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Pierre Corneille's *Le Cid* in Colonial Quebec

In April 1652, the fledgling French settlement of Quebec saw a performance of one of seventeenth-century France's best-known plays, an event that is recorded in a manuscript journal kept by Jesuit missionaries there: "Le 16 se representa la tragedie du Scide, de Corneille" (*Journal des Jésuites* 166).¹ No further details of this spectacle are known, except that it most likely was sponsored by colonial governor Jean de Lauson and probably took place in a warehouse near the St. Lawrence River where furs were stored while awaiting transport to France each autumn (Gardner 244-245, 259). In this particular location, with the river perhaps even audible or visible in the background, the audience must have found something very familiar about Corneille's drama of domestic politics in medieval Castile, set against the backdrop of a threat of surprise attack by an army of Moors lurking downriver from the city of Seville. Indeed, at the very moment the play was staged in Quebec, the St. Lawrence River also seemed, to chroniclers of colonial life, to be teeming with aggressive cultural Others—the Iroquois—who were awaiting opportunities to launch surprise attacks on the vulnerable French and their Amerindian allies. This article examines three aspects of Castile's conflict with the Moors in *Le Cid*—the vulnerability associated with proximity to a river, the enemy's stealth, and the way

Castilians meet the challenge—in light of the particular social and political climate of its performance in Quebec. Here I argue that the play would have reflected to colonial audience members both their own dangerous situation and their unique relationship to royal authority. Comparison of this analysis to the conventional wisdom about the play shows how accounting for colonial experiences of French literature may bring fresh perspective both to individual texts and to the relationship between France and its colonies more broadly.

As David Clarke has observed, *Le Cid* and the rest of Corneille's political drama "has almost invariably been discussed in terms of Parisian taste or 'national' political preoccupations" (1), a tendency that manifests itself even in scholarly work on theatre in New France. In addition to *Le Cid*, Corneille's *Héraclius* and *Nicomède*, Jean Racine's *Mithridate*, and the anonymously authored religious drama *Le Sage Visionnaire* are known to have made their way to the colony, and general comments about theatre in the colonial record suggest that that others did as well, even if no trace of their performance has survived (True, "Beyond the *Affaire Tartuffe*," 454-55).² Such performances often are treated in scholarship primarily as reflections of metropolitan culture, or as one scholar put it "a pale, local mirroring" of French cultural life (Gardner 229).³ This point of view is perhaps natural enough considering seventeenth-century France's famous concentration of political and artistic prestige in Paris and, later, Versailles, but it also tends to reinforce the old colonial organization of the world with Europe as its one and only center, as if even performances that took place as far from Paris as possible could not help but operate primarily as reflections of metropolitan France.

This article instead takes its cue from scholars of Atlantic Studies who have recently articulated a “de-centered, non-hierarchical reconceptualisation of France and its constituent and connected spaces and territories, and of French culture(s) in general” (Marshall 12).⁴ Instead of a mere provincial backwater that could do no more than faintly echo the metropole, Quebec here is considered a pole of French culture in its own right, a constituent space of France that might have more to tell us about French literature than is often assumed. Scholars of the French seventeenth century, in contrast, have generally paid scant attention to the colonial New World, preferring to think of France as “enclosed within an insular, self-protective bubble” (Melzer 14).⁵ Although a lack of detailed records regrettably forecloses any possibility of examining the staging and reception of *Le Cid* in Quebec, it is possible to assess how colonists’ own immediate concerns about dangerous outsiders would have cast Castile’s conflict with the Moors in a unique light. Indeed, as Elizabeth Maddock Dillon recently has shown in her study of theatre in the British Atlantic, contextual factors ensure that “the meaning of any given play will change enormously from one production to the next” (50).

