et les arts du spectale, XIXe–XXIe siècles, ed. Geneviève Sicotte et al. (Presses de l'Université Laval, 2013).

38 Geneviève Sicotte, "Introduction. Ce que la littérature peut dire de l'économie", in *Fiction et économie: représentations de l'économie dans la littérature et les arts du spectale, XIXe–XXIe siècles*, ed. Geneviève Sicotte et al. (Presses de l'Université Laval, 2013), 10 – 11.

39 Poirson, *Spectacle et économie*, 310.

40 Jean-Pierre Claris de Florian, *Les Deux billets, comédie en un acte et en prose* (Didot l'aîné, 1784), III, 9.

worth to Argentine, by refusing to trade the lotto ticket for the love letter.[41] A master of trickery, Arlequin can have it both ways, as he lures the winning ticket from Scapin, thus possessing both the sentimental *and* the economic worth needed to marry his beloved.

We can read *Les Deux billets* as an expression of what Sarah Lloyd has called, in reference to the British context, the "ticketing" of eighteenth-century culture.[42] The ticket imbroglio serves as an efficient comic device because the term *billet* (like *ticket*) was highly polysemantic, referencing a polymorphous and versatile cultural object. The *billet de loterie* was a prominent instance of this material culture, in addition to being a symbol of the eighteenth-century consumer revolution.[43] Several comedies play with this cultural significance: through its circulation between different characters, the lottery ticket becomes a driving element of the plot.[44] The rapid circulation of the lottery ticket creates farcical situations, underpinned by a shifting belief in the ticket's potential value. In *Les Deux billets*, then, the lottery is primarily represented for its status as an institution conferring value to the ticket, thus enabling the imbroglio of monetary and sentimental value.

In the nineteenth-century lotto comedies, there are very different issues at stake, concerning the state lottery institution as part of a larger system of finance capitalism and the lotto as a metaphor for financial speculation. Certainly, it is possible to identify already in seventeenth-century lottery comedies an analogy between lotteries and the stock market.[45] Poirson notes how comedies such as *Le Gros lot de Marseille* (1700) stage "dramatic situations engendered by the aleatory character of the distribution of fortunes and goods", with the lottery thus appearing as a signifier for broader financial developments.[46] What seems to change with the lotto comedy, notably in the last decades before the abolition of 1836, is a more explicit development of the analogy, as well as an increased pertinence due to the structure of the lotto scheme. Compared to the blanks and prizes lottery, the lotto allowed for greater agency in the choice of stakes, but also, as a result, demanded greater risk-benefit analysis in order to assess how

41 *Les Deux billets*, IX, 23.

42 Sarah Lloyd, "Ticketing the British Eighteenth Century: 'A thing … Never Heard of Before'", *Journal of Social History* 46, no. 4 (2013).

43 Kruckeberg, "The Royal Lottery", 26.

44 Picard, *La Maison en loterie*; Gellert, *Le Billet de loterie.*

45 Spielmann, "Mise (s) en jeu", 201.

46 Martial Poirson, "Quand l'économie politique était sur les planches: argent, morale et intérêt dans la comédie à l'Age classique", in *Les Frontières littéraires de l'économie (XVII–XIX siècles)*, ed. Martial Poirson, Yves Citton, and Christian Biet (Paris: Desjonquères, 2008), 35.

much to bet and on which combinations.[47] This aspect seems to have strengthened the speculation analogy: in *Plus de loterie!*, for instance, the initially wealthy landowner Roussillon plays the lottery in a twisted financial logic, planning to reinvest increasingly high prizes into the game in an attempt to ruin the institution.[48] Of course, he nearly ruins himself instead.

L'Agiotage ou le Métier à la mode (1826) is a prime example of a play that situates playing the lotto within a larger trend of speculative practices. The comedy opposes an older generation, an uncle representing traditional values of commerce, against a younger generation, his nephew, who is in the process of ruining himself in stock-market speculation. The play concludes with the nephew acknowledging the errors of his ways, and the uncle getting the final word, voicing an unequivocal moral message: "Malediction! Curse on speculation! Glory and respect to commerce and industry".[49] The lotto plays a minor yet centrally situated role in the play. In the opening scenes, we are introduced to three different "players", whose activities appear as different facets of the same culture of speculation: the maid Justine plays the lotto, the manservant Joseph plays the stock market, and the clerk Laurent plays *trente-et-un* (a form of blackjack) and roulette. The comedy hints to a gendered and sociological partition of these analogous activities – Joseph plays the stock market despite being a "pauvre domestique"– but also insists on their common denominator: everyone wants to make a rapid fortune, each through their preferred form of speculation. As the title suggests, the comedy is a satire on contemporary customs and a society affected by the frenzy of quick wealth, where the lotto is one of several means and the lottery fantasy an instance of a broader cultural trope. As such, the lotto also appears as both gendered and socially determined, the preferred option for women of the modest classes.

