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Jackpot! Turning the Lottery Fantasy into a Societal Critique – *Le Gros lot* by Hector Chaussier

French eighteenth-century literature encompasses numerous fictional narratives that depict games and gaming culture. Frequently, these elements serve merely as background details to establish an atmosphere or to signify "reality" in the sense posited by Roland Barthes.[1] This phenomenon is evident in several renowned prose fiction works from the period, including Prévost's *Manon Lescaut*, Diderot's *Jacques le fataliste et son maître* and *Le Neveu de Rameau*, Laclos's *Les Liaisons dangereuses*, and Casanova's *Histoire de ma vie*. These narratives stand in stark contrast to more prominent game-centric stories from the nineteenth century, where the titles, such as Pushkin's "The Queen of Spades" (1834) and Dostoevsky's *The Gambler* (1866), explicitly indicate their focus on games and gamers. However, upon closer examination, many eighteenth-century stories also reveal the critical function of games as central to their interpretation and understanding.

One particularly intriguing example is the relatively little-known novel *Le Gros lot, ou Une journée de Jocrisse au Palais-Égalité*, written by Hector Chaussier in 1800 (corresponding to Year 9 in the revolutionary calendar). This novel is of special interest because its title explicitly identifies it as a game story, namely about a lottery.[2] It is intriguing also because it differs markedly from other no-

1 Roland Barthes, "L'Effet de réel", in *Communications* 11, no. 1 (1968): 84–89.

2 Hector Chaussier, *Le Gros lot, ou Une journée de Jocrisse au Palais-Égalité* (Roux, an IX [1800]). Chaussier (1769–1837) is not among the most celebrated writers from the eighteenth century, yet he was not entirely unknown either. His literary *œuvre* is mainly recognised for his *vaudevilles-comédies* which had a certain success at the end of the century. In *Le Gros lot*, there is ample use of typical features from this popular genre which is not so different from the more well-known cabaret-genre. The comic, the light-hearted, and the funny – often interspersed with songs and poems – characterise the vaudeville genre. Yet, *Le Gros lot* is not a drama, but prose fiction, maybe a novel, even though this genre was still in the making in this period. Moreover, even if *Le Gros lot* applies the techniques from another genre, its scope is more critical in its ambition. Already the titlepage testifies to this with its exergue in Latin: *Beatus vir qui timet Dominum et syphillim*. The inscription is well known for most of the readers at the time, since its first part is a quote from Psalm 112 in the *Book of Psalms*, translated as "Blessed is the man who fears the Lord". Distinguished composers like Monteverdi, Charpentier, Vivaldi, and others have set the psalm to music. The last part of the exergue – *et syphillim* ("and syphilis") – is a clearly subversive addition, profaning a serious and sincere psalm. Whether this is meant to be a specific subtle

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table lottery stories, such as Honoré de Balzac's *La Rabouilleuse* (1843) and Jules Verne's *Un Billet de loterie* (1886).[3] These stories tend to construct their plots around expectations, hopes, and dreams of a potential big win. This form of fantasising suggests that the lottery itself encompasses a fictional element, comprising a specific poetics based on anticipation and expectation. Daydreaming about what to do with a big win can be considered a source of hypothetical reality, aligning with the most traditional and widespread definition of literature since Aristotle. In *The Poetics*, Aristotle states:

> It is not the poet's function to relate actual events, but the kinds of things that might occur and are possible in terms of probability or necessity. The difference between the historian and the poet is not that between using verse or prose. No, the difference is this: that the one relates actual events, the other the kinds of things that might occur.[4]

This definition resonates as a vital element related to the cultural history of the lottery: what might happen if the jackpot occurs. As Marius Warholm Haugen has pointed out, dreams of social ascension through sudden wealth wielded a powerful attraction in the eighteenth century,[5] and it is possible to contend that the lottery fostered a "cultural trope" subsuming "the idea of sudden effortless and potential life transforming wealth, epitomised by the phrase "If I were to hit the jackpot, I would…".[6]

Given this context, it is particularly noteworthy that Chaussier's *Le Gros lot* does not embody this fantasy purely as a hypothetical imagination. Instead, it represents the fantasy as a realised event. At the very least, *Le Gros lot* adds a different dimension to the understanding of the lottery fantasy as a cultural trope. Although the lottery in Chaussier's story is pivotal, it is not a lottery fantasy in the sense that the protagonist dreams of a big win. The narrative is not fuelled by expectations, hopes, or dreams of winning. Far from being a long-awaited event for the protagonist, the jackpot arrives unexpectedly. Consequently, the story focuses less on the lottery itself and more on its transient effects post-drawing, de-

religious blasphemy, or a more general critique of a decadent society, is an issue open to interpretation (it might as well be both).

3 For more on Balzac's *La Rabouilleuse*, see, *infra*, Marius Warholm Haugen, "Plus de loterie".

4 Aristotle, *Poetics*, ch. 9, edited and translated by Stephen Halliwell (Loeb Classical Library, Harvard University Press, 1995), 59.

5 Marius Warholm Haugen, "The Lottery Fantasy and Social Mobility in Eighteenth-Century Venetian Literature: Carlo Goldoni, Pietro Chiari, and Giacomo Casanova", *Italian Studies* 77, no. 3 (2022): 253, doi:10.1080/00751634.2022.2069409.