For all their importance to the story, Corneille’s Moors have no consistent cultural identity, alternately resembling medieval Iberian Moors, early modern Moriscos, and North African subjects of the Ottoman Empire, a muddled picture that would have left audiences free to make their own associations. Michèle Longino has argued that to spectators in Paris, Castile’s adversary would have recalled the similarly non-Christian and reputedly fierce Ottoman subjects—Turks—with whom French traders and travelers often found themselves in conflict on the

Mediterranean Sea (81).⁶ Her argument rests not on any record of seventeenth-century spectators linking Corneille's Moors to France's own adversaries—and such testimony seems, in fact, to be absent—but rather the notion that “they (like all theatre audiences) understood the plot, borrowed and reworked from the past, to be speaking to and about their present” (82). And it is not hard to understand how theatregoers in Paris could see parallels between the play and their own political climate. Aside from whatever religious and political affinities spectators may have been able to discern between the Moors on stage and France's Ottoman adversaries, the threat of piracy, sea-borne raids on French cities, and slavery were constant for French travelers and traders, and audience members in Paris had access to a steady stream of written reports about the dangers their compatriots faced on the Mediterranean Sea (82-86).

As former residents of France, spectators at the performance of *Le Cid* in Quebec also may have seen the Moors as thinly-disguised Turks. But in the colonial context, that association also would have suggested another analogue for the Moors: the reputedly violent Amerindians—and especially the Iroquois—who threatened French colonists living along the St. Lawrence River. The Turk sometimes appears in accounts of colonial life as a reference point for descriptions of Amerindian cultures, most often to emphasize the perceived violence, superstition, and general lack of civility of the latter. The French traveler and parliamentary lawyer Marc Lescarbot, for example, compared some Amerindians' violent rituals to prove bravery (366), their habit of dining while seated on the ground (383), and their efforts to summon spirits (271) to what he deemed to be the similar behavior of the Turks, among

other perceived similarities.⁷ The Turk also could be used as a metaphor to emphasize the perceived violence and barbarity of the Iroquois, in particular. The Jesuit *Relation* for 1661, for example, refers to that group as “ce petit Turc de la Nouvelle France” (*Monumenta Novae Franciae*, vol. 9, 599).⁸ If Corneille’s Moors reminded Parisian audiences of Turks, spectators in Quebec easily could have extended the link to the New World’s unfamiliar and sometimes violent cultures, which were already sometimes compared to Turks in texts chronicling colonial life.

Even without a connection to the Turks, however, there is good reason to think that Corneille’s Moors would have struck a chord among audience members in Quebec due to the unmistakable alignment of two aspects of the play—its setting on a river and the enemy’s preference for surprise attack—with the nature of the Iroquois threat faced by colonists. The Spanish play that inspired *Le Cid*, Guillén de Castro’s 1618 *Las Mocedades del Cid*, is set in the land-locked town of Bourgos, but Corneille relocated the action to the riverside city of Seville, by his own account for the sake of plausibility. The emerging standards of French classical theatre demanded that the play’s action unfold within twenty-four hours instead of the much longer timeframe of Castro’s version of the story, and, as Corneille himself put it in his *examen* of *Le Cid*: “l’Armée ne pouvait venir si vite par terre que par eau” (704). It is clear that Parisian audiences simply would not have been able to believe that a land-based attack could be launched, executed, and turned back all in the span of only a single day. The impossibility of such an invasion had been amply demonstrated the year before the appearance of Corneille’s play when Spanish troops laid siege in August of 1636 to the French city of Corbie, 100 kilometers from

Paris, several months after having crossed into France (Margitić xxxiii). Scholars often point to this slow-moving invasion and siege as a key part of the context of the play's first appearance in Paris, one that would have allowed spectators there to identify with the tense atmosphere in Seville, and that would have made the sudden attack by land depicted in Castro's play implausible to French audiences (Scott 301; Longino 240 n6). Although the Moors' water-based attack was surely more plausible to Parisian audiences in light of recent events, it is worth noting that this plausibility would have stemmed more from what the attack is *not* than from what it *is*. As Longino points out, violent sea-borne raids may have been a familiar danger to residents of Marseille, but not Paris (85).

In Quebec, in contrast, the play's depiction of the threat of attack via a river would have been not merely plausible, but all too familiar, as that possibility shaped the daily lives of the residents of the embryonic settlement. The Iroquois were at war with the French and their Amerindian allies from 1647 until 1653, and the conflict paralyzed movement and trade along the St. Lawrence River (Trudel 196). The Iroquois initially targeted Amerindian trading partners of the French, blockading the river in strategic locations and all but exterminating the Huron, Neutral, Pétun, and Attikamègues Amerindian groups between 1649 and 1651 (Trudel 199-202). With those enemies defeated, the Iroquois increasingly turned their attention to French settlements along the river, coming within three leagues of Quebec in 1650, to the great alarm of its inhabitants, and attacking Montreal in 1651 (Trudel 203-204). The following year, in which *Le Cid* was staged in Quebec, seems to have been especially terrifying and dangerous for French settlers, as the Iroquois

“ont rôdé tout le printemps et tout l’esté à l’entour des habitations françoises” (*MNF* vol. 8, 335). In much the same way the river in *Le Cid* serves as a point of vulnerability and an avenue of attack on Seville, then, the St. Lawrence River and its tributaries in New France were a constant source of danger for French colonists, perhaps more than ever at the very moment of the play’s performance in Quebec.

