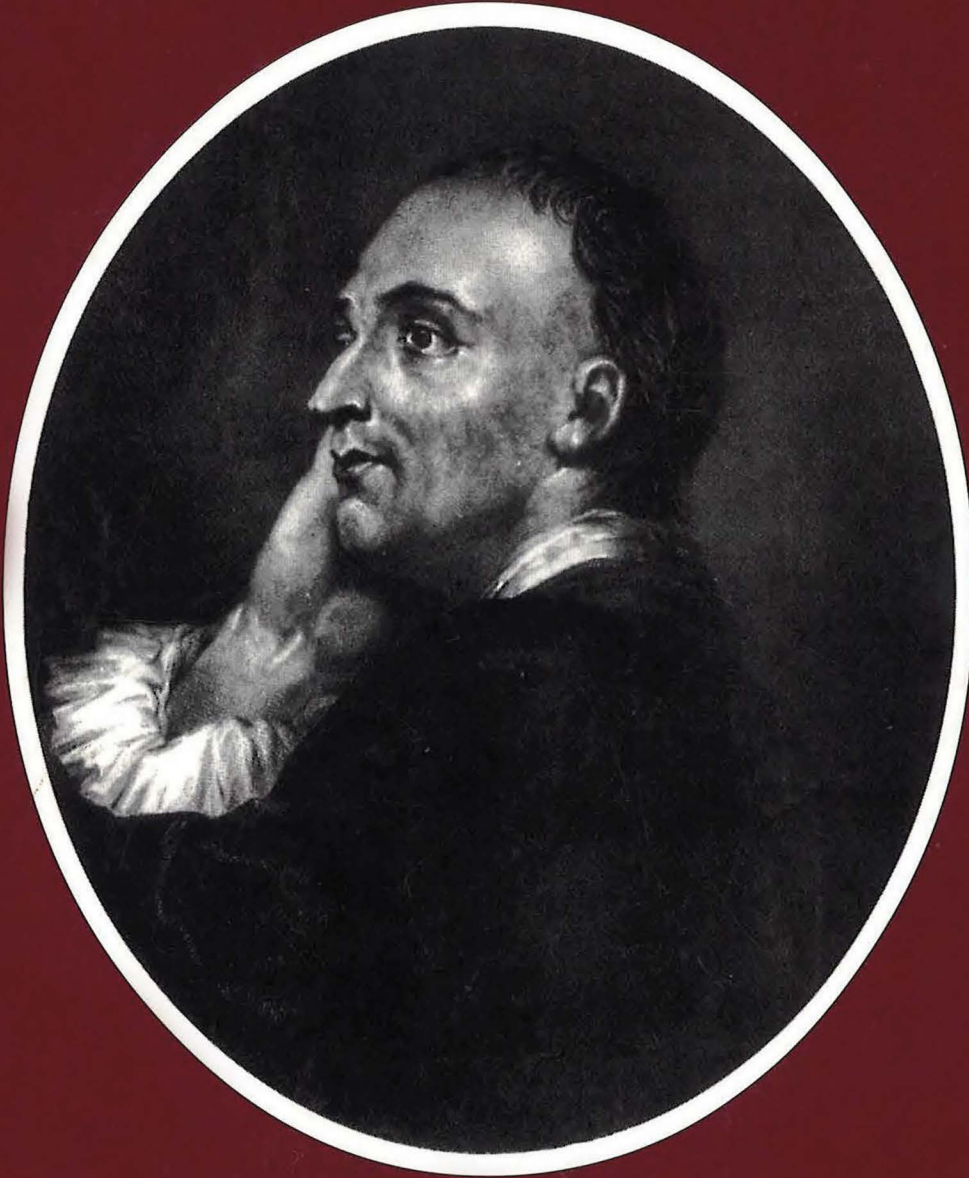


Jan Blomsted

SHAME AND GUILT

Diderot's Moral Rhetoric



JYVÄSKYLÄ STUDIES IN THE ARTS

Jan Blomstedt
Shame and Guilt
Diderot's Moral Rhetoric

Esitetään Jyväskylän yliopiston humanistisen tiedekunnan suostumuksella
julkisesti tarkastettavaksi yliopiston vanhassa juhlasalissa (S212)
helmikuun 14. päivänä 1998 klo 12.

Academic dissertation to be publicly discussed, by permission of
the Faculty of Humanities of the University of Jyväskylä,
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UNIVERSITY OF JYVÄSKYLÄ

JYVÄSKYLÄ 1998

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JYVÄSKYLÄ STUDIES IN THE ARTS 61

Jan Blomstedt
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UNIVERSITY OF JYVÄSKYLÄ

JYVÄSKYLÄ 1998

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URN:ISBN:978-951-39-7880-8
ISBN 978-951-39-7880-8 (PDF)
ISSN 0075-4633

ISBN 951-39-0073-8
ISSN 0075-4633

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Jyväskylä University Printing House, Jyväskylä
and ER-Paino Ky, Lievestuore

ABSTRACT

Blomstedt, Jan
Shame and Guilt: Diderot's Moral Rhetoric
Jyvaskyla: University of Jyvaskyla 1998, 148 p.
(Jyvaskyla Studies in the Arts,
ISSN 0075-4633; 61)
ISBN 951-39-0073-8
Diss.

The subject of this dissertation is the implicit and explicit morality of Denis Diderot's fiction, his novels and stories, with regard to two moral traditions, defined as shame morality and guilt morality.

The social framework of the French Enlightenment was the Republic of Letters, which emphasized the importance of habits and public opinion, and favored shame morality over guilt morality.

Guilt morality is primarily concerned with individual conscience, and shame morality with social esteem. The 'philosophes' of the Enlightenment were most often critical towards religion. Moral sentiments, such as guilt and remorse, were seen as relics of Christianity.

As the liberation of the individual is an important aspect of Diderot's fiction and characterology, the problem of guilt, which in Diderot's case can be called enlightened guilt, becomes an implicit and essential part of his moral rhetoric. This 'rhetoric of distance' frequently resorts to irony and challenges the reader to independently judge the ambiguities presented, according to his/her moral values and identity, or conscience.

Key words: Blind spots, character, dialogue, Direct/Indirect View, moral irony

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This study would not have been possible without the financial support from This Wihuri Foundation, to which I wish to express my gratitude. I am also indebted to my supervisor Professor Tarmo Kunnas for his many advices and remarks, to Professor Eero Tarasti for his encouragement and moral support, and to Dr Timo Kaitaro for our enlightening conversations on Denis Diderot's philosophy. Dr Joanna Zach-Blonska kindly accepted to be my first reader and was always swift in giving her spontaneous and insightful comments, which were of great inspiration to me. Last but not least, I wish to thank Dr Kathy Badigan for reading the first draft of my text and for correcting my language. She is not, of course, responsible for the possible errors I may have made in rewriting certain parts at a later stage.

Helsinki, November 1997
Jan Blomstedt

I INTRODUCTION

The intention of this study is to examine the aspects of shame and _{g u}ilt in the literary work of Denis Diderot as well as the moral conceptions of his epoch, the 18th century. As Diderot was one of the great 'philosophes' of the French Enlightenment, the question arises, whether a literary study can add anything to what philosophers have hitherto discovered in his work. If we assume that Diderot's fiction was the laboratory of his ideas, the answer could well be no. But if we hold that fiction often generates new meanings to the ideas it is presumed to express by the aid of narration and _{fi g u}ral language, then a literary study should try to bring out those meanings. Its aim would not be to reconstruct an ideology, but to respond to the ways in which a text allows - or negotiates - possible interpretations, through clues, situations, tropes, characters, and irony.

The basic assumption of this study is that morality is not only about moral ideas. What Diderot made of his ideas in his literary work (his stories, novels, plays) certainly requires an understanding of those ideas, but not at the expense of seeing beyond them and relating them to the traditions and patterns of morality, and to the changing rhetoric of shame and guilt.

Diderot was a writer of a special kind, a 'philosophe'. Its English equivalent 'philosopher' does not quite render the 18th century meaning of the French word. The philosopher is one who constructs or criticizes systems of thought; his interests are more theoretical than practical. The 18th century philosophe was not indifferent to theory, but theory was only one facet of his social engagement. Philosophe, says Peter Gay, "is a French word for an international type", and for the use of the French word there is a particular reason: "in France the encounter of the Enlightenment with the Establishment was the most dramatic: in 18th century France, abuses were glaring enough to invite the most scathing criticism, while the machinery of repression was inefficient enough to permit critics adequate room for maneuver.(...) The French philosophe, being the most belligerent, was the purest specimen" (1977, 10). In fact, for the Enlightenment, the terms 'philosophy' and 'criticism' did not merely mean allied activities, "they were synonyms" (ib. 130).

Diderot may not have been as "belligerent" as Voltaire, but he was one of the

most ebullient philosophes and represented well the historical aspect of the philosophes' undertaking, as described by Gay: "the dialectical interplay of their appeal to antiquity, their tension with Christianity, their pursuit of modernity" (1977, 8). The philosophes were, in Peter Gay's definition, "modern pagans" (ib.). Diderot was well read in Classical literature, and allusions to ancients flowed lightly from his pen. Throughout his work, says Peter France, "we can see how his thinking and writing are nourished by the presence of earlier writers" (1983, 18).

A philosophe was observant of how people really lived, and less restricted than the academic philosopher in his choice of literary form. However, especially the letter became a dominant form of writing in the 18th century, and the letter was later transformed into the newsletter and into the journal (Goodman 1994, 137).

I understand the term 'philosophe' as a modification of the 17th century 'moraliste'. Both terms imply a literary attitude, an emphasis on the social usefulness of art. The moralistes of the 17th century (La Fontaine, La Rochefoucauld, Moliere, La Bruyere) were not simply writers who preached morality but who studied 'morals' in the sense of habits or manners (moeurs) and 'human nature'. The philosophes, unlike the moralistes, wanted to improve social and political conditions. There was an aspect of engagement, but also of literary continuity, in their work.

A number of studies have been written on Diderot's ideas (not only moral ideas) with little concern for the literary form in which these ideas were often shaped and tested; the dialogue form. Dialogue is not only talking in turns, one having the correct ideas, the other the incorrect ones. Surely dialogue differs from two interrupted monologues; it creates a new source of meaning (Maranhao 1990, 18). This is a question of rhetoric: how meaning is produced in co-operation. Drawing a neat line between Diderot's rhetoric and philosophy would be difficult (take *Le Reve de d'Alembert* for example) and senseless. There is an interaction between ideas and characters. Characters absorb ideas and turn them into self-saving caricatures of both those ideas and their spokesmen; in dialogue ideas are given a 'voice' and 'read' against the background of the character voicing them.

Friedrich Nietzsche once came to an interesting observation: "Man widerspricht oft einer Meinung, während uns eigentlich nur der Ton, mit dem sie vorgetragen wurde, unsympathisch ist" (1954, 237). The word 'tone' (Ton) refers to the presence of rhetoric in the act of expressing an opinion (Meinung). No one knew this better than Diderot. Roger Kempf has resumed it in one sentence: "Diderot ne s'adresse pas à l'oreille d'un sourd" (1976, 113). To 'hear' the tone is to imagine the materiality of a character. The question of character in its mental-material entirety is connected to how meanings are produced in Diderot's dialogues.

Formally, my intention is to carry out a literary research and to focus on Diderot's verbal art, the way he used words to create metaphors, characters, situations, moral irony, clues to be caught, meanings to be completed. In practice, to do this I need certain historical, psychological and rhetorical concepts.

1. One may construct a brilliant moral philosophy, but still lack moral sensibility or a psychology of virtue. Passion, sentiment and sensibility were issues Diderot simply could not overlook, important as they were to the sentimental morality of the 18th century. At the same time, some moral aspects of Diderot's work are not

explicit in his philosophy, although they were related to the mentality which contributed to the formulation of his ideas.

These were above all the negative aspects of morality, the problem of moral pain, shame and guilt. Cultural anthropology has used the distinction between shame and guilt cultures in its comparative studies. A classic in this field is Ruth Benedict's *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword*, an American study on Japanese culture, published in 1946. In this study Japanese culture was presented as a typical shame culture. "True shame cultures", Benedict wrote, "rely on external sanctions for good behavior, not, as true guilt cultures do, on an internalized conviction of sin" (1946, 223). Some cultures, like the North American, can be seen as mixed shame and guilt cultures. E.R. Dodd's literary and historical study *The Greeks and the irrational*, published in 1959, offers an account of the development of the early Greek civilization from archaic shame morality to the later guilt morality of Plato, if not the tragedians.

It is only natural that even psychologists - Sigmund Freud among others - have been interested in the problem of shame and guilt. The Freudian position is that we are driven by the 'pleasure-principle' and only follow the 'reality-principle' to avoid moral pain in one or another of its forms. It has been said that Freud had no consistent theory of shame (Broncek 1991, 12). On the other hand, Freud's theory of guilt emphasized the fear of authority, originally external, later internalized as what he called the Super-ego. To a certain degree this confuses the mechanism of guilt with that of shame. Shame is concerned with the gaze and judgement of others (Williams 1993, 82). It is the "emotion of self-protection" (Taylor 1985, 81). In this sense the Freudian Super-ego stands for internalized shame. Guilt, by contrast, has the potential of liberating itself from the fear of authorities and punitive consequences, of passing from the borrowed morality of the Super-ego to the "free morality of conscience where oughts, commands, and prohibitions have become moral guides and not moral policemen" (McKenzie 1962, 49). This happens when guilt takes the form of an inner dialogue, in which the basic issue is whether the moral agent can identify with its past, present, or expected actions and attitudes. To Freud guilt had its basis in the renunciation of instinct owing to fear of the internal authority (1961, 75). This does not quite account for a conscious acceptance of guilt-feelings, and that is what realistic and creative guilt is mostly about. As an impulse to correct and renew one's moral premises or habits, guilt can have a creative function in a person's life.

Diderot had no specific theory of shame and guilt, but the way he treats shame (honte) in his writings has much in common with the Freudian idea of guilt. On the other hand, Diderot did indirectly approach the notion of realistic guilt in his theory on character and his idea of freedom as "autodetermination de l'esprit humain au milieu d'un déterminisme généralisé," (Schmitt 1977, 70). For guilt to be realistic, it must be based on moral values which have become the real interests of the Self in its striving towards rational and moral unity, and not only borrowed labels for fears and wishful thinking.

Since Freud psychologists have been aware of the problematic and repressive aspects of morality. James Gilligan is one of them: "Moral beliefs and value judgements", he contends, "are simply the cognitive counterparts of the painful affects that underlie all morality and all neurosis, namely, shame and guilt" (1976, 145). The idea is that morality not only helps people to live with one another (which

is its explicit function), it also creates conflicts and problems that could have been avoided with 'love' (consideration, flexibility, forgiveness). For Gilligan, love goes beyond morality, for it transcends the conflict between egoism and altruism, which he sees as distinctive to the "moral relationship" (ib. 158).

Gilligan has a point. One does not love for the sake of being moral and virtuous. But as soon as it is suggested that love "should" be mature rather than immature, morality comes into the picture. Here it may be said that a distinction between ethics and morality is needed. The word 'ethics' would refer to the kind of person one is supposed to aspire to be, the kind of life one is incited to lead. The word 'morality' would refer to the prescriptive code one is obliged to follow on pain of sanction, internal or external (Rajchman 1991, 90). However, the problem with guilt is that it is not merely a 'punishment' but also an impetus, an appeal to moral freedom. The question of how painful guilt is (and it never is a pure pleasure) depends on how free the moral agent is to respond to the challenge; helplessness increases the pain, self-determination can turn it into creative energy. Guilt is comparable to reason in the sense that it does not give the right answers, but helps to find the way to the answers. With this in mind, I prefer to hold to 'morality' as my conceptual tool and to complexify its meaning by introducing two ways of handling it: the direct and the indirect view (Stephen Hudson's distinction, of which more will be said below).

Love is certainly an important theme in Diderot, but one can hardly claim it to be the key to all moral problems. Love is a passion, and passions tend to be problematic. The 'neurotic' aspect of morality is obviously present in Diderot's fiction, more so than in his official moral theory. It can be disputed whether Diderot had any moral theory. Eric-Emmanuel Schmitt claims that "Diderot reflechira sur la morale, mais n'ecrira pas de morale" (1997, 83). In fact, Diderot did write about virtue, the cognitive counterpart of moral pain, on many occasions, in his letters, in his notes to the Shaftesbury-translation and in his *Essai sur les regnes de Claude et Neron*, for example. In his *Plan d'une universite*, we find his definition of morality: "la science qui fait decouler de l'idée du vrai bonheur, et des rapports actuels de l'homme avec ses semblables, ses devoirs et toutes les lois justes" (OC, III, 490). The idea of happiness is central to Diderot. By his 'official theory' I mean simply that he believed in the equivalence of virtue and happiness, and that could only mean: if you are not virtuous, the consequence is displeasure, unhappiness.

