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# Le Pouvoir du théâtre: Foreign Languages, Higher Education, and Capturing the Notion of Symbolic Competence

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The study of foreign languages has historically been a cornerstone in higher education for a variety of very good reasons, one being that it will help students develop a sensitivity to diversity. This rationale is compelling in theory, but requires a practical approach for instruction that actually guides students towards such a learning outcome. Current research (e.g., Byrnes, 2006; Kramersch, 2006; Swaffar, 2006) has argued that the traditional focus on the development of communicative competence often promotes a functional understanding of the target language and dominant cultural values, thereby obscuring examples of linguistic ambiguity, power dynamics, and even cultural diversity. According to Kramersch (2009) these concepts can be highlighted by prioritizing symbolic competence, which is the “...ability to draw on the semiotic diversity afforded by multiple languages to reframe ways of seeing familiar events, create alternative realities, and find an appropriate subject position ‘between languages,’ so to speak” (pp. 200–201). This article discusses why the notion of symbolic competence is so important when teaching foreign language courses at the university level, and explains why theater offers a salient opportunity to engage with semiotic diversity. Specifically, theater allows students to interpret and play with meaning, and in the context of semiotics, students are able to observe, enact, and even dismantle meaning-making devices such as symbolic representation, symbolic action, and symbolic power. This article illustrates classroom activities and examples of student work from an intermediate (200-level) French course, and concludes by discussing the larger implications for foreign language teaching and learning.

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## INTRODUCTION

It is customary by now in foreign language (FL) education to introduce students to cultural practices in addition to teaching them lexicogrammatical forms that will help them communicate.<sup>1</sup> In a French lesson, for example, that starts out with basic language related to food, drinking, cooking, grocery shopping, and eating out, the instructor might eventually want to contextualize one (or more) of these topics in a culturally relevant situation. A possibility could be *l'apéritif*,<sup>2</sup> commonly known as *l'apéro*. The instructor might ask her students to consider how the tradition of *l'apéro* in France is similar to and/or different from the cocktail hour in the United States, and she might want them to be prepared should they

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<sup>1</sup> I am talking here about the general integration of language and culture, irrespective of the pedagogical approach used to define learning outcomes, deliver content, and evaluate achievement.

<sup>2</sup> As this article deals with the teaching of French as a foreign language, French will be used from time to time to exemplify particular points. When necessary and/or applicable, a translation will be given. In this case, an *apéritif* is both a pre-dinner drink (i.e., cocktail) and the term used to refer to the social occasion before the meal.

ever attend an *apéro*. In order to practice for such an opportunity, she might ask students to write a dialogue or act out a skit in which she would expect them to use the appropriate vocabulary and expressions such as “*je prendrais...*,” “*vous en voulez?*” and “*bonne dégustation.*”<sup>3</sup> Her students could also demonstrate in their performances that they would drink *du pastis*, and that they would appreciate small snacks such as pretzels or peanuts (instead of the heavy appetizers to which they might typically be accustomed in the United States). Theoretically, this kind of exercise allows students to demonstrate their skills, and their teachers can then evaluate them using measures such as communicative, cultural, and intercultural competence.

Those of us who have had the experience of learning a language other than our mother tongue (and in this case, French) probably realize how unlikely it is that the process will occur this way and go this smoothly. Not to mention, how robotic and stereotypical it might seem, especially as we reflect on the real-life encounters that we have actually experienced. In addition to the wonderful memories we may have of *les apéros* in France, we might also remember awkward conversations and confusion about what to drink, as well as “nontraditional” *apéros*, some that start at brunch on Sunday or last well past dinner time, others that are spent drinking overpriced *Kir Royale* at touristy restaurants in cities like Paris and Nice. Even among all those different moments in time, it is very possible that we never had a lesson in the classroom that informed our real-life *apéro* interactions, *mais nous nous sommes débrouillés quand même*,<sup>4</sup> and now *l'apéro* is our favorite time of day. The fact that we now enjoy *l'apéro* and, more importantly, feel like we have the linguistic and sociocultural capital to participate in these gatherings is a matter of symbolic competence.

Symbolic competence is the understanding that language use involves much more than communicating (i.e., giving and receiving) information across evenhanded channels. According to Kramsch (2015), our ability to use language in a meaningful way depends on what words we use (i.e., symbolic representation) and what those words reveal about our intentions (i.e., symbolic action). In keeping with the example of *l'apéro*, I might ask, “*Auriez-vous par hasard des glaçons?*”<sup>5</sup> to which the response in a strictly communicative context might be either “*oui*” or “*non*.” However, I am obviously not interested in starting an informational conversation about the presence of ice. I would like ice for my drink, but I have performed my request in a certain way, which might be for a number of reasons. Perhaps I do not want to offend the person who provided me with what I perceive to be a warm beverage. Or, I may not want to reveal my “American” need/desire for excessive amounts of ice. It may even be the simple matter that I do not feel comfortable rummaging through a stranger’s freezer for ice. Whatever the rationale for the particular utterance may be, I accomplish something different and additional than if I had said, “*donnez-moi des glaçons...*” or “*est-ce que je peux avoir des glaçons?*” or even “*où sont les glaçons?*”<sup>6</sup> Whether I want to be polite or save face, I hope that I get some ice out of the deal, too.

All the while, there are plenty of French speaking people across the world who practice *l'apéro* in a completely different way than described above, who may dislike it, or who do not practice it at all. It is not the positive or normative experience with *l'apéro* (or even the static understanding of the tradition) that indicates symbolic competence. *L'apéro* sets the stage for

<sup>3</sup> Translation: “I’ll have...,” “would you like...,” and “enjoy” (respectively). Instead of providing exact translations, I am offering commonly used English expressions that convey the gist of the French.

<sup>4</sup> Translation: “...we figured it out anyway...”

<sup>5</sup> Translation: “Would you happen to have some ice?”

<sup>6</sup> Translation: “Give me some ice...,” “Can I have some ice?” and “Where’s the ice?” (respectively).

a linguistically and socioculturally charged game of power, and while some participants come to the party with the ability to play by the rules already in place (i.e., symbolic power), individuals from diverse backgrounds use their symbolic competence to reframe the context of the game in a way that either allows for their participation or that changes the game altogether (Kramsch, 2015). In this way, communities that practice *l'apéro* differently, those that have renamed it or resignified the practice so that it incorporates their personal identities and diverse backgrounds, have exercised symbolic competence.

In this article, I discuss why it is essential that FL courses in higher education be organized around a framework that reveals examples of symbolic representation, symbolic action, and symbolic power, even during the early stages of learning. In order for students to not only observe but also engage with these symbolic dimensions, I propose the integration of two pedagogical approaches, one related to critical literacies and the other to performance, so that students might begin to develop symbolic competence when studying a foreign language. At the heart of the paper, I explain how the process can be “nourished by a literary imagination” (Kramsch, 2006), and I illustrate the practical elements of an intermediate (200-level) French course in which students read, analyzed, and eventually recreated scenes from the play *Huis Clos* (Sartre, 1947). Throughout the description of this course, I share specific examples of instances in which the notion of symbolic competence has been used to capture the students’ ability to “play with elements of an exchange using all available semiotic resources including the real and the imagined to bend the activity in ways favorable to their position” (Kramsch & Whiteside, 2015, p. 4). This article is meant to serve as a resource to inspire instructors so that they can guide their students towards the (initial) development of this very important competency in their own FL courses.