The Moors’ reliance on the element of surprise, a repeated point of emphasis in *Le Cid*, also would have been more familiar to audience members in Quebec than in Paris. Spectators first learn of the Moorish army waiting just down river from Seville in act two, scene six, when King Don Fernand himself declares that he fears “une surprise” from the Moors who have been spotted near the river’s mouth (733). Later, when the attack is truly imminent, the nobleman Don Diègue uses another form of the same word while urging his son Rodrigue to take up arms against the Moors, who are approaching silently, under the cover of night: “La flotte qu’on craignait dans ce grand fleuve entrée / Vient surprendre la ville et piller la contrée” (751). Later, when recounting the battle at the king’s request, Rodrigue confirms again the Moors’ preferred method of warfare, even as he explains that it failed to yield its intended result: “Notre profond silence abusant leurs esprits / Ils n’osent plus douter de nous avoir surpris” (758). The stealthy tactics of the Moors are a significant departure from Castro’s play, in which the enemy is said to march in formation, with banners aloft (41), one that provides a convenient explanation for the fact that the invaders never appear on stage. This absence may have been necessitated by emerging standards of decorum in French theatre (Gerhard 19), but it would not necessarily have resonated with the personal experiences of Parisian

spectators who had recently witnessed with great anxiety the plainly visible and slow-moving Spanish invasion and siege of Corbie, and who could read about sudden violent raids by Turks on the Mediterranean Sea, but were not themselves vulnerable to such incidents, insulated from the threat as they were by hundreds of miles of French territory (Longino 83-85).

The residents of Quebec, on the other hand, had ample experience of surprise attack at the hands of the Iroquois, a danger that was nearly constant and perhaps never greater than around the time *Le Cid* was performed there.⁹ The Jesuits' *Relation* for 1651 opens with an account of the "fréquentes surprises des troupes iroquoises" that afflicted colonists settled along the St. Lawrence River that spring and summer, including one case in May that saw a French woman kidnapped from Montreal, tortured, and killed (*MNF* vol. 8, 104-105). Just a few months before the performance of Corneille's play, a Frenchman narrowly escaped ambush at the hands of a group of Iroquois lying in wait for him on the St. Lawrence River (*Journal des Jésuites* 164). And on March 6, 1652, one month before the performance of *Le Cid* in Quebec, a group of Iroquois swooped down on and killed a group of Huron allies of the French near Trois-Rivières (*MNF* vol. 8, 335). Such sudden violence frequently caught the French and their Amerindian allies off guard and resulted in loss of life, creating what one scholar has identified as a climate of "fear and anxiety" among colonists that was perhaps not unlike Seville's situation in *Le Cid*, in which any sign of the enemy's presence could prompt an expectation of imminent attack (Blackburn 62). Indeed, just as the troubling presence of the Moors is announced in the play by the sight of their fleet at the mouth of the river and, later, by the

appearance of 30 sails within sight of Seville (733, 758), the appearance of a single enemy canoe on the river near Quebec in one case seemed, to at least some of the town's residents, to confirm the panic-inducing rumor that 500 Iroquois were lurking nearby and surreptitiously preparing to attack (*MNF* vol. 3, 629-630).