A lotto comedy that directly and critically engages with the state lottery, *Le Bureau de loterie* (1823), also deals systematically with the role of this institution within a larger economic system. This position is staged from the moment the curtain is raised, via the distribution of the dramatic space, as revealed by the stage directions: a Paris street, with a lottery office on the front left-hand side, with a savings bank on the opposite side, and a pawnshop at the back.[50] The spectators are presented with a symbolic urban landscape, whose main feature is the opposition, spatially and conceptually, between the lottery and the savings bank, between gambling and saving. As such, this comedy is doubly topical: the first

47 See, *infra*, Kristiansen, Haugen, and Fabris, "A Cultural History of European Lotteries".

48 *Plus de loterie!*, IV, 4.

49 Louis-Benoît Picard and Adolphe Simonis Empis, *L'Agiotage ou Le Métier à la mode, comédie en cinq actes et en prose* (Béchet aîné et cie., 1826), 5, VIII, 108.

50 *Le Bureau de loterie*, s.p.

French *caisse d'épargne* was established in 1818 to fight the corrupting vices of booze, tobacco, gambling and, notably, the lottery; from 1822 onward, the liberal bankers behind the *caisses d'épargne*, led by the politician and banker Benjamin Delessert, lobbied for the abolition of the Loterie de France.[51] The comedy directly engages with this historical development.

To the three institutions represented on stage, *Le Bureau de loterie* adds a fourth, the stock market, evoked verbally. The four institutions are presented as forming a network, through various connections of exchange, analogy, and opposition. The stock market is also situated in opposition to the savings bank, while forming an analogy with the lottery, as representative of an economy based on speculation and risk.[52] The pawnshop and the lottery office exist in symbiosis, as players move back and forth between them. The relationship between the lottery and the savings bank is more complex, simultaneously conflicting, symbiotic, and ironic. To the great despair of the bank manager, his entire household – including his wife – plays the lottery, while the lottery office manager, who never plays the lottery, places her profits in his bank. Thus, while the comedy presents the lottery as detrimental to society, it also exposes the incapacity of the savings bank to capture people's imaginations in the same way as the lottery: "Hush! Tell me about the lottery…! That is a good thing…! Whereas your savings bank…"[53] The lottery fantasy, although highly improbable, was more alluring than the sure thing of longtime saving.

4 Negotiating value: the marital lottery comedy as economic fiction

Applying the analytical lens of economic fiction not only gives a broader perspective on the lotto comedies but also allows us to explore how other lottery comedies engaged with socio-political and economic issues. In the case of the marital comedy, the use of the lottery as a dramatic device is intimately linked with the representation of marriage as a financial transaction, a recurring motif in classic French theatre.[54] The marital lottery can be regarded as a sub-category of this motif, which highlights the contractual, transactional, and financial aspects

51 Carole Christen-Lécuyer, *Histoire sociale et culturelle des caisses d'épargne en France: 1818–1881* (Economica, 2004), 236–239.
52 *Le Bureau de loterie*, IV, 9.
53 *Le Bureau de loterie*, V, 10.
54 Poirson, *Spectacle et économie*, 340–342.

of marriage. In these comedies, a lottery is organised in which a young woman or man is posed as the big prize, to be married to the winner. A key element, then, is the principle of aleatory distribution which, at least on the surface, introduces suspense and uncertainty in the selection of a spouse. But the lottery also figures as a financial tool here, with the lottery scheme being conceived by the operator (usually a relative, but on one occasion a creditor) to collect money in order to secure a dowry or save a character from debt.

