

# Harping on patriotism: female education meets Orléanist ambition in Jean-Antoine-Théodore Giroust's *The Harp Lesson* (1791)

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## ABSTRACT

One of the largest and most striking submissions to the 1791 Salon, *The Harp Lesson* by Jean-Antoine-Théodore Giroust was an ambitious but spectacularly ill-timed intervention in revolutionary politics. It emerged from Félicité de Genlis' remarkable educational project for the children of the duc d'Orléans, especially Princess Adélaïde, which mixed bold ideas about gender and civic virtue with specific political ambition. This article situates the painting within the experimental politics and sentimental crises of the Orléans household. It argues that Giroust, an intimate of this household, sought to exemplify some of Genlis' boldest claims for the capacities and potential of the royal children in her care, especially at the expense of their biological mother. It demonstrates how Giroust engaged with the visual languages of recent Salon painting to create a domestic scene of female accomplishment that was also freighted with national purpose. The failure of the painting to resonate with the public illuminates the desperate gamble of different figures in the Orléanist camp as well as the unfulfilled possibilities of summer 1791.

The Salon of 1791, the first official art exhibition of the Revolution to open under new open artistic admission standards, was an eye-popping exercise in liberty and equality. When its doors opened to the public on 8 September, visitors were greeted by almost 900 artworks, three times the number on view at the previous Salon of 1789.<sup>1</sup> Revolutionary politics entered the Salon with a vengeance in 1791 as well—from Jacques-Louis David's project drawing for the

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1 Régis Michel, 'L'Art des Salons', in *Aux Armes et aux arts! Les arts de la Révolution 1789–1799* (eds), Michel and Philippe Bordes (Paris, 1988), 26.

*Oath of the Tennis Court* to clumsier, if similarly sincere, revolutionary allegories and portraits of legislators and National Guardsmen.

One of the splashiest paintings on view was a seemingly apolitical monumental portrait by Jean-Antoine-Théodore Giroust of Eugénie Louise Adélaïde de Bourbon Orléans, daughter of Louis-Philippe, duc d'Orléans, known as *The Harp Lesson* (see [Figure 1](#)).



**Figure 1.** Jean-Antoine-Théodore Giroust, *The Harp Lesson*, 1791, oil on canvas, 245.75 × 185.42 cm, Dallas Museum of Art, Foundation for the Arts Collection, Mrs John B. O'Hara Fund, 2015.10.FA. Image courtesy Dallas Museum of Art.

Giroust was a promising history painter trained by Joseph-Marie Vien alongside David; this was his first venture into large-scale portraiture. Adélaïde was fourteen years old and already in the public eye, thanks to the pedagogical writings of her governess, Félicité Ducrest de Saint-Aubin, comtesse de Genlis, who is pictured playing another harp behind her. Genlis' prominent place in the portrait reflects her own celebrity, as an author and, controversially, as the teacher of Adélaïde's brothers. To the duo of pupil and teacher, Giroust added a third figure: Paméla, an English orphan adopted by the Orléans family. Even though the painting was identified in the *livret* as a portrait of Adélaïde, Genlis looms large in both the composition and in contemporary commentary; indeed, as we will argue, it is likely that Genlis was the motor behind the portrait and even its true subject. The portrait, which at 246 by 185 cm would have drawn viewers' eyes even on the Salon's crowded walls, is remarkable not only for its physical presence and multiple sitters but also for its precise rendering of a profusion of fashionable luxury goods: the sitters' gowns, the ornately carved harps, the neoclassical interior and furnishings, even the drawing portfolio and *porte-crayon* that threaten to tip into the viewer's space, all presided over by a statuette of Minerva that literally casts a shadow over this scene of aristocratic feminine accomplishment.

*The Harp Lesson* is on no one's list of important revolutionary paintings—partly because it remained in the Orléans family and then in private hands until 2015, when it was acquired by the Dallas Museum of Art, and partly because of its compositional eccentricities and slightly wooden execution. Scholarship on the painting is sparse and somewhat confused; even more recent accounts of the Orléans family or Giroust's work have skimmed over its significance as a portrait or as Orléanist propaganda.<sup>2</sup> Juan-Manuel Ibeas-Altamira's recent study of Genlis' work touches on the painting's contributions to Genlis' self-fashioning and the Orléanist cause, but does not grapple with its visual strategies or claims about the role of women in revolutionary politics.<sup>3</sup> The painting, however, is a composition to be reckoned with, both on aesthetic and political grounds. Giroust's portrait rethinks both the definition of elite familial lineage and of female accomplishment. The three women pictured—an aristocratic teenager, a famous *femme de lettres*, and an orphaned foreigner—are not technically a family (despite rumours that Paméla was the illegitimate daughter of Genlis and Adélaïde's father) but their portrait treats the fellowship and artistic engagement of women with utmost seriousness.<sup>4</sup> In 1791, when gender roles, social hierarchies and artmaking were all politicized, Giroust's portrait was a major intervention in public debate. This crystalline depiction of female beauty and accomplishment simultaneously promoted the Orléanist political cause and Genlis' reputation as a public intellectual. It was a perfect expression of her commitment to progressive ideals and performative transparency, a strategy she also pursued in print throughout summer 1791. At its heart the painting expressed the belief that at least certain women and girls could embody the values of the Revolution, at a moment when the capacity of *citoyennes* was hotly debated.<sup>5</sup> The analysis presented here takes

2 Valeria Di Guiseppe Di Paolo, 'Jean-Antoine-Théodore Giroust, peintre d'histoire et portraitiste', *Bulletin de la Société de l'art français* (2010), 213–32; and J. Baillo, 'Mademoiselle d'Orléans taking a harp lesson', (Christie's New York, 28 January 2015) which includes the most recent account of its provenance. Anthony Halliday, *Facing the Public: Portraiture in the Aftermath of the French Revolution* (Manchester, 2000), 38–39; E. Salles, *Antoine Giroust de l'ancienne Académie: étude biographique 1753–1817* (Pontoise, 1888) 50–51. For the most recent treatment of the painting, in the context of Genlis' artistic pedagogy, see Franny Brock, 'Madame de Genlis's new method and teaching drawing to children in eighteenth-century France', in *The Enlightened Mind: Education in the Long Eighteenth Century*, ed. Amanda Strasik (Wilmington, 2022), 67–84. The picture, having been in private hands for so long, has not been incorporated into discussion of these years in the Orléans family; Gabriel de Broglie even alleges it is an old picture from 1787, just rehung in 1791.

3 Juan-Manuel Ibeas-Altamira, *La Pédagogie dans le boudoir: heurs et malheurs de Félicité de Genlis* (Paris, 2021) 52, 55.

4 On the mysterious identity of Paméla Syms, whom Genlis claimed was an adopted orphan from Newfoundland that the duc d'Orléans had sourced through his English agent Nathaniel Forth Parker, the most reliable discussion is in Gabriel de Broglie, *Madame de Genlis* (Paris, 1985), 100–04.

5 Annie Smart, *Citoyennes: Women and the Ideal of Citizenship in Eighteenth-Century France* (Delaware, 2011). For female citizenship and portraiture, see Amy Freund, *Portraiture and Politics in Revolutionary France* (University Park, PA, 2014), 127–60.

inspiration from Colin Jones' flair for crossing disciplinary boundaries between art history and history, and for revolutionary micro-histories that contain major insights into changing political, cultural and gender regimes. From Robespierre to the duchesse d'Elbeuf, Jones has, throughout his career, traced the dilemmas of individuals negotiating the revolutionary vortex in vivid and often very funny prose.<sup>6</sup> We think Genlis and Giroust, who worked together to make the 1791 portrait serve their respective and somewhat delusional agendas, deserve a similar treatment.

The selection of Giroust to produce this portrait—manifesto is, on the surface, peculiar. In 1791, he was known not as a portraitist but as a member of a new generation of classicizing history painters.<sup>7</sup> When Vien, his first teacher, left Paris to direct the Royal Academy in Rome, Giroust moved to the studio of Nicolas-Bernard Lépicié, a genre painter and portraitist whose inventive family portraits and keen eye for contemporary fashion provided a model for Giroust's unexpected shift into portraiture. Giroust's two-pronged training paid off; he won the Prix de Rome in 1778, was named an academician in 1788, and in 1789 exhibited a reception piece, also now at the Dallas Museum of Art, on the subject of Oedipus at Colonus, the family drama par excellence.<sup>8</sup>

Giroust made another valuable acquaintance in Vien's studio: Silvestre-David Mirys, a Polish-born artist who was an intimate of the Genlis/Orléans circle and served as the children's history and drawing instructor.<sup>9</sup> Through Mirys, Giroust gained entry into the Genlis pedagogical experiment and became a supporting player in the Orléans domestic drama—both figuratively and literally.<sup>10</sup> In her memoirs, Genlis recalled that Giroust was acting in private theatricals held in the Château de Saint-Leu when news of the revolutionary disturbances broke on 9 July 1789. The painter was so keen to learn more that he travelled straight to Paris, only to be arrested at the city gates by guards alarmed by his appearance (in his haste, he had forgotten to change out of his Polyphemus costume).<sup>11</sup> This familiarity must have led to Giroust, rather than one of the many more experienced portraitists vying to make their mark in a crowded market, being awarded the commission.