Diderot was not very precise about the quality and function of that displeasure. And yet the difference between shame and guilt was important to the mentality of the 18th century and to Diderot's fiction. (Shame and remorse are words that crop up in his texts, but they usually take on the meaning of something 'unnatural').

2. The word 'mentality' has become familiar from the history of mentalities. It refers to the mental structures characteristic of certain periods of history, structures that are partly known, partly unconscious to the people living amidst them. Though I dare not call myself a historian of mentalities, my approach is partly influenced by this psychohistorical notion. According to Michel Vovelle, the term 'history of mentalities' was defined by Ernest Labrousse in a seminar held in 1965 as "l'histoire des resistances au changement" (1978, 79).

Ernest Labrousse's definition is interesting and useful even for a literary study which, like mine, attempts to grasp some specific features of the 18th century and the Enlightenment project, known for its fervor to promote change and progress. If one agrees that morality has to do with mental defenses (against shame or guilt, which imply changes in the individual psyche), it is not surprising that a collective mentality has something defensive about it, too. In the end, a mentality resisting change also resists dramatic disturbances in its moral defences.

One sign of such 'resistance to change' (co-existing with an ideology of change) is the fact that the French Enlightenment found its proper arena within the Republic of Letters, which the 'progressive' 18th century inherited from the 'conservative' 17th century with its codes of respectability and refinement. The art of dialogue (which became Diderot's distinctive form of expression) had its roots in the 'polite society' created under the influence of a well-behaving, conversation-loving nobility and its shame morality. This morality was a pacified version of its earlier martial and chivalric traditions. For there had been a remarkable "pacification of France" following the religious wars and the Fronde; it brought along a new emphasis on public opinion (Goodman 1994, 237).

More generally speaking, shame morality is a tradition which goes back to the ancient Greeks, to the Homeric man, his sense of honor (and shame), his enjoyment of public esteem (Dodds 1957, 17), whereas for the origins of guilt morality we must turn to the Jews and to the appearance of the Christian God. In the Judea-Christian tradition guilt was equivalent to the sense of sin, a cause for self-doubt if not self-hatred. This sense of original sin can be called primitive guilt. In this study the working assumption is that there are more complex forms of guilt, and the Enlightenment itself contributed dialectically and unknowingly to their development.

The 17th century mentality was a mixture of shame and guilt morality. On the one hand, there was Moliere, on the other, Pascal. Moliere's comedies are concerned with shame morality: they purport to ridicule vices and deviations from the ideals of honorability. Pascal is loyal to the Christian idea of guilt; it takes the form of despair and self-hatred. Pascal denounces the central value of shame morality, the enjoyment of public esteem, as vanity. La Rochefoucauld is in the middle of the two in terms of shame and guilt. *Amour-propre*, his basic idea, comes from the Augustinian conception of sin and guilt, like Pascal's, but his personal (and aristocratic) taste goes for shame morality and for preserving honorability in the eyes of 'le monde'.

Diderot came from the people, from a religious family, and was brought up in the spirit of guilt morality. Originally, he had a clerical career in mind (Furbank 1992, 12). Later he would declare himself an atheist and detach himself from his Christian background. His first independent philosophical work was *Pensees philosophiques* (1746), intended as a sceptical counterblast to Pascal's *Pensees*. He had previously translated Shaftesbury's *Inquiry concerning Merit and Virtue* into French (*L'Essai sur le Merite et la Vertu*, 1745) which in its basic principles stood for shame morality: virtue, according to Shaftesbury, depended on participation in the happiness of others and the desire for their good opinion. In England the Shaftesburyan philosophy of virtue was criticized by Samuel Johnson, whose views on human nature were darker. For Johnson, the need for 'penal sanctions' arose

precisely because no man could be obliged by nature to prefer the happiness of others to his own. Even Shaftesbury, however naive Johnson might consider his theories, conceived of virtue in a way that was in general accordance with Christian morality (Kenshur 1993, 211).

The demands of shame morality became familiar to Diderot with the standing he gained in the Republic of Letters. But to some degree he resisted those demands and sought, in his fiction, other moral strategies, which would not mean a falling back to the traditional, and primitive, idea of guilt.

3. *In Human Character and morality* Stephen D. Hudson refers to two different conceptions of what morality is about. He calls them the Direct View and the Indirect View:

Roughly, the Direct View holds that morality is primarily about acts or conduct.(...) Other moral phenomena - for example, moral agents and their traits, capacities, and motives - and their assessment are seen as secondary to or derivative from (assessments of) primary moral phenomena. The second conception, the Indirect View, denies the primacy of acts asserted by the Direct View; instead, it holds that moral agency and human character possess equal standing or are even more fundamental than acts. (1989, x)

Stephen D. Hudson is a philosopher. When defending "a version of the Indirect View" he aims at formulating a moral theory, which, as he admits, is not original in its basic premises (ib. xiv).

In literature the Indirect View has a long history, as one understands from Hudson's claim that the historical tradition of the Indirect View includes Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle as its foremost advocates (ib. 28). Socrates is best known as the hero of Plato's dialogues, Plato was the poet-philosopher who wrote those dialogues, and Aristotle is known not only as the author of *Nicomachean Ethics* but of *Poetics* as well. Even David Hume, on whose theories Hudson concentrates, wrote dialogues (his *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* appeared posthumously in 1779). Hume was connected to literature also as a personal essayist. The connection between literature and the Indirect View seems obvious to me, though of minor interest to Hudson.

But, on the other hand, is the distinction to which Hudson referred always so obvious to literary scholars, who sometimes are happy enough to extract a general 'message' from singular works of literature, by saying, for instance, that *Le Neveu de Rameau* "implies on every page that Diderot believed his age to be a period of moral and cultural decline" (O'Gorman 1971, 218)? If one wonders why Diderot, to imply this, portrayed a curious character who still puzzles our minds, the answer would be that decadence is dangerous for the very reason that it can be so charming. The Indirect View presented through a dialogue between two characters is thus explained in terms of Diderot's alleged Direct View, in terms of how people, according to Diderot, should (not) live.

In the quoted sentence the concept of 'decline' emphasizes the generality of the problem: there are universal principles which people should live by, and if they fail to do so, moral and cultural decline follows. No other conclusion could be more typical of the Direct View, for it assumes that morality is about establishing general principles by which our choices and acts should be guided. As a philosophe, Diderot

may have had such principles. But as the author of *Le Neveu de Rameau*, he had to subordinate these principles to a far more psychological and individual concern: the portrayal of one character (Lui) in dialogue with another character (Moi). And they both, to use Hudson's apt metaphor, carry different "mental baggages" (1986, 7) with them.

Mental baggages: experiences, desires, habits, and defences that form character - this should be essential to the Indirect View. It is what we expect from literary characters: we expect them to be more than just walking and talking abstractions, so that even their most general ideas have a personal accent.

The question is, whether these "mental baggages" are needed only to give poetic or psychological color to characters, or whether they are somehow morally meaningful. The Indirect View, to my understanding, takes the latter stand. It does not deny the importance of the question: How should one live? It "only denies that the relation between the question and the answer is straightforward" (ib. 5). On the road from idea to character, and vice versa, these mental baggages are crucial evidence for making moral judgements.

I would add that they affect the way characters individually relate to shame and guilt: how strongly they resist the one or the other feeling, how vulnerable they are to moral pain, how they escape or confront the experience. Even when surveying shame and guilt as specific moralities from a broad historical perspective, the Indirect View reminds us that the experiences of shame and guilt are not quite the same everywhere. They can and they do vary from one individual to another.

Diderot's theory of organization, a materialist theory which entails a conception of individual character and attaches great value to unity of character, indirectly deals with these issues, the crucial question in organization being its self-control and its relation to the environing world.

In chapter II (entitled In the Republic of Letters) I will apply the Direct View to the moral principles valued in the 18th century 'public sphere', as if the fundamental question were: How to live in this society - if one happened to be a man of letters? After this, in chapter III (Morality, Obstacles, and Character), I will study how Diderot developed the materialist basis for the kind of Indirect View we find in his fiction.

4. Whenever the question is asked - What is moral, what is morality about? - we run into certain basic concepts. The 18th century had great faith in the concept of 'nature'. Basic concepts were different in the Middle Ages: 'sin', 'humility', 'faith', 'soul' impregnated the moral vocabulary; 'self-sacrifice' ranked higher than 'self-interest', which in the 18th century was proposed by Helvetius as the basis of civic morality. On the other hand, few centuries have been as eloquent about virtue as the 18th. In the words of Henri Plard: "Si la vertu n'est qu'un mot, il n'est guere de siecle ou il ait autant resonne et ete affecte de tant de sens que celui des Lumieres" (1985, 7).

What do these differences tell us? They tell us two things: 1 philosophical views on morality do change in the course of history, and 2 we do not have to take all these changes too literally. We are faced with certain rhetorical challenges as soon as we look upon morality as a form of communication, for "new accounts of the good life regularly and rapidly turn out to be variations of old ones, subject to a

predictable range of decisive objections" (Becker 1992, 15).

Morality is not only communicated once (by parents to their children), it is communicated throughout our adult lives: our acts are judged, we judge others, we present moral views, and we appeal to feelings. Moral communication can thus be divided into two levels: the cognitive (concepts, norms, virtues, vices) and the affective (praise and esteem, shame and guilt). These two levels are closely intervoven in the fig_ur_al language of moral narratives, stories with a didactic end. As to Diderot's contes, I would hesitate to call them 'didactic'. They are more like 'moral experiments' - they tend to pose questions rather than offer didactic guidance. Yet the two levels can be found in them as well.

In chapter IV (Rhetoric and Dialogue) I start by asking what is actually meant by the word 'rhetoric'. Is all communication rhetorical or only certain kinds of communication? I am not so much interested in finding one overall theory on rhetoric as in relating two different definitions to my theme: morality. These two definitions correspond by and large to the distinctions I presented earlier: between shame and guilt morality, on the one hand, and between the Direct and Indirect View, on the other.

If rhetoric is persuasion, as the traditional definition goes (Robrieux 1993, 2), then shame morality should be the ideal basis for rhetoric. In shame morality the stress is on social prestige and on public opinion. One is expected to react, not only to an intelligent argument, but also to the lures of social esteem, to the prospect of belonging to the ideal (rhetorically idealized) group of people: the smart or the virtuous ones, for example. I imagine that the Direct View offers the most clean and respectful way to such persuasion, that is, by presenting ideas of how one ought to live, to think, to feel, to relate to some specific issue in order to match the right sort of people (and to avoid shame). There are other aspects in persuasion than those involving verbal exchange, but they are irrelevant here.

On the other hand, if one defines rhetoric the way Michel Meyer does, as negotiating on distance between subjects (1993, 21), then I suppose that guilt morality is the most appropriate basis for such communication, for guilt morality challenges the individual subject to look inwards rather than outwards in order to judge and do justice to others. This, in a situation where one is not alone but communicating with another, necessarily implies distance and an agreement, not always a fully conscious one, on the distance between the subjects. This is often the case when reading literature; the text, the written word, is between the subjects, the author and the reader, and prevents a direct contact between them- although one can always imagine that this is not so: a personal style can simulate presence, and the reader can experience the author as a friend or a teacher. Meyer's definition hardly excludes persuasive intent: persuasion is also a form of distance. But as soon as distance becomes the distinctive quality of the relation, the "mental baggages" of the subjects gain weight, and the Indirect View has an advantage over the Direct: judgements relate to character and to personal experience more than to impersonal social distinctions.

What kind of dialogue, then, should the reader (the critic, the scholar) establish with Diderot's texts? Should a study, like this one, also comprise a dialogue with Diderot?

5. In an essay published in *Le Debat* (1989, 158-166) and entitled *Une critique dialogique* Tzvetan Todorov defined his ideal of criticism: a dialogue with the author on his ideas.

The critic sees the author as an Other. There is and can be no fusion between the two; this is how the dialogue begins and becomes possible. The author addresses his words to the reader (the critic), and the critic replies by expressing his differing views to the author. In Todorov's words:

La critique dialogique parle, non des oeuvres, mais aux oeuvres, ou plutôt: avec les oeuvres; elle se refuse d'éliminer aucune des deux voix en présence. Le texte critique, n'est pas un objet que doit prendre en charge un 'métalangage' mais un discours que rencontre celui du critique; l'auteur est un 'tu' et non pas un 'il', un interlocuteur avec qui on débat de valeurs humaines. (1984, 163)

There are two problems.

Firstly, what if the text under study refuses to be treated as the Voice of the author; what if there is a plurality of voices instead of one; if the text diverges from the Platonic model of dialogue by undermining the 'master's' leadership in favor of the reader's as to making the questions and finding the proper answers?

In *Nous et les autres* (1989) Todorov applies his method to Diderot's *Supplément au voyage de Bougainville*. He departs from the assumption that Diderot is saying something definite in this text. More likely he is posing problems. At any rate, there is no One Voice dominating the text (as we will see in chapter V), and the Platonic model of dialogue has been replaced with a more reader-oriented one. The consequence of this plurality of voices, as well of the active/ dialogic role given to the reader, is that instead of theses we should look for themes and ways in which they are rhetorically developed and prepared for further elaboration. The model the text presents for a dialogue with the reader is thus closer to co-operation with the author (or the text) than a dispute with the author about his ideas.

Todorov's method presupposes that there can be an unmediated contact between the author and the reader ("you" and "me"). This presumption is debatable. It becomes problematic as soon as we enter the domain of fiction. In fiction we are dealing with what was termed above as the Indirect View. Between the reader and the author there is the intermediary agency of character(s). These inter-agents represent their own viewpoints. The author's ideas are thus significantly distanced. The question arises: Is the text granted a 'benefit of doubt', a chance to prove that it has more to say than the author is expected to say? If the critic is not careful with the moral ironies of the polygonal text, he runs the risk of producing an ideological reduction of what the text is saying, directly and indirectly.

Secondly, there is the 'psychohistorical' problem related to collective mentalities. Andre Burguiere, an historian of mentalities, defines the problem as follows:

Tout se passe comme si chaque société avait besoin d'annuler sa transparence pour exister, de brouiller les pistes aussi bien pour elle-même que pour le monde extérieur. L'anthropologue est familiarisé, depuis longtemps avec ce principe d'opacité, qui caractérise toute réalité sociale. Il sait qu'il faut toujours contourner ce qu'une société déclare d'elle-même pour la comprendre. (1978, 144)

This brings us back to the question of resistance to change. The simple interpretation of the *Supplement* is that Diderot saw in the Tahitian way of life, as described by Bougainville, a model of sexual freedom. Not perhaps a model to be imported as such to France, but a model of natural morality all the same. In *Nous et les autres*, Todorov himself is inclined to interpret Diderot this way. He claims that Diderot "souhaiterait éliminer la honte et soumettre la vie sociale directement à l'intérêt" (1989, 34). The wish to "eliminate shame" means, according to Todorov, that Diderot aimed at destroying morality, replacing it with nature, and here Todorov, not surprisingly, disagrees. He disregards the problem of 'opacity' in the Tahitian system, its resistance to change, its defensive conception of nature. In sum, Todorov's dialogue halts.

Diderot was perfectly aware of the problem of opacity, and the dialogues embedded in the text give clues to that knowledge or scepticism. I intend to deal with this issue in chapter V, and my answer to the question whether my study is a dialogue with Diderot is a reserved yes and no-answer: yes in the sense that I am a subjective reader of Diderot, and no in the sense that I try to be more objective (or more apologetic, as Todorov would say) in my writing. I agree with Todorov that there can be no fusion of the two, the author and the critic, but I disagree with him on the issue of distance. I do not see my distance to Diderot as an invitation to correct his ideas. Yet critical distance has a meaning. And here, again, I respect Nietzsche's advice in *Menschliches, Allzumenschliches*: "das Werdende und Unvollkommene zu fordern, als es in seiner Unvollkommenheit zu durchschauen und zu verleugnen" (1954, 330). One should attempt to further that which is evolving and imperfect, rather than to penetrate its imperfections and reject it.

As I see my task in this study, negotiating moral meanings for the text would be a better description of my method than the Todorovian 'dialogue'.

6. In his analysis of Diderot's novel *La Religieuse* P.N.Furbank finds "a combined system of three interests" in Suzanne's, the heroine's, narration (1992, 227). The expression is taken from Diderot's *Essai sur la peinture*, in which Diderot develops an idea of three different interests in the painterly composition of a scene: a man giving a friend a reading. Diderot imagines himself as the listener: how would he look, how would he pose his arms etc.