## WHY IS SYMBOLIC COMPETENCE IMPORTANT WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF FL TEACHING AND LEARNING?

The aforementioned example of *l'apéro* is quite benign in comparison to the everyday hegemony that disenfranchises certain individuals and where symbolic competence is especially valuable, both socially and economically speaking. Scholars (e.g., Hult, 2013; Kramsch & Whiteside, 2008; Warriner, 2011) usually (and for good reason) concentrate on these groups when discussing the power dimension of symbolic competence, whereas classroom-based research (e.g., Gassenbauer, 2012; Kaiser & Shibahara, 2014; Kearney 2012, 2015; Kramsch, 2006, 2011; Lopez-Sanchez, 2009; Vinall, 2016; Warriner 2011; Zhang et al., 2015) has focused more on aspects of symbolic competence that heighten pedagogical and intellectual rigor (such as semiotic awareness, multiliteracies, literary/artistic interpretation, meaning-making, perspective-taking, etc.).<sup>7</sup>

As this particular article deals with a presumably privileged population of students (those who have access to higher education as well as the option to study a language other than English), the focus on the power dimension of symbolic competence may seem counterintuitive, especially if the students do, in fact, belong to a dominant group that is afforded symbolic power. Oftentimes, however, it is the individual who benefits from symbolic power the most that is aware of it the least. (And it goes without saying that s/he who abuses symbolic power is either ignorant, autocratic, or even a blurry combination of

<sup>7</sup> This synthesis of previous research was possible thanks to the lecture by Kramsch and Whiteside (posted online by the Berkeley Language Center, November 20, 2015).

both.) This unfortunate reality can be addressed in an educational setting by exposing students to historical and cultural examples of symbolic power, as well as the ways in which it has the potential to sustain hierarchies and perpetuate injustices in society. By learning about the circumstances that lead to marginalization and oppression, and by exploring ways in which people can manipulate these circumstances for the better, students themselves can actively contribute to making positive changes and advancements in their community and, eventually, in society.

In a language course (whether it be a language arts, grammar and composition, writing, reading, literary analysis, or foreign language course), we can actually address these issues from a linguistic perspective. This is because symbolic power exists everywhere, on macro-cultural and micro-linguistic levels, and in a language course we can (and we should) consider what linguistic moves (i.e., speech acts) reveal about an interlocutor's intentions. Furthermore, we can explore the ways in which those linguistic moves either uphold or dismantle symbolic power or whether they potentially commit symbolic violence. In foreign language courses, it may be that the system of signs is different, but the range of effects of speech acts on the human condition is similar.

Well before students can identify symbolic power and analyze the effects of it, however, they must be introduced to symbolic representation and be made aware that it is pluralistic. Language learners and even their teachers can get caught up in the question, "*Qu'est-ce que cela veut dire?*"<sup>8</sup> In other words, the need to link words (i.e., signifiers) to fixed definitions of objects, images, concepts, and/or ideas. As structural linguists have pointed out, that which is signified by words can have a number of variations, and the structures (e.g., morphemes, phonemes, phrases, clauses, parts of speech, etc.) used to symbolize everything from needs to desires and emotions to memories are quite complex. For these reasons, many scholars would agree that it is not enough to teach language as a system governed by rules and regularities. Pennycook (2006), for example, has reiterated that "...cultural and linguistic forms are always in a state of flux, always changing, always part of the refashioning of identity" (p. 8), and Baker (2016) has argued that "...learners must always be prepared for this flux" (p. 84). In order for learners "to be able to manage the inherent variability in not only the form and function of [the language and culture]..." they need to be prepared for "...the multitude of contexts and interlocutors that they will encounter..." (Baker, 2016, p. 84). While the pluralistic nature of symbolic representation can be challenging, it offers a unique opportunity to teach diversity, even without making sweeping generalizations about diverse cultural norms and traditions.

The act of using language is also pluralistic, and our choice of words and symbols depends on the situation as well as our intentions. It could be that we are proving a point, asking a question, telling a story, expressing a thought, trying to understand, trying to change an opinion, dodging an argument, justifying an argument, apologizing, convincing, clarifying, reasoning, reassuring, the list goes on. Therefore, the objective when studying a language must go beyond the acquisition of functional skills in order to communicate information. The goal, after all, is not only to be understood, but also to be heard and listened to. And because "people wield power with words" (Kramsch, 2015, p. 17), language learners must consider the linguistic moves that give an interlocutor the upper hand in an exchange. Ultimately, language learners and language users should be able to interact and engage with others in such a meaningful way that they can provoke action and even social change.

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<sup>8</sup> Translation: "What does that mean?"

Language learners can embark on this journey by examining culturally relevant texts and artifacts and focusing their “...attention squarely on the dialogic relations that connect language and other semiotic resources, subjectivities and identities, and meaning making processes in context” (Kearney, 2015). Through the regular observation and analysis of these dialogical relations, learners can eventually envision ways that they would act as symbolically competent participants in real life settings.

Another important reason for prioritizing symbolic competence in the FL classroom is to empower non-native speakers of a language. Labeling the situation in the FL classroom as oppressive might be too extreme, but pedagogical approaches that use the native speaker as a model for students to emulate can provoke the perception that there is one authoritative source of knowledge (Keneman, 2015). As a result of this perception, students might fall into a trap where they willingly accept information, facts, and knowledge. Symbolically competent language users, on the other hand, understand the performative power of speech acts, and are therefore very careful with their choice of words as well as their linguistically diverse semiotic practices. Instead of learning functional skills that allow them to code and decode the language and give them a sense of some dominant cultural values, language learners deserve to feel like they participate in society in a variety of contexts and in a transformative way, which means that they can not only respect but also flout cultural norms.

## **HOW CAN WE FOSTER SYMBOLIC COMPETENCE IN THE FL CLASSROOM?**

Scholars (e.g., Kearney, 2015; Kramsch, 2009; Vinall, 2012, 2016) have pointed to the ways in which “transgression” can provide students with the opportunity to “perform and create alternative realities,” an element of symbolic competence as defined by Kramsch and Whiteside (2008, p. 666). Transgression in the classroom, according to Kramsch (2009), occurs when we encourage students to break the rules; not because we want them to be disobedient, but because we want them to understand that very important aspect (as well as the potential risks and affordances) of dismantling linguistic and cultural hegemony. This practice has the potential to pave the way for the idea of alternative realities in the student’s imagination. Both a critical literacies pedagogical approach (Keneman, 2015) and a performance-based approach (Essif, 2006) ask students to recreate texts and engage in performances in a way that resembles the kind of transgression discussed by Kramsch (2009).

According to Keneman (2015) the FL classroom can and should be a place that fosters the development of critical literacies, a learning outcome that has been advocated in conjunction to emancipatory or problem-posing education (e.g., Freire, 1970; Freire & Macedo, 1987; Giroux, 1998; 2011). While the concept of critical literacies is often promoted to empower men and women from socially and economically disenfranchised communities, it is relevant in the FL classroom, a space where students are often trying to overcome the idealization of the native speaker, a perception that dominates their learning. The critical literacies pedagogical approach in the context of the FL classroom challenges students, through textual analysis and production, to examine language from a variety of perspectives including sociocultural, political, and performative. As students study, engage with, adopt, parody, and sometimes even question the ideology behind linguistic discourse and textual production, their own performances are recognized as valid creations (e.g., written, spoken,

visual, or digital) worthy of textual analysis. Students are simultaneously encouraged to develop a personal relationship with the language, and the long-term goal is for students to cultivate a voice that grants them active participation in communities that use the target language.