Giroust's composition borrowed liberally from large-scale multifigure portraits by those established practitioners. The interior, colour scheme, figure of Paméla, and even Genlis' spectacular hat recall David's 1788 portrait of the tax farmer/scientist Antoine-Laurent Lavoisier and his artist/scientist wife Marie Anne Pierrette Paulze (see Figure 2).<sup>12</sup>

The grouping of fashionable and accomplished women calls to mind Adélaïde Labille-Guiard's self-portrait with her students shown at the Salon of 1785 (see Figure 3); indeed, the footstool with the *porte-crayon* and rolled drawings is lifted directly from Labille-Guiard.

6 Colin Jones, *Madame de Pompadour: Images of a Mistress* (London and New Haven, CT, 2002); *The Smile Revolution in Eighteenth-Century Paris* (Oxford, 2014); 'French crossings IV: vagaries of passion and power in Enlightenment Paris', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 23 (2013), 3–35.

7 Giroust may have had a family connection to an already successful portraitist—Marie-Suzanne Giroust, one of the rare female members of the Royal Academy, who married the portraitist Alexandre Roslin and had close ties of friendship to Vien. See Salles, *Giroust*, 4, and also Neil Jeffares on Marie-Suzanne Giroust in *Dictionary of Pastellists before 1800* <<http://www.pastellists.com/Articles/RoslinMS.pdf>>. A close relationship to a successful female artist may have predisposed him to appreciate Adélaïde's and Genlis' ambitions.

8 Di Paolo, 'Jean-Antoine-Théodore Giroust, peintre d'histoire et portraitiste'.

9 Salles, *Giroust*, 5.

10 Bordes discusses Lépicié's painting and other Orléans family portraits in an important essay on the inventive use of portraiture in court circles at this moment; 'Portraiture in the mode of genre: a social interpretation', in *French Genre Painting in the Eighteenth Century: Studies in the History of Art* 72, ed. P. Conisbee (Washington, DC, 2007), 257–73.

11 Stéphanie-Félicité de Genlis, *Mémoires de madame de Genlis*, ed. D. Masseau (Paris, 2004), 311.

12 Recent technical examination has revealed Paulze's original hat; see Kimberly Chrisman-Campbell, 'A tale of two chapeaux: fashion, revolution, and David's portrait of the Lavoisiers', *Metropolitan Museum Journal*, 57 (2022) 67–84 and David Pullins, Dorothy Mahon and Silvia A. Centeno, 'The Lavoisiers by David: technical findings on portraiture at the brink of Revolution', *The Burlington Magazine*, 163, v. 1422 (2021), 780–91.



Genlis was in fact already a client of Labille-Guiard, who in 1790 painted a half-length portrait of Genlis in another impressive hat (see [Figure 4](#)).<sup>13</sup>

And whilst David, the Lavoisiers, and Labille-Guiard were all, like the Orléans family and Genlis, early supporters of the Revolution, Giroust's portrait also borrows from the distinctly royal visual language of Elisabeth Vigée-Lebrun's portrait of Marie Antoinette with her children,



**Figure 2.** Jacques-Louis David, *Antoine-Laurent Lavoisier (1743–94) and Marie Anne Lavoisier (Marie Anne Pierrette Paulze, 1758–1836)*, 1788, oil on canvas, 259.7 × 194.6 cm, 1977.10, Metropolitan Museum of Art, Purchase, Mr and Mrs Charles Wrightsman Gift, in honour of Everett Fahy, 1977.

13 Laura Auricchio, *Adélaïde Labille-Guiard: Artist in the Age of Revolution* (Los Angeles, 2009), 80–81.

a glorification of queenship and motherhood shown in the Salon of 1787. It is worth noting that Vigée-Lebrun had sent a portrait of the duchesse d'Orléans, Adélaïde's mother, to the Salon of 1789, another and even more obvious juxtaposition of the Orléans and Bourbon women—although significantly (as we will see) the duchess was pictured without her children.



**Figure 3.** Adélaïde Labille-Guiard, *Self-Portrait with Two Pupils, Marie Gabrielle Capet (1761–1818) and Marie Marguerite Carreaux de Rosemond (died 1788)*, 1785, oil on canvas, 210.8 × 151.1 cm, Metropolitan Museum of Art, 53.225.5, Gift of Julia A. Berwind, 1953.

These visual borrowings are both evidence of Giroust's inexperience with multifigure portraiture, and part of a larger revolutionary conversation, conducted through portraits, about who could and should wield political power at a moment of profound instability. That conversation was already happening within the second-most powerful family in France. In the dying years of the *ancien régime*, the duc d'Orléans and his supporters had pioneered a 'new politics' in the phrase of George Kelly, dabbling with propaganda and stirring up the volatile forces of public opinion.<sup>14</sup> Whereas other princes of the blood had fled from the Revolution in its opening months, Louis-Philippe-Joseph had gambled on its success, posing as 'its foremost, its most



**Figure 4.** Adélaïde Labille-Guiard, *Portrait of MADAME de Genlis*, 1790, oil on canvas, 73.98 × 60.01 cm, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, purchased with funds provided by the William Randolph Hearst Collection, Arnold S. Kirkeby and other donors by exchange (91.2).

14 George A. Kelly, 'The machine of the duc d'Orléans and the new politics', *Journal of Modern History*, 51 (1979), 667–84.



precious, its best Citizen'.<sup>15</sup> In summer 1791, the duke's supporters believed that he was finally on the cusp of wresting power from his disgraced cousin, Louis XVI, whose reputation was fatally wounded after the abortive flight to Varennes. Genlis had other ideas, though, pinning her hopes on the children the duke had placed in her charge, into whom she had mercilessly drilled patriotic sentiments. Giroust's painting thus emerged at a crucial juncture, acting as a publicity vehicle for the tutor's pedagogic ideals and the dynasty she claimed to serve. That it horribly backfired upon its appearance at the Salon only deepens its value as a kind of revolutionary counter-factual, a monument to thwarted ambitions.

## I

Giroust's portrait was situated at the confluence of the political, intellectual, sentimental and sexual intrigues that had progressively engulfed the Orléans household over the preceding months and years. In 1778, Genlis was charged with the education of Adélaïde and her twin sister Françoise (who died at age four). At that point, Genlis was lady-in-waiting to the then duchesse de Chartres, but already tied to the Orléans family through her aunt, madame de Montesson, the morganatic wife of Louis-Philippe-Joseph's father, and through her husband, Charles Alexis Brûlart, who served as captain of the household guards. In 1782, Genlis was named *gouverneur* of the duc de Chartres' three sons as well. Satirists marvelled at this transformation in the fortunes of the duke's former mistress, and her unprecedented elevation to a traditionally male role: one verse pictured the androgynous Genlis crowing: 'Je suis monsieur dans le lycée/ Et madame dans le boudoir'.<sup>16</sup> Satirists scoffed when it was mooted that she might be amongst the first four female writers inducted to the Académie française.<sup>17</sup> Misogyny followed each stage of Genlis' career and has continued to colour conservative historiography, where she figures as a master manipulator, even an emotional rapist, the serpent who poisoned the Orléans' *ménage* and infected it with dangerous revolutionary ideas.<sup>18</sup>

Even her detractors, however, acknowledged Genlis' extraordinary influence. She was one of the most prolific writers on education in France, a theme she explored across a range of genres, from treatises and manuals to novels. Her eminence in the field was fundamental to her public image as a woman of letters, carefully cultivated through painted and engraved portraits.<sup>19</sup> The appointment to the post of *gouverneur* gave Genlis the opportunity to finally translate into practice some of the ideas about raising children that she had developed over the previous decade. From the outset, Genlis conceived of the Orléans nursery as an ideal laboratory for pedagogic, and literary, experimentation.<sup>20</sup> In an important 2019 article, Dominique Julia has argued that Genlisian pedagogy was a self-conscious game of mirrors, built upon a deliberate and 'phantasmatic' blurring of reality with representation. The children's experience was continuously mediated by, and recycled into, works of fiction, either the novels penned by their governess, or the epistolary pseudo-novels they were asked to devise as part of their training.<sup>21</sup>

15 *Lettre adressé à monseigneur le duc d'Orléans, sur l'éloignement de ses enfants, propose & projeté dernièrement par madame de Sillery* (Paris, s.d.), 2.

16 *Mémoires historiques, littéraires, anecdotiques et critiques de Bachaumont, depuis l'année 1762 à 1788* (Paris: 1808), vol. 2, 7–8 (15 February 1782); Ellen Moers, *Literary Women* (New York, 1976), 211–31.

17 Ann L. Schroder, 'Going public against the Academy in 1784: Mme de Genlis speaks out on gender bias', *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 32 (1999), 376–82.

18 *La Famille d'Orléans pendant la Révolution, d'après sa correspondance inédite*, eds Gaston Du Bosq de Beaumont and M. Bernos (Paris, 1913), 203; Guy Antonetti, *Louis-Philippe* (Paris, 1994), 117.