As mentioned, the marital lottery motif belongs to an older, transnational tradition. Amy Froide has noted how the cultural connection between the lottery and marriage seems to be rooted in the idea that unmarried women played to secure a dowry.[55] In addition, there are certain analogies between lotteries and marriage regarding the fantasy of social ascension. In Henry Fielding's comedy *The Lottery* (1732), for instance, marrying a lord and winning the lottery are posited as two analogous ways of realising this fantasy.[56] In other words, there are several cultural connections between the two that could have contributed to producing the trope of the marital lottery. There were even stories of allegedly real-life marital lotteries circulating in the eighteenth century: in 1778, a literary periodical reported that an old, rich bachelor was to have organised a lottery in order to find a wife, and two similar anecdotes are recorded by the journalist and hack writer Nougaret.[57] Whether fiction inspired reality in this matter, or rather vice-versa, remains unclear.

What *is* clear, is that the marital lottery as a comic motif often draws upon a well-established metaphor. "Marriage is a lottery", says M. Bontems in *Le Valet intendant*, before announcing his decision to place his daughter Adèle as the prize of a lottery.[58] As Paul Goring argues in his chapter on British lottery fiction, the lottery can even be read as a metaphor for the marriage *market*, simultaneously pointing to the financial and the aleatory character of the latter.[59]

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55 See Amy Froide, *Silent Partners: Women as Public Investors during Britain's Financial Revolution, 1690–1750* (Oxford University Press, 2016), 30. See also, *infra:* Marly Terwisscha van Scheltinga, "If I Had the Great Prize", section 7, and Goring, "The Lottery in British Prose Literature", section 1.

56 Henry Fielding, *The Lottery. A Farce* (N. Newman, 1733 [1732].

57 *Almanach littéraire, ou Étrennes d'Apollon*, 1778, 220. Pierre-Jean-Baptiste Nougaret, *Les Sottises et les folies parisiennes*, vol. 2 (Veuve Duchesne, 1781), 47–54.

58 D.M., *Le Valet intendant et ami de son maître, ou La Fille en Loterie, comédie en un acte et en vers* (Pierre Beaume, 1821), XXV, 60. The metaphor also figures in Alexandre Bernos and Frédéric Dupetit-Méré, *L'Isle des mariages ou les Filles en loterie, Mélodrame-comique en trois actes, a grand spectacle* (Barba, 1809), 2, II, 36.

59 See, *infra*, Goring, "The Lottery in British Prose Literature", section 1.

In almost all the French marital comedies, however, the lottery scheme is undermined by trickery, allowing true love to triumph over the aleatory principle.[60] As is highlighted by one title, *Le Hasard corrigé par l'amour*, chance is corrected by love.[61] In another example, particularly interesting from a gender perspective, the attempt by the protagonists to cheat in the lottery fails, but the allotted bride nonetheless overcomes the obstacle by simply leaving the winner, whom she does not love.[62] Overall, the marital comedies tend to stage the well-established opposition between marriages of interest and marriages of inclination, privileging the latter, although usually through a compromise assuring the financial situation of the enamoured couple.

By extension, a recurring economic feature of these comedies is the play with opposing notions of value. The opening scene of *Le Cocq de village* establishes as its premise the law of the market, as it is applied to the eligibility of the protagonist, Pierrot. Since "rarity makes the prize of all things", and since all other eligible bachelors have enrolled in the army, he goes from being ignored to being coveted by all unwed women and widows in the village.[63] His godfather organises a blanks and prizes lottery, intended to let fate decide the choice of spouse and to secure a dowry. The drawing is rigged so that Pierrot can marry his beloved Thérèse while also keeping the money, thus dissolving through trickery the opposition between sentimental and monetary value.

Furthermore, this opposition often transcends both the lottery and marriage, to voice a more general societal critique. In *Le Hasard corrigé*, Colombine, placed in the lottery by her father Cassandre, protests against the scheme, as she "prefers Arlequin without fortune, to Gilles with all the treasures of the world".[64] To defend his scheme, Cassandre points to how money has triumphed as the "sole compass" for morals, virtues, and values.[65] In this case then, the lottery, explicitly presented as the Loterie de France, on which Cassandre's scheme is a subsidiary and privately organised betting arrangement, becomes a placeholder for an emerging value system in which money is the universal measure. As such, this