Castile's response to this threat is famously decentralized, initiated not by the king through formal channels of authority, but by Castilian nobles who see it as an opportunity to advance their own interests. It is Don Diègue who first recognizes the urgency of the threat, and his son Rodrigue, at the head of 500 of his father's allies, who actually turns back the invasion. The pair is motivated by a desire to inoculate Rodrigue against punishment for dueling and killing another nobleman, Don Gomès, to avenge his father's humiliation during an argument between the two men. The willingness of the monarch's subjects to take the threat posed by the Moors and other matters into their own hands often has been seen as a symptom of his subjects' scandalously low regard for his authority, or his own failure to conform to ideals of kingly comportment (Margitić xli-xlii, Scott 294-295). And it is not uncommon among scholars who read the play primarily as a phenomenon of the Parisian stage to see this situation as a reflection of France's own transition from feudalism to a strong monarchy under Louis XIII.¹⁰ From this point of view, the threat posed by the Moors and the kingdom's vulnerability would, in Longino's words, have "serve(d) to justify the construction of a strong state," and it is indeed a newly powerful king who manages to shift Castile from a defensive footing to an offensive one when Don Fernand dispatches Rodrigue to conquer the Moors on their own soil at the end of the play (106).

If spectators in New France could have seen the play as speaking to their own circumstances, especially the colony's ongoing struggle with the Moor-like Iroquois, they would have found it aligning with a very different political transition, one in which power was being returned to local residents instead of being consolidated by the crown. Direct royal oversight of affairs in New France had been deemed impractical in its earliest decades, and administrative authority was placed instead, in 1627, in the hands of the merchants based in France who carried out trade in the colony, the Compagnie des Cent Associés (Havard and Vidal 86-92). The company's charter called for it to assume territorial, military, and economic control over New France, a degree of power thought necessary to ensure the success of efforts to foster both economic and demographic growth there (*Acte pour l'Établissement* 24-30). When this arrangement in turn proved impractical, many of the responsibilities of colonial government were handed over in 1645 to a new Communauté des Habitants—elite residents of the colony who took on the administrative obligations of the trading company as delegated by the Crown in return for exclusive rights to trade (Trudel 171). This arrangement was altered by the French Crown in subsequent years to empower ordinary colonists to trade individually with Amerindians and to add elected members to the Communauté's governing council (Trudel 188, 192-193). Over the course of New France's earliest decades, then, authority over civil affairs there grew increasingly local, and residents gained more power over their own community.

In addition to its relative independence as a matter of policy, New France was also isolated by the slow pace of communication with France.¹¹ In one incident,

for example, Quebec was roiled by a dispute over whether to execute or pardon an Algonquin man accused of murder.¹² To break the impasse, it was agreed that a case for clemency would be presented to the king, a solution that was soon rendered moot when the prisoner escaped before the king's judgment could be received. In another case, a gift of fine clothing was received from the king in 1639. Unsure what to do with it and unable to ask for clarification in a timely manner, the colony's governor decided to distribute the gift among several Amerindian groups who had converted to Christianity, reasoning that this choice accorded with the king's previously-expressed love for new Amerindian believers (*MNF* vol. 4, 267-268). And even something as simple as asking for help against the Iroquois who seemingly could pounce at any moment required a long journey, such as mission superior Paul Le Jeune's visits to France in 1641 and 1642, or a written request for help, both of which took months and could be made irrelevant at any moment if the Iroquois suddenly attacked. The result was that as a matter of both policy and practicality around the time colonists were watching the performance of *Le Cid* on a makeshift stage in Quebec, "la Nouvelle-France laurentienne se trouva seule, en face d'une Iroquoisie toujours plus envahissante" (Trudel 207).

Faced with this lack of help from the crown, colonists sought a variety of solutions to the Iroquois threat on their own. In 1645, the governor of New France brokered a peace treaty between one particular group of Iroquois and their Amerindian allies. Although this agreement restored vigorous trade to the St. Lawrence River and profitability to French merchants after two consecutive years of greatly diminished economic activity due to Iroquois blockades, it was short lived,

and New France's adversaries had resumed their attacks on French settlements and their Amerindian allies by 1647 (Trudel 181, 198). A mobile defense unit of 40 soldiers was established in 1648, and its numbers increased to 70 in 1651, but its dependence on funds from the colony—in short supply due to trade disruptions caused by the Iroquois—prevented it from becoming large enough to effectively counter the threat (Trudel 221). The colony even went so far as to seek a formal alliance against the Iroquois with the British colonies of New England, without success (Trudel 204-207). In short, although colonists frequently requested help against the Iroquois from France, thereby signaling an understanding of their ongoing status as French subjects despite their relative autonomy, they also were accustomed to seeking their own ways to confront the threat.