19 Marie-Émanuelle Plangol-Diéval, 'The visual and textual portraits of madame de Genlis: the *gouverneur*, educator and author of *mémoires*', in *Portraits and Poses: Female Intellectual Authority, Agency and Authorship in Early Modern Europe*, eds Beatrijs Vanacker and Lieke van Deinsen (Leuven, 2022), 93–107.

20 Antonetti, *Louis-Philippe*, 105.

21 Dominique Julia, 'Princes et élèves: les études des princes d'Orléans sous l'autorité de madame de Genlis (1782–1792)', *Histoire de l'éducation*, 151 (2019), 119–20.



Theatricality was the hallmark of Genlis' educational programme; in the words of one early historian, she was a 'first-rate director' (*metteuse en scène de premier ordre*).<sup>22</sup> In 1779, she and the princesses had moved into a special pavilion in the convent of Bellechasse that she transformed into an immersive didactic environment (see Figure 5).

Mirys was employed to translate the lessons of ancient history and mythology into magic lantern shows, and the walls of Adélaïde's bedroom were covered with medallions in grisaille depicting the kings, emperors and empresses of ancient Rome.<sup>23</sup> In this domestic theatre the children assembled to perform 'tableaux historiques', which Genlis then exhibited to friends in Parisian society, including Giroust and Jacques-Louis David (who took 'great pleasure in personally arranging these ephemeral tableaux').<sup>24</sup> Upon Genlis' command, Paméla, too, would apparently assume the pose of Rousseau's heroine Heloise, letting down her hair, falling to her knees and simulating 'a passionate ecstasy'. The marquise de la Rochejacquelin recalled seeing Paméla pull off this sentimental stunt in front of the paintings hanging in the Salon.<sup>25</sup> Her observation tallies with other evidence of Genlis' delight in breaking the fourth wall. In summer



Figure 5. Bernard Poyet, *Pavilion of Bellechasse*, ink and watercolour on paper, 15.3 × 19.7 cm, Musée Carnavalet, D.5886.

22 François Anatole Gruyer, *La Jeunesse du roi Louis-Philippe, d'après les portraits et les tableaux conservés au Musée Condé* (Paris, 1909); 'La Fête de la Sauvinière', plate 12.

23 Genlis, *Mémoires de madame de Genlis*, 278.

24 Genlis, *Mémoires de madame de Genlis*, 294–95.

25 Victoire de Donnissan de La Rochejacquelin, *Mémoires de la marquise de Rochejacquelin* (Paris, 1889), 20–22.

1791, Genlis created a new kind of theatrical spectacle when she escorted Adélaïde and Paméla, coiffed in liberty bonnets, to view Giroust's picture at the Salon, eliding any difference between the girls and their idealized representations and underlining the portrait's political import.<sup>26</sup>

Genlis' thinking (and teaching) through *tableaux* went beyond even amateur theatrics and the pedagogical decoration of Bellechasse to permeate her writings. Her *Leçons d'une gouvernante* (1791), published the same year as Giroust's portrait, detailed the Orléans children's education under her care and her own feuds with members of the Orléans household; Genlis explicitly characterized the book as 'a precise and faithful picture [tableau] of my conduct for the past 12 years'.<sup>27</sup> She added in a footnote that 'I wanted to sketch a faithful painting [*une peinture fidèle*] of the manners of my century'. Later she connected the production of *tableaux* to a legal defence, describing the self-disclosure through *Leçons d'une gouvernante* as the only possible response to continuous calumny and persecution ('In court we use an alibi to demonstrate that we did not commit the deed a false witness accuses us of ...'). This is a shot in Genlis' war against her many accusers, but it is also evidence of her sense of herself as a painter. She imagines herself, like Giroust, painting histories and portraits. Genlis, then, was an extraordinarily self-aware subject for portraiture, accustomed to dictating the terms of her own (and her pupils') representation. Drawing on the late eighteenth-century genre of politicized legal defences and the nascent revolutionary culture of self-justification, she explicitly gives picture-making the status of public testimony.<sup>28</sup>

Bellechasse was home to Genlis for four months of the year; the other months were spent at the estate of Saint-Leu, acquired by the duc d'Orléans for this purpose. The open doorway in Giroust's painting points to its chief attractions, namely the extensive gardens and proximity to the Montmorency Forest. A privileged site for role-play, the grounds at Saint-Leu were also a site of labour since Genlis accorded the children each a portion of the garden to cultivate, under the supervision of a German-speaking gardener.<sup>29</sup> Manual work, often wearing only coarse smocks, and tough physical exercise were a staple of Genlis' pedagogic gospel. Biographers of Louis-Philippe have marvelled at the Spartan regime to which he and his brothers were subjected, including eating poor food, sleeping on planks and carrying builders' hods up and down the stairs.<sup>30</sup> Whilst Adélaïde took many of her classes separately from the boys, in subjects deemed compatible with female decorum, the young princess was also expected to keep fit and active. In 1791, her routine included wearing shoes weighted with lead, running over distances 'without stopping or walking for a moment' and archery.<sup>31</sup> From the middle of her bedroom ceiling dangled a rope, 'which we were made to climb up like a tree', Louis-Philippe recalled in disbelief.<sup>32</sup>

The elegant décor and high fashion of *The Harp Lesson* seems like a repudiation of the virtuous rigours of the Genlis educational regime in favour of a more decorative and opulent vision of female accomplishment, but civic virtue and luxury consumption were by no means incompatible in the late eighteenth century. Colin Jones has underlined the role of a 'great chain of buying' in the fashioning of citizenship in a new, commercial nation; this argument is amply supported by Genlis' own writing.<sup>33</sup> In her exactly contemporaneous treatise *Discours sur le luxe et sur l'hospitalité considérés sous leurs rapports avec les âmes & l'éducation nationale* (1791), Genlis argued:

26 *Lettre de l'Inconstant sur les tableaux exposés au Salon* (Paris, 1791), 511.

27 Genlis, *Leçons d'une gouvernante à ses élèves, ou Fragments d'un journal qui a été fait pour l'éducation des enfants de monsieur d'Orléans*, 2 vols (Paris, 1791), 2:7.

28 Sarah Maza, *Private Lives and Public Affairs: The Causes Célèbres of Pre-Revolutionary France* (Berkeley, 1993).

29 Genlis, *Mémoires de madame de Genlis*, 293, 294; Louis-Philippe, *Mémoires 1773-1793*, ed. John Hardman (New York, 1977), 17.

30 John Hardman, 'Introduction', in *Louis-Philippe Memoirs*, xxvii; Munro Price, *The Perilous Crown: France between Revolutions, 1814-1848* (London, 2010), 20.

31 Genlis, *Leçons d'une gouvernante*, 2:514, 522, 525.

32 Louis-Philippe, *Mémoires*, 10.

33 Colin Jones, 'The great chain of buying: medical advertisement, the bourgeois public sphere, and the origins of the French Revolution', *American Historical Review*, 101 (1996), 13-40.

In a large empire, where one seeks to encourage manufactures, & make the arts flourish, one must strive, not to destroy luxury, but to direct it towards useful ends & to give it that character of grandeur, which adds to the glory of the Nation & makes even vanity participate in the benevolent designs of virtue.<sup>34</sup>

Genlis clearly understood the kind of luxury on display in *The Harp Lesson* as one such patriotic exercise of the arts in the service of the nation. Adélaïde knew of the work that went into making garments like those worn in the portrait: Genlis had guided the princess through the laborious process of raising silkworms, weaving cloth from the thread, and producing her own silk gown.<sup>35</sup> That painting might represent a useful exercise in luxury could easily justify the financial support of a history painter like Giroust through what must have been a very expensive portrait commission, especially at a time when the duc d'Orléans was saddled with seemingly insoluble debts despite selling off part of his property portfolio and ancestral art collections.<sup>36</sup>

The precisely rendered portfolio of drawings, and *porte-crayon*, in the bottom right of Giroust's canvas allude to the importance Genlis placed upon artistic instruction.<sup>37</sup> A flower painter in her youth, the classes she organized with the aid of Carmontelle and later Mirys laid the foundation for the draughtsmanship displayed by all the Orléans children in later life, especially Montpensier and Adélaïde. Annual prize contests were organized to judge the work produced by this infantile *académie*, with David and Giroust serving as judges.<sup>38</sup> We know from a manuscript journal preserved in the Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal that the princes' visual education was enhanced by visits to public and private collections around Paris, the opening of the Salon, regular auctions and the studio of David in the Louvre.<sup>39</sup> Giroust's unmistakable allusions to the self-portrait of Labille-Guiard with her students, known for her revolutionary sympathies and professional success, transforms *The Harp Lesson* from a private celebration of polite accomplishment into a public manifesto about the transmission of knowledge between women.