Ajoutez un troisième personnage à la scène, il subira la loi des deux premiers; c'est un système combiné, de trois intérêts. Qu'il en survienne cent, deux cents, mille; la même loi s'observera. (...) Peu à peu chacun se résoudra à se départir d'une portion de son intérêt; et la masse se composera. (OC, X, 498)

This combined system of interests is, according to P.N.Furbank, working implicitly at the three different levels of Suzanne's narration: "She has been telling the story of her wrongs for its own sake, she has been telling it for the special benefit of the Marquis, and she (or Diderot) is telling it, over the Marquis's head, to the world at large" (1992, 227). Marquis de Croismare is the 'listener', the gentleman to whom Suzanne addresses her letters.

Although applied in this case only to *La Religieuse*, the theory of three interests can be extended to concern Diderot's dialogic method and his moral rhetoric in general. In rhetoric the basic assumption is that a speaker addresses an audience.

The aspect of 'kairos' comes in when the speaker has to cope with the contingency of the moment (Cahn 1993, 69) and with the unpredictable reactions of the audience; kairotic rhetoric is thus typically oral communication. Diderot's written dialogues are designed to convey this oral and kairotic quality of speech to the reader of the final and unchanging text. Instead of one dialogue there are two: the first is the oral dialogue, and the second is less a dialogue than a negotiation between the text and its reader on the implicit and derived meanings produced in the reading of the 'oral' dialogue.

As a materialist, Diderot saw in orality (in transcriptions of oral dialogues, to be accurate) a way to communicate physical presence. As a naturalist, he understood that speaking was more natural than writing. But as a moralist, he chose writing. As morality, in his view, could not disregard the natural world, neither could writing separate itself entirely from speaking. Walter Ong propounds a similar view in *Orality and literacy*: "Spoken words are always modifications of a total, existential situation, which always engages the body (1982, 67). Writing, again, heightens consciousness: "Alienation from a natural milieu can be good for us and indeed in many ways essential for full human life. To live and to understand fully, we need not only proximity but also distance" (ib, 82).

Both aspects are present in Diderot's rhetoric: the proximity of oral dialogue, and the distance created by writing. Being the "troisième personnage" in the painterly (rhetorical) setting, the reader is a witness to the 'oral' event, but also distanced from it, so that he/she can move freely between observation and interpretation, thus making the physical (expressions, voices, positions) continuous with the textual, the 'beyondness' which offers the reader a possibility to detect the hidden meanings in the situation, or rather 'between' the situations.

The system of combined interests has consequences concerning Diderot's theory of fiction. Furbank writes: "Fiction, for him, signified not a story, but a spectacle of somebody telling a story" (1992, 361). The act of communication is the link between the story and the reader; as a 'go-between' it intermediates between the inside and the outside, the external events and the internal reactions of the reader, and, whether he intended it or not, between the shame and guilt aspects of those events.

How did Diderot come to adopt the dialogic method? He was, of course, familiar with Plato's dialogues. Socrates had become one of his heroes. Obviously, he had read Fontenelle's *Entretiens sur la pluralité des mondes*, which was a model for the popular scientific expositions of the Enlightenment, and other philosophical dialogues, some of them by English authors (Shaftesbury and Berkeley). However, the model of philosophical dialogue did not fully satisfy his need to see the dialogic method evolve from its pedagogic aims towards a more 'realistic' aesthetic of characterization. As Eric-Emmanuel Schmitt has pointed out, there are two forms of dialogue in Diderot's work: "l'héritage, le dialogue épédectique; et l'invention, le dialogue heuristique" (1997, 269). As to Plato, Diderot admired his dialogues not so much for their dialectic as for his art of characterization, sense of situation, and ease of conversation (ib. 275).

7. Although Diderot's correspondence is conventionally included in his literary work - especially his letters to Sophie Volland, which have been described by certain

scholars as "un sommet de la littérature amoureuse" (Bonnet 1987, 105) -, I would insist on the distinction between fiction and other, autobiographical or bipolar forms of writing, in which the 'three interests' do not appear as fundamental as in Diderot's fiction. The letters to Sophie Volland tell us a great deal about Diderot's ideas and writing practices, but, unlike Diderot's fiction, they offer little space for negotiations with a third party and, with the exception of a few anecdotes, no foothold for an Indirect View. Therefore, I regard these letters as a source of information, and not as an object of study as such. However, a few points concerning the free form and certain expressed ideas (related to the theme of morality) need to be discussed here.

The 'freedom' of the letter had not always been the rule in French epistolary art; indeed, there had been other rules. The evolution of epistolary art, as Janet Gurkin Altman has pointed out, was closely tied to shifts in the political and cultural organization of French society (1989, 418). The poetics of the genre depended on a politics (one could even say: a Direct View on morality); letter writing in the 17th century was conducted under the watchful eye of the nation-state and was an important means for forming civic identity. The conventions that governed letter writing throughout the classical period were established largely through anthologies of model letters. They were designed to teach courtly manners and the code of 'honnetete' to the wider public. In the 18th century, due to the impact of Madame de Sevigne's unconventional and personal letters and the revival of the Erasmian model of 'epistolary liberty', as the ideal was propounded in Erasmus' *De Conscribendis Epistolis* from 1522, the personal letter returned to preeminence after a century of courtly discipline (ib. 416-418).

The history of the letter has been the history of models and conventions, by which the epistolary subject, the 'I' of the letter, had defined its relation to the recipient, the 'you'. However free in form and egalitarian in tone Diderot's letters to Sophie Volland may seem, they also display a need to place themselves in the tradition of epistolary art (in a wide sense, including Montaigne's semi-epistolary *Essais*) and to advance certain general (moral, philosophical, and journalist) purposes within the obvious but insufficient privacy of the exchange. It is difficult to imagine Diderot writing love letters - or being in love - without having anything else to express than his love.

In his letters to Sophie (actually, Louise-Henriette; Sophie was a nickname, apparently alluding to her wisdom) we find a man who shows enthusiasm for virtue and is concerned with the moral state of mankind. He persuades Sophie to believe that by loving him she would help him to become a better man: "Aimez-moi done toujours, afin que je craigne toujours le vice" (1978, I, 42). He imagines himself living together with Sophie in a small and modest chateau; their happiness would consist of "le bien que nous ferons et par celui qu'on dira de nous" (ib. 78). Their private virtue would depend not only on happiness but on the good opinion of others. The idea, also expressed in *De la poesie dramatique* and including Diderot's friend Friedrich Melchior Grimm to the circle of moral censors, is that virtue calls for "moral witnesses that one must have in mind when one writes or acts" (Kaitaro 1995, 131). Such ideas reflect the shame morality typical of the Republic of Letters.

Diderot's letters are directed at what the Enlightenment as a literary movement saw as the ideal reader: the woman, free from prejudices, a facilitator of movement among men from different social classes - she "stood close not only to the bourgeois

of historical reality but also to the new ideal, derived from the bourgeois, of the emancipated, detached, enlightened individual, the abstract, universal citizen who was no longer defined and restricted by a fixed social role" (Gossman 1989, 489). In Diderot's eyes, even Sophie's sexual identity was unfixed: "ma Sophie est homme et femme quand il lui plait" (1978, I, 39). As a woman Sophie was perhaps to some degree an idealized man: she represented for Diderot not so much a physical presence (their correspondance lasted for three decades, and they lived for most of that time separate from one another) but a mental companion, a kind of a faraway conscience with which (whom) one could be at ease and always enter an inner dialogue in the form of writing, a system combining proximity with distance, confession with the request of moral support, selfhood with the risks and comforts of an internalized other.

8 Efforts have been made to find in Diderot's versatile work an underlying principle of unity. It has been presented as either epistemological or political. No doubt one could venture to show that the underlying principle in his work is not epistemological or political, but purely moral, some moral Idea. Such an attempt would be caught in a vicious circle: assuming that moral unity in a writer's work indicates his greatness, one projects unity to his work in order to show that studying his work is justified by this greatness.

Is the virtue of unity really as impressive as the obstacles and contradictions the writer confronted and dealt with in his writing? Instead of unity, I would look for continuities and recurrent themes, which tend to be stronger and more developed in some works than in others. In order to be continuities they must, however, be present in one form or another in most of the writer's work.

In *Supplement au Voyage de Bougainville* and in *Le Neveu de Rameau* we find some Diderotian continuities in a concentrated form: the art of dialogue and the theme of opacity (we look at intelligible surfaces and yet feel an obstacle, a resistance), but as to another continuity, Diderot's interest in character, *Le Neveu* is richer in moral nuance and psychological observation than the *Supplement*. If we look for sentimental morality, we find *La Religieuse* more representative of that continuity than *Jacques le fataliste* (although the latter has its sentimental traits, too). As to Diderot's plays, can we recognize the moral irony of *Est-il ban? Est-il méchant* in *Le Fils naturel*? No.

The continuities I will be studying are principally these: characterology, opacity, moral irony, and tropes of shame and guilt. In chapter VI (Identity and Alienation) the topic is *Le Neveu de Rameau*. In chapter VII (Resistance and Responsibility) the troping of shame and guilt in Diderot's other novels, his stories and plays will be discussed.

9 Denis Diderot was born on the 5th of October 1713 in Langres. He was the eldest child and was followed by three sisters and a brother. His father Didier was a master cutler, a propertied artisan, who enjoyed the reputation of a wise man in his home town, as we can understand from Diderot's portrayal of him in *Entretien d'un père avec ses enfants*. Despite their differences in opinion, the old cutler came to be for Diderot an incarnation of the most precious virtues: generosity, integrity, fairness, family affection. Apparently, in his own public enthusiasm for virtue the

son tried to live up to this example of excellence (France 1983, 5).

The family was religious. Denis' brother Didier-Pierre became a priest (Denis was to dedicate to him his translation of Earl Shaftesbury's *Inquiry*), and his sister Angelique died mad in a convent. Denis himself went through a phase of extreme piety. He received the tonsure, studied theology and was about to become a Cartusian novice. Instead, he embarked on the career of man of letters. For some time he seems to have led a Bohemian life in Paris, reflected in the description of Lui's temporal poverty in *Le Neveu de Rameau*. Occasionally, Diderot supported himself by writing and selling sermons (Furbank 1992, 13), which shows that the Christian rhetoric remained familiar to him, although he had lost his faith on the way.

By the 1740s Diderot began to gain a reputation and to make friends and allies in the Republic of Letters. He became close to Jean-Jacques Rousseau who later broke off the friendship and reported all the reasons for his diasappointment with Diderot in his *Confessions*. One of them was a sentence in Diderot's play *Le Fils naturel* stating that "il n'y a que le mechant qui soit seul". Rousseau, a loner, took it personally. But Rousseau also complained about his friend's readiness to make promises and his negligence in keeping them, among other things (1903, 327). With Rousseau Diderot used to have lengthy debates over 'conscience', on one's 'own' judgement in contrast to the judgements of others (Furbank 1992, 108). Unlike Rousseau, who in *Emile* had defined conscience as "instinct divin" (1969, 600), Diderot could not easily accept the idea of an 'innate' moral sense: "C'est une vision dont la poesie peut s'accommoder", he wrote in one of his *Salons*, "mais que la philosophie rejette" (QC, XI,25).

Those close to Diderot included also the German Melchior Grimm, who in 1753 started to run a manuscript newsletter called the *Correspondance litteraire*. The journal, despatched through diplomatic channels, had a very select list of subscribers, not more than fifteen. Diderot became a diligent contributor to the journal, and from 1759 he provided Grimm with accounts on the *Salons* of the Academy of Painting and Sculpture, which are among the earliest examples of modern art criticism (France 1983, 11). The *Salons*, as he called his reviews, developed into an art- form, serving his critical and reflective talent and curiosity.

One of his favorite painters, at least for a while, was Jean-Baptiste Greuze. Greuze's style was close to theatre, especially to the 'drame bourgeois' of which Diderot was the theoretician (Furbank 1992, 281). It was an art focused on time and moment, and it seemed to have a narrative, not to say a moral, dimension which pleased the critic: "D'abord le genre me plait; c'est la peinture morale", Diderot wrote in *Salon de 1763*, and went on describing how one of Greuze's paintings, *le Paralytique*, had moved him almost to tears, in this manner, addressing his words to the artist:

Que n'etais-tu à cote, de cette jeune fille qui, regardant la tete de ton Paralytique, s'ecria avec une vivacite channante: 'Ah! mon Dieu, cornrne il me touche! mais si je le regarde encore, je crois que je vais pleurer.' Et que cette jeune fille n'etait-elle la rnienne! je l'aurais reconnue a ce mouvement. Lorsque je vis ce viellard eloquent et pathetique, je sentis cornrne elle mon ame s'attendrir et des pleurs prêts à tomber de mes yeux. (OC, X, 208)

The style illustrates the kind of morality that was typical of the 18th century - it has been termed 'sentimental morality'. Diderot subscribed to the sentimentalist assumption that the main aim of art was to 'affect' the audience. On the other hand, not only his theory on acting (*Le Paradoxe sur le comédien*) but also his own art of fiction shows significant discrepancies with the sentimentalist position. Diderot's oeuvre, as Michael Bell has remarked, presents us with several, partly opposed, models (1983, 90).

In the 1750s Diderot devoted most of his time and energy to the editing of the *Encyclopédie* (co-edited by the mathematician d'Alembert), but he also worked on his own philosophical texts, such as the *Lettre sur les sourds et muets*, following the *Lettre sur les aveugles* from 1749, and *De l'interprétation de la nature*. In the second half of the decade, he was drawn to dramatic expression (*Le Fils naturel*, *Le Père de famille*) and became a dramatic theorist (*De la poésie dramatique*). Diderot himself was ridiculed in a comedy entitled *Les philosophes*, written by Charles Palissot; he was presented as a bombastic charlatan. Diderot's own favorite type of comedy was 'sérieux': the stress was to be on the ordeals of virtue and not on poking fun at vices (as in the art of Molière). Yet his last comedy *Est-il bon? est-il méchant?* comes close to the conventional idea of an amusing comedy.

Diderot was also a political thinker, but his interests in political matters were slow to develop. Throughout the whole of the *Encyclopédie* period he supported political stability and the indivisibility of sovereignty, and did not believe that the people had the right to resist the ruler (OPo, 20). The movement towards the idea of popular sovereignty in his political thought corresponded, as Anthony Strugnell has shown, to the liberation of the individual in his fiction (1973, 59). Faced with the irreducible reality of human individuality Diderot turned away from the idea of universal morality with its strong absolutist connotations, and now argued that sovereign power lied with the people, who were free at any time to reinterpret their contract with their rulers. In this light, his literary and moral work preceded the radicalisation of his political ideas.

In 1748, Diderot wrote his first novel *Les Bijoux indiscrets*, and in the coming years was to develop his story-telling skills, in novels, such as *La Religieuse*, *Jacques le fataliste et son maître*, and *Le Neveu de Rameau*, and in stories - to which it is customary to refer as 'contes et entretiens'. His last work was to be the *Essai sur les régnes de Claude et Neron* (1782).

10. The French Enlightenment period can be seen as a continuation of an earlier crisis: the outbreak of modernity. The Renaissance shattered the very foundations of the medieval 'spiritual' world and puzzled the minds of a learned elite. Some knew how to play with the fire of doubt. Montaigne, Rabelais and Erasmus were the very incarnations of this new spirit. There is ambiguity in all of them: still in the fideistic tradition, yet not hiding away their doubts; seriousness and irony go hand in hand in their writings. They are the representatives of a tradition of ironic humanism, continued by Diderot - the great master and figure-head of this tradition being, of course, Socrates.

But the 16th century was also a time of the Wars of Religion - perhaps another symptom of the breakdown of a collective world of faith, where even Christian morality enjoyed credibility. The chaos was followed by the 17th century, also

known as the Classical period. It tamed the Renaissance anarchy, calling for order, good manners, loyalty, Absolutism. Religion was back, this time with a gloomy appearance. 17th century philosophy agonized over what it saw as man's exile from God; for Pascal the way to faith was paved with doubts, guilt, and despair.

The Enlightenment, by contrast, exiled God from the world. According to Peter Gay, "the Enlightenment had to treat religion as superstition and error in order to recognize itself" (1977, 37), in order to establish its historical identity. But this historical identity did not cover the private identities of the philosophes:

They were rather like political refugees returning to view the ruins of a city where they had lived as children: they were elated at the opportunity for ambitious reconstruction, confident that they could build a new and fairer city, but faintly mournful at the spectacle and faintly guilty at having helped in the destruction of a place that had been ugly, unhealthy, inhospitable, but in some sense their own. (1977, 68)

No doubt, there was nostalgia and guilt. But guilt can be more than just a sad feeling of having helped to destroy an old order and thereby a part of one's identity. Guilt can play a role in recreating one's identity. It can take the form of constructive doubt and reflection.

The Enlightenment believed in doubt. To establish a morality on that belief was an odd challenge. It resulted in a rhetoric of tolerance, of self-interest, of quest, a way of asking: any better ideas? One hears the echo of that question in Diderot's dialogues. They turn to the reader, asking: what do You think?