60 Of course, as Call points out, there is in reality no place for the random in these comedies, as "it is ultimately the author who has the entire control". Call, "Fortuna Goes to the Theater", 12.
61 Jacques-André Jaquelin and Philidor Rochelle [Joseph-Henri Flacon], *Le Hasard corrigé par l'Amour ou La Fille en loterie, Arlequinade. En un Acte et en Vaudevilles* (Fages, Libraire, 1801).
62 Jean-Baptiste Dubois, "Ma sœur en loterie, folie vaudeville en un acte", ms, 1810, NAF 2952. CXI Martin Guerre – Memnon, Théâtre de la Gaité, XV, Bibliothèque nationale de France.
63 Charles-Simon Favart, *Le Cocq de village, opéra comique* (Prault fils, 1743; repr., 1822), I, 3.
64 *Le Hasard corrigé*, II, 4.
65 *Le Hasard corrigé*, I, 3.

comedy can be seen as voicing a conservative critique of the lottery as an institution through which the state effectively became a merchant.[66]

Connected to this conservative economic critique is the use of the marital lottery as a way to symbolise the commodification and monetarisation of the human.[67] If this idea is implicit in all the marital lottery plays, it seems to have become increasingly explicit throughout the period, perhaps due to the growing impact of financial capitalism. The topic of commodification is particularly important in the two 1821 comedies *Le Jeune homme en loterie* and *Un jour à Rome.*[68] In the former, the debt-ridden young pleasure-seeker Eugène Valcour organises his own subsidiary betting scheme on the Parisian lotto, with himself as the prize.[69] The scheme initially appears as a clever solution to his money problems and as a light-hearted party game. A central point of interest resides in dialogues that playfully evaluate Eugène's value and the prize of the lottery ticket, in a way that conflates the monetary with the sentimental (and the sexual). The bachelor's qualities determine his prize, but they are subject to evaluation and negotiation, and they depend on supply and demand.[70]

Eugène's scheme is undermined by his true love Julie, who disguises herself as a rich English lady, claiming to have bought all the tickets. Thus, not only is chance overcome by ruse, but the masquerade also serves as a test of character: initially, Eugène decides to accept the deal offered by the English lady despite loving Julie, sacrificing his own happiness to secure Julie a dowry. In the dramatic climax, however, the heroine reveals her true identity and denounces the marital lottery and any woman who would "bu[y] a man as one buys a slave". In love's triumph over both chance and "vile calculations", Julie also contrasts the lottery to an ethos of honest work. Thus, when the pleasure-seeker promises to become "a man useful to society" before throwing himself at Julie's feet, it signals the victory of work ethic over easy money.[71] As such, the comedy rejects the lottery fantasy on behalf of a bourgeois ethos that had long put its mark on the anti-lottery discourse.

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66 See Kruckeberg, "The Royal Lottery".

67 This is also a topic in British lottery fiction. See, *infra*, Goring, "The Lottery in British Prose Literature".

68 Both have similarities with the lost comedy *L'Homme en loterie*, as it is presented in the review of the *Chronique de Paris*, 29 October 1789.

69 Alex. Duval, *Le Jeune homme en loterie, comédie en un acte et en prose* (Barba; Firmin Didot, 1821), V, 16.

70 *Le Jeune homme en loterie*, V, 18–19.

71 *Le Jeune homme en loterie*, XXI–XXVI, 53–59.

A similar plot unfolds in *Un jour à Rome:* Ernest, a young French composer living in Rome, also heavily indebted, is unwillingly transformed into a lottery prize by his main creditor, the innkeeper Guillaume. The comedy consistently transposes a discourse of finance and credit economy onto the person of Ernest and onto the social transactions to which he is the object. In what could be read as a comment on the increasing commodification of an emerging market capitalism, Guillaume dismisses Ernest's protestations by affirming that they live in a world in which everything is for sale.[72] From being the object of a merchandise lottery extended to include the human, Ernest is subsequently subjected to financial transactions: the winner of the lottery, a wealthy old Roman widow, agrees to sell him to his true love Jenny (in disguise), in an exchange playfully presented as a stock-market transaction.[73]

As in Duval's comedy, the disguised intervention by the protagonist's true love circumvents the lottery scheme. However, in a much more cynical finale, distinct from Duval's message of work ethic, love might well triumph, but not at the expense of speculation and commerce, as Guillaume comes out on top regardless of the outcome: "If you lose, me, I win, / If you win, I win again. / I traffic, I calculate, / On your tickets I speculate, / Without shame and without scruples, / I am sure to get rich".[74] One could read this as a representation of the exploitative lottery operator who always wins in the long run. But Guillaume perhaps also incarnates a more general figure, that of the "agioteur" who profits from the value and work of others. In any case, both comedies use the marital lottery plot as a device to play critically with contemporary economic figures, practices, and discourses, in a way that is more explicitly developed than in the earlier marital plays.