6 See, *infra:* Johanne Slettvoll Kristiansen, Marius Warholm Haugen, and Angela Fabris, "A Cultural History of European Lotteries"; Marly Terwisscha van Scheltinga, "If I Had the Great Prize".

picted with significant irony due to the stark contrast between the narrative perspectives of the omniscient narrator and the uninformed protagonist. While the narrator presents events as a predictable chain of causes and effects, the protagonist experiences them as curious chance occurrences. This structure arguably reflects one of the most debated Enlightenment themes: the tension between chance and necessity.[7]

This chapter explores the indirect representation of the lottery fantasy in this narrative. Chaussier does not offer a traditional lottery fantasy centred on dreams of sudden wealth. Nevertheless, given that the entire novel is steeped in the popular lottery and gambling culture of the eighteenth century, it may still express the lottery fantasy as a concept of unexpected economic transformation and social mobility. The chapter argues that the novel maintains a thoroughly ironic and light-hearted approach while simultaneously conveying a severe critique of decadent post-revolutionary Parisian society and politics through the lens of consumer culture.

1 Easy-going and light-hearted at the Palace of Equality

Le Gros lot tells the story of Jocrisse, a valet who, due to his clumsiness, is dismissed from a bourgeois Parisian household. The initial chapters serve as an exposition, providing the background for the plot and detailing the precarious situation of the protagonist. Upon being fired from his master's house, he finds himself penniless and destitute on the street, coincidentally near the entrance of the Palais-Égalité. From this point forward, the Palais-Égalité serves as the central setting, drawing on a well-known schematic model found in fairytales and comedies.

Palais-Égalité serves as the point zero of this adventure, laden with symbolic meaning and historical significance, yet also a tabula rasa upon which a new story

7 For more details about this debate in philosophy and literature, see, for example: Ian Hacking, *The Emergence of Probability* (Cambridge University Press, 2006); Lorraine Daston, *Classical Probability in the Enlightenment* (Princeton University Press, 1988); Thomas M. Kavanagh, *Enlightenment and the Shadows of Chance* (John Hopkins University Press, 1993); Jesse Molesworth, *Chance and the Eighteenth-Century Novel: Realism, Probability, Magic* (Cambridge University Press, 2010); Jessica Richard, *The Romance of Gambling in the Eighteenth-Century British Novel* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).

may begin. From the outset, the narrator highlights the site's contradictory and ironic nature:

> Palais-Égalité!... This is a sound and majestic title! ... As if the substantive *'Equality'* wonderfully frames the substantive *'Palace'!* Eternal honour and glory to the most brilliant minds who so aptly named it... It required particular intelligence and genuinely new ideas to nest Equality in a Palace.[8]

Palais-Égalité, historically known as Palais-Royal, is a renowned Parisian landmark situated behind the Louvre Museum and the national theatre, La Comédie Française. Once a royal palace, it features a magnificent garden surrounded by arcaded shops, restaurants, and cafés. During the French Revolution, the location was stripped of its monarchical connotations to reflect revolutionary ideals – *liberté, égalité, fraternité.* The owner at the time, the Duke of Orléans, changed the name of the square, and even his own name from Philippe d'Orléans to Philippe Égalité to demonstrate his support for the Revolution.

The concept of equality is thus embedded in the very name of this famous square. Furthermore, the notion of equality extends to all games of chance. Whether rich or poor, king or valet, man or woman, everyone stands an equal chance to win in games based on chance rather than skill. Lorraine Daston argues that there is a democratic dimension to games of chance, as they level the playing field: "at all levels, the lottery was perceived as a radical equalising force. At the moment of the drawing, all were equal before fortune".[9] The lottery is thus tied to hopes of financial and social advancement.[10] As such it represents a challenge to the very infrastructure of the *Ancien Régime*, which valued hierarchy, stability, and order, condensed adequately in the Latin proverb *sutur ne ultra crepidam*, "let the cobbler not judge beyond the crepida". The extraordinary popularity of games of chance coincides with the rise of revolutionary ideas in the eighteenth century, from the Regency period following the death of Louis XIV until the outbreak of the French Revolution in 1789.

Moreover, even before Chaussier, the square held literary significance. Notable among its representations is the opening scene in Denis Diderot's *Le Neveu de Rameau:*

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8 Chaussier, *Le Gros lot*, 12–13. The page numbers will hereafter be referred to in the main text. All translations of Chaussier are mine.

9 Daston, *Classical Probability*, 150.

10 Kavanagh, *Enlightenment and the Shadows of Chance*, 59.

> Rain or shine, it's my habit, around five in the evening, to go for a stroll in the Palais Royal. [...] If the weather is too cold or too wet, I take refuge in the Café de la Régence, where I spend time watching the game of chess. Of all the cities in the world, it's Paris, and of all the places in Paris, it's the Café de la Régence, where chess is played best.[11]

Diderot's pre-revolutionary dialogue refers to chess, also called the royal game, the quintessential game of skill. Conversely, Chaussier's post-revolutionary story emphasises the lottery (more specifically the *lotto*), a game of chance accessible to all. Despite its openness, the lottery became, as Daston notes, mainly the pastime of the labouring and indigent classes.[12] After the Revolution, the number of lottery offices within Palais-Égalité tripled.[13] It is tempting to interpret Chaussier's narrative as a sardonic commentary on the efforts to democratise this famous landmark. Before and after the Revolution, the square was extraordinary, whether called Palais Royal or Palais Égalité, and whether associated with chess or the lottery. It was often described as a "city within the city" with cafés, restaurants, shops, theatres, gambling dens, and more. Like the Palais-Royal today, Palais-Égalité was popular and reputable, bolstered by Philippe Égalité. It was an exceptional place governed by rules which its owner's status could uniquely permit, such as barring police entry. Merchants, cafés, print shops, booksellers, and disparate crowds – from prostitutes and gamblers to strollers – coexisted in the arcades.[14] Thus, Palais-Royal serves as a microcosm of the burgeoning consumer culture of the century, within which the lottery is an integral component.[15]

2 The sudden event – out of the blue

The story is narrated by a third-person observer who maintains a conspicuous distance from the protagonist. The narrator never identifies with Jocrisse but frequently offers normative comments on his actions, consistently portraying them

11 Denis Diderot, *Rameau's Nephew*, translated by Margaret Mauldon (Oxford University Press, 2006), 3.

12 Daston, *Classical Probability*, 161.

13 Francis Freundlich, *Le Monde du jeu à Paris 1715–1800* (Albin Michel, 1995), 144–147.

14 Victor Champier, *Le Palais-Royal d'après des documents inédits (1629–1900)* (Société des propagation des livres d'arts, 1900).