The chosen vessel for this transmission, the harp, was Genlis' signature object. In her disobliging memoirs, the baronne d'Oberkirch recalled Genlis' appearance in aristocratic circles 'with the ubiquitous harp that she dragged around everywhere in her wake'.<sup>40</sup> The harp had been introduced into Parisian high society in 1749 through the recitals of Genlis' teacher Georges-Adam Gopfert (whom she referred to as Gaiffre). As an instrument, it won the favour of the royalty and was taken up by a new crop of child musical prodigies.<sup>41</sup> It also became an accessory of choice for female portraiture. Madame Victoire, whose music tutor Beaumarchais had been another pupil of Gopfert, was depicted playing a harp in a stately 1773 portrait by Étienne Aubrey (Versailles), as was Marie Antoinette in a more intimate c. 1775 portrait in gouache by Jean-Baptiste-André Gautier d'Agoty (Versailles). Having decided that Adélaïde would start playing the harp in earnest aged seven, Genlis insisted that they take classes together for at least one hour and a half every day in her room.<sup>42</sup> Based on her own experience, Genlis believed that the graceful form of the harp was the perfect accessory for a woman 'when she is young and

34 Genlis, *Discours sur le luxe et sur l'hospitalité considérés sous leurs rapports avec les mœurs & l'éducation nationale* (Paris, 1791), 11.

35 André Castelot (ed.), *Dernières Lettres d'amour: correspondance inédite de la comtesse de Genlis et du Comte Anatole de Montesquiou* (Paris, 1954), 168; cited in Ibeas-Altamira, *Pédagogie*, 79.

36 Évelyne Lever, *Philippe Égalité* (Paris, 1996), 433.

37 For Genlis' commitment to drawing pedagogy, see Brock, 'Madame de Genlis' New Method'.

38 Genlis, *Leçons*, 1:148, 281.

39 Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal, Mss 15265, 'Journal'.

40 Henriette Louise de Waldner de Freundstein, baronne d'Oberkirch, *Mémoires de la baronne d'Oberkirch sur la cour de Louis XVI*, ed. S. Buckhard (Paris, 1989), 480.

41 Robert Adelson and Jacqueline Letzer, 'La Harpe virile: Mme de Genlis et la carrière manqué de Casimir Becker', in *Madame de Genlis: littérature et éducation*, eds François Bessire and Martine Reid (Rouen, 2008), 131, 135.

42 Gruyer, *La Jeunesse*, 51; Louis-Philippe *Mémoires*, 11.



beautiful.<sup>43</sup> It was this very connection to youth and beauty, though, which also made the harp a staple of libertine culture, exemplified in the seduction by a male tutor of his female student in *Les Liaisons dangereuses*.<sup>44</sup>

The harp takes a prominent place in the exquisite drawing of the Orléans children by Richard Cosway, probably executed during the artist's sojourn in Paris in 1786/87 (see [Figure 6](#)). It



**Figure 6.** Richard Cosway, *The Music and Drawing Lesson (The Orléans Children)*, nd, pencil, sanguine, coloured pencil, wash on paper, 30 × 22 cm, Musée Condé, Château de Chantilly, Institut de France, PD 530.

43 Genlis, *Nouvelle Méthode pour apprendre à jouer de la harpe en mois de six leçons* (Paris, 1802), 1.

44 On this context, see "The music lesson," in *Dangerous Liaisons: Fashion and the Furniture in Eighteenth-Century France*, eds Harold Koda and Andrew Bolton (Exh. Cat, New York, 2006).



offers an intriguing precedent and prototype for Giroust's composition, one freed of Genlis' presence.<sup>45</sup> Commissioned by the duc d'Orléans, it depicts Adélaïde fingering the harp whilst she and Beaujolais pose for their older brothers: Chartres sketches with a pen and holds her gaze, whilst Montpensier holds a compass in one hand, and with the other makes a gauging gesture.

Cosway creates a complete circuit of portraiture, in which the children are simultaneously artists, sitters and viewers—perfectly in tune with the Orléans/Genlis commitment to self-fashioning. A curtain drawn back reveals a green landscape and a row of columns. Whilst some critics have speculated that we are looking onto Parc Monceau, a more plausible setting might be the Palais-Royal, whose colonnades had been constructed by 1784 on the plans of Victor Louis, as part of the wider project of turning the exclusive princely residence into a commercial *entrepôt* of shops, sex and sociability.<sup>46</sup> The setting in the Palais-Royal points again to the 'great chain of buying' and a new model of citizenship. Unlike the royal children cloistered away at Versailles, the next generation of Orléans are shown learning in a commercial, metropolitan environment. Cosway's drawing exudes refined, oppositional politics, a politics magnified by the choice of an English artist.

## II

Giroust's picture can also be read as a riposte to Genlis' political and pedagogical rivals. Genlis' authority had always depended on, and been shared with, other teachers, towards whom the *gouverneur* remained suspicious, if not paranoid.<sup>47</sup> The long recriminations contained within *Leçons d'une gouvernante* attest to how sensitive Genlis remained to attacks from ex-tutors with whom she clashed.<sup>48</sup> The *Harp Lesson* identified Genlis as the undisputed master of the Orléans children, a mastery that secured her stake in the struggles raging within the Orléans' household. Insofar as there was a coherent Orléanist faction in the early years of the French Revolution, its twin poles of attraction were Genlis and Choderlos de Laclos, the duke's chief advisor who, as the author of *Les Liaisons dangereuses*, was also preoccupied with the question of (mis)education.<sup>49</sup> In fact, we can better understand Laclos' novel if we read it as a sardonic commentary on Genlis' own fiction, and the experiment she was conducting on the Orléans children—an intertextual imbroglio that Ibea-Altamira also detects in the libertine writings of the marquis de Sade a few years later.<sup>50</sup> Genlis detested Laclos morally, and disagreed with his political strategy; Giroust's group portrait offers a diametrically opposed vision of the harp's moral associations, as well of women's bodies, intellects and political capacities.<sup>51</sup>

The painting must also be interpreted as a riposte to the duchesse d'Orléans since her absence is fundamental to its meaning. Although the two women had initially been intimate, relations became frayed as Genlis demanded ever more of the children's time at Bellechasse, therefore eroding that spent with their mother at the Palais-Royal. In the later 1780s the duchess apparently learnt from her lady-in-waiting, madame de Chastellux, that Genlis had once been her husband's mistress. Gossip was rife in society about the estrangement of the duchesse d'Orléans

45 Olivier Meslay, 'Richard Cosway', in *L'Art anglais dans les collections de l'Institut de France* (Paris, 2004), 56 (no. 7).

46 Gruyer, *La Jeunesse*, 56–57.

47 Antonetti, *Louis-Philippe*, 96–101.

48 In fact, its publication prompted an angry rebuttal: see *Alla Signora de Sillery-Brulart, lettera dell' Abate F. Mariottini* (London, 1792).

49 Broglie, *Madame de Genlis*, 155–79.

50 Ibeas-Altamira, *Pédagogie*.

51 Martine Reid, pointing to the near-simultaneous publication of Genlis' *Adèle et Théodore* and Laclos' *Les Liaisons dangereuses* in 1782, argues that the novels were in direct argument with each other; for instance, Laclos makes harp lessons a vector of seduction. Martine Reid, *Félicité de Genlis, la pédagogie des Lumières* (Paris, 2022), 87.

from her husband, and exclusion from her children's lives. 'This princess carried with her everywhere a melancholy that nothing could heal', observed the baronne d'Oberkirch. 'She smiled sometimes, she never laughed. Her separation from her children, taken away by Madame de Genlis, broke her heart.'<sup>52</sup>

Whilst the Orléans household had all the ingredients of a sentimental melodrama, it was the political differences unleashed by the Revolution that enlarged a domestic dispute into a national crisis. The duchesse d'Orléans was profoundly troubled by her eldest son's zealous embrace of the values of 1789. The duc de Chartres attended debates at the Assemblée nationale, applauded the abolition of nobility and was carried in triumph to the Fête de la Fédération (in contrast to the crowd's muted response to his father that day).<sup>53</sup> He defended the honour of the common people in the pages of *L'Ami du peuple*, and even made a speech on the floor of the Jacobin Club on 1 November 1790 (where he was introduced by Genlis' husband).<sup>54</sup> In the *Leçons*, she later reproved this step, warning Louis-Philippe not to go beyond the discussions in the Assemblée nationale.<sup>55</sup> For his part, Louis-Philippe was convinced that the 'love of virtue, of morality and of everything that is good and honourable', which had been impressed on him and his siblings over many years, had prepared them to welcome 'a new stimulus toward democracy and revolution'.<sup>56</sup>

How far was Genlis responsible for setting him on this path? In her memoirs, penned in the final years of the empire, she vented her disgust for the disorders of the Revolution; revealingly, she compared the militants that she found frequenting the Cordeliers Club to 'badly brought-up children, and left to their own devices, playing a wicked game'.<sup>57</sup> She insisted that during the Revolution she had shunned political affairs, concentrating instead on 'a retired, sedentary and peaceful life'.<sup>58</sup> Despite these strategic disavowals, we know that she initially plunged the children into the action, escorting them to observe the Bastille's demolition, and presenting to the duchesse d'Orléans a jewel made from one of its polished stones.<sup>59</sup> Adélaïde, aged thirteen, was spotted watching the debates in the Assemblée nationale with her tutor on 1 June 1790.<sup>60</sup> Unlike her evasive memoirs, a truer glimpse of Genlis' feelings can be gleaned in a self-justificatory text published in Hamburg in 1796:

I loved the Revolution sincerely, especially during its first eighteen months; whilst deploring some excesses which from the start stained the triumph of the people, I thought that the new constitution, however imperfect it might be, would always be an inestimable benefit, since it destroyed horrible abuses & despotism & in truth if the court had acted in good faith, if the first more reasonable émigrés had not irrevocably fled as soon as they heard the word 'Liberty' spoke, I think that we would only have had a single Revolution and that it would have achieved the happiness of France.<sup>61</sup>

52 *Mémoires de la baronne d'Oberkirch*, 321.