One marital comedy, *L'Isle des mariages* (1809), sets itself apart from the rest in another manner, by inscribing the lottery into a political economy, in a setting that echoes the utopian/dystopian trope of alternative political organisations. This comedy has a similar premise to *Le Cocq de village*, though, both presenting the lottery as a device to solve a demographic problem, namely the penury of unmarried men. On a remote island inhabited by survivors from the siege of La Rochelle, women are in superior numbers, resulting in a law that demands that all newly arriving men must marry a woman chosen through a lottery. Three sailors shipwrecked on the island become unwilling players of the game, even more so as it transpires that the provost of the community – who governs this aleatory system

72 Édouard-Joseph-Ennemond Mazères and Gabriel de Lurieu, *Un jour à Rome, ou Le jeune homme en loterie, comédie-vaudeville en un acte* (Barba, 1821), II, 6.

73 *Un jour à Rome*, XIII, 28.

74 *Un jour à Rome*, XIII, 28.

of social organisation – is himself cheating on behalf of his unattractive spinster sister.

Fatality and bad luck are recurring topics here, for the spinster who has played the lottery thirty times without being drawn, as well as for the three sailors, adventurers denied of Fortune's favours, who look with dread upon the prospect of the marital lottery: "I know the fatality of my star; the ugliest and the oldest will be for me".[75] Aided by three young women whom they would much rather marry, the sailors lead a revolt against the provost's rule. Unlike *Le Cocq de village*, where trickery serves the hero by allowing love to triumph over chance, the provost's cheating appears as political corruption and abuse of power. As such, this is perhaps the most politically potent of all the plays in the corpus, as it can be read as a satire on abusive, corrupt, and arbitrary rule.

If the marital lottery plot is primarily farcical in *La Lotterie de Scapin* (1694), it appears to have increasingly functioned as a matrix for economic and political satire in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century.[76] The marital lottery can serve as a signifier for various socio-economic and political issues, from the commodification and monetisation of human value, via financial speculation, to the arbitrariness of political rule. The marital plots play with the idea of treating human beings as commodities, subjecting them to market laws and to the aleatory principle of the lottery, and they create dramatic interest and comic effect from having the protagonist(s) *mis en jeu*, in a double sense of the term.

5 For ten *écus* to become a prince: the property lottery comedy as economic fiction

The third and final category, the property lottery comedy, also engages extensively with economic and financial issues. The first comedy, *La Maison en loterie* (1818), was, as mentioned, based on an idea taken from a German comedy. The author, Louis-Benoît Picard, notes that property lotteries were rare in France and seemingly dismisses the topicality of the plot by stating that the property lottery only served to "put into play the character's different passions".[77] Regardless, the prop-

75 *L'Isle des mariages*, 2, II, 36.

76 The satirical and parodic aspect of the plot seems to have been more present earlier on in the case of British fiction. See, *infra*, Goring, "The Lottery in British Prose Literature".

77 Louis-Benoît Picard, "Préface", in *Œuvres de L.B. Picard* (J.N. Barba, 1821), 3–4. However, there are recorded occurrences also in France, for example of a "house lottery" organised in Toulouse, as reported by the *Journal universel* on 25 January 1792.

erty lottery plot allowed for the satirical representation of specific socio-economic phenomena, as well as the staging of a particular and historically determined version of the lottery fantasy: the dream of joining the property-owning classes.

La Maison en loterie is set in a small town outside of Paris, where a "nice house surrounded by a garden" has been put into a lottery.[78] The scheme in question is a serial lottery, where a first drawing selects one set of tickets, from which the winning ticket will be chosen in a second drawing. When the play begins, the first drawing has already taken place, with the winning set of tickets being predominantly owned by the town's inhabitants. This has created a lottery craze in the small community that bears resemblance to a financial bubble.[79] The scarcity of tickets, combined with the psychological effects of the collective craze, inflates the sales value, which quickly rises from five francs to three hundred francs a ticket.[80] The lottery thus appears as a metaphor for financial speculation.