In this context, what traditionally has been understood as Don Fernand's weakness or ineptness in countering the Moorish invasion and in other matters must have looked instead like individual decisiveness on the part of other characters in the face of a hands-off king who simply cannot intervene in a timely fashion. Indeed, Don Fernand's knowledge of events in his own kingdom frequently lags behind that of other characters. When he finally appears on stage in act two, scene six, for example, the king orders the Castilian nobleman Don Alonso to rein in the errant Don Gomès, unaware that Rodrigue has already challenged his father's rival to a duel (732). The king's lack of current knowledge about the dispute is underscored by the fact that other characters—Chimène and the Infanta—have already moved on in the two preceding scenes to worrying about the duel's outcome, before Don Fernand is even aware of it. Later, after it becomes known that

Don Gomès has died at Rodrigue's hands, the king's reaction to the news makes clear his own inability to keep up with events: "Dès que j'ai su l'affront, j'ai prévu la vengeance / Et j'ai voulu dès lors prévenir ce malheur" (734). This declaration, with its twin temporal qualifiers (dès que j'ai su, dès lors) highlights a simple fact: the king did not learn what was happening in time to prevent the obvious outcome. It is perhaps not surprising, then, that when Rodrigue's romantic rival Don Sanche attempts to convince Chimène to allow him to avenge her father's death instead of waiting for the king to act, he cites the slow pace of royal authority as a reason to seek an alternative solution. Formal justice, he claims, "marche avec tant de langueur / Que bien souvent le crime échappe à sa longueur." Acting on his own, he insists, would be "plus prompt" (740).

Castile's conflict with the Moors also could have been seen this way, as reflecting colonists' experience of a hands-off Crown that fails to keep pace with events. Don Fernand's failure to recognize the urgency of the threat is a clear example of events overtaking his knowledge of them and ability to respond. The first time the Moors are mentioned in the play, in Act II, Don Fernand cites a vaguely-sourced rumor of the lurking threat as a reason for vigilance, changing the subject from the dispute between Don Diègue and Don Gomès: "N'en parlons plus. Au reste on nous menace fort: / Sur un avis reçu je crains une surprise" (733). The king goes on to say that an unspecified number of the Moors' ships have been seen at the mouth of the river, and that the river could quickly bring them to Seville, but he nonetheless concludes that because the "avis" he received was "mal sûr," there is no reason to sound the alarm and prepare to counter an attack that might be nothing

but a rumor (734). In contrast to the king's hazy knowledge of the threat, Don Diègue has very precise information about it in the following act, reporting with assurance that the Moors have been seen entering the river, that they are coming to pillage Castile, and that they will arrive in one hour (751). And as Longino has pointed out, the king's lack of awareness of the urgency of the threat is further highlighted by Corneille's revisions for the 1660 edition. In the later version, Don Fernand no longer relies on rumor, but reports that ten ships flying the flag of Castile's longstanding Moorish adversary have been spotted at the mouth of the river (1498; Longino 95).

Just as the king is late to recognize the threat, he is also unable to act to counter it as quickly as Rodrigue can. Rodrigue's decision to lead an army to resist the Moorish invasion is unquestionably a matter of avoiding punishment for killing Don Gomès—his father urges him to “force par ta vaillance / La justice au pardon” (752)—but he also later explains it as a necessity due to the pressing nature of the threat, reminding the king that “Le peril approchait” (758). Don Fernand himself confirms his own inability to meet the challenge in a timely fashion earlier in the same scene, in the middle of a speech singing Rodrigue's praises for having preserved his reign over Castile: “Et les Mores défaits avant qu'en ces alarmes / j'eusse pu donner ordre à repousser leurs armes” (757). The king is therefore grateful to Rodrigue, even as he acknowledges that the young warrior was motivated by something other than a desire to serve his royal master: “J'excuse ta chaleur à venger ton offense, / Et l'État défendu me parle en ta defense” (758). Far from thinking about punishing Rodrigue's presumptuous behavior, the king is

concerned with how to reward it, lamenting that: “Pour te récompenser, ma force est trop petite” (757).