II IN THE REPUBLIC OF LETTERS

In this chapter I intend to survey the moral system of habits and virtues in the so-called Republic of Letters.

The concept of the Republic of Letters became widespread at the end of the 17th century. First references to the 'Respublica literaria' can be found as early as 1417. Originally, the idea was Italian. Emerging with Italian Renaissance culture it traced its history back to ancient Greece and Rome (Goodman 1994, 15). In 16th century France, Michel de Montaigne paid tribute to the Italian model of conversation in his essay *De l'art de conferer*, but it was not until the 17th century that exercises in this art were institutionalized in France.

Printing, so instrumental to the communication of ideas, together with the circulation of letters, contributed to the creation of what Jurgen Habermas has called the 'public sphere', a phenomenon clearly recognizable and distinguished from the French monarchy at the time when the Enlightenment Project was initiated and when Diderot started his work.

1 The Republic of Letters

1.1 Power versus manners

The Republic of Letters has been defined as an intellectual² community transcending space and time. It was composed of all nationalities, social classes, ages, and both sexes; understood as having both historical specificity and ideal universality the republic has been likened to the Catholic church (Goodman 1994, 15-16).

Practically speaking, the concept can be largely associated with France in its pre-revolutionary phase and the cosmopolitan spirit of French men and women of letters. Reciprocity became its prime virtue. Epistolary exchange and conversation

between learned and ambitious people, motivated by a love of truth and a desire to make that love publicly acknowledged, exemplify its idea of transcendence, a value higher than the self.

A parallel has been drawn between the French monarchy and the Republic of Letters: each polity had its own constitution, but the constituencies of the two institutions overlapped. Thus the history of the Republic of Letters, from its founding in the 17th century as an apolitical community to its transformation in the 18th century into a very political community whose project of Enlightenment challenged the state and church authorities, is interwoven with the history of the monarchy (Goodman 1994, 12).

Peter France, using the term *polite* "in its broad eighteenth century sense" - *polite*, as opposed to rude, rustic, childish, popular, unreasonable - claims that the polite society of the 18th century owed more to 17th century decorum than any stereotyped account of the two centuries (the one 'religious' and 'conservative', the other 'secular' and 'progressive') would allow us to think (1992, 2).

In my view, this continuity can be largely undertood in terms of an inherited shame culture in which feelings of inferiority, inadequacy, and dishonor had, as moral sanctions, replaced the religious fear of eternal damnation. Damnation, in the religious sense, had turned into social shame, which was to be avoided in advance by taking good care of one's manners and reputation. In contrast to the medieval ideology of fear, the 18th century ideology of hope chose to emphasize the pleasurable aspects of polite behavior. Yet the fear of displeasure and unhappiness was an important undertone in the rhetoric of shame.

Politeness was one of the key-principles of the Republic of Letters: polite sociability attempted to replace traditional conceptions of political power with manners. A public sphere without a shame morality of its own would not have been able to develop into a credible institution. It was more shameful to be uncivilized (impolite and unreasonable) than to fear political disfavor. The new political ideal leaned more on the reciprocal dialogue between equals than on the hierarchy of the society of orders and the absolutist state (Gordon 1990, 72).

Polite manners, for one thing, made it easier to practice criticism without ending up in conflict and heated emotions. But it also meant that dissidence became normalized, rationalized, and moralized, which again opened the field for what Diderot, in *Le Neveu de Rameau*, called "idiotismes moraux", that is moral idioms - a disposition to advertise personal deflections from a normative center, an escape from general standards of language, manners, morals (Undank 1989, 425).

12 The undercurrent of malaise

France dominated the western world, politically, militarily, culturally, and by the beginning of the 18th century an attack against what seemed to be an expression of French arrogance, its self-styled universalism, began in the German principalities. It took the form of pouring contempt on the French *esprit's* empty show; the French had no sense of true values - the inner life, the life of the spirit, etc (Berlin 1990, 36). Some discontent made itself felt even in France - in the 17th century Moliere's *Le Misanthrope* gave expression to it. Moliere's play showed a man in rebellion against the insincerity and vanity of others, but not quite convincing in his efforts to embody

an alternative ideal. Blaise Pascal's message, put in universal terms, was that the social existence of man was based on illusions; his inner life was anxiety and misery; surrounded by limits, man could not stand his own company within four walls.

In the 18th century the undercurrent of malaise had become a philosophical if not political problem, notably in the work of Rousseau, but also, in a different manner, for Diderot. Although taking distance to the tragic and religious aspects of the 17th century, writers of the Enlightenment (including the eminent ones, like Voltaire) could not always avoid feeling inferior in regard to le Grand Siècle. Most of them appear to have believed they were impotent epigons of the giants who had preceded them (Gossman 1989, 492). In this spirit Diderot remarked that he could never compete with "une belle scene de Racine" (OF, 592). The 'giants' had at least the hope of grounding man's being in something beyond himself, a transcendence, although the effort, in Pascal's interpretation, was nothing but a tragic wager. The Enlightenment had no other transcendence than the other man, and when the other man seemed too much alike, one had to turn to the cultural Other, to the world beyond the Republic of Letters, to find something truly savage and natural.

Denis Diderot was a citizen of the republic, not only as the editor of the *Encyclopedie*³ and as a regular participant in the conversational associations of his time, notably in the one known as baron d'Holbach's circle or "coterie d'Holbachique" (in Rousseau's words), but also as a writer of dialogues and letters (private and public). One can say that he represents the spirit of the Republic and also, to a certain extent, the undercurrent of malaise, that is, displeasure with 'polite society'. It can appear in the guise of 'poetic' doubts, as in the following quotation from *De la poesie dramatique*: "En general, plus un peuple est civilise, poli, moins ses mœurs sont poetiques; tout s'affaiblit en s'adoucissant" (OC, II, 370).

But Diderot was not able or willing to express the malaise in another way than within the limits and liberties prescribed by the code of polite sociability.

13 Public and private sphere

According to Jurgen Habermas, it was in the 18th century that a clearly demarcated public sphere grew out of aristocratic 'polite society' (like the 'ruelles' of the precieuses) which already, during the 17th century, started separating from the state. For the first time the private and public spheres became separate in a specifically modern sense (1989, 11).

The new public sphere brought together private people who soon learned the art of public reasoning by dialoguing with other private persons. The private and public thus intersected in ways that are interesting also from a moral point of view. Publicness was not anymore an attribute of power as such, but of private values as well (friendship, passion, feeling) as far as it seemed worthy of public attention or of social consequence.

Habermas contends that the private sphere in this new order comprised civil society in the narrowest sense: the realm of commodity exchange and of social labor; imbedded in it was the family with its interior domain. The public sphere in the political realm evolved from the world of letters (1989, 30), or in the French context, from the Republic of Letters.

The idea of publicness concerned everything that called for reasoning (and

reasoning was a public activity, i.e. thinking aloud and submitting one's arguments to criticism). The private became associated with secrecy, which paradoxically involved the political domain: the princely authority on secrets of state. Just as secrecy in the monarchical system was supposed to serve the maintenance of sovereignty based on 'voluntas', so publicity was supposed to promote debate and legislation based on 'ratio' (Habermas 1989, 53). This means, in practical terms, that while the borderline drawn between the two spheres was politically clear, morally and intellectually the line became ambiguous and transcendable, which favored dialogue between the two spheres, personal and public.

The intimacy and subjectivity of personal letters had already in the 17th century been subjected to public attention. It was considered natural that a letter from one person to another would be read aloud in good company and that the sender would regard such a 'publication' as a compliment. It followed that the private and the public were closely intervoven in the art of correspondence during both the 17th and the 18th century - which was fundamental to the very concept of the Republic of Letters.

The audience-oriented subjectivity of correspondence explained the origin of the typical literary genre of the 18th century: the domestic novel modeled by the exchange of letters. Its early and most influential example was Richardson's *Pamela* (1740); the novel was not only modeled by letters, it became a model for writing them. Samuel Richardson's influence on Diderot cannot be neglected, at least in his early novel *La Religieuse*. For Diderot Richardson's epistolary art had exemplary significance, not in preaching moral precepts but in awakening a moral sense in the reader - which was also Diderot's goal in his capacity of both public and 'secret' writer⁴.

Public opinion came into existence as the judgement of a group of people involved in a process of reasoning and interaction. It was through the public opinion that the public sphere put the state in touch with the needs of society (Habermas 1989, 31). But public opinion also had authority over the reputation of an individual, and reputation was an important measure of value in the Republic of Letters.

2 The moral system in the republic

In the Republic of Letters we can distinguish a specific shame morality, a system of habits and virtues.

I would define habit as the basic form of morality, virtue represents a higher level of values. They both can be analyzed as components of collective (social and cultural) morality, but virtues are to a certain degree more individual than habits are. Even if one may create one's own habits ('idiotismes moraux', as Diderot would say), these individual habits are by definition deviations from a collective pattern, whereas virtues require an individual specificity, a personal accent, in order to ensure that behind separate actions there is a consistent moral agency. One could say, using a notion to be discussed later, that virtue is translated into reality as an integral part of character. Beyond character virtue can exist only as an abstract idea,

and it is as an abstract idea that it shall be discussed here (from the Direct View).

Even though no virtue can be totally confined to a particular period of history⁵, the 18th century gave to virtues its own articulations. What is interesting in the 17th and 18th century practice of governing conduct is that it aimed at establishing habits that would replace conscience as a governing element of action. Habit differs from conscience in that conscience speaks the language of guilt, habit the language of shame.

21 Habit

Etymologically the word 'morality' comes from Latin: *mos, moris*, which means: behaviour, custom, usage, habits. The adjective 'moral' would thus refer to conformity with the habits and mores of a given community and concern the actions of an agent who, as member of that community, has done or is going to do something to be judged, primarily, by other members of the community.

Any moral reformist who wishes to change peoples minds wishes to change their habits as well. Let us take two examples typical of the Enlightenment project: politeness and tolerance.

2.1.1 Politeness

The *Encyclopedie* claims that "la politesse tire son origine de vertu" (OC, XVI, 339). A debatable issue. Shakespeare saw the matter differently in *King Lear*: "The king of darkness is a gentleman" (scene IV). One can imagine Don Juan being polite to women he is about to mislead. If love and fidelity are virtues, Don Juan is vicious - but polite. Politeness is a facade, and one can be convincingly polite only by habit.

Yet Andre Comte-Sponville, in his *Petit traite des grandes vertus*, mentions 'la politesse' as the first of virtues. First but also the most superficial, a virtue without substance. It can be asked whether it is a virtue at all. Politeness can even be insulting, Comte-Sponville says quoting Diderot (1995, 15). What makes 'la politesse' interesting is that it is at the origin of all virtues:

C'est moins contradictoire qu'il n'y parait. L'origine des vertus ne saurait en être une (car alors elle supposerait elle-même une origine, et ne pourrait l'être), et il est de l'essence des vertus, peut-être, que la première ne soit pas vertueuse. (1995, 17)

Comte-Sponville holds that politeness is anterior to morality. He offers one clue to our understanding of the polite society of the 18th century:

La politesse est une petite chose, qui en prépare de grandes. C'est un rituel, mais sans Dieu; un cérémonial, mais sans culte; une étiquette, mais sans sonnerie. (1995, 24)

In the Republic of Letters, politeness continued a tradition invented by the nobility, but with a distinction: the practice of polite conversation was to transform itself from a sign of social and moral superiority into a sign of respectable dissent, equality between individuals of different ranks and autonomy vis-a-vis the state. In order to differentiate itself from crude military and political power the new polite morality believed in the power of manners, not least because it seemed a guarantee for free

criticism and justice. The idea went against Pascal's pessimism: "ne pouvant faire que ce qui est juste fut fort, on a fait que ce qui est fort fut juste" (1972, 145). Furthermore, the chivalric martial tradition of nobility as well as the scholastic and Jesuit tradition of disputation were to be overcome by polite collaboration (Goodman 1994, 119).

The *Encyclopedie*, in its article on 'moeurs', distinguishes between uncorrupted habits and polite manners engendered under the influence of women in rich and idle monarchies (OC, XVI, 121). 'Manieres' are defined separately as expressions of habits, "plus recherchees dans quelques individus" (ib.66). In this view, polite manners were like exaggerated signs of sound habits; they differed from natural sociability by bearing the mark of individual vanity. The distinction is not opposite to the ideal of la politesse as such, but rather in tune with the Classical ideal of l'honnête homme (who is always natural, never flattering). It echoes the scepticism of the moralistes. What La Bruyere says about politeness serves as an example of Classical scepticism. La politesse raises doubts, but is not questioned as good conduct: "elle en donne du moins les apparences, et fait paroître l'homme au dehors comme il devroit être intérieurement" (1985, 126).

The only difference is perhaps that the 'inner man' has become a secondary concern for les moralistes of the 18th century⁶: in the *Encyclopedie* the emphasis is on the difference between moeurs and manieres, on external appearances. Politeness was the form that made virtue possible and attractive, and its opposite shameful and unattractive.

2.1.2 Tolerance

To be tolerant is to be in the habit of listening to opinions one disagrees with. Like politeness, it is a quasi-virtue, not quite a virtue of its own. It is the ground on which empathy and understanding can grow, it is not empathy nor understanding. In La Rochefoucault's view, we have strength enough to tolerate the misfortunes of others (Maxime 19) - this is not a virtue. For Comte-Sponville, tolerance is a minor virtue (1995, 227). In the 18th century it could have in principle been a virtue, but the *Encyclopedie* article on 'moeurs' includes tolerance in the catalogue of habits assumed to reign "dans une republique qui ne peut subsister que du commerce d'economie" (OC, XVI, 120). This is a politico-materialist theory of tolerance.

From a historical perspective, tolerance, which went hand in hand with the practice of dialogue (notably in the Republic of Letters) was a pioneering habit: in the long run it created the conditions for a new political culture: parliamentary democracy supported by a free press. Although not in the near future: France had first to go through the chaos of a revolution.

Tolerance went hand in hand with dialogue: this means that it could not have entered the process of habit-formation without a preparative cultural stage. As a literary form dialogue had a long history; there is, however, a difference in reading Plato and practising dialogue in real life. Turning dialogue into an art and a social habit was one of the achievements of the 17th century salons, usually led by women. Along with the habits of 'commerce' - conversation - established within the Republic of letters, the Classical Period contributed to the Enlighteners' readiness to debate political issues more openly.

Diderot's *Entretien d'un philosophe avec la Marechale de**** is basically about tolerance. As he respects the religious (and narrow) views of his pious interlocutor, logic demands that also he, the unbeliever, should be tolerated as a reasonable being and not regarded as a potential criminal.

2.1.3 The ambiguity of habit

Sociable habits offer protection against shame. The more regular the good habits are, the less there is cause for shame. Respect is earned by the habit of acting respectably, not by single and arbitrary deeds. On the other hand, habits are mechanisms which are not moral or nonmoral in themselves once they get going; they follow their own rules; they become their own legislators.

Hypocrisy, vanity and flattery are habits, too. Questionable ones - already for the moralistes of the grand siecle. If 'bad faith' was an eye-sore to the grand siecle, the Enlightenment criticized faith based on ignorance or irrational authority. In his fiction Diderot also portrayed habits which are basically obsessions, like Jacques' ex-master's habit of duelling with his friend. How was one to deal with obsessions and bad habits?

Roughly speaking, there are two ways of looking at habits: the hard and the soft theory.

The hard theory emphasizes the involuntary nature of habits. The Catholic thinker Andre Leonard defines habit as follows: "un pouvoir involontaire qui facilite nos efforts" (1991, 52). This theory, as is seen in Leonard's case, finds support in Blaise Pascal's aphorism: "la coutume est une seconde nature" (1972, 50). In Leonard's wording:

l'habitude est une seconde nature, s'il est vrai que la nature designe souvent ce que nous sommes independamment de notre liberte. Bref, l'habitude, c'est de la liberte qui devient nature. (1991, 52)

There was once a moment of liberty in the history of a habit: at the beginning - when it was not yet a habit. In the Pascalian world everything seemingly natural turns into stubborn artifice, second nature - no doubt, thought-provoking for 18th century mechanical materialism and its conception of nature.

Do habits facilitate our efforts? The contrary may also be true. Habits can become obstacles to man's happiness. This may happen when a habit grows stronger than man's natural desire for fulfilment and happiness. If so, should one look for a solution in medicine and the natural sciences, as La Mettrie suggested? For Diderot, the problem concerned human organization (to be discussed in chapter 10) which was bound to face obstacles. Obstacles could be overcome - sometimes. The worst obstacle was human mediocrity, the facility to imitate and difficulty to produce sublime acts of passion. Diderot's attitude to the hard theory was reserved.