While a critical literacies pedagogical approach accounts for symbolic representations and textual elements of symbolic action and power, a performance-based approach takes into consideration the ecology of language learning and allows students to feel the “embodiment of language and spatio-temporal structures [that] are instrumental in the creation of learning opportunities” (van Lier, 2004, p. 79). Essif (2006) describes in great detail a performance-based approach in his book *The French Play: Exploring Theater “Re-Creatively” with Foreign Language Students*. The approach involves several interactive and comprehensively outlined stages, one being the performative reading:

The performative reading should pay close attention to at least four specific properties of the theatre text: 1) the stage directions, and not only the (explicit) stage directions proper, but also the (implicit) directions that are embedded in the dialogue; 2) the “holes” in the text (the un-said)...; 3) the need for a community of reader-practitioners belonging to a specific contemporary culture and subculture to collaboratively negotiate and renegotiate possible and alternative stagings and meanings for the text in contemporary performance; and 4) the need to evaluate each aspect (each sign system) of the text conjunctively as well as individually. (Essif, 2006, pp. 67–68)

Reading the play in this way demands that students think critically and creatively about the theatrical nature of the text as one whose meaning is open to interpretation. Furthermore, through the process of reimagining, rewriting, and performing the play, students can consider their own (semiotically diverse) interpretations in legitimate terms that contribute to an ever-changing corpus of knowledge.

## METHODOLOGY

The course that will be described in this article was made possible by a Teaching Innovation Grant to explore new approaches to teaching French as a foreign language. Whereas the university-wide objective was to redesign courses that satisfied general education requirements, an additional focus in the French department was placed on promoting learning outcomes other than the traditionally favored communicative competence. Therefore, at its onset, the redesign was inspired by Kramersch’s (2006) seminal article “From Communicative Competence to Symbolic Competence.” In her article, Kramersch explained:

Symbolic competence has to be nourished by a literary imagination at all levels of the curriculum. For it is through literature that learners can communicate not only with living others but also with imagined others and with other selves they might want to become. Through literature, they can learn the full meaning potential of language... What literature can do is foster the three major components of symbolic competence: the production of complexity, the tolerance of ambiguity, and appreciation of form as meaning. (p. 251)

Practically speaking, these three components align with the learning outcomes described by the critical literacies and performance-based pedagogical approaches, which is why I designed the 15-week course around the play *Huis Clos*, a canonical piece of French

literature.<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, I designed a corresponding theater project that required all students to work together towards one final goal: a staged performance of scenes inspired by Sartre's play.

From a technical perspective, the students spent the first half of the course (7 weeks) reading and analyzing the play. The second half of the course (8 weeks) was devoted to rewriting and rehearsing scenes inspired by the play, and the course culminated in final performances. It is important to note that the impetus for this course redesign was pedagogical, and it was not intended as a study with an experimental or quasiexperimental research design. While I had the resources to collect exploratory data for departmental purposes, the timeline of the grant and the implementation of the course did not allow for the development or securing of formal instrumentation to evaluate or measure student affect or learning. With that said, I made observations and took notes on a daily basis. I collected all student work and, at the end of the semester, I recorded the students performing their scenes. Using a grounded approach, I analyzed these three sources (field notes, student work, and recordings of scenes) to explore and summarize the main characteristics of what I observed during the course.

## **WHAT ARE SOME EXAMPLES OF SYMBOLIC COMPETENCE IN A FL CLASS TAUGHT USING THEATER?**

This discussion offers a glimpse into the ways in which the reading and rewriting of the play within a critical literacies and performance-based context gave students the opportunity to discover and make meaning in a foreign language (i.e., symbolic competence).<sup>10</sup>

### **Textual Analysis and the Pluralistic Nature of Symbolic Representation**

A unique aspect of the play *Huis Clos* is that the characters are introduced to the location at the same time as the audience.<sup>11</sup> In fact, the first line of the play is “Alors, voilà,”<sup>12</sup> as Garcin enters the stage and looks around the space. Garcin proceeds to investigate his new surroundings, while the audience simultaneously discovers the set and the stage. Garcin makes observations, and so does the audience. Garcin takes inventory, and so does the audience. Garcin asks questions, and similar questions are provoked among the audience. Before long, readers and audience members are ultimately asking themselves, “Où sommes-

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<sup>9</sup> *Huis Clos* is the classic, existential text about three characters (Garcin, Inès, and Estelle) that find themselves united in a very unusual version of Hell, and it is due precisely to its “strangeness” that I chose it as the play to read in this particular course. The general uncertainty that characterizes the play as well as the frequent representations (albeit dark) of inquisitiveness, self-doubt, self-awareness, and revelation reflect the semiotic journey that is a feature of the course itself.

<sup>10</sup> It is important to note that, prior to reading the play, I gave students very little background on the author, the historical context, the philosophical message, or the plot. This was done on purpose so that students could discover these elements on their own, and so that the focus of the analysis was a semiotic one. I wanted the students to have a heightened sense of awareness as they immersed themselves in a world that was created in the play thanks to a variety of systems of signs including but not limited to words. I expected the students to trust me, the teacher-director, that a sense of uncertainty and mystery would help us to interpret the text as well as to make conclusions.

<sup>11</sup> This is not a necessary requirement for this pedagogical approach.

<sup>12</sup> Translation: “Well, here we are.”



nous?”<sup>13</sup> Of course, this is a typical question when encountering a piece of literature or theater for the first time, but readers of the play *Huis Clos* may also find themselves wondering: “Le personnage principal, sait-il où il est?”<sup>14</sup> Garcin does know that he is dead, and he has a troubling suspicion that he is in Hell. But he is nonetheless confused, and having never read or seen the play before, so were my students. As the confusion ensues, the first scene actually lends itself to a series of interactive activities that can uncover the pluralistic nature of symbolic representation. Several dimensions are in question: (1) the physical space on the stage (in terms of objects, props, furniture, and set design), (2) the idea of what the space represents and how it is both familiar and unfamiliar, and later (3) the completely ambiguous concept of Hell, subject entirely to interpretation and our own imagination.<sup>15</sup>

As a point of departure, I asked students to begin to envision the physical space on the stage by listing all the objects (e.g., props and furniture) that are described in stage directions and/or mentioned by the characters in dialogue. For example:

*une porte (a door)*

*un bronze (a bronze statue)*

*une cheminée (a fireplace)*

*des meubles (furniture)*

*un fauteuil (an armchair)*

*des canapés (a sofa)*

*une glace (a mirror)*

*des fenêtres (windows)*

*des choses fragiles (fragile things)*

*un lit (a bed)*

*des lampes (lamps)*

*des escaliers (stairs)*

*un interrupteur (a switch)*

*une sonnette (a doorbell)*

*un coupe-papier (a letter cutter)*

*des livres (books)*

*un mécanisme (a mechanism)*

*une brosse à dents (a toothbrush)*

*des pals (torture device for impalement)*

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<sup>13</sup> Translation: “Where are we?”