A central element of this comedy resides in the circulation of the winning ticket, in a farcical play that highlights the ambiguous and uncertain status of the lottery ticket as a document mediating value, or, to use Mary Poovey's term, as a "monetary genre".[81] Possessing certain value for those who know that it is the winning ticket, it is endowed with potential value for the others, and, as such, becomes an object of speculation and negotiation. The shady and greedy notary Jacquillard and his scheming clerk Rigaudin learn of the winning numbers an hour before it is to be officially announced. Having discovered that his servant Toinette is the owner of the winning ticket, the notary tries to exploit the situation by proposing to her, in order to get his hands on the house.[82] The clerk reveals the truth to Toinette, only for them to find out that she has given the ticket to the shopkeeper Miss Verneuil as repayment of her debts.

The quest for the winning tickets continues with the greedy notary turning his attention to Miss Verneuil, but his clerk once again undermines the attempted courtship. The shopkeeper has, in any case, already sold the ticket to the manservant Charles, whom *she* then tries to court.[83] The winning ticket finally comes full circle when Charles chooses to marry his beloved Toinette, with love triumphing over greed and pure economic interest. The circulation of the ticket underpins this

78 Louis-Benoît Picard and Jean-Baptiste Radet, *La Maison en loterie, comédie en un acte, mêlée de couplets* (Barba; Chaignieau aîné, 1818), I, 3.

79 *La Maison en loterie*, V, 12.

80 *La Maison en loterie*, XI, 23.

81 Mary Poovey, *Genres of the Credit Economy: Mediating Value in Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century Britain* (University of Chicago Press, 2008), 35–55.

82 *La Maison en loterie*, XXII, 37–39.

83 *La Maison en loterie*, XXVI, 47–48.

triumph, functioning as a dramatic device that ensures a worthy winner: Charles was the only one to hold on to the ticket, as it symbolised his dream of giving Toinette a better life. His lottery fantasy was a noble one, in contrast with the purely materialistic interests of the notary and the shopkeeper. This plot structure is not unique to the property lottery play: the circulation of the lottery ticket, ending with the ticket falling in the hands of the morally deserving winner, also characterises, for instance, Gellert's *Le Billet de loterie* (1785). In the case of *La Maison en loterie*, however, it is significant that the winning ticket allows the two servants to enter the property-owning bourgeoisie, in a class-specific version of the lottery fantasy. As such, this comedy not only reflects the increasing importance of property and wealth, as opposed to birth, as a signifier of social status;[84] it also presents the realisation of a fantasy that was not exuberant, but relatively modest and attainable.

By comparison, château lotteries arguably had a more disruptive potential with regard to traditional hierarchies, allowing for anybody to dream of becoming landed gentry. The three remaining property plays all stage château lotteries, a game that became fashionable in the German states and the Austro-Hungarian Empire in the early nineteenth century.[85] According to a contemporary commentator, château lotteries were advertised in French departmental papers, allowing readers to dream of "waking up, one beautiful morning, as the owner, for a nothing of twenty francs, of the estate of *Isvonitz*, or that of *Wrokanka!*".[86] Importantly, there is not only a property at stake in the château lottery plot, but also a title. This presents the audience with yet another variant of the lottery fantasy, a completely life-changing "rags-to-riches" story with old-regime (albeit foreign) nobility in the pot. The commentator addresses this fantasy, not without irony, seeing in it a trump card that not even the Genoese lotto possesses: What is "a miserable *quaterne*", they ask, compared to the prospect of, not only land, but also subjects?[87]

One could expect the château lottery plays to satirise this particular fantasy by ridiculing the social aspirations towards nobility, following a tradition going

84 Thomas Piketty, *Capital et idéologie* (Editions du Seuil, 2019), 191.

85 Zollinger, "Loteries de châteaux", 88–91.

86 "Loterie", in François Noël and L. J. M. Carpentier, *Nouveau dictionnaire des origines, inventions et découvertes*, 2 vols., vol. 2 (Janet et Cotelle, 1827), 83. The passage is also quoted by Zollinger, "Loteries de châteaux", 89–90.