From the perspective of the soft theory, habits are systems of readiness - they enter action when the necessary internal or external stimuli are present (McKenzie 1962, 102). This definition leaves room for consideration and free choice: readiness gives reason a chance to interfere, to judge whether action is necessary. To tolerate a differing opinion qualifies as a sociable habit insofar as one can abstain from tolerating anything - folly and fanaticism, for example. Where does this abstinence

come from? Not from habit.

One practices the habit of tolerance for the sake of reason or reciprocity (by showing respect one wins respect for oneself). Habit as such is not the primary source of 'ou ht' - except for a conventionalist. Diderot was surely not a conventionalist .

The ambiguity we are dealing with comes from the philosophes' predilection for nature and natural law. They had different ideas of what nature represented, but nature was a common point of reference, their alternative to religion. The philosophes spoke for reason. To affect behavior reason had to exercise power over habit, the second nature-this was in accordance with the 'soft theory'. Reason was the measure of everything, the foundation of civilization. But as nature was a value, and for many the ultimate reality - this, again, seemed to prioritize the 'hard theory' leaving to reason the role of observing the laws of nature.

As Daniel Gordon has shown, the idea of sociability was located in two independent discourses, one of natural law and the other of conviviality. Within natural law discourse, many of the French thinkers maintained the inherent sociability of human beings. The discourse of conviviality, by contrast, represented human sociability as an achievement of civilization, the product of history (1990, 35-54).

In Diderot's case, these two discourses are curiously mixed. Man was by nature a sociable animal, but for a man of genius, living in close touch with the energies of nature in himself, there was the risk of not ever becoming a good citizen, father, uncle, friend, etc⁸. These roles, like sociability itself, inevitably bore the imprint of mediocrity. Mediocrity was the work of both nature and society: lack of passion and creativity, on the one hand, imitation and tyranny of habits, on the other. Mediocrity was the thing to be ashamed of.

2.2 Law, social and natural

An unchecked habit amounts to moral passivity - or to "la folie generale", as Diderot said in reference to harmful practices and customs:

En quel endroit du monde ne remarque-t-on pas cette contradiction des usages et des lois? Il faut laisser subsister la loi parce qu'elle est sage. Il faudrait reformer l'usage, mais cela ne se peut; c'est la folie generale de toute une nation, a laquelle le remede serait peut-etre pire que le mal; ce serait un acte de despotisme. (OC, III, 299)

In a developed moral outlook habit must be related to a 'higher' moral instance, to values. The distinction between habits and laws is important in the sense that laws have their origin in values, whereas habits and practices have their origin in laws and precepts, but they are also closer to vices and weaknesses and therefore endangered by mediocrity. Even laws can be bad and outmoded; yet it is better to comply with bad laws and to be a fool among fools than wise alone, as B, Diderot's alter ego⁹, says in *Supplement au voyage de Bougainville*:

Nous parlerons contre les lois insensees jusqu'a ce qu'on les reforme; et, en attendant, nous nous y sournettrons. Celui qui, de son autorite privée, enfreint une loi mauvaise, autorise tout autre à enfreindre les bonnes. Il y a moins d'inconvenients à être fou avec des fous, qu' à être sage tout seul. (OP, 515)

Most of the philosophes of the Enlightenment agreed upon the fundamental role of laws as guarantors of virtue in society, even if this agreement covered a variety of nuances in opinion as to how this role should be understood: it was discussed, for example, whether social laws did or should correspond to laws of nature (Domenach 1989, 99). Judging by *Le Neveu de Rameau*, it had occurred to Diderot that apart from the judicial system even nature had its own proceedings. In the words of Lui:

Il y a deux procureurs genereaux, l'un à votre porte qui chatie les delits contre la societe. La nature est l'autre. Celle-ci connait de tousles vices qui echappent aux lois. Vous vous livrez à la debauché des femmes; vous serez hydrophique. Vous etes crapuleux: vous serez pournonique. (1981, 129).

Not only Diderot but also other materialists of the day seemed to be caught by the analogy between natural law and laws/customs in society.

With Diderot, however, the idea that laws influence habits and customs is complicated. The legislator's task is to create habits for the people. But, as Diderot adds in his letter to Sophie Volland (October 15th, 1760):

Donner des moeurs à un peuple, c'est augmenter son energie pour le bien et pour le mal; c'est !'encourager(...) aux grands crimes et aux grandes vertus. Il ne se fait aucune action forte chez un peuple faible. (1978, I, 231)

A man is made by his habits, ultimately by laws, but this is not the whole story: we do not know yet how this social outfit shall be used, for good or bad. We do not know much about the inner conditions.

2.3 Moral sentiment

Already before Romanticism a quest for moral sentiments made itself felt. Various influences converged to produce the 18th century cult of sentiment, or sentimental morality, among them the secularization of religious sensibility and the new, largely female readership providing the demand for sentimental fiction. 'Sentiment' became a central expression of middle-class life and literacy (Bell 1983, 2). Samuel Richardson's prose (*Pamela*, *Clarissa*) became the emblem of epistolary sentimentalism. The English author was admired by Diderot, who even wrote an essay in Richardson's praise, *Eloge de Richardson*¹⁰.

In France, sentimental fiction was known in the 17th century, and, according to Thomas DiPiero, it reflected the values of nobility. It often portrayed the harmony and bliss in store for the truly noble who remained virtuous in the face of hardships. Writers emphasized not plot or character development but the simple display of sentiment. These novels espoused philosophies that echoed the way nobles perceived themselves (1992, 29-32). Noble sentiment and virtue were seen by aristocrats as qualities which distinguished them from the moneyed bourgeois. By

the 18th century the genre had become popular among bourgeois readers, although it still reflected aristocratic sensibilities.

According to Domenach, Malebranche's Augustinian concept of "l'amour de l'ordre", presented in his *Traite de morale*, had an considerable influence on 18th century philosophy. The concept was adopted and diversified by several thinkers from Voltaire to Rousseau (1989, 57-58). In Diderot's *Le Fils naturel* the idea of such a moral sentiment present in man was termed "gout de l'ordre". Philosophes attempted to give secular interpretations of the phenomenon. Voltaire wrote in *La Henriade* of an "instinct of virtue" implanted in us by nature: "De l'instinct des vertus elle aime à nous remplir / Et dans nos premiers ans nous enseigne à rougir (1970, 715). In all, 'sentiment', 'gout' and 'instinct' were concepts that the Age of Reason lined up behind virtue.

Order - like another frequent sentimental figure, emptiness (vide) - were spatial metaphors used to describe the interior state of man. The less the sentiment of order was predominant, one might speculate, the more there was an inner void, also alluded to as 'mal de vivre', 'melancolie', and 'vapeurs', forms of moral anomaly if not of latent nihilism (Mauzi 1960, 23). For Diderot, the fundamental existential sentiment was 'inquiétude' (OC, XIV, 297).

It was at the end of the 18th century that a 'mythologie du malheur' came into being attributing glory to unhappiness (Mauzi 1960, 24). Before that happiness was thought to be the primary goal of man, morally, socially, and psychologically. This goes for Diderot, too. For Diderot, man, in all his inquietude, could become happy only by loving virtue and being virtuous.

As to Richardsonian sentimentalism, Diderot took a different direction in his later work and came to mistrust sentiment, the very criterion of verisimilitude (for the Richardsonian school). Instead of verisimilitude he developed his fiction towards the Stemean model of self-conscious and ironic narration, notably in *Jacques le fataliste*, and towards semi-Platonic dialogues, as in *Le Neveu de Rameau* and the *Supplement au voyage de Bougainville*, in which the reader's nonsentimental distance to the narrative becomes the condition for his active role in putting the pieces together and forming a free (yet text-dependent) judgement.

2.4 Virtue

The Republic of Letters, in the process of separating itself from the state and the church, was in need of a non-religious conception of virtue. It was the English philosopher Anthony Ashley Shaftesbury who, in the French opinion, came to represent the rescue of virtue from the tutelage of religion (Hellden 1994, 62). Diderot was to translate Shaftesbury's *Inquiry concerning Merit and Virtue* into French in 1745. This heavily annotated translation was his first significant work in the capacity of a philosophe.

Shaftesbury was not an atheist, but he held that morality should be independant of Revelation and Deity. Assuming there was a just and benevolent God, one had to establish standards of judgement by which to decide that God was just and belevolent. Virtue belonged to the social sphere, and it concerned man's aspiration to the public good, although not at the expense of his private good. In a footnote Diderot developes the theme:

Car nous sommes tous d'accord que la creature peut s'aimer, peut tendre a ses interets, et poursuivre son bonheur temporel, sans cesser d'etre vertueuse. La question n'est donc pas de savoir si nous avons agi par amour-propre ou par interet; mais de determiner quand ces deux sentiments concouraient au but que tout homme se propose, c'est d'entendre ses interets, c'est de connaitre son bonheur comme il faut. (OC, I, 29)

The idea was that virtue should not contradict man's basic human right to happiness. In fact, virtue was not an obstacle but a way to happiness. In virtue man realized his social nature, his sociability. Happiness played a key-role in 18th century moral philosophy in general. Even in the case of "la vertu-conflit" (Mauzi 1960, 603), happiness is not lost for good in choosing virtue; happiness will be the reward of virtue (ib.). Virtue may be put to the test, like in Diderot's play *Le Fils naturel*, but a man to whom virtue brings suffering will learn that his hard lot was due to a passing ordeal if not to a misunderstanding of his real situation. In *Observation sur le Nakaz* Diderot defines a happy society as one in which "la vertu et les talents ont une recompense assuree" (OPo, 403). The question of assuring that the moral equation takes place in a man-made society thus ceases to be existentially grounded and becomes a political issue.

Diderot was frequently paying tribute to virtue. When writing about Seneca he announces: "Je n'accorde le titre de philosophe qu'a celui qui s'exerce constamment a la recherche de la verite et pratique de la vertu" (OC, III, 218). But what was virtue?

2.4.1 Generosity

In his *Dictionnaire philosophique* Voltaire poses the question: "Qu'est-ce que vertu?" His answer is: "Bienfaisance envers le prochain" (1964, 373). I will here translate 'bienfaisance' as generosity. It can be interpreted as a nonreligious version of Christian neighborly love. The premise is also the same: man is not alone in this world. For Diderot, the virtue of generosity concerned philosophy, too: "Quel est l'objet de la philosophie?" he asks in *Essai sur les regnes de Claude et de Neron*. "C'est de lier les hommes par un commerce d'idees et par l'exercice d'une bienfaisance perpetuelle" (OC, III, 210).

In Diderot's play *Est-il bon? est-il mechant?* we find a man, Monsieur Hardouin, who represents the virtue of 'bienfaisance' in a way that reflects the question of the title. Although he is generous and benevolent, he gives the impression of a shameless scoundrel to those whose wishes he fulfills. As a philosophe, Diderot believed in virtue and in generosity, but as a writer he took the liberty of problematizing the obvious, in this case, by distinguishing virtue from its methods and manifestations.

2.4.2 Reputation

For the shame morality of the republic, reputation was a crucial measure of personal worth. It can be given the status of virtue. Association with people whose public image one wanted for one's own was the basis of reputation (Goodman 1994, 116).

In the past, duelling had been a matter of honor and a way of defending one's reputation. It still was, despite the 1679 and 1725 royal edicts which ordered the death penalty for duelling. This shows how strong the hold of shame morality was

on people, who once challenged to defend their honor, had to choose between shame and death. Duelling may not have been to the taste of men of letters, but they were equally aware of the calamity of public disgrace.

A critical writer like Diderot was left with the task of reminding the public of its power and its responsibility.

Public opinion had the potential to destroy lives by lack of fairness and tolerance, as in the story entitled *Madame de la Carliere*. The lady in the story chooses to be judged by public opinion, the tribunal of friends and relations, with the most disastrous consequences: not only is a relatively happy marriage destroyed, but lives are wasted, the child's and the mother's, and practically speaking, the life of the 'unfaithful' husband. Considered the murderer of his wife and child, he has lost his reputation for good. The story gives a gloomy account of the judgements of a prejudiced public, "cette foule imbecile qui nous juge, qui dispose de notre honneur, qui nous porte aux nues ou qui nous traîne dans la fange" (1977, 165).

In the reign of public opinion, the question of guilt appears in the guise of a moral riddle: who is guilty, after all - the husband whose crime is in no proportion to the consequences - or the public - who cannot be put on trial, and whose only crime was to judge?

2.4.3 Reciprocity

According to Goodman, reciprocity was the fundamental virtue of the Republic of Letters (1994, 18). Reciprocity matches the idea and practice of correspondence, which by definition is based on reciprocity. It also implies equality as to giving and taking (in the exchange of ideas and respect if not of material goods).

Behind the virtue of reciprocity lurks the ancient notion of sacrifice. As an elementary form of religion, sacrifice implied two things: 1. it was a gift to a superior recipient in exchange for the guarantee of a gift in return, and 2. sacrifice joined the individual to the group (Amato 1982, 32). Sacrifice was a sacred form of giving and taking within a hierarchy of superior and inferior beings just as reciprocity is a secular version of giving and taking on an egalitarian basis.

Reciprocity is also fundamental to dialogue as well as to its inner logic: the symbiosis of freedom and dependence (to be discussed in chapter IV).

2.4.4 Friendship

Another virtue, compatible with the ideal of reciprocity and equally valued in the republic, was friendship. Citizenry in the Republic of Letters came to value reciprocal exchange based on the model of friendship, says Goodman (1994, 2). Friendship has, in the tradition of humanism, always had a high symbolic value. Michel de Montaigne's *Essais* were born in remembrance of the author's friend Etienne de La Boetie; the essays can be seen as a continued dialogue with the deceased friend. In the essay *De l'amitie* Montaigne celebrates friendship as the most perfect form of human rapport; he is also convinced of its rarity: "Il faut tant de rencontres a la batir, que c'est beaucoup si la fortune y arrive une fois en trois siecles" (1965, I, 226).

This conclusion was not shared by d'Alembert, who, very much in the Enlightenment manner of making private virtues public, concluded in 1753 his *Essai sur la société de gens de lettres et des grands* by saying that a man of letters should 'commerce' only with his equals and friends (1822, IV, 359). And friends one had in abundance. The idea of friendship as a public virtue was opposed to the patriarchal bonds of the family and to the absolutist relations of the monarchy (Goodman 1994, 83).

For Diderot, friendship had a special meaning, as he affirms in a letter dated 14.7.1762 to Sophie: "L'amour et l'amitié ne sont pour moi ce qu'ils sont pour le reste des hommes" (1978, II, 70). Friendship, love and religion belonged to the "plus violents enthousiasmes de la vie" (ib). This idea of friendship is considerably more passionate than that of d'Alembert. Diderot refused to stay within the limits of intellectual commerce and wanted to enrich the Republic of Letters - his readers - with more vital and adventurous forms of friendship, as in *Jacques le fataliste* and *Les Deux amis de Bourbonne*.

In the latter story friendship amounts to self-sacrifice and presents a puzzling counter-model to the smooth reconciliation of self-interest and generosity which was the moral model in the republic. But also the social landscape is different from that of the Parisian salon. The story is set in a rural environment, the two friends are outlaws, and the narrative style has been likened to Homeric simplicity (France 1983, 86-87).

3 Moral freedom

One can see an analogy between the importance of habits in the republic and the importance of laws in 18th century materialist philosophy, as in the works of Helvetius and La Mettrie.

When writing about La Mettrie, The Swedish historian of ideas Rolf Lindborg describes the 18th century theological view on soul and body - a view that La Mettrie opposed - as man wearing a costume (1978, 71). The soul was the essence of man, whereas the body was an appearance. When it was claimed that man IS his costume (his body), the conclusion was that man is nothing but the laws (customs) ruling over him. They become important to his development, which is the message of 18th century materialism. One is not 'free' to choose one's costume, but one can try to change the conditions under which costumes are tailored.

Materialism was a liberation movement, but one that tended to turn the problem of moral freedom into a technical problem.

3.1 Free will

The question of 'free will' is an ancient one. Historically seen it has a connection with the theological notion of sin. This was a subject of dispute between Luther and Erasmus, for example. For Luther, man was too burdened by sin to possess free will; he criticized Erasmus, who advocated the notion, for not having read St. Augustine

well enough. In fact, the Classical period in France was influenced by Augustinianism - apparent in the works of La Rochefoucauld and Pascal, with different accents. The 18th century (i.e. Helvetius) exploited La Rochefoucauld's ideas for materialist-mechanist ends; he was read as an early 'libertin', whereas Pascal remained in the damnation of religious thought. From a moral perspective one understands why: La Rochefoucauld represented shame morality, Pascal guilt morality, and the first was more appealing to 18th century mentality than the latter.

