Questions for ***Ridicule*** (with comparisons to ***Swades***)

**Directions**: Choose one of the questions below and type up a thoughtful paragraph or so in response. This will be due Friday, 2/19, in class and in hard copy, please.

1. Like most works of historical fiction, this film has one eye on the period it depicts and one eye on the period in which it is made. Reviewer Thomas Bourne, in his article for *History at the Movies: The Early Modern Years*, said this about the film’s relevance: “Leconte himself denied that this was a film about the eighteenth century; ‘the modernity of it comes through treating the story as something universal, and why not –something of today’ (Quoted in *French Cinema in the 1990s*). Bourne adds, “It is suggested that the idea of Ponceludon’s quest, which ultimately has a medical goal, to prevent the spread of malaria, brings to mind serious scandals about corruption in the funding for medical research in the 1990s in France. It is also suggested that the point that endures to modern times is the hegemony of language and wit, or in modern terms, the soundbite.”

Considering what you know of the world today, what about this film touches on familiar human behaviors or attitudes? On the other hand, what about the situation, character, or ideas seems foreign? Be as specific as you can.

1. Although *Swades* is set in 21st century India and *Ridicule* is set in 18th century France, there are some similar personality types, plot lines, and conflicts of ideas. Choose one of the items below and discuss how the two films deal with the character, situation, or conflict of beliefs or values.
2. An idealistic young man who wants to improve the lot of the common people through technology faces opposition from more conservative forces. Strangely, even those who hold those conservative values and benefit from that system find something appealing in the outsider’s stance.
3. An intelligent young woman wishes to devote herself to the life of the mind but finds herself urged toward a marriage that would define her in more traditionally female (i.e. subservient, sexual) terms.
4. In one society it is the “Untouchables,” in another it is the Deaf, but in either case some define people of the subgroup as less than human, while others define them as equal.
5. We see king Louis XVI and his queen, Marie Antoinette, only briefly, but what impression do they make? If you can, compare this to any other portrait of these monarchs, fictional or nonfictional, that you have encountered elsewhere. Does the film seem to present them as villains? Ordinary humans? Or what? Would you have liked their characters to have played a larger role in the film?
6. While it seems fair to call young Gregoire Ponceludon the hero of the piece, and the lovely Mathilde de Bellegarde as a heroine (at least by the end), it might be less clear whom to define as a villain. Would you call Madame de Blayac and her ally, the Abbe de Vilecourt, villains? Or does the film depict them as mere products of their time, not really personally responsible for the prevailing folly of the society they live in?