87 Noël and Carpentier, *Nouveau dictionnaire*, 2, 83.

back to Molière's *Le Bourgeois gentilhomme* (1670),[88] but perhaps also with increased poignancy due to the conflict between old-regime and Imperial nobility. However, this is only partly the case. If the opening scene of *Les Brigands de Schiller* can be said to satirise lottery playing, this is not done through the topic of social ascension, but by addressing the anticipatory impulse of players dreaming of the big win, incarnated by a group of students drinking on credit to celebrate winning the lottery, which has yet to be drawn.[89] Furthermore, the château lottery of this comedy functions primarily as a plot device: the protagonist, a young German student, wins the Saxon château of Engelthal, the title of count, and, as a result, can marry his beloved.[90] As in *La Maison en loterie*, this is a case of virtue rewarded, adding to the trope of the morally deserving winner.[91]

There is more at stake in *Le Barbier châtelain*, in which the Gascon barber Crépignac wins a château and a barony by the Rhine. The barber succinctly articulates the allure of the château-lottery fantasy, the possibility, for ten *écus*, to become "a German prince".[92] The play draws much comic effect from the vanity and the social *faux-pas* of the stereotypically construed Gascon,[93] who, as a *parvenu*, ignores the proper codes and decorum demanded by his new title.[94] As a result, the barber appears, on one level, as a successor of Molière's M. Jourdain, or even as a subtle stab at the figure of the Napoleonic nobleman. More importantly, the comedy deflates the lottery fantasy by confronting it with the hard economic realities: the barony is accompanied by heavy expenses, with the result that the poor barber cannot afford to keep it. He therefore disgruntledly describes the lottery as a "trap".[95] The barber baron clings to his château throughout two more acts, until – after numerous twists and turns, schemes, and negotiations – he agrees to sell the domain

88 As Tilman Haug shows, references to Molière's play appear in other lottery representations. See, *infra*, Tilman Haug, "Selling Like a State". See also, *infra*, Anne Beate Maurseth, "Jackpot", section 4.

89 Thomas Sauvage and Henri Dupin, *Les Brigands de Schiller, opéra-vaudeville en deux actes* (Gardet, 1828), 1, I, 3.

90 *Les Brigands de Schiller*, 2, XI, 43.

91 This trope still has its sway on the cultural imagination. See Per Binde, "The Good, the Bad and the Unhappy: The Cultural Meanings of Newspaper Reporting on Jackpot Winners", *International gambling studies* 7, no. 2 (2007), https://doi.org/10.1080/14459790701387667, 222–223.

92 Emmanuel Théaulon and Théodore Anne, *Le Barbier châtelain, ou La Loterie de Francfort, comédie-vaudeville en trois actes* (Ode et Wodon, 1828), 1, VII, 22.

93 On the Gascon as a type in French comedy, see Pauline Beaucé and Françoise Rubellin, "'Vos pièces sont farcies de Gascons': enjeux d'une figure comique sur les scènes parisiennes du XVIIIe siècle", *Littératures classiques* 87, no. 2 (2015), https://doi.org/10.3917/licla1.087.0301.

94 On the figure of the parvenu, see Sarah Juliette Sasson, *Longing to Belong: The Parvenu in Nineteenth-Century French and German Literature* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 9.

95 *Le Barbier châtelain*, 1, IX, 27–29.

and the title to the rightful heir. Thus, the social order is re-established, as the lottery gives way to another, more conventional – and perhaps also, in the eyes of many contemporaries, more legitimate – form of economic redistribution, namely inheritance.[96]

The lottery fantasy is not completely undermined, however, as the barber goes from "poor prince" to "millionaire".[97] As such, the comedy stages a compromise resembling, to a certain degree, the denouement of *Le Château en loterie* (1836), in which a poor cobbler wins a château only to find that it comes with considerably higher expenses than revenues.[98] The cobbler as lottery player is a recurring, common-European figure, who, more often than not, has to remain in, or return to, his initial socio-economic position.[99] In the lotto comedy *Le Bureau de loterie*, for instance, the cobbler is asked to "take up [his] trade" again, after having seen his lottery fantasy shatter, in an echo of the dictum "cobbler, stick to your last".[100] Similarly, in *Le Château en loterie*, the cobbler finally relinquishes the château, although not without compensation, as he regains 18,000 francs previously lost. The comedy does nonetheless conclude with a complete dismissal of the lottery, presented as a game where "the only way to win [...] is not to play".[101] Considering that the play was published in the same year as the abolition of the state lotto, there is reason to suspect that this final condemnation was also addressed to this institution, echoing the moral and political critique of the Loterie de France as a state-sanctioned lure.