Even the king’s decision to dispatch Rodrigue to conquer the Moors on their own soil at the end of the play, which has been seen as the moment Don Fernand seizes control of events in his own kingdom (Scott 301), can alternatively be understood as arrival at a conclusion long since reached by his subjects. Predictions that Rodrigue will conquer lands beyond Castile—and specifically that of the Moors—are made repeatedly beginning in the play’s earliest scenes. Before the dispute with Don Diègue that leads to his own death at Rodrigue’s hands, Don Gomès predicts that the young man will follow in his father’s footsteps: “Je me promets du fils ce que j’ai vu du père” (710). A few scenes later, Rodrigue’s father, Don Diègue, clarifies that his own glorious record involves knowing how to “dompter les nations” (715), giving more specific meaning to Don Gomès prediction: Rodrigue is destined not only to be a great warrior, but a conqueror. Similarly, the king’s own love-struck daughter, the Infanta, immediately begins to imagine a glorious future for Rodrigue as a conqueror upon hearing of his duel in progress with Don Gomès: “J’ose m’imaginer qu’à ses moindres exploits / Les Royaumes entiers tomberont sous ses lois” (730). Her prediction becomes more specific after Rodrigue turns back the invading Moors and captures two of their kings:

Après avoir vaincu deux Rois

Pourrais-tu manquer de couronne?

Et ce grand nom de Cid que tu viens de gagner

Marque-t-il pas déjà sur qui tu dois régner? (768).

In the play's final scene, Rodrigue himself declares that he is ready to "Aux deux bouts de la terre étendre [s]es travaux" (776) in order to win Chimène's forgiveness for killing her father, a solution that the king seizes upon immediately afterward to send Rodrigue off to conquer the Moors. Decisive though it may seem when the play is thought of as a reflection of metropolitan France's own increasing centralization of power, Don Fernand's decision to send Rodrigue to conquer the Moors must have seemed, in relatively autonomous New France, more like belated validation of a conclusion that is hinted at repeatedly—and even presented as inevitable—by more than one character.

There is good reason to think, then, that in the context of New France's ongoing struggle with the Iroquois, Castile's conflict with the Moors would have echoed with remarkable precision the specific dangers faced by colonists, and reminded them of their own responsibility to face the threat instead of waiting for help from France. Don Fernand's subjects find their own solutions to the Moorish menace when the king is caught unawares, showing the value of the sort of self-determination that the residents of Quebec were then being called on to harness in their own conflict with the Iroquois, and in colonial administration more generally. At the same time, the king's consistent intervention as a kind of retroactive validator of the decisions made by his subjects could have served as a reminder to spectators that their heightened independence at the time did not constitute absolute freedom, and that they were still expected to act in ways that would meet with the approval of the Crown, were they known. Don Fernand deems Rodrigue's slaying of Don Gomes "juste" and "mérité" (734); he approves, in act four, a plan made earlier in the play

by Chimène and Don Sanche for the latter to duel Rodrigue to avenge Don Gomès (763); and, as mentioned above, he happily accepts the results of Rodrigue's initiative in repelling the Moors' invasion and then adopts the young warrior's plan to direct his aggression outward, beyond Castile. Don Gomès' decision to refuse to accept being passed over for appointment as governor and to humiliate his rival, in contrast, is clearly not validated by the king after the fact, a feature of the play that must have reinforced the notion that colonists' autonomy was not without limits. In light of published reports of colonial life that record a sometimes-lax attitude among colonists toward following rules, this message no doubt would have been useful to the authorities who sponsored the performance.¹³

Although this analysis is unavoidably speculative in the absence of any record of how the play was received in Quebec, it has the virtue of bringing to the surface aspects of the play—the way the king's knowledge lags behind that of his subjects and his habit of retroactively approving their actions—that may be harder to see when it is considered from the traditional, Paris-centric point of view. At a minimum, this suggests that New France's theatrical and literary culture might be better understood not as a mere pale reflection of that of France, but as a lens through which texts might fruitfully be interpreted, in much the same way *Le Cid* has often been interpreted in light of the political and social context of its first performance in France. As noted earlier, *Le Cid* was not the only well-known French play to make its way to the colony, and it is not hard to imagine that an approach like the one taken here might yield interesting results if applied to *Nicomède's* portrait of courage in the service of the public good, or *Mithridate's* story of failed