<sup>14</sup> Translation: “Does the main character know where he is?”

<sup>15</sup> All of these dimensions should be addressed eventually and can even be addressed simultaneously. However, with first-time readers of the play, there is something both amusing and intellectually stimulating about waiting until the last possible minute to reveal and establish the fact that the characters are in Hell. I enjoyed telling the students, “Si vous l’avez trouvé, ne le dites pas encore. De toute façon, on veut vérifier avec les éléments dans le texte que on ne se trompe pas!” (Translation: “If you figured it out, don’t say anything yet. After all, we’ll want to check all the elements in the text to make sure!”)

*des grils (red-hot pincer for torture)*

*des entonnoirs de cuir (leather funnel for water torture)*

Then, in order to determine what the space is meant to represent (i.e., the play's setting), the students identified which objects are actually present on stage and which ones are mentioned by characters precisely because they are not (and the character is concerned). This activity, an innocent kind of bait-and-switch, allowed students to imagine a variety of possible contexts that are relevant but inevitably inconsistent. A hotel without a mirror and a bed? An insane asylum with a bronze sculpture? A torture chamber without instruments of torture? Separately, none of these interpretations hold up, but together, they all do. Like looking at the negative to a photograph, the elimination of these inaccurate interpretations eventually helps to create meaning, and readers are introduced Sartre's version of Hell.

The same "backwards" approach can be used to unpack unfamiliar modifiers that describe the objects in the space, thereby illuminating once more the pluralistic nature of symbolic representation. For example, my students struggled when they encountered the terms *Barbadienne*, *Louis Philippe*, and *Second Empire*. The traditional pedagogical tendency might have been to explain the significance of these historical figures and time periods for the students to learn and retain. However, in the symbolically oriented course where the reader's interpretation takes precedence, students are encouraged to identify and connect with other signs in the text that might help them to establish meaning in an alternative way. In this instance, I asked the students to turn their attention to a statement made by Estelle where she compares the room to a room at an old aunt's house, and she cringes at the thought of a holiday (such as New Year's Eve) spent with her unfashionable relative. The students were able to use Estelle's analogy as a resource to interpret the effects of the décor (described as *Barbadienne*, *Louis Philippe*, and *Second Empire*) on the feelings of the characters. By extension, the students were able to make general inferences about the significance of the terms, at least in this particular context. After all, that would have most likely been Sartre's intention—to use them to depict Hell as outmoded and uncomfortably dull—but we cannot necessarily expect first-time readers to easily pick up on such connotations. Not to mention a lesson that explained the historical implications of the terms would not necessarily have illuminated the subtext for 21st century readers. The close reading activity of Estelle's analogy, however, offered a salient opportunity for students to think about what the descriptors *Barbadienne*, *Louis Philippe*, and *Second Empire* meant not only to Sartre, the 20th century French audience, and/or the characters, but also to them. Furthermore, they began to imagine the ways in which they might resignify elements of the play using their own words and symbols.

### **L'IMPROVISATION: FROM SYMBOLIC REPRESENTATION TO SYMBOLIC ACTION**

In theater, the process of textual analysis always has the potential for an additional iteration in which readers can play an active role. That is the fact that someone, usually the director (and her team of designers), must interpret the playwright's language and directions to represent visually what was described in the text. After having analyzed the dialogue and stage directions for the various symbols that Sartre used to depict Hell, the students acted collectively as directors and they worked together to set the stage on a daily basis. At first,

they would take the cue from me and the questions that I would ask, such as: “Fermez les yeux. Imaginez la scène. Rappelez-vous des objets qui sont représentés sur la scène. Où est le bronze? La porte? La sonnerie? Où sont les canapés? Et les personnages? Comment sont-ils habillés? Dans la scène que nous avons lue hier soir, où est Garcin? Estelle? Inès? Que font-ils dans cette scène? Qui a le coupe-papier?”<sup>16</sup> This activity as an example of symbolic action is twofold. First, on a somewhat basic level, action was provoked as students listened to and responded to my questions. Second, there is the action implied by a play that it should be staged (and that the words should be enacted). This particular activity allowed students to see and experience the various ways in which the words on the page might influence the set-up on the stage.

Of course, the visual elements are hardly the most important representations of Hell in *Huis Clos*. For Sartre, “L’enfer, c’est les autres,”<sup>17</sup> and his version of Hell has much more to do with the action, behaviors, emotional responses, and verbal outbursts that are all triggered by the dialogue between characters. Students were able to get a feel for this dynamic by improvising three scenes from the text (pp. 33–34, pp. 42–43, pp. 46–47). In the first scene, students interpreted and reinterpreted Garcin and Estelle’s reactions to the heat, Garcin’s inclination to remove his coat and Estelle’s reaction, Inès’ enunciation that she does not like men, Estelle’s reaction, Garcin’s reaction, and the characters’ emotions and feelings when observing the living and the people they left behind. In the second scene, which has less language and even more action, students interpreted and reinterpreted the actions of each character as the desperately try to sit in silence. Using noise, movements, gestures, and vocal sounds, students were able to explore semiotic practices that were not necessarily linguistic. Finally, in the third scene, students interpreted and reinterpreted Inès’ efforts to attract Estelle, Estelle’s efforts to attract Garcin, Garcin’s absentmindedness, the physical interaction between Inès and Estelle, and the linguistic moves that say one thing and mean another. Through the act of improvising, students learned that language brings about action, and vice-versa.

### **LA PETITE MISE-EN-SCÈNE: FROM SYMBOLIC ACTION TO SYMBOLIC COMPETENCE**

As students became comfortable with their bodies, their voices, and the space as well as the general concept of the play and its language, the students took on the responsibility of authoring their own scenes inspired by the original text (i.e., they became student-authors). Other students were later cast to act out the scenes in final performances (i.e., they became student-actors). For the writing portion of the project, the guidelines were fairly open-ended. I assigned them the page numbers for certain scenes, and I basically told them to capture the essence of the scene by rewriting it from their perspective and in their own words (in French, of course). The catch was that they would be performing it for their peers (each other as well as students from other French classes with a similar level of proficiency), and they would want to captivate and entertain their audience. We worked on the “playwriting”

<sup>16</sup> Translation: “Close your eyes. Imagine the stage. Remember which objects are represented on the stage. Where is the bronze statue? The door? The bell? Where are the couches? What about the characters? How are they dressed? In the scene we read last night, where is Garcin? Estelle? Ines? What are they doing? Who has the letter opener?”

<sup>17</sup> Translation: “Hell is other people.”

for several weeks, and by the end of the semester, more than one group of student-authors had interpreted the same scene. Therefore, when the student-actors eventually performed the scenes, the audience had a chance to see several different interpretations of the same scene.

This activity, known as *la petite mise-en-scène*, captured the concept of transgression in that it allowed students to manipulate symbolic representation and practice symbolic action, all in an effort to make the original text more meaningful to them. One scene in particular that yielded several compelling interpretations by students was a monologue by Estelle. The long excerpt of text was in some ways intimidating and difficult to read because of the linguistically dense discourse and Estelle's relatively incoherent rambling. Sometimes Estelle is talking to herself and sometimes to Garcin and Inès, but most of the time she is addressing two characters from her previous life, Olga and Pierre, but they are not visually represented on stage. Like a hallucination, she watches and talks to them in thin air, but they cannot see or hear her. When asking students to rewrite this particular scene, I suggested that they do so as a dialogue, instead of a monologue, and in a way that accounted for Olga and Pierre. The three scenes that the students authored are reproduced in the Appendix, and I will discuss them below (in no particular order).