15 For the consumer culture of the eighteenth century, see Daniel Roche, *The Culture of Clothing* [*La Culture des apparences*, 1989], translated by Jean Birrell, (Cambridge University Press, 1994). For the lottery culture related to the consumer culture, see also Robert D. Kruckeberg, "The Wheel of Fortune in Eighteenth-Century France: The Lottery, Consumption, and Politics" (PhD diss., University of Michigan, 2009).

as ridiculous. The protagonist, following the lineage of typical comic characters crafted by Molière and others, is depicted as a naive and gullible fool. His very name, Jocrisse, is indicative of this stock character, common in the late eighteenth century French comedy, and comparable to classic Molièresque characters like "Tartuffe", "The Misanthrope", and "The Miser".

The narrative's central turning point is the significant win, *le gros lot*, and its consequent effects. This pivotal and abrupt event is described in a dedicated chapter aptly titled "The Lottery", which follows immediately after the introductory chapters. Jocrisse, portrayed as simpleminded and credulous, is stripped of everything and reduced to a nonentity until he unexpectedly wins the big prize. This event is a true game-changer, dramatically altering the course of his day. The subsequent chapters chronicle the unfolding story in sequential steps, corresponding to the progression of the day. It becomes apparent that the plot is constructed around a single chance event that precipitates a series of other events as direct outcomes of the initial win. While the narrator is acutely aware of this causal mechanism, the protagonist perceives these events as disconnected chance occurrences, lacking any apparent causal links.

It is often noted that the lottery differs from many other games of chance, primarily in terms of its timeline. While most other games, such as roulette, dice, and card games, have relatively short timelines as stakes and results are immediate, the lottery unfolds over a more extended period. It is not uncommon for weeks to pass between purchasing a ticket and the drawing of winners.[16] This extended timeline makes the lottery especially conducive to fostering expectations, hopes, fantasies, and frenzies. Jocrisse, however, appears to have no predisposition towards any form of gambling.

Serendipitously, he is reminded of the five lottery tickets he carries only when someone shouts, "Here is the list! .... Who wants to see the list?" (32) Until this moment, he has been utterly oblivious to the tickets' existence, which his previous employer had given him out of sheer generosity: "This shout reminds Jocrisse that he has five tickets in his pocket, procured eight days earlier, thanks to M. Duval's [his master's] indulgence" (32). Thus, Jocrisse is not only naive and ignorant but also entirely indifferent to the popular lottery culture in Paris. He remains unaffected not only by the widespread frenzy for games typical of the period and the specific popular obsession with the lottery and its associated machinery of ticket

16 For the frequence of drawings, see Elisabeth Belmas, *Jouer autrefois: essai sur le jeu dans la France moderne (XVIe–XVIIIe siècle)* (Editions Champ Vallon, 2006), 331; Kruckeberg, "The Wheel of Fortune", 130–147; Stephen M. Stigler, *Casanova's Lottery. The History of a Revolutionary Game of Chance* (The University of Chicago Press, 2022), 28–42.

sales, periodic drawings, calculations, and false ticket production, but also by its expectations, dreams, and fantasies.

The reminder of the forgotten lottery tickets is presented not as a premeditated action but rather as a random chance event occurring unexpectedly. At this point, Jocrisse is merely wandering around Palais-Égalité, penniless and directionless, open to new adventures. It is plausible, therefore, to interpret the jackpot as a sudden and surprising event. Unlike other literary characters obsessed with the lottery fantasy, Jocrisse neither exhibits signs of such obsession nor nurtures any lottery dreams before his win. In this regard, the text lacks a conventional lottery fantasy. Nevertheless, the win's effects serve as a satirical commentary on the lottery's promise of social mobility and unchecked consumerism. Moreover, it creates a dreamlike narrative that delivers a severe yet light-hearted critique of society.

The lottery in question in Chaussier's story is the post-revolutionary National Lottery. It was modelled after similar principles as the Loterie de l'École Royale Militaire established in 1757 with among others Giacomo Casanova as co-director. Later it evolved into the Loterie Royale. This Genoese-style lotto sparked fervent debates from its inception, particularly during and after the Revolution. Abolished in 1793 and reinstated four years later as the National Lottery, the lottery Chaussier refers to is the one restored in 1797.[17]

The rhetoric and stylistic choices in narrating the lottery event in Chaussier's story are particularly significant as they demonstrate how Chaussier deliberately alternates between representing the event's simultaneity – the specific lottery drawing – and reflecting on the lottery phenomenon in general. The chapter "La Loterie" begins with an apostrophe, abruptly introducing the word "La loterie!....." (32) followed by an exclamation mark and an ellipsis. This recurring rhetorical figure in *Le Gros lot* typically indicates both what is missing and what cannot be said – or in this case, what cannot be heard.