53 Lever, *Philippe Égalité*, 388, 390.

54 Louis-Philippe, *Mémoires*, 80.

55 Genlis, *Leçons*, 1:208.

56 Louis-Philippe, *Mémoires*, 15.

57 *Mémoires de madame de Genlis*, 303.

58 *Ibid.*, 317.

59 Broglie, *Madame de Genlis*, 185; Julia, 'Princes', 104–09. Helena Maria Williams reported that Genlis was also fond of wearing jewellery fashioned from the stones of the Bastille. See Ibeas-Altamira, *Pédagogie*, 70–71.

60 Raoul Arnoud, *Adélaïde d'Orléans (1777–1847), d'après des documents inédits: l'égérie de Louis-Philippe* (Paris, 1908), 59.

61 Genlis, *Précis de la conduite de madame de Genlis depuis la Révolution, suivi d'une lettre à M. de Chartres & de réflexions sur la critique* (Hamburg, 1796), 20–21.

This attack on the *émigrés* reflects the hostile reception Genlis had experienced from them upon leaving France. It also supports what we know about some of her political activities between 1789 and 1791.

Under the name of madame Sillery, or citoyenne Brûlart, during these years she transformed Bellechasse into a revolutionary salon. Here, according to some witnesses, she presided in her 'dress of three colours', urging the children to dance along to the 'Ça Ira'.<sup>62</sup> If on Saturdays she used to welcome literary personalities, on Sunday she now entertained more radical voices, including Brissot, Sièyes, Barnave, Pétion and Barère (the latter was even named as a tutor to Paméla in 1791).<sup>63</sup> That contemporaries viewed her at the heart of political factions is confirmed by the print *Garre aux Faux-Pas* from 1791: as Pétion, the newly elected mayor of Paris, tries to walk a tightrope set up in front of the Hôtel de Ville, his hesitant steps receive musical accompaniment from a small orchestra including madame de Staël, Condorcet and the duc d'Orléans, but with a Phrygian bonnet-wearing Genlis the harpist in the front row, quite literally pulling the strings.<sup>64</sup> Her relations with Brissot had begun during his time working as a secretary in the Orléans' household. In the memoirs he composed in the Abbaye prison in 1793, Brissot rallied to defend 'her opinions which were more constitutional, more republican perhaps, than those of the republicans who revile her today'. He even described the *Leçons d'une gouvernante* as a prophetic text that foretold the downfall of the monarchy.<sup>65</sup> Camille Desmoulins, by contrast, recalled a decadent soirée at Bellechasse, in which Genlis, singing at her harp, incited loose morals whilst 'Mlles Paméla and Sercey [Genlis' niece] danced a Russian dance' in 'so voluptuous' a manner that it rivalled that performed by Salome for Herod. 'Mme Sillery's harp and the powerful seductions of her sirens', Desmoulins reasoned, were a ploy to distract visitors from the political scheming going on.<sup>66</sup> Such domestic entertainments seemed an unwelcome regression back to the salons of the *ancien régime*, when political business was cloaked in social rituals and conducted behind closed doors.<sup>67</sup> For hostile interpreters, Giroust's portrait might seem another attempt by Genlis to bamboozle the viewer through her feminine wiles.

The new circumstances of the Revolution allowed Genlis to extend her meditations on education in bold new directions, not just as a hostess but as a writer preoccupied with national questions. The suppression of the religious orders sparked her calls for new forms of popular and female education.<sup>68</sup> Friction over religion was another source of conflict with the duchesse d'Orléans, who along with her father, the duc de Penthièvre, urged Chartres to avoid associating with any non-juring priests as Easter approached. He assured his mother that the Civil Constitution of the Clergy posed no threat to Christian principles, whereas his father, the duc d'Orléans, fumed that his wife's conservative ideas had to be concealed from the public.<sup>69</sup> By autumn 1790, Louis-Philippe had at any rate achieved maturity and joined the army, despite Genlis' hopes to extend her tutelage until the prince was twenty. Having lost Chartres, all her energies were redirected towards Adélaïde, who became the pawn and the prize in the intensifying dispute with the duchesse d'Orléans. Already in October 1790 the duchess had attempted to have her rival removed.<sup>70</sup>

62 Marie-Joséphine Louise, duchesse de Gontaut, *Mémoires de madame la duchesse de Gontaut* (Paris, 1891), 21.

63 Broglie, *Madame de Genlis*, 177–79, 202; also Olivier Blanc, 'Cercles politiques et "salons" du début de la Révolution', *Annales historiques de la Révolution française*, 344 (2006), 63–92.

64 Reproduced in Ibeas-Altamira, *Pédagogie*, 56–57.

65 J. P. Brissot: *Mémoires* (1754–93), ed. Claude-Marie Perroud, 2 vols (Paris, 1912), I: 149; II: 15–16.

66 Camille Desmoulins, *Fragments de l'histoire secrète de la Révolution: sur la faction d'Orléans, le comité Anglo-Prussien et les six premiers mois de la République* (Paris, 1793), 10, 20.

67 Marissa Linton and Mette Harde, "'Come and dine": the dangers of conspicuous consumption in French revolutionary politics', *European History Quarterly*, 45 (2015), 615–37.

68 Genlis, *Discours sur la suppression des couvens des religieuses et l'éducation publique des femmes* (Paris, 1791).

69 Lever, *Philippe Égalité*, 407.

70 Julia, 'Princes', 111.

Hence all the ingredients were there for the 'harrowing scenes' in April 1791, whose painful repercussions can be traced in the correspondence kept at the Institut de France.<sup>71</sup> To briefly summarize: the duchesse d'Orléans arrived on 1 April at Bellechase and, without saying a word, handed over a letter demanding the departure of Genlis from the household. The ensuing rebuke from the duc d'Orléans marked the beginning of a formal separation from his wife: retiring in despair to her family estate of Eu in Normandy, she ceded rights of childcare to her husband, telling him to sort out the sudden vacancy. On 26 April, Genlis left Paris and headed south; meanwhile, Adélaïde went into convulsions of anxiety at the prospect of being separated from her beloved tutor (a distress inflamed by the quasi-romantic letters of devotion that Genlis left addressed to her before departing). Soon Chartres was pleading with his parents that the only way to restore his sister to health was to bring back the governess (with whom at this point he was also romantically infatuated). Genlis returned in triumph on 12 May, and Giroust's painting celebrated the resumption of her control over the princess, and the unravelling of the campaign to evict her.<sup>72</sup>

This domestic scandal in spring 1791 caused ripples at court and in public opinion. Genlis sought to vindicate her behaviour by publishing the *Leçons d'une gouvernante*, which included a rambling defence of her dealings with the duchesse d'Orléans, and most likely by commissioning the Giroust group portrait. Such interventions were not simply an exercise in retrospective self-exculpation; they also insinuated that her virtuous training of the Orléans children had laid the foundations for a happier future for France. Already in 1790, she had published *Discours sur l'éducation de monsieur le dauphin*, railing against the inadequate education hitherto received by the son of Louis XVI, which risked filling his head with reactionary ideas. She demanded that the contents of this outdated curriculum, and his daily movements, be published as a *tableau* for public scrutiny.<sup>73</sup> The decrepitude of the Bourbon heir offered a stark contrast with the exemplary lessons she had administered to Chartres, Montpensier, Beaujolais and Mademoiselle d'Orléans, a royal family who were waiting in the wings. Unlike Laclos, who at this juncture schemed for the duc d'Orléans to be named as regent, she urged France to look to his children for potential deliverance. Her repeated arguments for the beneficial practice of adoption in antiquity, including in her 1791 publication on luxury, signalled the hope that the compromised King Louis XVI might bypass his own son to name Chartres his heir (and thereby consecrate Genlis' patient efforts to create a patriot prince).<sup>74</sup>

Such a project might sound chimerical, but it gained some currency in the unprecedented vacuum of authority opened up by the flight to Varennes on 20/21 June, just two months before the opening of the 1791 Salon. Genlis had long mooted a switch in the royal succession, drawing on older intellectual traditions within Bourbon France. As a pedagogue, one of her treasured texts was Abbé Fénelon's *Les Aventures de Télémaque* (1699/1717), a sharp indictment of absolutist monarchy, and defence of aristocratic republicanism and antique virtue, as articulated by the instructor Mentor (later revealed as Minerva). Written in the closing years of Louis XIV's reign, it pointed to a happy future for France under the duc de Bourgogne—a parallel made explicit in Genlis' *Leçons*.<sup>75</sup> Since the Orléans children had been raised outside of the pomp and intrigue of the court, they were ideal candidates, she insinuated, to one day purify the French political nation. Their father was too unreliable, and too compromised, to rule. Ironically, one main achievement of Genlis in the aftermath of Varennes was to persuade the duc d'Orléans to

71 *Louis-Philippe Memoirs*, 77; for his account of the April crisis, see 81–84.