Both thinkers, however, found in the Augustinian 'amour-propre' the origin of a variety of vices and self-deceptions. For Pascal it was a cause for self-hatred, or in more general terms, hatred of the 'self: to talk about free will made no sense, from this perspective, without a clear separation between the two notions, that of will and that of self. La Rochefoucauld had equally lost all naivety concerning free will and the governance of reason: to a certain degree one was 'free', of course, as far as saving appearances went; the inner man was not free, he was locked in the dressing room, amidst his disguises, only his 'persona' could move freely between the dressing room and the stage. The world was a theater; so was the consciousness of man.

In this world, habit was the ruler. La Rochefoucauld, if anyone, supported the 'hard theory of habits'. We are so much in the habit of wearing a disguise, he contends, that we finally appear disguised before ourselves (Maxime 119).

At any rate, the problem of free will was not anymore about choosing between good and bad, virtue and vice, either loving God or loving oneself; there was no escape from amour-propre. Thus the free will issue turned into a question of hypocrisy and self-consciousness. The maxims of La Rochefoucauld served to unmask the deceptive narcissism of man. But, in the words of Jean Lafonde:

Demasquer l'hypocrisie (...) c'est ruiner l'idée que la vertu puisse être et, en même temps, être consciente de soi. La conscience de la vertu et l'être vertueux s'excluent. (1977, 11)

By being conscious of one's virtue one played the game of vice. Due to the implicit Augustinianism in La Rochefoucauld's maxims, his presentation of man (play-acting on the stage of society, masking his self-love in good manners and virtuous appearances) is basically a moral vision, despite the 'cynicism' his maxims have become famous for. When the moralizing aspect is stripped off, what remains is a hard theory of habit - if not a theory of acting or, indeed, 'un paradoxe sur le comédien'.

Diderot's *Paradoxe sur le comédien* formulates the problem of inner versus outer man in aesthetic-theatrical terms, although real life experiences are also taken into account. The paradox is that great actors are able to master appearances because they do not (even try) to 'feel'. The idea might not have come as a surprise to La Rochefoucauld, who knew well that it is more difficult to hide feelings we have than to pretend feelings we do not have (Maxime 559). Likewise, the fact that one did not feel amour-propre did not mean that one was a saint, rather the contrary. Nevertheless it made it possible to act like a saint.

What was morally ambiguous in La Rochefoucauld, has become an artistic paradox in Diderot. The problem of free will seems to have disappeared on the way, or rather, it has been dissociated from the inner man, the self that Pascal, ironically

enough, saw as weak and immersed in the second nature of habit and artifice. In fact, the problem has been redefined: as far as mastering the appearances is concerned, a good actor is certainly 'free' to choose between a good and a bad appearance.

This paradox hardly contradicted the moral expectations of polite society.

3.2 Determinism

Within the framework of Diderot's materialism the question of moral freedom, in the philosophical and non-theatrical sense, is a twister. In her analysis on Diderot's materialism Anderson puts her finger on the body-mind problem:

I think that his project appears strange because he derived his materialism from a denial of the body-mind opposition, whereas for a modern reader the opposition of body to mind is part of the concept of mechanistic materialism (1990,4).

In the strict mechanistic materialism we find, for example, in Helvetius or in La Mettrie's major work *L'Homme-machine*, there is no place for freedom. Diderot was not committed to the notion either, as far as his theoretical stance goes, yet we see him criticizing Helvetius for underestimating human diversity and making hasty statements on the conditions of greatness. But is moral freedom the issue here?

Yes and no. No: Diderot was pleading the case for complexity, not defending the notion of free will. Yes: because 18th century materialism was in a way a liberation movement, and Helvetius, in his attempt to free the 'soul' from clerical abuse, did not pursue his project far enough to protect his homme-automate from falling prey to some other form of tyranny, which is a concern of Diderot giving *Refutation d'Helvetius* a moral and political edge. In conclusion, the problem of moral freedom was not easy to disregard, even for materialists who may have been inclined to associate it with an outworn theological dogma.

The traditional problem of 'free will' can be presented as follows: how can one be responsible for one's actions without freely willing them? And how is such willing to be understood without the mind-body distinction - which would assure that the mind is not merely reacting to its environment and that the mind has an activity of its own?

Anderson's answer is that

denying the mind-body distinction Diderot quite coherently denied that action and reaction are qualitatively different. (...) Activeness is a function of how much sensibility is either inert or mobilized in any event" (1990, 61).

The problem of moral freedom seems to have been displaced from the idea of one mind to the dynamics of interaction between minds.

In fact, a lot of nonsense has been written on determinism from the premise that it excludes moral freedom. No doubt this applies to 'metaphysical' determinism with its hard opposition between cause and freedom, a priori defined as irreconcilable. Would it be possible to think of a soft version of determinism? Psychological determinism, for instance, in John G. McKenzie's version: "All that psychological determinism means is that there is no behavior without a motive or

a cause; and the Self as agent is a cause indeed" (1962, 74).

This is a rather simple idea, but what is obvious for John G. McKenzie - that the Self has a will of its own - was hardly so obvious in the aftermath of the Classical period in France when writers made the same point over and over again, in tragedies and comedies, in the form of maxims and pensées: life is about acting on a stage, wearing masks, following conventions, turning habits into second nature, taking care of one's reputation and not falling into the bottomless abyss of self-love, the cosmic void and solitude, the uncharted wilderness of the Self. Jean Lafond points out in his study on La Rochefoucault that

la psychologie des facultés que pratique le XII^e siècle concevait l'âme sur le modèle de l'espace extérieur. Il lui est possible par là d'établir une sorte de carte géographique, ou de topologie de cet espace intérieur où se situent et s'affrontent données physiologiques, passions et volontés comme s'affrontent dans l'univers physique les forces et les choses. (1977. 25-26)

In this view, the Self was an inhabited 'territory' ruled by impersonal powers before civilization stepped in and started to build roads (of thought), prescribe laws (of social behaviour), establish habits (of feeling) and chart the area as if it were a spatial entity to be annexed to the monarchy, to the church or - why not - to the Republic of Letters.

This spatial image of the Self had its implications as to how the inhabitant of a surrounded territory, surrounded by 'le monde', was expected to feel when doing something wrong - should he (or not) feel shame or guilt. Obviously shame dominated the moral views on unwise actions. Guilt seemed like a corollary of shame, a private anxiety, a matter between man and God. Shame is awareness of the others. The same can be said of remorse. But guilt is about the Self's inner struggle with moral options, and this is crucial to the understanding of moral freedom. Guilt has its role to play in Diderot's writings, too, although not on the ideological level, in his world of ideas.

In guilt one faces an 'internalized Other', which, in Bernard Williams words, is a somewhat abstracted neighbor lodged in our inner lives, not merely a representative of some social group, but of some one "whose reactions I could respect" (1993, 84). In order to know whom I can respect, however, I need to be a Self, and know or feel 'its' difference from my social group. Peter Gay gives us an idea of Diderot's internalized Other - others, in fact - when speaking of his pagan masters: Diogenes, Socrates and Seneca. "They were his collective conscience", he claims (1977, 48).

4 'Betweenness': the intermediary zone

'Betweenness' was the ideal moral position. One was not supposed to be carried away by extremes. Fanaticism and intolerance were extreme attitudes, but so was also the idea of conscience which went to the extreme in emphasizing the inner dimension of man. Reputation, reciprocity and friendship were not values of pure

exteriority; they did not signify submission to the blind forces of nature or to external authorities, but the happy mean between moral egoism and self-sacrifice.

Instead of the interior and the exterior, the 'between' stood for control and balance. For maintaining the equilibrium between the 'private' and 'public' self, for example, of which Richard Sennett has spoken (1977, 18-19). In *De l'interpretation de la nature*, Diderot presents the natural scientist moving back and forth between empiria and speculation: "Tout se reduit à revenir des sens à la reflexion, et de la reflexion au sens: rentrer en soi et en sortir sans cesse" (OP, 185). This could have as well been formulated as a moral principle.

Attempted definitions of 'interior' and 'exterior' are, as Walter Ong has claimed, "inevitably tautological: 'interior' is defined by 'in', which is defined by 'between', which is defined by 'inside', and so on round and round the tautological circle. The same is true with 'exterior'" (1982, 73). Here again, in a very 18th century fashion, we find the 'between' as the measure of everything.

41 Mediocrity

Mediocrity was mentioned above. The concept was not altogether pejorative to the contemporaries of Diderot. It certainly was for Diderot as it is to the modern understanding. This implies that the word has been stripped of its early moral meaning and given an esthetic usage expressing platitude, imperfection, and lack of originality. Yet the *Petit Robert* dictionary remembers Bossuet speaking of "cette mediocrite temperee en laquelle la vertu consiste". The same meaning is confirmed by Robert Mauzi in a chapter entitled *Apologie de la Mediocrite* in his *L'idee du bonheur au XVIII siecle*: "C'est surtout autour d'une idee morale qu'il se constitue", he says, "l'aurea mediocritas, heritee de la sagesse antique, dont le XVIII siecle (...) se nourrit avec plus de ferveur encore que l'age classique" (1960, 175).

Mauzi compounds the term to "bonheur bourgeois", warning all the same that it should not be attributed to one social class alone. This ideal of comfort, situated between the extremes of ascetism and luxury, saintliness and dissipation, soon exported itself to other social classes as well. Correctly understood, mediocrity thus indicates an intermediary state, which very much like moderation, is defined in relation to what it is not and wishes not to be. Yet, as Mauzi adds:

La mediocrite n'est en somme que la transposition sociale de l'idee du repos. Elle exclut les passions et permet à l'homme de savourer sa propre immobilité. L'homme 'mediocre' n'a pas besoin d'émotions pour être heureux. Son bonheur n'est pas une aventure, ni même un devenir, mais un état définitivement assuré. (1960, 175)

This moral ideal fell far from what Diderot had in store for his readers and soulmates. In his conviction, immobility was unknown to nature, readiness was all, and happiness was nothing but movement, activity, and energy. The writer's task was above all to upset immobility and bring out the basic 'inquietude' in man for the sake of the complexity and intensity of his being in the world¹¹, in brief, to defy mediocrity.

In Diderot's world there was no place for 'repos' unless it was an anticipation of new activities. That all people did not think so was observed, however, and in *Les Bijoux indiscrets* the ideal of 'repos' is scorned as some people's preference to sleep

midway in a miserable inn "dans une ivresse perpetuelle" (1981, 165) over finding the palace that nature has promised us. What had 'repos' to offer, then, if one had to be half-dead to match the ideal?

Diderot's ideas on energy were not only in contrast with the ideal of 'mediocrity', but also, in lack of scientific theory and demonstration, loose and speculative ideas in their time, as Jacques Chouillet has pointed out (1984, 45).

New ideas were in the air, and, with them, another kind of moral vision as to the intermediary stage between too much and too little. The ideal of mediocrity rejected the extremes of luxury and scarcity. The new in-between ideal presented itself as dynamic luxury, in contrast to scarcity and idle luxury.

4.2 Necessary luxury

The *Encyclopedie* article on 'luxe' is lengthy and presents an outline of the history and political connections of luxury. It specifies the traditional arguments for and against luxury: claims that it favors economy and the arts, or that it destroys patriotism and the sense of honor. None of these arguments are accepted as universally valid. Particular circumstances count in all cases. The concept of luxury itself is felt to be diffuse and in need of specification. The length of the article (25 pages) testifies to the importance of the subject. Why is this so? Because luxury as the very image of material wealth appealed to materialist sensibilities?

Perhaps. Still the most interesting aspect of the article is its attempt to replace or complete the traditional quantitative idea of luxury with qualitative and moral distinctions. They concern context and function¹².

One should, firstly, consider the passions that are involved in the creation and use of luxury, and secondly, see luxury more as a category of energy than of 'things' and 'objects'. Thirdly, the value of this extra energy is not in itself, but in the way it reconnects to passions and their evolution.

Consequently, there can be good and bad luxury depending on whether this wealth serves the public good by providing means to advance the sciences, arts, and virtues, or is allowed to take over the symbolic power of ideals and turn into an ideal of its own. Luxury is "excessif" and "desordonne" to the degree that it is not engaged in creativity but becomes a self-referential sign, in a moral wording, a sign of complacency and mediocrity; "il epuise ses sources, il tarit ses canaux" (OC, XVI, 21). It is morally justified to the degree that it is acquired through harmonious interaction with nature and used to produce merit. In productive and inventive use luxury contributes to immaterial well-being as well; philosophy is given a chance to distinguish dangerous errors from solid social truths (OC, XVI, 26), etc. The borderline between necessity and luxury has disappeared.

As a form of social energy luxury thus proposes itself as a new moral in-between ideal taking distance to two extremes: that of scarcity - amounting to primitiveness of habits and virtues - and that of passive opulence - leading to the decay of habits and virtues, and to the withering away of strong passions.

In the change, luxury has reaffirmed its paradoxical nature. Given a moral dimension it has swept away the ancient notions of good and bad in a world of scarcity and limited good: in this world the basic virtues were gratitude and sacrifice. "Perhaps gratitude is the first source of morality", says Joseph Anthony

Amato (1982, 28). If so, from gratitude arose respect and duty. From sacrifice grew the notion of the 'sacred'. Luxury promises unlimited good and replaces the sacred with utility, pleasure, and freedom. Luxury, now striving to gain moral significance, was winning the social animal over to its side, but was still far from being a secure social virtue. It was an ambiguous good.

References

- 1 Montaigne writes about the art of conversation: "Les Atheniens, et encore les Romains conservaient en grand honneur cet exercice en leurs academies. De notre temps, les Italiens en retiennent quelques vestiges, a leur grand profit, cornrne il se voit par la comparaison de nos entendements aux leurs" (Essais 1965, III, 154).
- 2 The word intellectual (intellectuel) did not yet exist at that time, "il n'apparaîtra qu'a l'aube du XX siecle pour designer la chose qui, elle, existe bel et bien", as Daniel Roche has pointed out in *Les Republicains des lettres* (1988, 219).
- 3 Diderot and Jean Le Ronde d'Alembert were the editors of the famous *Encyclopedie*. This monumental work comprised seventeen folio volumes containing 71,818 articles and eleven folio volumes of 2,885 plates. The first volume of articles appeared in 1751, and the work was completed a quarter-century later, in 1772. The *Encyclopedie* aimed to embody the very spirit of the Enlightenment and the Republic of Letters by "becoming the the center of the universal correspondence across the ages" (Goodman 1994, 27).
- 4 *Le Neveu de Rameau* was published posthumously, and first in Goethe's German translation, in 1805. Only thereafter was *Le Neveu* published in French. It seems that Diderot consciously addressed his novel to posterity. He may have suspected that his contemporary readers were not yet able to appreciate this work, which in some respects anticipated Romantic attitudes and ideas.
- 5 Philosophically speaking, the crucial question is whether we see virtues as internalized rules (with a specific history of their own) or as qualities or dispositions which defy external criteria. Georg Henrik von Wright has claimed that virtues do not name any act categories (1963, 141). In agreement with von Wright's view, Maija-Riitta Ollila associates the idea of virtue ethics with "the effort to break free from the bondage of principle-based morality enforced by authority" (1993, 291). This interpretation applies to our historical understanding of the Enlightenment movement. The question of authority-based morality is a recurrent theme in history, and of particular importance in the 18th century, as the philosophes aspired to liberate reason and virtue from the influence of religious - and 'irrational' - authority. There is another aspect to the matter: the cult of virtue had its socio-historical background in the nobility's sense of threatened social authority and in the attempt to mystify this authority in terms of an "abstract and essentialistic notion of virtue and merit" (DiPiero 1992, 14), a mystification appropriated by the citizens of the Republic of Letters, the meritorious critics of political power and churchly authority. From a philosophical point of view, again, the idea of virtue favors moral freedom and, in similarity to intelligence, man's ability to act surprisingly (Ollila 1993, 293).
- 6 Rousseau is an obvious exception. In his study entitled *Jean- Jacques Rousseau - Transparency and Obstruction* Jean Starobinski maintains that Rousseau, unlike most moralists, incriminated the external in his very definition of evil: for Rousseau, "evil can be identified with man's passion for what is external to himself: prestige, appearances, possession of material wealth. (...) if man succumbs entirely to the seduction of alien goods, he falls entirely under the dominion of evil. But he always has the option of securing his salvation by turning inward" (1988, 20). A moral attitude of this kind cannot have been in favor of the moral ideals of the Republic of Letters, and we know that

Rousseau found himself in conflict with his environment and its shame morality. When dealing with Rousseau's resistance to (or proclaimed indifference of) the opinions of others, Starobinski contends that Rousseau saw even the "gaze of others" as a form of evil (ib. 247). The 'inner man' was, for him, identical with primordial innocence, to the degree that man's faculty of moral reflection imposed a danger to this innocence; it meant living at some distance from oneself, not being oneself (ib. 199).