17 For the history of lotteries in eighteenth-century France, see, among others: Belmas, *Jouer autrefois*; Freundlich, *Le Monde du jeu à Paris*; Claude Bruneel, "Les Loteries de l'Europe méridionale", in *Loteries en Europe: Cinq siècles d'histoire*, ed. Bruno Bernard and Michael Ansiaux (Loterie nationale; Snoeck-Ducajau & Zoon, 1994), 100–116; Marie-Laure Legay, *Les Loteries royales dans l'Europe des Lumières: 1680–1815* (Presses Universitaires du Septentrion, 2014); Kruckeberg, "The Wheel of Fortune"; Robert D. Kruckeberg, "The Royal Lottery and the Old Regime: Financial Innovation and Modern Political Culture", *French Historical Studies* 37, no. 1 (2014); Robert D. Kruckeberg, "'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; Stigler, *Casanova's Lottery*.

The description of the lottery event oscillates between narrating a specific situation – the lottery drawing – and the narrator's broader reflections on the lottery as a phenomenon. The scene at the lottery office is one of uproar, with numerous people gathered, eager to learn whether their ticket is the winning one. Fragments of their conversations and exclamations are interspersed throughout the narration: "Thirty-three. – I win two hundred and seventy-five francs… Let's go and eat at the Porcherons. How stupid you are! ….and your husband and your daughter? Why! Too bad, […] Let's go" (37).

Multiple voices, all informal and vernacular, indicate that the lottery attracts a diverse array of ordinary people. The reader is presented with snippets of incomplete sentences regarding betting strategies, calculations, expectations, hopes, and disappointments. All the well-known tropes related to the cultural representations of lottery fantasies are woven together to provide a sense of simultaneity. Collectively, these fragments convey the impression of an intense, densely packed, and significant moment for many individuals. This chaotic situation contrasts sharply with Jocrisse's complete obliviousness to the unfolding events.

Amidst the turmoil, the narrator seizes the opportunity to articulate various general and theoretical reflections on the lottery as a phenomenon. He enumerates different reactions to the announcement: "To these words, the proud opulence only lifts their shoulders, …. the honest affluence only smiles at it, the sad destitution despairs over past losses. Still calculating, nevertheless, the possibility to win at the next drawing" (32). In this manner, Chaussier outlines how different socio-economic standings influence various attitudes towards the lottery. The narrator also contemplates the varying attitudes toward the lottery and comments on instances of fraud and cheating, such as the production of fake tickets and false winning lists for sale.

> Is it good? Or is it bad, the lottery? How much has been reasoned, or unreasoned, upon this lottery?… Consult M… He can speak skilfully on this matter; he knows the pros and cons… He proves, in a pedantic academic manner, that the lottery institution, a barbaric and tyrannous institution, is nothing but an indirect tax on the working class. (35)

Reflections like this were not uncommon in the eighteenth-century history of the lottery, and it became a topos in lottery discourse to address and prevent these illegitimate practices.[18] Moral considerations surrounding the lottery phenomenon are elements of the narrator's explicit reflections. The moral debates about lotteries were fervent throughout the century, especially intense just before and after

18 See for example Freundlich, *Le Monde du jeu à Paris*, 154–156, and Kruckeberg, "The Wheel of Fortune", 135.

the Revolution. Questions of whether the lottery reflects pre-revolutionary society and consequently should be abolished in line with revolutionary ideals, or whether it could be preserved according to the values of the Revolution, were frequently discussed. Chaussier refers to well-known arguments from the period, conveyed by prominent figures such as Georges-Louis Leclerc de Buffon, Etienne Bonnot de Condillac, Charles-Maurice de Talleyrand, and Louis-Sébastien Mercier.[19] He weighs the moral pros and cons of the lottery, questioning whether the lottery, as a form of fiscal measure, albeit voluntary, is a legitimate means of increasing state revenue at the expense of the poor.

Viewed in its entirety, the lottery in Chaussier's story is depicted as a regularly recurring event. The narrative conveys multiple spontaneous reactions among players and diverse sets of reflections among moralists and mathematicians. The narrator captures sentiments such as suspense, expectations, indignation, and indifference, alongside more theoretical and moral arguments and judgments. This condensed chapter, combining a lively description of a specific event with general reflection, encapsulates the wide-ranging aspects of the contemporary lottery discourse in the late eighteenth century. Narratively, the scene is presented with a significant degree of irony.

The major narrative event, Jocrisse winning the jackpot, receives, however, minimal direct attention. The reader learns about it indirectly through a lottery office manager addressing the protagonist as "Monsieur...". Not knowing his name, the manager's address – Monsieur – is indicative. Jocrisse does not comprehend that he is the intended recipient, especially since it is the first time in his life he is called a *citoyen* and a *monsieur*, a citizen and a gentleman. The narrator turns the irony into a societal critique when stating that the big win "makes him look like a Monsieur, in spite of all the past, present, and future revolutions" (38). While the inherent ambition of the French Revolution centres on the concept of *égalité*, Chaussier underscores that social distinctions persist, as the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu might have noted. Being addressed as Monsieur implies that class-based vocabulary remains tied to economic capital, conferring socio-economic status and dignifying one's address.[20]

Thus, the central event, le gros lot, is encapsulated by an apostrophe at the beginning and the protagonist's confusion at the end, not understanding that he

19 For a short introduction to these arguments, see Legay, "Chapitre 9. Loteries et esprit critique", in *Les Loteries royales,* https://doi.org/10.4000/books.septentrion.1567. See also Kruckeberg, "The Wheel of Fortune"; John Dunkley, *Gambling: a Social and Moral Problem in France, 1685–1792* (Voltaire Foundation, 1985), 149–151, and Stigler, *Casanova's Lottery*, 67–71.