The first scene (*petite mise-en-scène #1*) was the shortest, the simplest, and perhaps the least "transgressed" of the three, in that the student-authors did not deviate too much from the original text with regards to time period, language, and concept. Their scene assumed the same setting, and their portrayal of the characters, Olga and Pierre, closely aligns with the way that Estelle describes them in the original monologue. With that said, the scene did accomplish the objectives of the assignment because the student-authors (re)interpreted and resignified the explicit and implicit stage directions and they manipulated and reimagined the holes in the text (the "unsaid"). Olga and Pierre are the only two characters depicted in this scene, so without Estelle's commentary, they act out the observations that she makes in the original monologue. Whereas Estelle originally says, "tu lui marches sur ses pieds,"<sup>18</sup> this scene begins with Olga stepping on Pierre's toes while they are dancing. Pierre reacts ("Aie! Faites attention!"<sup>19</sup>), and the conversation seems forced with the awkward silence and the "so... anyway..."<sup>20</sup> feeling given off by Olga. Both of these interactions reflect Estelle's presumption in the original text that Pierre would not have wanted to be there with Olga. Furthermore, the dialogue between Olga and Pierre ensues in exactly the order that Estelle had overheard it: first there is the mention of Roger, then *le voyage en Suisse*, and finally *l'enfant* (although *bébé* was the term used by the student-authors of this scene). What is different about this new scene, however, is Olga's overt declaration, "Elle a tué son bébé,"<sup>21</sup> a horrific detail that Estelle conveniently leaves out when relaying the conversation in the original text. Entitled "La vérité sur Estelle,"<sup>22</sup> this scene does just that: it reveals in very quick and straightforward terms the truth about Estelle's past.

The student-authors of this first scene also included language and physical action that punctuated the scene once it was performed by the student-actors. First, there was the

<sup>18</sup> Translation: "You're stepping on his feet."

<sup>19</sup> Translation: "Ouch! Be careful!"

<sup>20</sup> This feeling is suggested by a filler, which these student-authors conveyed as "bah," but which is typically written as "ben" in French. The student-authors spelling the word as "bah" could be considered an error, but it does show that they are thinking about how filler sounds and expressions are used and signified.

<sup>21</sup> Translation: "She killed her baby."

<sup>22</sup> Translation: "The Truth about Estelle."

reference to Estelle as “notre chère Estelle,”<sup>23</sup> a term of endearment that Estelle herself mocks when hearing it in the original monologue. This is because there is nothing “chère” about Olga’s feelings for Estelle, and the student-actor who played Olga made this clear by expressing the words with disdain and sarcasm. Then, there was the movement of the dancing, which progressed in sync with the conversation. Although the student-actors did not elect to play music during the performance, they danced a traditional box step to a rhythm that got faster or slower depending on not only the stage directions but also the mood of the characters. In particular, the dancing stopped completely when Pierre yelled, “Arrête!” even though his outburst was meant to stop Olga from talking (and not necessarily dancing). The dramatic conclusion, where Pierre falls to his knees, also gives meaning to an elliptical quote from the monologue. Sartre’s version of Estelle drifts off on purpose; she would not want Garcin or Inès to know what Olga was saying about her. But this new scene ventures a guess as this scene ends with Olga saying to Pierre, “Elle n’était pas la femme que vous pensez!”<sup>24</sup>

The second scene (*petite mise-en-scène #2*) was different in that it portrayed Estelle on the stage with Pierre and Olga. As a result, language from the original monologue was interspersed with the student-authored dialogue between Olga and Pierre. However, the choice to reproduce language from the Sartre text was not necessarily out of laziness. The student-authors synthesized the language in a way that made Estelle’s rambling somewhat more coherent, which in turn points to a sophisticated comprehension of the original text. Estelle’s request, “Pense à moi, Pierre,”<sup>25</sup> for example, is followed by the supporting argument, as in: “Think of me, Pierre, because I’m better. You can’t possibly want to be with her, because she’s red like a tomato, and we laughed about her hundreds of times!” While these student-authors mostly wrote Estelle’s lines using exact words from the original text, they did manipulate some lexicogrammatical items. Instead of “vous vous amuseriez...,”<sup>26</sup> for example, they use the somewhat synonymous expression “vous aimeriez...”<sup>27</sup> And the pronoun “la” was changed to “le,” indicating that Estelle is not only making fun of Olga (“la” meaning “her”), but also the entire situation that she is watching (“le” meaning “it”). Finally, “elle ne saura pas...” became “elle ne sait pas...,”<sup>28</sup> which draws more explicit attention to the present, as in: “She does not know that I can see her *now*, while she is dancing right there in front of me!” In a way, this can serve as a clarification for the audience, who can see those two characters on the stage. Without speaking with the student-authors, it is hard to tell if these micro-linguistic changes were as intentional as this analysis suggests, but it is, at the very least, clear that the students were playing with grammatical structures during the writing process.

This group of student-authors made conceptual changes to the scene in addition to linguistic ones. Its title, “La Trahison,”<sup>29</sup> refers to two acts of betrayal that take place in the scene. The most obvious is Estelle’s betrayal of Pierre, which is characterized by her illicit relationship with Roger. For these student-authors, a plausible conclusion to the elliptical

<sup>23</sup> Translation: “Our dear Estelle.”

<sup>24</sup> Translation: “She wasn’t the woman you thought she was!”

<sup>25</sup> Translation: “Think of me, Pierre.”

<sup>26</sup> Translation: “You would enjoy...”

<sup>27</sup> Translation: “You would like...”

<sup>28</sup> Translation: “She will not know...” and “She does not know...” (respectively).

<sup>29</sup> Translation: “The Betrayal.”

quote, “Notre chère Estelle n’était pas...,”<sup>30</sup> was that she was not “parfaite”<sup>31</sup> due to her affair with Roger. Pierre is surprised by this news, not because of Estelle’s perceived innocence, but because “Roger would never do such a thing,”—a somewhat creative twist implied by the student-authors.<sup>32</sup> A second, perhaps more provocative betrayal that takes place in this scene is Olga’s betrayal of Estelle’s friendship (irrespective of Estelle’s cowardice and generally despicable character). The student-authors of this scene penned a scandalous Freudian-type slip, where Olga essentially says, “The best, I mean, the worst part is that she killed her baby!” Not only does Olga betray her friend’s trust by exposing Estelle’s secret (albeit horrific), but she also seems to take pleasure in the suffering that the whole situation might have caused Estelle. It is not surprising that towards the end of this scene, she has no regard for Pierre’s lingering feelings for Estelle, which she convinces him to abandon in favor of her affection.