- 7 In *De la poesie dramatique* Diderot expresses the following view on conventions and human nature: "Ce sont les miserables conventions qui pervertissent l'homme, et non la nature qu'il faut accuser" (OC, VII, 312).
- 8 Such ideas appear in Diderot's later work, particularly in *Le Neveu de Rameau*, and they point forward to a Romantic conception of the artist as a solitary creative genius.
- 9 B can be seen as Diderot's alter ego, not as a character, but in his role of a public philosophe. Similarities exist between B's and Diderot's statements concerning the authority of laws. In the *Encyclopedia* article on Greeks Diderot wrote: "Qu'est-ce que la voix de la conscience sans l'autorite et la menace des lois?" (OC, XV, 57).
- 10 The essay *Eloge de Richardson* (1762) clearly belongs to that school or tradition of criticism, in which literary works are estimated and evaluated more as acts than objects, from the view of how they affect the reader. Diderot is not so much interested in Richardson's technique or style as in the moral impact of his novels. This is how he describes his own state of mind after reading Richardson: "Combien j'etais ban! combien j'etais juste! que j'etais satisfait de moi! J'etais, au sortir de ta lecture, ce qu'est un homme a la fin d'une journee qu'il a employee a faire le bien" (OE, 30). The English author is compared with French moralists: "Tout ce que Montaigne, Charron, La Rochefoucauld et Nicole ont mis en maximes, Richardson l'a mis en action" (ib. 29). Richardson is praised for his skills in making his heroes and heroines so life-like and singular: "chacun a ses idees, ses expressions, son ton" (ib. 39). This praise gives us an idea of Diderot's own aims in his dialogues.
- 11 As an example of Diderot's wish to disturb the complacency of people coming to see a theater performance is the passage in *De la poesie dramatique* where he speaks of the 'magic' of drama: "c'est de mettre un peuple comme a la gene. Alors les esprits seront troubles, incertains, flottants, eperdus; et vos spectateurs, tels que ceux qui, dans les tremblements d'une partie du globe, voient les murs de leurs maisons vaciller, et sentent la terre se dérober sous leurs pieds" (OC, VII, 314).
- 12 The influence of luxury on the arts is discussed in similar terms in a dialogue between Grimm and Diderot in *Salon de 1767*: the same external reason (luxury) that seems to fortify the arts can also cause their degradation (OC, XI, 85).

III MORALITY, OBSTACLES, AND CHARACTER

The preceding chapter focused on the moral system of habits and virtues in the Republic of Letters. We approached our subject - Diderot and morality - from the exterior and secondarily from the perspective of Diderot's literary work and its specific features. For practical and procedural reasons the Direct View was given priority over the Indirect View. Diderot was seen as a citizen in the Republic of Letters.

Typical of the morality predominant in the republic was that it saw its prime responsibility in solving conflicts between people with differing opinions and interests. The morality of 'sociability' held that man was by nature (instinctively as well as by his 'second nature') a social animal. Pure egoism was seen as leading to unhappiness, whereas virtue pointed to a happy harmony between self-interest and the public good. The ideal was almost too good to be realistic.

In this chapter the emphasis is on the inner problematics of morality, seen through Diderot's texts, two texts in particular. *Lettre sur les aveugles* and *Le Reve de d'Alembert* are not, at first glance, moral studies. They stand for 'natural philosophy' in the wide sense, but since nature is always present in the moral thought of the 18th century, and in Diderot's materialism as well, these two texts provide a basis for specifying certain concepts relevant to his Indirect View - such as 'obstacle', 'organization', and 'character'.

1 Organs and obstacles

1.1 Blind language

Concepts operate in the same way as citizens in the Republic of Letters, through interaction. At the outset of a thought-process one may have a vague idea in mind.

Its meaning may seem clear, as when a word is checked in a dictionary and its semantic core immediately grasped. But it is only by relating the idea to other ideas that one understands its rhetorical dimensions.

Diderot's *Lettre sur les aveugles* (1749) illustrates this point. Diderot, as anyone, had an idea - une idée reçue - of what it means to be blind. But there was more to learn, as he soon found out by interviewing a blind man in Puiseaux. Another example is the blind mathematician Saunderson who managed to think far without seeing. The blind even have their own sense of morality¹, not to mention metaphysics (OP, 93).

Blindness serves here as a metaphor of a relational rather than representational mode of perception. As a blind man cannot see and represent objects on the screen of his mind, he has to rely on the workings and interactions of his other senses. He is also dependant on what seeing people tell him. The question of language, abstraction, and rhetoric becomes central.

Language as a system of relations rather than a mere naming of objects, like 'mirror' to which the blind man gives his own peculiar, metaphoric definition², depends for its meaning on how language is used by sender and receiver (Paulson 1987, 47). The hint seems to be that the same goes for our use of concepts, whether we are blind or not. 'Freedom' is a concept which is not directly related to anything we can see, but by calling some one's behaviour 'free' we resort to a mental image of freedom, which is possible through the metaphoricity of language. It has even been claimed that no literal language exists; all concepts involve figurative and semantic oscillations (Leitch 1983, 57).

Wilda Anderson holds that Diderot's way of redefining concepts was dynamic. It was not in specifying new fixed meanings - why should definitions of terms be any more stable than the world they describe? The process of redefinition came about through the reader's direct experience of using these terms (1990, 61). Diderot gave such terms as 'materialism' and 'determinism' his own meanings, which resist identification with those of his philosophical allies. The reason is to be found in "the most striking characteristics" of his metaphysics, which is "its strong dependence on metaphors" (1990, 24). This is correct, and the wealth of metaphors in Diderot may pertain to rhetoric more than to metaphysics in the strict sense. Nevertheless, *Lettre sur les aveugles* is a philosophical essay, and it is claimed to mark a turning-point in his philosophy: his "reservations about materialism are overcome and he is free to develop it into a sound and coherent intellectual system" (Strugnell 1973, 2-3). We should keep that in mind, and at the same time notice that in this essay Diderot's concerns are rhetorical: he is interested in the blind man's language, its logic and metaphors.

Even language is an organ, the organ that co-ordinates and organizes the data passed on by the specialized organs, like the eyes. Just as one cannot take any sense-data as 'given' but as the result of learning, the use of language is also based on learning and discovery. Thus a sensory handicap, like blindness, is analogous to language unprepared to judge and make sense of the world. It confines itself to repeating given meanings. But this kind of 'blind' language is fairly common even among those who see. Learning to use language creatively requires resistance to the fixity of language and its ready-made metaphors.

But what is resistance without an obstacle? In this sense, there is more in

'blindness' than meets the eye... The blind man is compelled, or challenged, to create his own language for things he cannot see. The obstacle can turn into an organizing factor. Not mechanically, but through consistent mental effort. This phenomenon is reflected in Diderot's characterology, and, at times, functions as a source of comedy³.

William R. Paulson says in *Enlightenment, Romanticism and the Blind in France*, that blindness, in the Enlightenment context, could not lose sight of its cultural meanings, of its role as a metaphor, as it began to arouse philosophical interest due to the contemporary developments in medicine.

During the 18th century the cure of congenital cataracts had become possible, and this affected the moralizing notion of blindness as punishment, which appears on a number of occasions in the *Old Testament*, not to mention the Greek myth of Oedipus who blinds himself in reaction to his shame⁴. In the *New Testament* we find miracles of healing the blind, which reinforced the metaphoric equivalent of sight and faith. Christianity had brought changes in the social status of the blind as in the metaphors of blindness. The Enlightenment philosophy sought to desacralize the theme without noticing that it sacralized its own principle of demystification (Paulson 1987, 4-13).

In brief, blindness was not only a concept fixed to a precise scientific meaning, but also a metaphor involving rhetorical, and moral potentialities.

1.2 Blindness as an obstacle

When Diderot wrote his *Lettre sur les aveugles a l'usage de ceux qui voient*, he was familiar with the famous 'Molyneux problem'. It was first published in John Locke's *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1694), and it had occupied several philosophers before Diderot. The Molyneux problem goes as follows:

Suppose a man born blind, and now adult, and taught by touch to distinguish between a Cube, and a Sphere of the same metal, and nighly of the same bigness, so as to tell, when he felt one an t'other, which is the Cube, which is the Sphere. Suppose then the Cube and Sphere placed on a Table, and the Blind Man to be made to see. Quere, Whether by his sight, before he touch'd them, he could now distinguish, and tell, which is the Globe, which the Cube?" (Molyneux's letter to Locke, dated 2.3.1693; Locke 1975, 146)

In other words: how would a blind person newly cured perceive the world? Diderot deals with this problem as well (his stance is that the cured must first learn to see), but another question becomes important - the one indicated already in the title: can those who see learn anything from the blind?

Indeed, if blindness is a disability, what could there be to learn from it? If knowledge is modeled on visual perception, as often happens ("I see" equals "I understand"), then blindness can hardly represent anything but limited knowing. But think of it as an obstacle to be overcome by mental effort, challenging the blind to make his own way to the understanding of the world, and the picture changes. Blindness turns into a metaphor of energy thrusting itself against obstacles and creating other - heroic or monstrous - ways of relating things to each other.

13 Saunderson, hero and monster

Saunderson, the blind mathematician mentioned in *Lettre sur les aveugles*, is a kind of heroic monster. Heroic in the sense that he remains faithful to his non-visual logic (and to the honesty of his character) till the very end of his life.

In his deathbed dialogue with Reverend Holmes, who comes to see him, Saunderson rejects the Reverend's aesthetizing logic. Holmes alludes to the beauties of nature as a proof of God's existence. Saunderson replies that the argument has no validity to a man who has spent all his life in darkness (OP, 199).

The philosophical depth of this dialogue can be questioned, and it might be more interesting to listen to Saunderson's last words from a moral angle. In fact, Saunderson himself uses moral arguments. He says that it is "vanity" to think of nature as God's creation. As soon as we think of ourselves in those terms we forget all the monstrosities ("productions monstrueuses") in the chain of evolution of which we are a part (OP, 122).

In a way, Saunderson is a monster himself, not only because he "has no eyes", but because he has chosen to be (and is not ashamed of being) a monster, one of those whose "uncompromising integrity of character leads them to extreme actions of which average men and women would be incapable" (Crocker 1974, 88). He belongs to the category of people that Diderot preferred for his moral experiments, such as Madame de la Carliere. Monsters in their blind consistency.

The deathbed dialogue shows that Saunderson has a strong head, but also a warm heart: he does not want to hurt Holmes. There is nothing evil in his monstrosity.

Diderot ends the story of Saunderson's last moments in praise of his mind and character. He compares his hero to those who can see but who are not as clever in interpreting nature:

Ils ont des yeux, dont Saunderson etait prive; mais Saunderson avait une purete de moeurs et une ingenuite de caractere qui leur manquent. Aussi ils vivent en aveugles, et Saunderson meurt comme s'il eut vu. (OP, 124)

Also William R. Paulson thinks of Saunderson as a 'monster', "an irregularity of nature, a burr in the universal clockwork", and goes on explaining Diderot's interest in monsters by the fact that monsters were a popular issue in the 18th century:

As a mechanistic theory of order replaced older theologies, the universality and perfection of such an order became more and more important, the existence of monsters more and more scandalous. With the concept of God so nearly assimilated to clocklike regulatory order, the disruption of natural law appeared to be an almost insurmountable obstacle to deistic faith. (1987, 61)

Obstacles to deistic faith are one thing. Obstacles that are felt as challenges, that direct mental energy, and that form character seem to be at issue in Saunderson's case. If he is a monster, it is because he has learned from his blindness, he is 'educated' by it, and knows his difference from others without fearing to show it.

Etymologically, there may be a connection between the French words 'monstre' and 'montrer' (lat. monstrum & monstrare); not totally uninteresting in this context.

Shame involves the idea of the gaze of another and the fear of that gaze (Williams 1993, 82). Shame is related to seeing. A monster, then, would be some one who shows (or cannot but show) his stigma, who demonstrates his shame (or shamelessness).

Elsewhere, Diderot defines monsters as contradictory beings: "Ce sont ceux dont l'organisation ne s'arrange pas avec le reste de l'univers" (OC, IX, 253). Monsters are borderline cases, and borders and boundaries link morality to the problems raised in *Le Reve de d'Alembert*.

2 Obstacles and organization

Le Reve de d'Alembert (consisting of three parts: 1. Entretien entre d'Alembert et Diderot; 2. Le Reve de d'Alembert; 3. Suite de l'entretien) was written in 1769. It is generally considered a grand synthesis of Diderot's materialist philosophy. One can perhaps name the materialism presented in the three dialogues as "transformational", because it deals with the question of matter and motion and how transformations (from inert to active matter, for example) take place in the processes of nature. I shall not estimate the philosophical value of this piece, but concentrate on two aspects (obstacles, organization) which seem significant to Diderot's moral psychology and characterology.

2.1 Overcoming dualism

Diderot wanted to base materialism on a holistic idea of nature and to overcome the antithesis that Descartes, among others, had proclaimed between soul and body. In Diderot's dialogue with d'Alembert, Cartesian dualism, to which d'Alembert subscribes with certain reservations, becomes an obstacle to moving forward in that direction.

The obstacle is an intellectual one, but also psychological. As soon as d'Alembert goes to bed and falls asleep, the obstacle raised by his conscious convictions disappears, and he continues the dialogue in a dream-state, giving his intelligence liberty to respond to Diderot's provocations. Liberty, here, does not mean only 'licence', but rather an unlimited mobilization of mental energy (which remained inert during the 'entretien').

From Diderot this was a daring move⁵, as literary a device as it was: a detour. No doubt a philosophical explanation can be offered as well. The rhetorical structure of the text makes it manifest. The dialogue between Mademoiselle de L'Espinasse and doctor Bordeu, taking place at d'Alembert's bedside when he is asleep and mumbling aloud his thoughts, displays their talent of anticipating each other's ideas. As soon as the major obstacle has vanished, that is d'Alembert's reservations, the process of anticipating and completing a discourse can go on without any hindrance; the dialogue between L'Espinasse and Bordeu abound in anticipatory leaps and intuitive guessing. This is what one should expect also from the great chain of events in nature; the mental activity of associating ideas runs parallel to causality (Furbank

1992, 335). Matter and mind are just two sides of the same coin.

While d'Alembert is still awake, however, he prefers to see the difficulty outside his own mind, in nature. The difficulty is the result of Diderot's attempt to replace the Cartesian 'soul' (or the thinking mind) with 'sensibility' and to assume that sensibility is an essential quality of matter. If Diderot is right, "il faut que la pierre sente", d'Alembert replies (OP, 258). This is the first metaphoric invention in the first dialogue, and it clearly alludes to an obstacle: a sentient stone - unthinkable!

2.2 Irony and the unthinkable

The 'unthinkable' is exactly what attracts Diderot. According to Michael Moriarty, Diderot calls into question the arguments of anti-materialism by representing them as materially conditioned, by showing that thinking is metaphorical, and hence materialist (1987, 148). To refer to a sentient stone is to use materialist language against materialism. Although this does not remove the obstacle, Diderot has at least lured his friend out onto his playground where matter and motion, the inert and the active, are interrelated. D'Alembert has shown that it is possible to relate 'stone' and 'sentience' in the imagery of the mind, even if the purpose was to negate that connection.

Diderot sees the irony in the supposed unthinkability of what can be thought and expressed in sensual terms. D'Alembert is blind to that irony. He is trapped by his literal language and its tendency to keep one thing apart from another as if there was nothing but void between them. Diderot's poetic approach, by contrast, recognizes in irony a means of introducing relations between things that seem unrelated. His strategy is to play on the presence of what is assumed to be absence in order to build an entire world out of a materialism of the relational (Anderson 1990, 215).

So Diderot quickly adopts the Socratic attitude. "Pourquoi non?" Why should a sentient stone be unthinkable? (OP, 258)

In the stone, sensibility is inert. But Diderot has an idea of how the stone can be transformed and assimilated to a living organism (by grinding it up, fermenting it into humus, growing a plant in it, and finally feeding the plant to a human being), so that in the end it does feel, even think, in a human body (OP, 261-264). The mind/matter dualism has been overcome!

Diderot's irony conforms with what Handwerk says about the subject in his *Irony and Ethics in Narrative*: irony "stands for the possibility and necessity of any and all interrelations, for the totalized and perfectly ordered universe, by incarnating the most radical, apparently disorderly relations" (1985, 22). This conception, if accepted, is not without moral implications.

If irony is about "disorderly relations", the sentient stone is a case in point, but it also alludes to situations in which an obstacle is a challenge to find a better way and not surrender to inertia. To choose ways of guiding energy so as to maximize the creation of organization and to minimize disorganization is a moral task, and irony has its part to play in generating a sense of complexities - which is needed in judging that process.

2.3 Metaphors and levels of organization

Le Reve de d'Alembert is concerned with forms of organization and presents a series of metaphors in which the biological and social aspects count simultaneously.