72 The fullest account is Broglie, *Madame de Genlis*, 199–214; for all the letters, see *La Famille d'Orléans*.

73 Genlis, *Discours sur l'éducation de monsieur le dauphin* (Paris, 1790); also Didier Masseau, 'Pouvoir éducatif et vertige de la programmation dans Adèle et Théodore et quelques autres ouvrages', in *Madame de Genlis*, (eds), Bessire and Reid, 35.

74 Lever, *Philippe Égalité*, 390; Genlis, *Discours sur le luxe*, 22.

75 Genlis, *Leçons*, 1:352; Antonetti, *Louis-Philippe*, 104.



not go along with Laclos' schemes, and instead write a letter to the Assembly formally forswearing any talk of Regency—a move of course that left the door open for his son.<sup>76</sup>

Giroust's submissions to the Salon of 1791 reflected these hopes, *The Harp Lesson* acquiring fresh meaning when juxtaposed with his two other entries that year. One was a half-length portrait of Chartres wearing a blue frock coat with a red collar and white linen; this patriotic colour scheme was complemented by gold buttons inscribed with the word *Liberté*. The original is lost but the composition is known through an 1839 copy by Auguste de Creuse for Louis-Philippe's historical gallery at Versailles (see Figure 7).

Chartres' portrait, painted in a style and format echoing the deputy portraits by Labille-Guiard and others at the same Salon, was a pointed reminder of the Orléans heir's revolutionary commitments. Giroust's other offering, identified in the *livret* as a scene of the early Christian Saint Félicité urging her sons on to martyrdom, was a thinly disguised portrait of Genlis and the three Orléans boys, intended as an altarpiece for the family chapel at Saint-Leu.<sup>77</sup> This painting is now lost, but the composition survives in a line engraving by Charles Landon (see Figure 8).

Between Giroust's paintings and the multiple representations of the duc d'Orléans by other artists, the Orléans family (minus the put-upon duchess) were represented in force in the 1791 Salon. The children in particular are put forward to the public as heroic self-sacrificing Christians and patriots (for the boys) and fashionable and accomplished devotees of the arts (for the girls) with Genlis encouraging all their various virtues. That the two surviving paintings lean conspicuously on a red, white and blue colour scheme only made their political valences clearer.<sup>78</sup>

Indeed, this dynastic onslaught might have prompted a counter-attack in portraiture on the part of the Assemblée nationale, which in September 1791 commissioned both David and Labille-Guiard to produce portraits of the king demonstrating to the dauphin the virtues of the new Constitution.<sup>79</sup> Those portraits were never produced, leaving Giroust, Genlis, and the Orléans briefly masters of the field. Genlis' triumphant substitution of herself for the Orléans children's parents, and particularly for their birth mother, had the additional virtue of presenting Chartres and his siblings as motherless children raised by an enlightened and patriotic woman, neatly substituting this ideal heir for a poorly educated dauphin burdened with treacherous parents. The contrast between Adélaïde, Paméla and Genlis (the duchesse d'Orléans having been definitively side-lined) and the much-maligned Marie Antoinette and her children, as envisioned in 1787 by Vigée-Lebrun, would have been particularly striking.

Moreover, Genlis' attachment to Fénélon sheds new light on Giroust's inclusion of the statuette of Minerva in *The Harp Lesson*. More than just a generic invocation of antiquity, the goddess is at once the emblem of good political education and of female wisdom. In fact, Minerva is doubled in the painting by the plumed helmet on the pillar of Adélaïde's gilded harp, which in turn is echoed by the princess' feathered headdress. Minerva's connections to a French lineage of enlightened rulers stretched back to Peter Paul Rubens' Marie de Medici cycle (1622–25, Louvre), in which the future Queen of France is educated at the knee of Minerva. And whilst Genlis might have been advocating for an Orléans monarchy, the example of female glory provided by Rubens' paintings would hardly have been lost on her; indeed, she had taken her pupils to admire the cycle.<sup>80</sup> The looming figure of Minerva in *The*

76 Broglie, *Madame de Genlis*, 196–97, 216–17; Genlis, *Précis de la conduite*, 17–18.

77 Di Paolo, 'Giroust', 223; Halliday, *Facing*, 38–41.

78 The invention of the red, white and blue Revolution cockade has pro-Orléanist roots in political demonstrations in the Palais-Royal; Richard Wrigley, *The Politics of Appearances: Representations of Dress in Revolutionary France* (Oxford, 2002) 98–99.

79 Amy Freund, 'The Revolution at home: masculinity, domesticity, and political identity in family portraiture, 1789–1795', in *Interior Portraiture and Masculine Identity, 1789–1914*, eds Temma Balducci, Heather Jensen and Pamela Warner (Burlington, VT, 2011) 19–20.

80 Genlis, *Leçons*, 2:462.

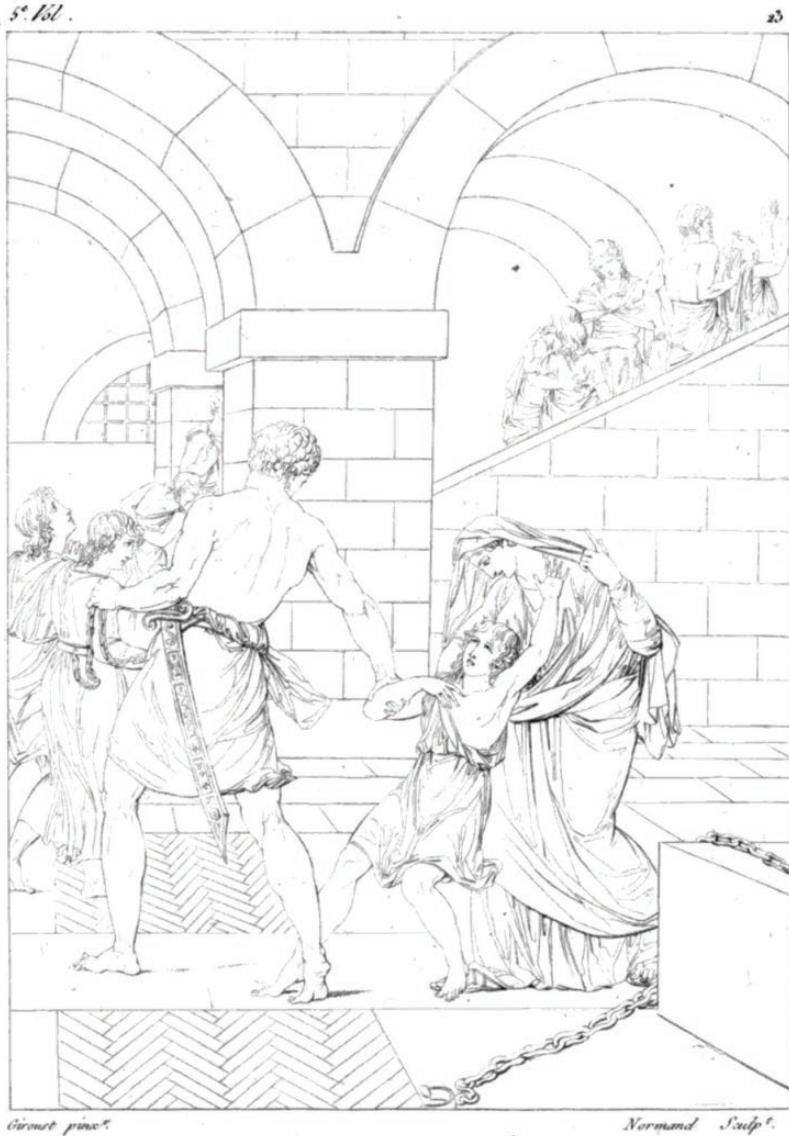


**Figure 7.** Auguste de Creuse, copy after Jean-Antoine-Théodore Giroust, *Louis-Philippe d'Orléans* (1773–1850), *duc de Chartres*, 1839, oil on canvas, 68 × 56 cm, Versailles, châteaux de Versailles et de Trianon, MV4526. Photo (C) RMN-Grand Palais (Château de Versailles)/Gérard Blot.

*Harp Lesson* also makes for a politically expedient mother figure for its nonbiological family. The potential confusion between Minerva and Liberty, in addition to the Fénélon and Medici allusions, made her an ideal tutelary goddess for a portrait that fused female accomplishment with Orleanist political ambitions.