Ultimately, this group of student-authors made very subtle yet creative changes to the original text, which was expanded upon by the student-actors. In particular, they decided on a very interesting choice of music to play during the dance between Olga and Pierre. The original text references the song “Saint Louis Blues,” and the student-actors (feeling as though the newly written scene was still set in a historical time period) initially wanted to use the same song for the dance. However, when searching online for a version of the song to play during the performance, they came across a Dubstep remix. Dubstep, a genre of electronic dance music, often has a dark feel as it uses minor keys and features dissonant harmonies. The student-actors were instantly intrigued, and decided to use it in their performance. While this was quite an effective choice, with regard to the scene’s sinister content, I encouraged the student-actors to think about the consequences of using electronic dance music in an otherwise historically situated scene. Specifically, I wanted them to consider updating (and further simplifying) some of the language, not only to establish temporal consistency with the song, but also so that the language could be more accessible for the nonnative audience members. However, this proved to be a challenging request, and the students eventually preserved the more sophisticated language from the original play.<sup>33</sup> The positive effect was that the scene had a kind of hybrid (historical and contemporary) feel to it, but the negative effect was that the nonnative audience missed some of the nuanced meanings in the dialogue when it was eventually performed.

The third example (*petite mise-en-scène* #3), entitled “Le Club,” realizes a level of transgression that extends from the very beginning to the end of the scene (both as it is written and as it was performed). First of all, the student-authors succeeded in rewriting the scene in almost entirely their own words, while still capturing the essence of what the original monologue conveyed. Furthermore, the students who wrote and performed this scene committed and remained faithful to a contemporary reinterpretation that was situated in a 21st century nightclub.<sup>34</sup> The student-authors modernized the language and the student-

<sup>30</sup> Translation: “Our dear Estelle wasn’t...”

<sup>31</sup> Translation: “perfect”

<sup>32</sup> It is possible that students based this inference off of Estelle’s statement in the original text: “On ne peut pas dire que la nouvelle l’ait bouleversé.” (Translation: “I can’t say that the news surprised him.” In other words, Pierre was not exactly surprised by the very shocking news about Estelle.)

<sup>33</sup> Identifying and using synonyms can be challenging for language learners, as they cannot always determine which words need to be simplified and, then, what would be a simpler word to use.

<sup>34</sup> It could be that their use of the term “club” is somewhat inappropriate, since French speakers, although most likely aware of the significance of this Anglicism, would most likely have used “boite (de nuit).” But these

actors used popular music to reinforce the present-day vibe. Ultimately, the entire scene was reimagined, as opposed to bits and pieces of it, which confirms that these students read the scene, established a sophisticated understanding of it, and then took charge when rewriting and performing it from their own perspective. As the language, emotions, and actions are overly dramatic and exaggerated, the scene unfolds like a reality TV show and the results are comical, almost like a parody.

The scene opens with Olga asking Pierre to dance, and when it comes to Estelle's reaction, there is no beating around the bush. While the original Estelle tries to rationalize the situation and suppress her shame, this contemporary Estelle is in a jealous rage. Her frenzy erupts as she calls Olga a "prostituée,"<sup>35</sup> an insult that aroused laughter among the audience when performed on stage. Olga's exaggerated flirtation ("Oh Pierre! Vous êtes un bon danseur!"<sup>36</sup>) is also humorous, and the student-actor who played her was quick to smile and bat her eyelashes for comedic effect. Satirical undertones were reinforced in the first part of this scene by the song that played during Olga and Pierre's dance. The "Cha-Cha Slide," a dance anthem from the nineties, is often considered tacky and only suitable for proms, bar mitzvahs, weddings, and roller-skating rinks. During the dance, an awkward yet humorous exchange ensues between the two characters. Olga, being manipulative, says that she misses Estelle, when in reality she is trying to gauge Pierre's feelings for the deceased friend, as in: "This song makes me think of Estelle. Do you miss her?" Pierre who is still oblivious to Estelle's past, emphatically reaffirms that he does miss Estelle, but does so using a 21st century cliché, the "retweet."<sup>37</sup> Estelle, meanwhile, does not believe a word of it, and reminds whoever will listen, "Ils n'ont même pas pleuré à mon enterrement,"<sup>38</sup> a reference to a differently worded but similar observation that Estelle makes in the original text.

At this point in the scene, the music becomes slower according to the stage directions. A change to a particular song is not specified, but in this performance Marvin Gaye's "Let's Get It On" was chosen, which thoroughly amused the audience members. Despite its musical reputation as a classic ballad, the song's message is so blatantly suggestive that it can be difficult to take it seriously as background music in seemingly romantic situations. As a result, the scene escalated as a farce. Olga and Pierre continued to dance clumsily, and Olga eventually decided to tell Pierre the evil truth about Estelle. In an ironic twist, however, the audience does not actually hear Olga's words. She whispers them to Pierre while he stands still, wide-eyed and stunned, and an extremely dramatic Estelle, who cannot contain her dismay, falls on her knees and cries. Once the deed is done, Pierre responds with the simple enunciation, "Je suis stupéfait."<sup>39</sup> I had originally suggested that the student-authors use a different, perhaps more common, adjective to describe Pierre's reaction. At the time, I did not think that the word "stupéfait" would be meaningful to the audience members, since it has the potential to sound like the unnatural reaction "I am stupefied," in English. On the other hand, the student-actor who played Pierre gravitated towards this word, and actually gave it meaning by acting it out with dedication and emotion in the performance. He looked directly at the audience when enunciating the word, and spoke slowly and genuinely, but the

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authors showed an awareness of their primarily American audience by using a term that they would understand.

<sup>35</sup> Translation: "prostitute"

<sup>36</sup> Translation: "Oh Pierre! You're a good dancer!"

<sup>37</sup> A retweet is an action used on social media to convey either "I agree (with what you're saying)" or "I would also like to say that."

<sup>38</sup> Translation: "They didn't even cry at my funeral!"

<sup>39</sup> Translation: "I'm stunned."

shock in his eyes was somewhat forced. In a way, the reaction was purposefully unnatural, and the audience erupted in laughter. From that moment, the French adjective “stupéfait” had a special meaning in our classroom community.

## CONCLUSION

According to Kearney (2015), the development of symbolic competence is observable as students engage in the interpretations of signs and meaning over time. Evidence of symbolic competence occurs when 1) signs that students encounter in texts resurface after analysis and negotiation of meaning, and 2) acts of meaning leave traces in learners’ own meaning-making repertoires. As is evidenced by each scene, the students in my course found a way to make their own work meaningful, while also using signs from the original text. While the content was in some ways heavy, dark, and quite philosophical, students reimagined and reenacted the very dramatic and dark love triangle that was originally described by Jean Paul Sartre. In rewriting and performing the scenes, students embarked on the semiotic journey as described by Essif (2006), where they renegotiated possible meanings and potential stagings of their scenes and the play itself. Finally, as was further hypothesized by Essif, students in the course developed a community of reader-practitioners belonging to a specific contemporary subculture, and it was within this subculture in the classroom that they were able to understand and make use of the performative power of speech acts.

Another important aspect of this project was that it allowed students to think about diversity on a micro-level as it related to language and semiotics (i.e., symbolic representation). Students also had the opportunity to interact with a linguistically diverse group of FL learning interlocutors in their very own classroom (i.e., symbolic action). Finally, the students that I described in this article were able to subvert symbolic power (Sartre’s canonical text) by enacting symbolic competence in their own texts, which were meaningful to themselves, each other, and those within their L2 community. This particular activity was just that: an activity that gave students an opportunity to think about semiotics and the diverse possibilities for making meaning, concepts they can apply to their use of the French language and their engagement with French and Francophone culture in the future (both in the classroom and in real life settings). In alignment with what was described in Kramersch (2006), the article that was used to design the course for this study, these students engaged with at least one very important component of symbolic competence: production of complexity. In other words, students were able to experience the idea that “most of the time there is not even a right or wrong way of communicating” (Kramersch, 2006, p. 252). After all, through the scenes they wrote and the one written by Sartre, they ultimately saw four versions of the same interaction. Future research will want to ask students directly what they thought about these kinds of experiences, and will want to know if students were aware of their symbolically competent performances. Furthermore, future research will want to develop reliable instruments that can measure the development of this competency in a more formal way.