20 For the notion "distinction" and "economic capital", see Pierre Bourdieu, *La Distinction. Critique sociale du jugement* (Les Editions de Minuit, 1979).

is the jackpot winner. This is the extent of the protagonist's direct experience with the lottery in Chaussier's story. The remaining narrative explores the various effects of chance initiated by the jackpot. *Le Gros lot* tells the tale of a nobody who, by chance, becomes a somebody – *un Monsieur.*

3 Chance effects or causal chain of events?

The effects of chance, as presented by the narrator, are organised into separate tableaux, situating Jocrisse at various locations such as the tailor, the cobbler, the brothel, the restaurant, the café, the bookstore, the theatre, and the gambling den. These scenes highlight typical features of the decadent Parisian consumer society of the period, seen through the lens of the naive protagonist.

The most frequent stylistic device that underscores the satire is enumeration, summarising different aspects of the urban, bourgeois Parisian lifestyle. The narrator has a penchant for lists that encompass architecture, how various people spend their nights and days, and their behaviour in public spaces such as streets, restaurants, cafés, bookshops, and theatres. These lists reveal that the ordinary, but rather affluent, Parisian bourgeois is primarily guided by a set of empty social and conventional status symbols. One notable observation related to these enumerations is the persistent mention of gamblers and gambling. Games and gaming are recurring elements, suggesting their ubiquity in society and highlighting the intimate relationship between chance and games. For instance, at Palais-Égalité, vice is asleep in favour of the tranquillity of virtue (14). The list includes figures such as the stockbroker, the rake, the crook, the courtesan, and at the very end, the gambler:

> The stockbroker [is sleeping] on eiderdown, the rake on the back seat of a tabagie [room designated for smoking and socialising]; the crook on a straw mattress concealing what he has stolen; the courtesan at the theatre of her debaucheries, and the gambler at the fatal green felt where he just lost his fortune… Oh, would they never wake up!…. (14–15)

A few pages later, the narrator lists how different inclinations give rise to different public spaces:

> The taste for pleasure generates shows and balls. The desire for education generates academies and literary salons. Celibacy generates restaurants. Idleness generates Bagnios. Frivolity generates fashion merchants. Greed generates gambling dens. And misery engenders pawnbrokers. (19)

These lists are indicative of the narrative position. The reader quickly grasps the easy-going setup of the story. The lists appear arbitrary while simultaneously pretending to establish a natural and necessary order.[21] As in many other game stories, the narrator indirectly builds the impression that games and gambling are omnipresent in the depicted society, and thus suitably mentioned in any comprehensive description of societal elements. Consequently, references to games gradually take on greater significance in Chaussier's story.

The interconnection between games and chance had been recognised long before the eighteenth century, but it was Blaise Pascal and his contemporaries who made this connection a tool for scientific inquiry.[22] Pascal and others in the late seventeenth and eighteenth century, utilised games and gaming culture as models in their calculations leading to modern probability theories. The explicit aim was to control chance, the so-called "taming of chance", contributing to a scientific conception of chance devoid of religious implications.[23] In the second half of the eighteenth century, this had become common knowledge. In the French *Encyclopédie*, chance is defined by Diderot, who authored the article:

> A rather ordinary term in language and completely bereft of meaning in nature. We say about an event that it is arbitrary when its cause is unknown to us; when its connection to the ones which precede, accompany or follow, escape us, in short, when it is beyond our knowledge and independent of our will.[24]

This definition clearly states that chance is largely a result of ignorance, and knowledge is the best remedy to prevail over it and eradicate its influence.

The presentation of chance effects in Chaussier's story is twofold, and corresponds to what Thomas M. Kavanagh calls the "ambiguity of the eighteenth-century attitude towards chance".[25] For Jocrisse, on the one hand, the chance effects are experienced as a series of arbitrary events following the big win in the lottery. On the other hand, the narrator subtly indicates that these are ordinary and largely predictable events in society. The protagonist is depicted as an ignorant fool, experiencing the consequences of *le gros lot* as disconnected chance events. Conversely, the narrator provides the reader with the understanding

21 For the inherent irony of the taxonomy of lists, see Michel Foucault, "Préface", in *Les Mots et les choses* (Gallimard, 1966), 8.

22 For this argument, see Hacking, *The Emergence of Probability Theory*, xxiii and 7.

23 See Hacking, *The Emergence of Probability Theory* and Daston, *Classical Probability*, 1988.

24 Denis Diderot, article "Fortuit", in Denis Diderot and Jean le Rond d'Alembert, eds., *L'Encyclopédie des arts et des métiers* (1757), vol. 7, 205b, http://enccre.academie-sciences.fr/encyclopedie/article/v7-167-0/

25 See Kavanagh, *Enlightenment and the Shadows of Chance*, 108.

that these events form a necessary chain of causes and effects. From the narrator's point of view, Chaussier's story is an example of how "probability theory and the novel worked together as a bulwark against chance".[26] Conversely, on the protagonist's level, chance remains celebrated; as Jesse Molesworth puts it, it contributes "to a re-enchantment of the world".[27]

4 Jackpot and the lures of consumption

The chance effects are depicted alongside the successive steps Jocrisse takes throughout his day at Palais-Égalité. The description contains all the classic elements of the "king for a day" topos, well known from fairy tales and certain classical comedies from the eighteenth century, such as the Norwegian author Ludvig Holberg's *Jeppe on the Hill* (1723).

Following the "king for a day" model, the narrator employs various ironic devices to describe how such an unexpected transformation – from nobody to somebody – follows a predictable pattern akin to many lottery comedies.[28] The most conspicuous effect of the lottery event is Jocrisse's immediate aspiration for discernible transformation. The lottery prize incites both the desire and the potential to transform oneself from a nobody into a somebody. "Soyons un personnage" ("Let's be a somebody") (53) becomes imperative for Jocrisse after the big win. Having a substantial amount of money for the first time in his life, his initial action is to go shopping and to dress up as a gentleman by visiting a cobbler and a tailor.