### III

Viewers at the Salon in September would have been hyper-aware of recent revolutionary events—the flight to Varennes, the Champs de Mars massacre, and the king's forced acceptance of the Constitution. The clash between 'Feuillants' and 'Orleanist' factions was fought out



**Figure 8.** Normand, after Jean-Antoine-Théodore Giroust, *Sainte Félicité*, engraving published in Charles Landon, *Annales du Musée et de l'École moderne des beaux-arts*, tome 5 (Paris, 1803) 52. Artwork in the public domain—Google Books [https://www.google.com/books/edition/\\_/2Ag1AQAAAJ?hl=en&gbpv=0](https://www.google.com/books/edition/_/2Ag1AQAAAJ?hl=en&gbpv=0).

in print and in the streets in Paris, as rumours swirled about conspiracies to put the duke on the throne and to stir the *faubourgs* into revolt.<sup>81</sup> This highly charged atmosphere powerfully informed readings of *The Harp Lesson*. Those viewers would also have understood the painting

<sup>81</sup> David Andress, *The Massacre at the Champs de Mars: Popular Dissent and Political Culture in the French Revolution* (Martlesham, 2013), 56–57.

in terms of other, similarly politicized, portraits at the Salon: an entire subgenre of portraits of members of the new National Guard; a series of deputies by Labille-Guiard including both the duc d'Orléans and Maximilien Robespierre; a set of portraits of Honoré de Mirabeau, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, and the duc d'Orléans (in an allegory of Liberty) by the deaf/mute sculptor Claude-André Deseine; and a number of portraits of women with harps. The most striking formal parallel to the Giroust portrait would have been Rose Ducreux's grand self-portrait with a harp, that shares a number of compositional and ideological gambits with Giroust's portrait of Adélaïde, not the least of which was the claim that a woman could succeed in the public sphere as well as in the private realms of feminine accomplishment (see Figure 9).

Giroust's portrait would also have been read against the buzziest group portrait in the Salon—David's *Oath of the Tennis Court*, an image of the deputies to the Estates General swearing to write a new Constitution. The patriotic fervour of the *Oath of the Tennis Court* might seem far removed from the decorous accomplishments of an Orléans princess and her companions, but each sent a potent message about the future of French politics. And not for nothing did Giroust's statuette of Minerva echo the statuette of Rome in David's *Brutus* that the artist had hung in this Salon alongside the *Oath of the Tennis Court* and the *Oath of the Horatii*. Nor was it an accident that both Minerva and Rome could be mistaken by a casual viewer for an allegory of Liberty.<sup>82</sup> Giroust, and his patrons, were keen for his portrait to be understood in connection with these serious (and famous) meditations on antique and modern patriotism.

A public campaign in portraiture by definition courted a public response. Unfortunately, reactions to Giroust's *The Harp Lesson* were tepid at best, and hostile at worst. One critic admired the likeness of Adélaïde and 'Madame Bruyard, ci-devant Sylleri' and credited the painting with 'freshness' but chided Giroust for squandering his talents as a history painter. The same critic correctly identified the Sainte Félicité painting as a portrait of Genlis and the Orléans boys but condemned it as vulgar and smacking of 'a hint of aristocratic pride.'<sup>83</sup> Another author branded the composition cold and without interest, criticized Giroust's drawing, and sarcastically noted the attachment of Genlis to *la harpe*—presumably a reference to her feud with the critic Jean-François de La Harpe and the swirling factions within the Orléans camp.<sup>84</sup> We are indebted to a third critic for the report on the sitters' performative visit, coiffed in liberty bonnets, to their own portrait but, in a dig at their aristocratic leanings, he added that the Phrygian cap 'befits even those faces hostile to our liberties.'<sup>85</sup> Even months after the Salon closed, the portrait echoed in revolutionary condemnations of Genlis and her ambitions for the Orléans children. Desmoulins, in his vitriolic 1793 attack on the Orléans faction, accused Genlis of wanting to be *premier ministre* and making Adélaïde into *une petite reine*, which seems like a direct acknowledgement of the portrait's regal scale and its public promotion of the teenager's (and her teacher's) ambitions.<sup>86</sup> In short, the Giroust–Genlis–Orléans portrait initiative garnered a great deal of attention, but not much sympathy. Worse, the critics read *The Harp Lesson* in political terms but (despite Genlis' best efforts) only to condemn the sitters' anti-revolutionary tendencies.

These aspersions soon seemed prophetic. Alarmed for her safety as the political situation radicalized, Genlis was determined to get out of France. The ploy must have been suspected, as pamphlets were already circulating pleading with the duc d'Orléans not to allow his children to be taken out of the country, and thereby surrender to the schemes of 'an ambitious, dominating woman [...] a woman who only has wit, fanciful ideas & no

82 Di Guiseppe Di Paolo in fact mistakes the statuette, anachronistically, for an allegory of the Republic ('Giroust' 224).

83 *Lettres analytiques, critiques et philosophiques sur les tableaux du Sallon* (Paris, 1791), 26–27.

84 *Sallon de peinture* (Paris, 1791), 13.

85 *Lettre de l'Inconstant sur les tableaux exposés au Salon* (Paris, 1791), 511.

86 Desmoulins, *Fragment*, 14.





**Figure 9.** Rose Adélaïde Ducreux, *Self-Portrait with a Harp*, 1791, oil on canvas, 193 × 128.9 cm, Metropolitan Museum of Art 67.55.1, Bequest of Susan Dwight Bliss, 1966.

principles.<sup>87</sup> In October 1791, Adélaïde's poor health was the pretext for her governess to insist on a trip to the curative waters at Bath. Chartres counselled against this decision,

87 *Lettre adressé à monseigneur*, 4.

fearing (correctly) that his sister risked being declared an *émigré*, but he could not prevent their departure (with Paméla and Genlis' niece Henriette de Sercey in tow). This sudden exit made Giroust's giant portrait still hanging on the Salon walls look absurd: one critic remarked that the figure of Adélaïde had 'the air of saying: Listen to me, I'm going to leave'.<sup>88</sup> Genlis extended her stay in Britain to over a year, despite the desperate commands of the duc d'Orléans to hand back his daughter. With awful timing, Genlis and Adélaïde alone finally returned at the end of November 1792, only to be instantly arrested by the revolutionaries, their release dependent on a promise to leave French territory within five days. Chartres agreed to accompany them over the border into the Austrian Netherlands, where they would be under the protection of General Dumouriez. Ironically, his faith in Dumouriez would be Chartres' undoing, as in April 1793 he was accused of joining the latter's conspiracy to restore the monarchy. Now compromised by his son, the family psychodrama culminated in the arrest and execution of the self-styled Philippe Égalité in November 1793.<sup>89</sup>

Genlis' second flight in November 1792 heralded a new phase of displacements and hardship. Having tried, and failed, to abandon Adélaïde at Zug, Genlis eventually settled with her charge and Henriette in the convent of St Clare at Bremgarten, Switzerland, in 1793; Parisian radicals rejoiced to think of the royal princess 'wandering Europe, suffering affronts as a result of her governess'.<sup>90</sup> Disgusted by the cynical treatment of his sister, Chartres' teenage infatuation with Genlis quickly cooled, and he came in later years to decry the (gendered) limits of her educational programme. 'You were taught to play the harp, that's very well done,' he wrote to his sister in January 1807, 'but apart from that, nothing else, that's the truth [...]'.<sup>91</sup> The duchesse d'Orléans, meanwhile, endured many difficult years of exile in Spain, fretting for the plight of her sons in prison or travelling the earth as outcasts, whilst Giroust abandoned painting for the call of service in the revolutionary armies and, eventually, the mayorship of a provincial town. His artistic career never recovered.

One of the fascinations of *The Harp Lesson* lies precisely in its status as an anomaly or dead end, a picture suddenly overtaken by the pressure of events. Its aesthetic incoherence was symptomatic of the broader Orléanist agenda, not to mention Genlis' educational philosophy, in which aristocratic and egalitarian ideals uncomfortably collided. The rhetorical missteps of the painting are also illustrative of the contradictions pulling apart revolutionary politics in summer 1791. But its very existence, and outsized grandeur, remind us that the outcomes of these struggles were by no means obvious to contemporaries. *The Harp Lesson* makes sense as an intervention in a contest for political legitimacy fought out in summer 1791; it fell flat, just as the parameters of the contest irrevocably shifted in the following months. But if the Orléans camp never managed to gain the initiative, Genlis' bid to reconcile forms of monarchy and democracy did at least expose the hollowness of the Louis XVI alternative.

Moreover, there remains something bold about the picture's claims that France's future might be secured through women and girls. Whilst its dynastic ambitions might seem reactionary, *The Harp Lesson* also evokes the values of liberty, equality and sorority, grounded in an education which, through the portrait's foregrounding of Paméla, also crosses the

88 *La Béquille de Voltaire au Salon, première promenade* (Paris, 1791), 5.

89 Price, *Perilous Crown*, 29–31, 34–36; Georges Poisson, *Les Orléans: une famille en quête d'un trône* (Paris, 1999), 177, 180–83.

90 *Vie de L. P. J. Capet, ci-devant duc d'Orléans, ou Mémoires pour servir à l'histoire de la Révolution française* (Paris, 1793), 52.