As a fortuitous byproduct (evidenced in the students’ collaborative efforts and co-authored scenes), the process of artistic collaboration also brought about cognitive benefits such as hypothesizing, problem solving, evaluating, and cause-effect as described by Heath and Roach (1999) that are typically assumed to be achieved exclusively through scientific activities. Finally, this project and the use of theater created a space where students could be “...less intent on decoding than on interpreting words and their indexicalities, less focused



on the standard monolingual use of one language than on the ability to use one language or the other, less keen on explaining and judging one national culture versus another than understanding their own and others' historical trajectories and values" (Kramersch, 2009, p. 189). Such an environment is the catalyst for the symbolic self, and while the process towards symbolic competence is ongoing and extends well beyond one semester of language learning, the opportunity for laying the foundation—or should I say setting the stage—is possible in the FL classroom.

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## APPENDIX: ORIGINAL SCENES WRITTEN BY STUDENTS (“PETITES MISES-EN-SCÈNES”)

Scenes are presented in their original format without highlighting or focusing on grammatical errors. For this particular analysis, “errors seem a relatively minor concern so long as they impair neither understanding nor students’ ability to sustain...” sophisticated expression (Byrnes & Kord, 2001, p. 47). Brackets ([]) denote grammatical errors that impeded understanding or sophistication, and explanations are in the footnotes.

### Petite mise-en-scène #1: “La vérité sur Estelle”

*Pierre et Olga entrent le restaurant et ils s’asseyent. La musique dansante commence. Les deux vont à la piste de danse. Olga marche sur les pieds de Pierre.*

Pierre : Aïe ! Faites attention !

Olga : Oh non ! Je suis désolée ! (*Un silence...*) Bah, comment allez-vous ?

Pierre : Je vais bien.

*La musique ralentit.*

Olga : Est-ce que vous avez pensé à Estelle ? Notre chère Estelle !?

Pierre : Je ne veux pas parler d’elle.

Olga : Mais, est-ce que vous avez entendu qu’elle s’est enfuie avec un homme qui s’appelait Roger ?

Pierre : Non...

Olga : Elle a voyagé en Suisse (*Pierre froncé.*) Et elle est tombée enceinte avec sa bébé.

Pierre : Je ne te crois pas.

Olga : Mais, c’est vrai ! Et ce n’est pas tout !

Pierre : Arrête !

Olga : Elle a tué son bébé. (*Pierre se tombe sur les genoux.*) Elle n'était pas la femme [que vous pensez]<sup>40</sup> !!!

### **Petite mise-en-scène #2: “La Trahison”**

Estelle *voit son amie Olga et un homme, Pierre, qui a aimé Estelle. Les deux emmènent au dancing, puis Olga et Pierre s'asseyent et ses parlent tranquillement.*

Estelle : Pense à moi, Pierre. Pense à moi tant que tu dances avec elle. Elle est rouge comme une tomate. Nous avons ri d'elle, cent fois !

*Olga et Pierre ses lèvent et dansent à « Saint Louis Blues. »*

Estelle (*Fredonnant*) : Dansez ! Dansez ! Garcin ! Vous aimeriez si vous pouviez le voir. Elle ne sait pas que je la vois. Si elle savait que je la voir, elle ne la ferait jamais. Je te vois, avec ta coiffure défaite, ton visage [chavire]<sup>41</sup>, tu lui marches sur les pieds.

*Olga et Pierre se ralentissent, ils respirent plus vite.*

Estelle : Si légère ! Allons, en mesure, il la tire ! C'est indécent ! C'est à mourir de rire.

Pierre et Olga *commencent parler [au]*<sup>42</sup> Estelle.

Pierre : Ah, pauvre Estelle.

Olga : Notre chère Estelle, oui.

Pierre : Elle était si jeune. Elle était si belle et généreuse. J'étais triste d'avoir des nouvelles de sa mort.

Estelle : « Notre chère Estelle » elle a le toupet de parler de moi.

Olga (*Sérieusement*) : Pierre, tu sais ce qu'elle a fait, n'est-ce pas ?

Pierre : Non ? De quoi parles-tu ?

Olga : Je peut le dire.

<sup>40</sup> There is a problem here with the choice of verb and the conjugation (the two verbs should preferably be in the same tense). Furthermore, the more appropriate verb in French (instead of “penser”, *to think*) is “croire,” *to believe*. Therefore, this clause is slightly awkward.

<sup>41</sup> Although this is the word used in the original Sartre text, the students did not use it correctly here. They misspelled it and therefore mispronounced it in the presentation.

<sup>42</sup> This incorrect preposition (*à*) causes a misunderstanding. The characters are talking about (*de*) Estelle, not to (*à*) her.

*Pierre et Olga s'asseyent, la musique arrête. Pendant l'histoire, Estelle est objectant et [dégréant].*

Olga : Notre chère Estelle n'était pas parfaite. Elle avait une liaison, tu sais, oui, avec Roger !

Pierre : Roger ? Non, Il ne le ferait pas, c'est impossible.

Olga : Oui, c'est vrai, ils ont voyagé en Suisse parce qu'elle avait un enfant ! La meilleure, pardon, la pire chose est qu'elle a jetté son enfant depuis un balcon. C'est vrai, elle me l'ai dit.

*Pierre a l'air triste, il pense à l'histoire. Après un temps.*

Olga : Pierre ! Nous sommes ici, en present. Elle n'est pas importante. [Elle est passé à meilleure vie.]<sup>43</sup> Dansons !

Pierre : D'accord, tu as raison. Dansons.

*La musique joue.*

Estelle : En mesure ! Garcin, danse avec moi. Une, deux, une, deux. Bah. (*Un temps. Estelle les regarde avec l'air jalouse. La musique se calme.*) Je n'entends plus bien. Plus fort ! Je vous en prie ! Plus...plus...je n'entends plus du toute. Jamais plus. La terre m'a quitté.

### **Petite mise-en-scène #3: "Le Club"**

*Pierre et Olga sont assis dans le club.*

Olga : Voulez-vous danser, Pierre ?

Pierre : Bien sûr, Olga. (*Pierre hésite à dire que oui.*)

*Pierre et Olga commencent à danser avec "cha-cha slide." Estelle remarque que Pierre et Olga dansent. Elle regarde vers la terre. Estelle est dans un état de choc avec sa grande bouche ouverte. Estelle se lève et elle regarde [les dégénérés]<sup>44</sup> qui dansent.*

Estelle : Oh non ! Comment pouvez-vous me tromper Pierre ?! Pierre ! Pierre ! PIERRE ! Arrêtez de danser avec cette prostituée !

Olga : Oh Pierre ! Vous êtes un bon danseur !

Pierre : Merci, c'est mon premier temps à danser.