6 Conclusion

The late eighteenth and early nineteenth century was a golden age of lottery comedies. Such comedies were not new to this period, nor did they form a homogeneous genre, but they provide privileged insight into the cultural imagination of lotteries in the era of the Loterie de France, a key period in French, and indeed European, lottery history. Staging lotteries in this period meant engaging, explicitly or implicitly, with the institution of the state lotto, as well as with the lottery as

96 *Le Barbier châtelain*, 3, VIII, 75.

97 *Le Barbier châtelain*, 3, VIII, 79.

98 Saint-Hilaire [Auguste-Eugène Demonval], *Le Château en loterie, ou Le Savetier propriétaire, comédie en deux actes, mêlée de couplets* (I. Pesron, 1836), 2, XVI, 117–118.

99 See, notably, *infra*, Michael Scham, "The Failed Promise", and Inga Henriette Undheim, "Lottery Dreams".

100 *Le Bureau de loterie*, XVII, 32.

101 *Le Château en loterie*, 2, XVI, 119.

an older form of social practice and financial device. If the categories we have operated with here reflect the diversity of lotteries as cultural phenomena in this period, there is one important common feature that transcends the categorisation, namely the representation of the lottery as a collective frenzy, one which largely surpasses sociological distinctions. All categories contain plays that present the lottery as a mania affecting an entire community, be it in a village (*Le Cocq de village*; *Les Brigands de Schiller*), in a provincial town (*La Maison en loterie*), or in the urban space of cities such as Paris (*Le Bureau de loterie*), Lyon (*Plus de loterie!*), Rome (*Un jour à Rome*) or London (*Le Billet de loterie*). Should we argue for the existence of *a* lottery comedy, as a comic subgenre, its most prominent trait would be precisely this: the playful and satirical staging of the lottery as a collective lure that powerfully captured the public's imagination.

As such, we may also observe an intriguing analogy between the lottery and the theatre. In *La Loterie à la mode* (1835), the final scene ends with the characters performing a blanks and prizes drawing that is integrated, visually, gesturally, and musically, into the dramatic performance, thus establishing a link between the theatrical play and the ritual of the lottery.[102] The official drawing of the state lottery was a public event and ritualised performance that had the dual objective of creating suspense and instil trustworthiness, to the point that it may be inscribed into what Martial Poirson and Guy Spielmann have termed the eighteenth-century "société de spectacle".[103] If few plays actually represented drawings on stage, many developed the analogy verbally, with characters describing the spectacle of the drawing to their interlocutors, and describing, in one case, the lottery as the poor man's opera.[104] There is not only a performative, but also an economic aspect to this analogy, which again transcends the three categories: the finale of several plays state that theatre, unlike the lottery, is a spectacle that makes winners of all.[105] If such elements reflect the increasing commercialisation of the theatre in this period,[106] they perhaps also reveal the commercial motivations for staging the lottery: theatres and playwrights could profit from the lottery frenzy by using its popularity and topicality to attract spectators.

102 Louis-Émile Vanderburch and Léon-Lévy Brunswick, *La Loterie à la mode, intermède-vaudeville* (Barba, 1835), VII, 16. The link between the theatricality of the lottery and its representation on stage is examined further, in a British context, in Goring, *Spectacular Gambling*.
103 Martial Poirson and Guy Spielmann, "Avant-propos", *Dix-huitième siècle* 49, no. 1 (2017): 10, https://doi.org/10.3917/dhs.049.0005. For Michael J. Call, "[t]he lottery was […] the most theatrical of the seventeenth-century games of chance". Call, "Fortuna Goes to the Theater", 4.
104 *Le Bureau de loterie*, XIV, 25.
105 *Plus de loterie!*, XIX, 16. *Un jour à Rome*, XVI, 32. *Le Barbier châtelain*, 3, VIII, 79.
106 Gengembre, *Le Théâtre français*, 54; Poirson, *Spectacle et économie*, 33.

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