Daniel Roche points out that eighteenth-century French society experienced a significant transformation in consumer culture, with clothing as one of its most tangible expressions. The textile industry made clothes more accessible, and for those with money, the culture of fashion became associated with dreams of elegance and opulence. Fashion became a symbolic sign of wealth. "Changing one's condition means changing one's clothes", Roche alleges,[29] and to a certain extent, Jocrisse adheres to this. Sartorial signs communicate the illusion of wealth through material possession, and as a lottery winner, Chaussier's protagonist embodies this idea once he hits the jackpot.

26 Kavanagh, *Enlightenment and the Shadows of Chance*, 108.
27 Molesworth, *Chance and the Eighteenth-Century Novel*, 2.
28 See, *infra*, Marius Warholm Haugen, "Staging Lotteries".
29 Roche, *The Culture of Clothing*, 92.

Aligning with Daniel Roche, Robert D. Kruckeberg asserts that the consumer revolution of the eighteenth century is closely linked to lottery culture: "It was not until the vast consumer revolution of the eighteenth century that lotteries became embedded within the fabric of French everyday life [...] The lottery ticket was both a real material possession itself and represented the imagination of possession of all that the consumer revolution offered".[30] In Chaussier's story, it is not the lottery tickets *per se* that represent this fantasy, but the realisation of the gain from the ticket that brings the fantasy to life within the narrative framework. The narrator, however, cannot resist satirising Jocrisse's desire to embellish himself according to the latest fashion. Everything must be *à la mode*, regardless of how ridiculous it appears, culminating in the narrator's ironic comment: "Il a tous les ridicules à la mode" ("He has all the silliness of fashion") (51).

The entire scene seems inspired by certain key moments in Molière's *Le Bourgeois gentilhomme* [*The Would-Be Gentleman*] (1670), with Jocrisse appearing as a relative of Monsieur Jourdain from Molière's play. Both embody the striving for social appearances and highlight the issue of social imitation. Molière and Chaussier both satirise attempts at social climbing. More explicitly, the character Jocrisse aspires to imitate is found in the engraving reproduced at the very beginning of Chaussier's novel (see figures 1 and 2). The engraving is by Carle Vernet (1758–1835), son of the renowned eighteenth-century painter Joseph Vernet (1714–1789). Entitled *Les Incroyables et les merveilleuses*, this engraving serves as a ludicrous model for the character Jocrisse wishes to emulate. Jocrisse is unaware that this is merely a caricature of the decadent lifestyle at the end of the eighteenth century, representing eccentric outfits, exaggerated luxury, and silliness. However, *Les Incroyables et les merveilleuses* is not only the title of a work of art, but was also a fashion trend during La Directoire (1795–1799), marked by eccentric fashion culture: "Les Incroyables viewed the world with a blasé and weary gaze. An Incroyable had to be as fashionable [...] and decadent as possible." [31]

Nonetheless, it appears that Jocrisse's masquerade succeeds. Once he has acquired "all the stupid fancies of fashion" (51), he is well-received everywhere at Palais-Égalité and the narrator resumes: "With a nice outfit, the fool achieves success everywhere" (56). This comment reflects a widespread perception in the eighteenth century that appearance is as significant, if not more so, than reality.

30 Kruckeberg, "The Wheel of Fortune", 3–4.

31 See Katell le Bourhis, ed., *The Age of Napoleon: Costume from Revolution to Empire (1789–1905)* (The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1989), 59.

Source gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France

Figure 1: Carle Vernet, *Les Incroyables* (1796). Gallica / Bibliothèque nationale de France. The character to the right is reproduced at the beginning of Chaussier's novel with the inscription "Soyons un personnage".

Jean-Jacques Rousseau's ironic statement, "The man of the world is wholly his mask; what he appears to be is everything", succinctly captures this idea.[32]

Casanova, in his famous autobiography, conducted his life according to this principle. Explaining how he became the co-director of the first state lottery in France in 1757, Casanova writes: "Paris was a city, and it still is, where everything is judged by its appearance. There is no other country where it is easier to succeed through appearance".[33] Chaussier echoes this in *Le Gros lot:* "Get a nice outfit, and everybody will pay attention to you" (57). However, there is at least one major difference between Casanova and Jocrisse. While Casanova's appearance contributes

32 Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Émile*, vol. IV, quoted after Roche, *The Culture of Clothing*, 400.
33 Giacomo Casanova, *Histoire de ma vie* (Robert Laffont, 1993), vol. 2, 31.

Figure 2: “Soyons un personnage”, illustration in *Le Gros lot.* Gallica / Bibliothèque nationale de France.

to his success as a prominent lottery-seller and co-director, Jocrisse is simply a lucky lottery winner who spends his gains to improve his appearance in the hope of becoming somebody.[34]

The fantasy and desire for wealth are not only linked to sartorial signs but also to the gambling culture of the period. While the lottery was primarily popular among impoverished individuals, gambling was associated with more affluent citizens. Naturally, Jocrisse's next step as a *nouveau riche* is to visit a gambling den, albeit without any premeditation, but solely according to the narrator's scheme. Describing the architecture of Parisian buildings, the narrative reveals that shops occupy the ground floor, gambling dens the first floor, first clerks, successful actors, and charlatans the second floor, brokers and usurers the third floor, artists the fourth floor, and writers the attic at the fifth floor. Initially, the gambling den is mentioned among other professional uses, and apparently, Jocrisse enters this part of the building by chance (64–65).