91 Antonetti, *Louis-Philippe*, 102.

boundaries of nationality and social class. Since 1789, Genlis had been publishing proposals for patriotic education schemes for women, extrapolating from the Orléans experiment to a national programme. She justified such measures as necessary for forming civic-minded wives and mothers.<sup>92</sup> Giroust's pictorial expression of this advocacy, itself scaled up from the domestic to the monumental, is more radical than its textual equivalent, presenting the Salon public with a portrait of unrelated young adult and adult women whose primary focus was each other, and the instruments (quite literally) of their education.<sup>93</sup> Of course, this vision had the potential to tap into a deep-seated fear of collective female agency across the political spectrum, seen in everything from the discourse around the working-class women of the October days to the eventual banning of female political clubs in 1793. Indeed, only months after the Giroust portrait went on view, Genlis was featured—in an image of female solidarity much less to her taste—in the February 1792 pornographic caricature *Grande débandement de l'armée anticonstitutionnelle*, baring her genitals alongside a line-up of other well-known pro-revolutionary women.<sup>94</sup>

Genlis' involuntary inclusion in this rogue's gallery of female revolutionaries aside, her political beliefs, and the portrait's claims, seem very different from the activism of women like Olympe de Gouges, whose *Declaration of the Rights of Woman and the Female Citizen* was published in September 1791, just as the Salon was opening. But there are merits to thinking about her intersections with Genlis, to whom she usually appears in ideological opposition.<sup>95</sup> Olympe de Gouges' writing and thinking was also powerfully shaped by the Orléanist politics: she attended the salon of madame de Montesson, a fellow playwright, and devoured the news in the cafés of the Palais-Royal; in publishing her two-volume works in 1788, she paid homage to the inspiration of Genlis and the patronage of the duc d'Orléans, their dedicatee.<sup>96</sup> Beyond the outbreak of the Revolution, her entanglement with the house of Orléans endured. In July 1789 she asked his permission to found her own *Journal du Peuple* and urged the duke to intervene in the crisis as the 'idol of France'. By contrast, on leaving France temporarily in 1790, she blamed the marquis and marquise de Sillery (namely Genlis and her husband) for leading the duke astray.<sup>97</sup> As late as January 1793, she put Chartres on stage in her play, *L'Entrée du Dumouriez à Bruxelles*, in the guise of the character Égalité. The sudden defeat and subsequent defection of Dumouriez spelt disaster for Louis-Philippe, as it did for the playwright and her Girondin comrades, and by July she had been arrested. In her final weeks she dedicated another edition of her works to Chartres' wretched father, now addressed simply as 'Philippe', along with a scathing and defiant preface, in which she both begged for protection and mocked his downfall.<sup>98</sup> The fact that she went to the scaffold only three days before him, in November that year, and four days after Genlis' husband, suggests how closely all their fates were entwined.

92 Reid, *Genlis*, 133–34.

93 Genlis, *Discours*, 20–21. Carla Hesse discusses Genlis' post-revolutionary publications and defence of women's intellectual equality in *The Other Enlightenment: How French Women Became Modern* (Princeton, 2001), 135–40.

94 This complex anti-revolutionary image mocking the weakness of royalist forces makes coded reference to Genlis (as 'Silles') alongside other female activists such as Théroigne de Méricourt. See *Journal de la cour et de la ville* (19 February 1792) 398; and Vivian Cameron, 'Political exposures: sexuality and caricature in the French Revolution', in *Eroticism and the Body Politic*, ed. Lynn Hunt (Baltimore, 1991), 90–107.

95 Mary Trouille, *Sexual Politics in the Enlightenment: Women Writers Read Rousseau* (New York, 1997), 237–92. Nonetheless, Trouille asserts that both women had been lovers of the duc d'Orléans.

96 *Oeuvres de madame de Gouges, dédiées à monseigneur le duc d'Orléans*, 2 vols (Paris, 1788). In her work *Bienfaisance*, the figure of the 'good mother', the marquise de Circey, is probably a flattering tribute to Genlis; John Cole, *Between the Queen and the Cabbie: Olympe de Gouges' Rights of Women* (Montréal, 2011), 11–12, 250.

97 *Départ de m. de Necker, et de madame de Gouges, ou Les Adieux de madame de Gouges* (Paris, 1790), 9.

98 *Oeuvres de la citoyenne de Gouges, dédiés à Philippe* (Paris, 1793).

This web of biographical connections demonstrates that the Orléanist stable was at one point large enough to accommodate the more radical and patriotic aspirations. By the same token, even the most emphatic feminist voices during the Revolution emerged within, and were conditioned by, loose political groupings still shadowed by rank and status. It is easy to see how such constraints left their mark on Genlis' evolving ideas about girls' education, at once national and democratic enterprise, open to all classes, but also separated along gendered lines in ways reminiscent of Saint-Cyr.<sup>99</sup> They can also be detected in Giroust's canvas, in which new ideas of female citizenship collide with older conventions regarding feminine accomplishment. That tension is embodied by Genlis' hat. As Kimberly Chrisman-Campbell has pointed out, the tall round-brimmed hat was both extremely fashionable and 'a visual shorthand for female patriotism' in the first years of the Revolution.<sup>100</sup> Both political statement and luxury good, Genlis' hat signifies both the heights of her civic engagement and the hedging of her bets; unlike more radical non-noble feminist activists like Gouges or Théroigne de Méricourt (who, as Chrisman-Campbell points out, was also portrayed in a tall hat), Genlis made her political claims in the rhetoric of a more traditional elite femininity: elegant gown, decorous interior space, artistic accomplishment, and child-rearing in the service of a dynasty. In the Giroust portraits, she is surrounded by the actual children she hoped would further her cause. It is also telling that, despite Genlis' previous patronage of Labille-Guiard and Giroust's lack of experience as a portraitist, the Orléans (or most likely Genlis herself) chose a male artist rather than one of the many well-known female portraitists active in revolutionary Paris to produce the Orléans family portraits at the Salon of 1791.<sup>101</sup> Labille-Guiard would certainly have done a better job of it, but Giroust was a safer choice in terms of gender politics and also brought the aura of history painting to the Orléans political campaign in portraits. Genlis, fearless pioneer of women's professional activity, did not use this lucrative commission to support similar trailblazers in the visual arts—more evidence of the difficulties she, or any woman, faced in making revolutionary political claims.

Ultimately, neither the radical nor royalist arguments for women's rights, in fashion, painting, print, or in the streets, were successful. But, however curtailed by misogyny and deference, revolutionary culture was testing and stretching gender norms in summer 1791, even amongst those who still clung to kingship, as Giroust's spectacular flop of a painting attests. In this way the unfulfilled promise of girls' rights during the Revolution encourages us to read Giroust's portrait forwards, as well as backwards, and to think beyond its short-term failures. Adélaïde emerged from the 1790s not just as a gifted musician and amateur artist, but also as an indispensable counsellor to her brother, Louis-Philippe, operating as a key political advisor during the July Monarchy.<sup>102</sup> However much he came to query the methods of his *gouverneur*, Louis-Philippe did not abjure her memory, and in 1842 commissioned a copy to be made of the Giroust painting by Jean-Baptiste Mauzaisse for the Château de Versailles, where it remains.<sup>103</sup> The subsequent transmission of the original portrait within the Orléans family and their international properties suggests how hard it was for the family, metaphorically and physically, to shake off the memory of Genlis and

99 Reid, *Genlis*, 133–34.

100 Chrisman-Campbell, 'Tale of two chapeaux', 79–80. On the connection between fashion, feminism and revolutionary ideals, Susan L. Siegfried, 'The visual culture of fashion and the classical ideal in post-revolutionary France', *The Art Bulletin*, 97 (2015), 77–99.

101 Genlis may have also been a patron of Marie-Victoire Lemoine, another successful female artist. A recent exhibition of the artist's work included a portrait thought to be of Genlis' daughter Pulchérie; Carole Blumenfeld, *Je déclare vivre de mon art, 1789 dans l'atelier des sœurs Lemoine & Chaudet* (Grasse, 2023).

102 Price, *Perilous Crown*.

103 In another royal commission, a portrait of the seated Genlis at the harp was copied by Joseph Albrier from Giroust's picture and now hangs at the Musée Louis-Philippe in Eu (Inv 2001.1.138; 3799).





**Figure 10.** Unknown artist, *Stéphanie-Félicité du Crest de Saint-Aubin, comtesse de Genlis* (1746–1830), *playing the harp*, watercolour and gouache on ivory, 7.9 × 6.4 cm, Chantilly, Musée Condé, OA 1419.

her progressive educational experiment.<sup>104</sup> Even at Chantilly today, amongst the cabinet of family miniatures can be found a likeness of the woman Louis-Philippe called variously *bonne amie* and *vraie mère*, smiling defiantly with her beloved harp (see Figure 10).

104 The Christie's provenance record by Joseph Baillo reveals that the Giroust painting passed from Louis-Philippe to his son the duc de Nemours and his descendants, the duc d'Alençon and the duc de Vendôme, at that point in exile in Twickenham, before being sold in Belgium in 1937.