resistance to the Roman Empire. And the fragmentary catalog of the Jesuit college library that scholars have managed to piece together in recent decades reveals that hundreds of other works—religious, scientific, and literary—also were present in the colony and available to at least some of its residents, including texts by such notable figures as Nicolas Boileau, Pierre Nicole, and Cardinal Richelieu, as well as issues of the literary periodicals *Le Mercure Galant* and *Le Nouveau Mercure Galant* (Drolet 509, 530-532, 536).¹⁴ These perhaps surprising instances of some of France’s most famous works of literature and theatre finding an audience far from the traditional center of French power and prestige suggest that it may be possible to conceive of a seventeenth-century French literary culture that spanned the Atlantic instead of, or in addition to, the familiar and oft-studied one centered on Paris and Versailles. Doing so might help scholars uncover new dimensions of meaning in some of the period’s best-known works, as well as to finally transcend the old colonial organization of the world with Europe as its one and only center.

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¹ The fact that the Jesuits labeled it a *tragédie* instead of a *tragicomédie* might indicate that the version of the play in question was published in 1648 or later. But it is also clear from the way they spelled the play's title—*Scide*—that these observers did not possess precise information about it. Due to the uncertainty, this

analysis draws on the original 1637 version. The changes made in the various editions prior to 1660 were, in any case, relatively few and minor. See Margitić lx-lxii.

² Not considered here are plays written in the colony, including religious dramas staged in the Jesuit college and ceremonial performances used to mark important events like the arrival of a new governor from France. On the former, see Laflamme and Tourangeau. On the latter, see Welch.

³ For additional examples, see Paquet 98 and Burger 46.

⁴ In addition to Bill Marshall's book *The French Atlantic*, the path for this article has been blazed by works like Joseph Roach's *Cities of the Dead*, Christopher L. Miller's *The French Atlantic Triangle*, and Elizabeth Maddock Dillon's *New World Drama*. The French Atlantic has emerged in recent years an alternative to frames such as *francophonie* and postcolonial studies that, as Marshall has pointed out, sometimes reproduce or rely on the same center-periphery relationships that automatically relegate non-Parisian locales to the margins (9-10).

⁵ This point of view is increasingly coming under scholarly scrutiny. In addition to Sara Melzer's work, notable examples include Brian Brazeau's *Writing a New France* and Katherine Ibbett's *The Style of the State*, especially the chapter on the figure of the colonial governor in Corneille's martyr plays.

⁶ In seventeenth-century France, the word *turc* designated not only a member of a particular ethnic or linguistic group, but also, more broadly, a "Sujet de l'Empereur d'Orient qui fait profession de la Secte de Mahomet" (Furetière). It also had a metaphorical dimension: "On dit aussi en voulant injurier un homme, le taxer de

barbarie, de cruauté, d'irrégion, que c'est un Turc, un homme inexorable, qu'il vaudroit autant avoir à faire à un Turc" (Furetière).

⁷ For more on appearances of the Turk in the colonial record, see True, "Strange Bedfellows."

⁸ Lucien Campeau's edition of the writings of Jesuit missionaries and related works, *Monumena Novae Franciae*, is hereafter abbreviated as *MNF*.

⁹ For earlier examples, see *MNF* vol. 2, 456 and 731.

¹⁰ See, to cite only a few prominent examples, Prigent 116, Margitić xxxiii, Lyons 8-11, and Scott 301.

¹¹ Comments indicating the slow and unreliable pace of communication with France abound in the colonial record. For only a few additional examples, see *MNF* vol. 4, 255 and 266, vol. 6, 391.

¹² This incident and efforts to resolve it are recounted by both Champlain and the Jesuits. See *MNF* vol. 2, 391-396 and 478-481.

¹³ Champlain, for example, lamented that "Ceux qui commandent pour sa Majesté sont fort peu obéis, n'ayant personne pour les assister, que sous le bon plaisir de la compagnie qui n'a rien tant à contre coeur" (Champlain, *Derniers récits*, 21). For examples of the liberties taken by colonists, see *MNF* vol. 3, 537; Samuel de Champlain, *Derniers récits*, 16, 50, and 142-143 and Champlain, *Premiers récits*, 70.

¹⁴ No complete catalogue of the Jesuit college library has survived, but approximately 750 books in various Canadian libraries have been identified that belonged to the Jesuit college library. See Drolet, Filion, and Pariseau.