At the gambling den, Jocrisse plays roulette for the first time in his life and, with the help of an advisor, wins a substantial amount of money. Even though Jocrisse wins, he is still depicted as a fool who does not grasp the social mechanism of the game. The gambling den is described as having no "good society […]; there are only players… and what kinds of players!!!…" (65), and "*La Roulette*" as "an excellent way to squander public fortune" (66–67). The italics, triple exclamation marks, and ellipses are clear markers of irony. Furthermore, the text is interspersed with an aria about the fatal green felt, lamenting the perpetual unhappiness of the gamblers' families, humorously conveying the bourgeois moral condemnation of chance games. The gambling advisor becomes Jocrisse's personal guide for the rest of the day. They visit a restaurant where they spend most of the winnings. The scene is described with the same enumerative narrative distance, poking fun at the various clients and their ridiculous appearance, unnoticed by the protagonist. The gap between the narrator's discourse and the protagonist's experience is thus further accentuated, enhancing the satirical effect (72–73).

By using simple literary devices such as rhetorical figures like the green felt as an metonymy of gambling culture, orthographic marks like exclamation marks, ellipses, and italics, and also by incorporating a song, Chaussier brings forward

34 For more on Casanova and the lottery, see, *infra*, Angela Fabris, "The Ambivalent Perceptions of the Genoese Lotto", section 3. See also Anne Beate Maurseth, "Le Motif du jeu et la fonction du hazard – un topos littéraire dans les mémoires de Casanova", *Revue Romane* 42, no. 2 (2007): 283–296.

the same moral issues related to gambling culture that the fervent opponent Jean Dusaulx had addressed a few years earlier in *De la Passion du jeu.*[35]

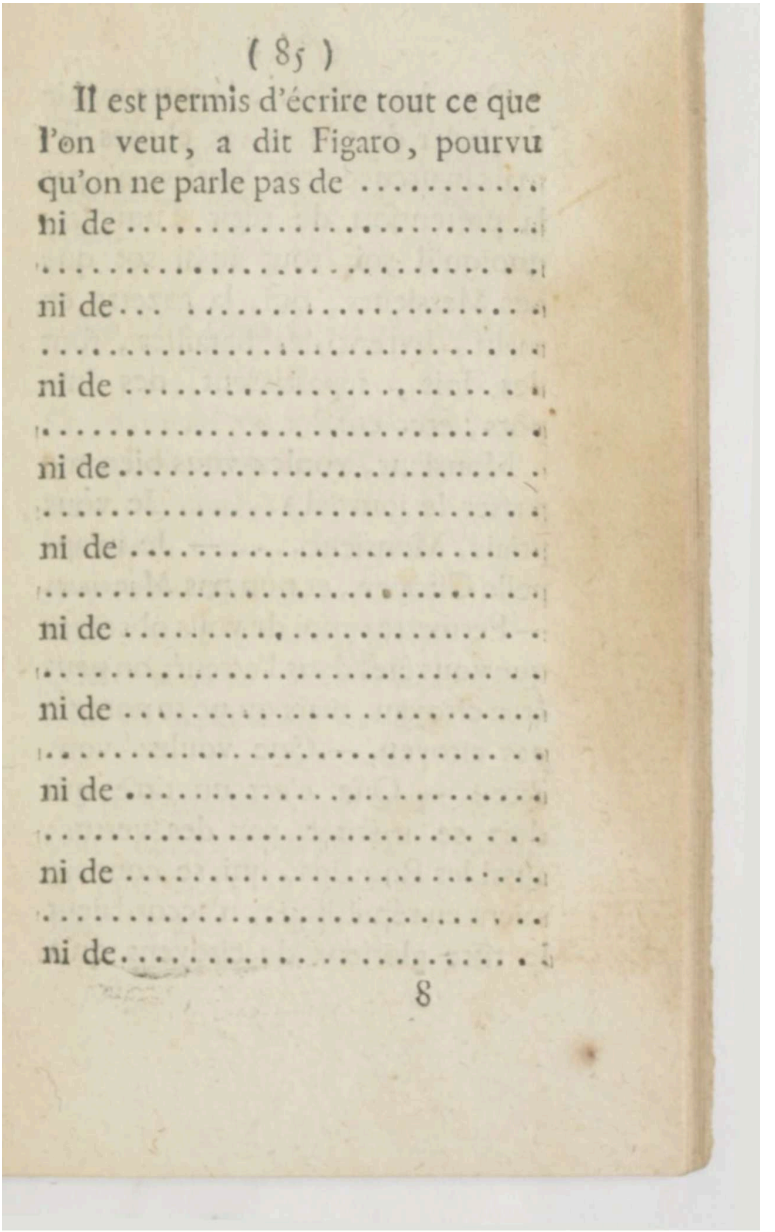
Following the typical routine of the Parisian bourgeoisie at the end of the eighteenth century, Jocrisse and his companion go to a café after dining. This is also the appropriate moment to discuss politics. Coffeehouses, as social spaces accessible to all, were essential in the eighteenth century for shaping public opinion. By coining the concept of the public sphere, Jürgen Habermas argues that these venues offered a setting where different topics could ideally be debated freely.[36] In *Le Gros lot*, the café denotes this function in a subversive manner. The political conversation at the café spans several pages but is represented solely through ellipses (see figure 3). When discussing freedom of speech, Jocrisse's interlocutor seems pleased to assert that they can talk about anything, but… (85), followed by more ellipses on the next two pages. The irony becomes evident when the narrator concludes by noting, "Jocrisse does not have the intention to rule the universe" (86).