Olga : Notre danse me rappelle d'Estelle. Elle me manque. (*Elle dit ça avec sarcasme.*)

<sup>43</sup> This sentence is slightly awkward, both grammatically and conceptually.

<sup>44</sup> To call the characters "degenerates" in the stage directions reveals opinions that the characters may have but not necessarily an omniscient narrator. Therefore, this "critique" of Olga and Pierre is awkward and inappropriate.

Pierre : Le retweet.

*Olga et Pierre vont s'asseoir sur le tabouret.*

Estelle : (*atterrée*) Oh mon Dieu ! Ils mentent ! Ils n'ont même pas pleuré à mon enterrement !

*Estelle [se promène]<sup>45</sup>, frustrée. La chanson commence doucement.*

Olga : (*très heureuse*) Pierre, notre chanson préférée ! Voulez-vous danser ?

Pierre : Pourquoi pas... ?

*Olga et Pierre se lèvent et commencent à danser lentement.*

Olga : [Comment savez-vous à propos d'Estelle ?]<sup>46</sup>

Pierre : Je la connais bien.

Olga : Vous ne la connaissez pas comme je la connais. La vérité c'est que...

*(Chuchotement.)*

Estelle : Attendez ! Non ! Ne le dites pas à Pierre ! Olga non ! Non, ne lui dites pas à ce sujet ! Pourquoi ?! S'il vous plaît ne lui dites pas, c'est trop.... Mais tu viens de le faire ! Comment peux-tu ?!

*Pierre est choqué. Estelle tombe sur ses genoux et pleure.*

Pierre : Oh mon Dieu. Je suis stupéfait. Allons nous asseoir.

Estelle : Bien ! Vous pouvez l'avoir. Je n'ai plus besoin de vous ! J'ai un nouvel homme.

*[Estelle met son corps contre le dessin de Garcin.]<sup>47</sup>*

Estelle : JE SOUHAITE QUE TU M'AIMES !

## **Translations of Scenes (“Petites mises-en-scènes”)**

### **Petite mise-en-scène #1: “The truth about Estelle”**

<sup>45</sup> While the misuse of this verb did not manifest in the performances, the stage directions should reflect what the actor did (or what she was supposed to do). She was pacing (“faire les cent pas” or “arpenter”) on stage, not strolling.

<sup>46</sup> It seems as though the character was trying to ask “How well do you know Estelle?” (based on Pierre’s response). This question in French is awkward grammatically, however, and does not convey that concept.

<sup>47</sup> In the presentation of this scene, Estelle pressed her body against Garcin and grabbed him, but this sentence has lexical inaccuracies that do not fully capture such an action.

*Pierre and Olga enter the restaurant and they sit down. The dancing music begins. The two go to the dance floor. Olga steps on Pierre's feet.*

Pierre: Ouch! Be careful!

Olga: Oh no! I'm sorry! (*A silence...*) Well, how are you?

Pierre: I'm ok.

*The music slows.*

Olga: Have you thought about Estelle? Our dear Estelle!?

Pierre: I don't want to talk about her.

Olga: But did you hear that she ran off with a man named Roger?

Pierre: No...

Olga: She traveled to Switzerland. (*Pierre frowns.*) She got pregnant with his baby.

Pierre: I don't believe you.

Olga: But it's true! And that isn't all!

Pierre: Stop!

Olga: She killed her baby. (*Pierre falls to his knees.*) She wasn't the woman that you think!!!

### **Petite mise-en-scène #2: "The Betrayal"**

*Estelle sees her friend Olga and a man, Pierre, who loved Estelle. The two go to a club, then Olga and Pierre sit down and talk to each other quietly.*

Estelle: Think of me, Pierre. Think of me while you dance with her. She is red like a tomato. We laughed about her, a hundred times!

*Olga and Pierre stand up and dance to "Saint Louis Blues."*

Estelle (*Humming*): Dance! Dance! Garcin! You would love if you could see it. She doesn't know that I see her. If she knew that I [to see] her, she would never do it [error here]. I see you, with your undone hairstyle, your [twisted] face, you are stepping on his feet!

*Olga and Pierre slow down, they breathe heavier.*

Estelle: So lightly! Let's go, get in position, he's pulling her! It's obscene! Laughable!

*Pierre and Olga start talking [about] Estelle.*

Pierre: Oh, poor Estelle.

Olga: Our dear Estelle, yes.

Pierre: She was so young. She was so beautiful and generous. I was sad to hear about her death.

Estelle: “Our dear Estelle” she has the nerve to talk about me.

Olga (*Seriously*): Pierre, you know what she did, right?

Pierre: No? What are you talking about?

Olga: [I can say it.]

*Pierre and Olga sit down, the music stops. During the story, Estelle is objecting and [?].*

Olga: Our dear Estelle was not perfect. She had an affair, you know, yes, with Roger!

Pierre: Roger? No, he wouldn’t do it, it’s impossible.

Olga: Yes, it’s true, they travelled to Switzerland because she had a baby! The best, excuse me, the worst thing is that she threw her baby from a balcony. It’s true, she told me.

*Pierre seems sad, he thinks about the story. After a pause.*

Olga: Pierre! We are here, in the moment. She is not important. [She has passed to a better life.] Let’s dance!

Pierre: Ok, you are right. Let’s dance.

*The music plays.*

Estelle: Get in position! Garcin, dance with me. One, two, one, two. Bah. (*A pause. Estelle looks at them with jealousy. The music calms down.*) I can’t hear very well anymore. Louder! Please! Louder... Louder... I don’t hear anything at all. Never again. Earth has left me.

### **Petite mise-en-scène #3: “The Club”**

*Pierre and Olga are sitting in the club.*

Olga: Do you want to dance, Pierre?

Pierre: Sure, Olga. (*Pierre hesitates to say yes.*)

*Pierre and Olga start to dance [with] the “cha-cha slide.” Estelle notices that Pierre and Olga are dancing. She looks towards the ground. She is in a state of shock with her big mouth open. She stands up and looks at [the degenerates] who are dancing.*

Estelle: Oh no! How could you cheat on me Pierre? Pierre! Pierre! PIERRE! Stop dancing with that prostitute!

Olga: Oh Pierre! You are a good dancer!

Pierre: Thanks, it’s my first time dancing.

Olga: Our dance reminds me of Estelle. I miss her. *(She says it with sarcasm.)*

Pierre: Retweet.

*Olga and Pierre go to sit down on the stool.*

Estelle: *(appalled)* Oh my God! They are lying! They didn’t even cry at my funeral!

*Estelle [paces], frustrated. The song starts quietly.*

Olga: *(very happy)* Pierre, our favorite song! Do you want to dance?

Pierre: Why not...?

*Olga and Pierre stand up and start to dance slowly.*

Olga: [How do you know about Estelle?]

Pierre: I know her well.

Olga: You don’t know her like I know her. The truth is that...

*(Whispering.)*

Estelle: Wait! No! Don’t tell Pierre! Olga no! No, don’t tell him about this topic! Why?! Please don’t tell him, it’s too... But you just did it! How can you?!

*Pierre is shocked, Estelle falls to her knees and cries.*

Pierre: Oh my God. I am stunned. Let’s go sit down.

Estelle: Well! You can have him. I don’t need you anymore! I have a new man.

*[Estelle puts her body against Garcin’s.]*

Estelle: I WANT YOU TO LOVE ME!