This passage serves as a critical comment and satirical remark on the post-revolutionary period, highlighting that freedom of speech and other revolutionary ideas have inherent limitations. The debate over the lottery in the Revolution's aftermath exemplifies this point. Despite opposition from prominent figures like Talleyrand and Dusaulx, the royal lottery persisted because moral arguments were insufficient to convince the parliament to suppress it as long as people were still eager to buy tickets and the lottery business contributed significantly to state revenues. The lottery's abolition in 1793 resulted from decreased popularity and revenue, not a shift in moral values. Similarly, its restoration in 1797 was not driven by ideological reasons, but rather by commercial considerations; there remained a market for the lottery in France, and the public desired it.[37] Although Jocrisse does not reflect on these issues, they underpin the narrative's subtext. Jocrisse continues, naively and candidly, into various episodes with his advisor, vis-

35 Jean Dusaulx, *De la Passion du jeu* (L'Imprimerie du Monseiur, Paris, 1779). For a discussion of the moral dimensions of the gambling culture in the eighteenth century, see Dunkley, *Gambling: a Social and Moral Problem*, 146–154, and Bruno Bernard, "Aspects moraux et sociaux des loteries", in *Loteries en Europe: Cinq siècles d'histoire*, 55–89.

36 See Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, translated by Thomas Bürger (MiT Press, 1991 [1962]).

37 For a more thorough account of the debate concerning the abolition and renaissance of the French state lottery after the revolution, see Kruckeberg, "The Wheel of Fortune", 204–260, and Bernard, "Aspects moraux et sociaux", 77–80.



(85)

Il est permis d'écrire tout ce que l'on veut, a dit Figaro, pourvu qu'on ne parle pas de .....
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ni de .....
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Source gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France

Figure 3: Page 85 of Hector Chaussier's *Le Gros lot.* Gallica / Bibliothèque nationale de France. The ellipses are a recurrent stylistic feature in the novel and add to the light-hearted and ironic dimension of the story.

iting a bookstore,[38] attending the theatre,[39] going to a brothel,[40] and eventually being invited to a ball.

In keeping with the ideal appearance of the upper-class bourgeois lifestyle, being invited to a ball is a natural inclusion of the chain of events at the end of the day. The narrator zooms into this tableau through a general reflection on society's historical transformation:

> In the past, you bought permission to kill people [in a duel], today [...] you may purchase the right to ruin everybody. This time-honoured right, called the Enterprise of Games, gives one individual the right to establish games everywhere and to confiscate to his own profit everybody coming to his legal territory. (135)

Unaware of the narrator's moral and political implications, Jocrisse is encouraged to gamble again, specifically to play *la bouillotte,* a card game popular at the end of the eighteenth century, considered a successor to *le brélan* and a predecessor to poker. This card game also names a classic interior lamp frequently used to illuminate card tables (see figure 4).

In less than an hour, Jocrisse loses all his money, is expelled from the gambling den, and ends up exactly where he started at Palais-Égalité in the morning. The narrator concludes with the classic proverb "Ce qui vient par la flûte, s'en va par le tambour" (138), which translates in English to "easy come, easy go".

38 The bookstore sequence serves as an opportunity for the narrator to make fun of the hypocritical culture of knowledge, the pretentiousness of both the industry and its content. And there is a certain subtle self-irony involved. Chaussier's story is published *Chez Roux, Palais-Égalité,* as it says on the front-page. As such, Chaussier's own story becomes itself an object of the imminent critique advanced by the narrator.

39 After the promenade in the afternoon, a visit to the theatre is the appropriate next step of the day. The spectacle is, however, cancelled due to indisposition of the entire crew of actors (119). They are on strike because the theatre director refuses to give them their paycheck. The irony is here combined with an explicit societal critique, nonetheless unnoticed by the protagonist and only conveyed to the reader by the narrator.

40 The narrator describes the brothel by help of extensive use of periphrases, the house being presented as "préface aux *Œuvres* de l'Aretin, car ce foyer est un veritable encan public où l'impudeur sous les traits de la beauté vient mettre ses charmes en vente" (122) [the preface to the *Works* of Aretino, since the foyer is a true public auction where shamelessness/impudence is selling its charms under the shape of beauty]. The Italian renaissance writer Pietro Aretino (1492–1556) is well known for his detailed descriptions of whorehouses.

Figure 4: *La Bouillotte* (1804), after drawing by Jean-François Bosio, Rijksmuseum Amsterdam, RP-P-OB-103.747.

5 Conclusion

Le Gros lot offers a thought-provoking and revealing exploration of the historical and cultural dimensions of the French lottery at the close of the eighteenth century. The lottery discourse itself is twofold: on the one hand, it depicts the moment of suspense for ticket holders until the drawing is completed; on the other, it reflects on various moral and theoretical dimensions of the phenomenon in the late eighteenth century. The narrator maintains an ironic distance toward both aspects. As such, the lottery serves perhaps first and foremost to put up front a satire of Parisian society at the time. The protagonist, Jocrisse, is clumsy and simple-minded. Although he is mocked, he serves as an instrument to mirror society's absurdities. The plot develops at Palais-Égalité, further embodying societal critique by ironically addressing the revolutionary ideal of equality.

Moreover, Chaussier's lottery story reveals one of the most debated aspects related to games and chance in the eighteenth century, namely the problem of calculation and the distinction between singular experiences and general reflections. Chance is always experienced as a sudden reality, but to a certain degree, it can also be controlled through prediction and calculation. *Le Gros lot* exhibits this tension through narrative devices. The clear distance between the protagonist's naivety and the informed narrator's condescending portrayal of him is significant. The narrator does not merely patronise the protagonist but also criticises the entire society of which he is a part. The different phases of the day are described sequentially, often through tableaux, representing different gears in the wheel of fortune and aiming to satirise society as a whole. By the end of the day, having lost all his money, Jocrisse returns to zero. "Easy come, easy go". Nothing has changed and perhaps never will – neither in his life nor in society. While the societal wheel of fortune predictably and inevitably continues, Chaussier's story serves as both a temporary chance event and a permanent statement of fate.

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