The problem of how matter is organized (from the lower levels to the higher) leads gradually to the question of how the mind of a "grand homme" (a man of genius) should be understood in terms of material relations and psychological organization.

The most important metaphors in the text are: the stone (not 'yet' sentient; the lowest level of organization), the swarm of bees, the pol_yp, the spider's web, and the great man.

As Jacques Chouillet has pointed out, these metaphors as well as other biological terms ('origine', 'faisceau' etc.) applied in the text even have political connotations (1984, 234). Let us quote one passage from the *Reve*:

BORDEU: (...) Derangez l'origine du faisceau, vous changez l'animal; il semble qu'il soit la tout entier, tantot dominant les ramifications, tantot domine par elles.
 MLLE DE L'ESPINASSE: Et l'animal est sous le despotisme ou sous l'anarchie.
 BORDEU: Sous le despotisme, fort bien dit. L'origine du faisceau commande, et tout le reste obeit. L'animal est maitre de soi, mentis compos.
 MLLE DE L'ESPINASSE: Sous l'anarchie, ou taus les filets du reseau sont soulevés contre leur chef, et ou il n'y a plus d'autorite supreme.
 BORDEU: A merveille. Dans les grands acces de passion, clans le delire, clans les perils imminents, si le maitre porte toutes les forces de ses sujets vers un point, l'animal le plus faible montre une force incroyable. (OF, 346)

Organization is about controlling and directing energy from a center. This concerns higher levels of organization (starting from the spider's web). Here 'despotism' corresponds to control and 'anarchy' to disorganization. This is as far as the political connotations go. From the fact that control is needed on higher levels of organization it does not follow that any social community or organization should submit to despotic rule. 'Control' can adopt new forms, especially when modified by the virtues of 'sociability'. Sociability represents 'luxury' (as defined in chapter II): energy freed from the crude maintenance of control, an opening up of new possibilities for cognition and communion.

In fact, what we see in *Le Reve* is the formation of a small democratic community composed of four individuals: Diderot, d'Alembert, Mlle de L'Espinasse and Bordeu. Their relations to each other exemplify a certain model of organization created by dialogic co-operation. D'Alembert is in the 'center' and all the others take their places around that center. But every subject involved in this process has had to give up a certain degree of individual autonomy, d'Alembert included (d'Alembert through his dream-state, and the others voluntarily). This characterizes the dialogic (democratic) order of that community. One can hardly describe it either as 'despotic' or 'anarchic'.

Here is where morality comes into the picture. As there are different levels of organization, there are different levels of morality. The homogenous organization of a stone is amoral, before its conjunction with something organic. A swarm of bees shows a tendency to organization; instinctive morality. The pol_yp belongs to the same category. With the spider's web a new aspect of organization is introduced:

hierarchy. The spider is the command-center of its web: it possesses control over each part of its web, as well as its victims; a primitive morality of despotism. The great man complexifies this despotic tendency. He is the master of his sensual and sentimental movements. Being always able to judge himself and his environment with 'sangfroid', he does not fear challenges or obstacles, not even death. In Bordeu's words:

Il ne craindra pas la mort, peur, comme a dit sublimement le stoicien, qui est une anse que saisit le robuste pour mener le faible partout ou il veut; il aura casse l'anse et se sera en meme temps affranchi de toutes les tyrannies de ce monde. Les etres sensibles ou les fous sont en scene, il est au parterre; c'est lui qui est le sage. (OP, 357)

By virtue of his inner despotic order the great man is free from all the tyrannies of the world, that is, he has character. Still, there is one problem (one source of moral irony, also): having character is not synonymous with being good and virtuous. But on the other hand, can one go on being good and virtuous without character?

3 On Diderot's characterology

3.1 Unity of character

Everything in nature strives towards unity and organization. But for every rule there are exceptions. Monsters and misfits are examples of motion that disorganize. In these cases the crucial question is whether there is a way to overcome the obstacle and regain control. But how exceptional is this? Is not any effort to increase organization a reaction to some difficulty? What if the exceptions are not so much exceptional as exemplary of ways in which unity of character comes about?

For unity of character is not a product of nature. Speaking of "le grand horn.me", Bordeu makes it clear that such a person has had to become the master of his actions (OF, 357), which implies that the degree of psychological organization (or unity of character) has been reached through struggle and pain ("le grand horn.me, s'il a malheusement reu cette disposition"). If the great man is not at the mercy of his 'diaphragm' anymore, he once was. He has fought for his integrity and his self-possession. His character is, more or less, of his own making.

In this sense, character had for Diderot a different, a more dynamic meaning, than for the author of *Les Caracteres*. For La Bruyere the notion gave rise to a portrayal of "personalities defined by the absence of true personalities" (Alter 1989, 307), though la Bruyere was also aware that true merit, or character, is rarely recognized as such. But Diderot was clearly fascinated by strong characters and sensitive to the ways they differed from 'mediocre' or incoherent people, always in danger of losing their reason and judgement, always submissive either to their feelings or to some external impulse. They lead contradictory lives without being able to harmonize the discordant elements in themselves.

An example of a 'mediocre' person is Gousse as described in *Jacques le fataliste*: ask him to follow you to a distant place and to do you a favor, he will follow and do

you the favor; then tell him to go away and he will go without protesting; another day he will steal money from a friend; "vous croyez a Gousse un grand fonds de morale? Eh bien! detrompez-vous, il n'en avait pas plus qu'il n'y en a dans la tete d'un brochet" (1973, 102). One day doing good, another day bad, it depends on what mood Gousse happens to be in. Not only has Gousse no character, he has no sense of shame or guilt either.

In an essay dealing with different accounts of 'good life' Lawrence C. Becker distinguishes one principle which well fits Diderot's moral psychology: 'inner unity'. However, Diderot's name is not mentioned on the list of the most famous advocates of this view: Plato, Butler, Nietzsche, Freud... Let us take Nietzsche, for example. In *Menschliches, Allzumenschliches* (aph. 228) Nietzsche defines his idea of "strong, good character":

Die Gebundenheit der Ansichten, durch Gewohnung zum Instinkt geworden, fiihrt zu dem, was man Charakterstarke nennt. Wenn jemand aus wenigen, aber immer aus den gleichen Motiven handelt, so erlangen seine Handlungen eine grosse Energie; stehen diese Handlungen im Einklange mit den Grundsätzen der gebundenen Geister, so werden anerkannt und erzeugen nebenbei in dem, der sie tut, die Empfindung des guten Gewissens. Wenige Motive, energisches Handeln und gutes Gewissen machen das aus, was man Charakterstarke nennt. (1954, 188).

What Nietzsche means by "wenige Motive" (few motives) is the equivalent of what Diderot means by control. In order to control oneself one cannot afford too many motives. That would lead to disintegration. "Gutes Gewissen" (good conscience) is also seen as essential⁶; Diderot may have preferred another expression - like 'sense of necessity' - to come to the same conclusion: a strong character has no time for shame and remorse. Inner unity is the supreme principle.

Becker is not unaware of the ambiguities involved in this principle: "A moral monster", he says, "can have inner unity, and justice surely should not be subordinated to that sort of unity" (1992, 24). Becker's remark points to the conflict zone between the Direct and Indirect View. The Indirect View faces the danger of justifying deviances from generalized principles of justice, from Right and Wrong.

Perhaps, but the Indirect View (here represented by the idea of inner unity) prevented Diderot from leaning too heavily on what he himself thought was Right and Wrong and from becoming a 'moralisateur', a preacher of morality. The principle of unity of character allowed his characters to speak or act on their own behalf; judging them was the business of others, of the narrator and the readers.

What, then, are the basic components of a person's character? According to Amelie Oksenberg Rorty's definition, it consists of "patterns of perceptual and emotional attention and salience, patterns and styles of cognitive and motivational organization, habits of social interaction, and typical strategies for coping with conflict" (1992, 41). One may, without hesitation, assume that Diderot's idea of character covered these aspects.

32 Character and blind spots

To continue from Oksenberg Rorty's definition, one may ask, with regard to Diderot's characterology, whether some components of character (like patterns of perceptual attention or of cognitive organization) may include something similar to blindness. Let us use the term 'blind spots'.

My theory is that Diderot's *Lettre sur les aveugles* left its mark on the author's mind and his metaphoric thought in general. This is to say that the metaphor of blindness can be extended to the interpretation of the 'inner unity' in most of Diderot's real and imagined characters.

Le Reve de d'Alembert questioned the existence of fixed and inviolable boundaries in nature. It follows that any entity in nature, even a human being with an individual identity and inner organization, is part of the great chain of interrelations. It cannot see but a limited truth of itself and its conditions, whatever its intellectual powers are. The higher the level of organization, the less there is transparency (external aspect) and the more intricate becomes the question of its cognition and its blind spots (internal aspect). I will discuss the problem of opacity and transparency later. Here it will suffice to say:

Diderot's characters usually have their specific blind spots.

3.2.1 Naive characters

Suzanne, the heroine of Diderot's novel *La Religieuse* (published in Correspondance litteraire during the years 1780-1783) is also the narrator of her story. The blind spots of her narration are evident especially in the parts describing her encounters with the lesbian prioress in the convent of Saine-Eutrope, but are also present in the overall quality of her character: in her naivety.

The novel was written under the influence of Richardson and represents the genre of the epistolary novel. Secluded in a convent against her will, Suzanne writes letters to a gentleman whom she expects to help her. Suzanne 'knows' the gentleman only by his good reputation. He, the Marquis de Croismare, remains silent throughout the novel. As readers, we have access only to Suzanne's letters and thus to her version of the events.

Suzanne's letters are smuggled out of the convent, as nuns are not allowed to communicate with the outside world, at least not without permission. Obviously, permission would not have been granted, for Suzanne's narrative turns out to be a monastic horror story inspiring awe and pity in the reader. With this in mind we can call the novel 'sentimental' or 'Richardsonian'.

This sentimental impact is, however, controlled by Diderot's narrative strategy of making Suzanne's naivety and blind spots manifest. Here the novel differs from the Richardsonian model. There is no reason to suspect that Suzanne is 'lying', but she is not always fully aware of the meaning of the incidents she candidly reports.

Take for example her description of the way the new prioress of Sainte-Eutrope treats a nun who has committed some error:

...elle la fait venir dans sa cellule, la traite avec durete, lui ordonne de se deshabiller et de se dormir vingt coups de discipline; la religieuse obeit, se deshabille, prend la discipline,

et se macere; mais à peine s'est elle donnée quelques coups, que la supérieure, devenue compatissante, lui arrache l'instrument de pénitence, se met à pleurer, dit qu'elle est bien malheureuse d'avoir à punir, lui baise le front, la bouche, les épaules: la caresse, la loue. (1966, 186)

For Suzanne, this behavior appears strange, but she is unable to see any deeper (sexual) cause for it. The reader is expected to draw the conclusions, to catch the irony residing in the blind spot of Suzanne's narration, and to understand what Suzanne, in her religious innocence, does not understand.

And yet, Suzanne is not stupid. Some of her reflections could have been jotted down by the pen of any Enlightener of the day:

Où est-ce que la nature, revoltee d'une contrainte pour laquelle elle n'est point faite, brise les obstacles qu'on lui oppose, devient furieuse, jette l'économie animale dans un désordre auquel il n'y a plus de remède. (ib. 151-152)

Suzanne is religious but unwilling to accept monastic seclusion. She believes that God has made man sociable, and therefore she sees no contradiction between her faith and desire for society. Moreover, it is not faith that makes her blind to the sexual in her superior's kisses and caresses. Confessor Lemoine, a man of faith himself, immediately grasps the meaning of the episode that Suzanne tells him and advises her to shun her superior; he presents the woman as an emissary of Satan, in religious jargon, in order not to abuse Suzanne's innocence.

The blind spot is part of Suzanne's character shaped by the necessity to submit to conditions which she cannot accept. Even if she is strong enough to stand up to the sadism imposed on her (punishments and ill-will; sadism is, of course, an outcome of the unnatural conditions of monastic life), her strength bears no fruit, and her resistance remains passive.

An important aspect of Suzanne's character is her sense of guilt, the voice of conscience that cannot allow her to conform with external expectations for the sake of social acceptance. She acts like a Christian martyr of faith in a surrounding that is supposed to represent that faith. But her faith can be defined only in negative terms: she does not want to be a nun. As to life in the world, she is unexperienced and unarmed against its dangers. Her adversary is the morality of shame (which exists also outside the convent), and the obstacle she has to face seems too suppressive to allow her character to rise above the situation, to judge it from the 'outside' (outside herself as well as the convent). Her naivety consists of being confined to her 'inner truth', which cannot cover but a small patch of the reality she lives in.

Another naive character portrayed by Diderot in *Entretien d'un philosophe avec la Marechale de **** is also a woman and a pious one. Charming as she is in her naivety, she is, without knowing it herself, rather ruthless in her views on morality. It is only the fear of eternal punishment, she thinks, that can guarantee man's virtue and prevent one from becoming a thief or a murderer. One senses a disparity between her convictions and her gentle character, and as the dialogue evolves, it becomes clear that her 'nature' is more open than her ideas, which are mostly received ideas, not to say parodies of Pascal. She asks Diderot: "Que gagnez-vous donc à ne pas croire?" (1977, 176), echoing Pascal's famous argument in favor of faith: "Si vous gagnez, vous gagnez tout; si vous perdez, vous ne perdez rien" (1972,

114). One assumes that in Pascal's proposition there was an ironic awareness of the utilitarian nature of the argument, but la Marechale is serious about her question, which, as the philosophe seems to understand better than she does, is not a religious concern: "Est-ce qu'on croit, parce qu'il y a quelque chose a gagner?" (ib.). La Marechale is a good person who is blind to the fact that her goodness is a personal quality, due to her innocence and openness, and not to religious fear.

3.2.2 Shrewed characters

In the case of naivety blind spots are rather evident, but what about shrewed characters who are more skilled in plotting against their destinies and taking control in their hands?

In *Jacques le fataliste* there is a story about a lady who most obviously falls into this category: Madame de la Pommeraye. Her actions are narrated from the outside, as if a shrewed character would be too shrewed to testify in his/her own case.

Jacques himself, one might say, is no fool either, but he is a shrewed character who is not afraid of playing the fool, which makes a difference. When Jacques tells about his plots and tricks with women, his narratives are spiced with humor, leaving the impression that he does not want to overrate his own part in the events. Exactly, this is the great axiom of his fatalism: whatever happens to Jacques has been 'written above', nothing is his own doing. For Jacques, the notion of 'character' would seem irrelevant (if associated with control and self-possession), but this is precisely where his blind spot lies. For it cannot be denied that he is a shrewed character from tip to toe, and only fails or refuses to acknowledge it.

Madame de la Pommeraye is quite a different case, a tragic one. Tragic, because she takes herself and her love seriously. Frustrated in her love to the Marquis des Arcis, she works out a plan for her revenge. She flatters herself with her objectivity: she knows what stirs the Marquis, seduces him, drives him mad. An innocent young woman, a paragon of virtue - and an obstacle. With great cunning Madame de la Pommeraye makes the Marquis run after an object he would not want, if he only knew.. In order to get the young woman the Marquis has to suffer, make sacrifices, and get married. The plan is carried out, the young woman takes her orders from Madame de la Pommeraye, and finally the Marquis steps into the trap. Married, the Marquis finds out the truth. Disaster! But after a while he accepts his lot and chooses to be happily married in spite of all...

Madame de la Pommeraye, if anyone, has the qualities of the 'great man', the capacity to judge coolly and objectively. She is in love and in despair at the same time; but she conceals her feelings from the Marquis and pretends to be his friend. Unity of character: love and hate, friendship and revenge, passion and patient calculation, all in the same person. Superb organization deriving from an obstacle (the Marquis's love is lost). Diderot warns his reader: "Vous pouvez hair; vous pouver redouter Madame de la Pommeraye; mais vous ne la mepriserez pas" (1973, 198). But she has a blind spot. Her revenge turns into a gift, for she did not take into account how surprising love can be.

However, one Diderotian character seems to be without a blind spot. He is Monsieur Hardouin from the play *Est-il ban? est-il mechant?* A resourceful man to whom people turn when they are in trouble and in need of a trick to change things

for the better. Hardouin is shrewed enough to know how such tricks are produced, but his shameless methods are rarely approved by those who ask for his favors.

Between means and goals there is a huge gap, creating moral perplexity and irony. The question arises: is Hardouin a good or a wicked person? There are contradictions in his character which he has integrated in his own way. He is not sentimental about what he is doing, but why then is he so willing to help? This is how Hardouin himself defines his situation: "Je suis ne, je crois, pour ne rien faire de ce qui me convient, pour faire tout ce que les autres exigent et pour ne contenter personne, non personne, pas meme moi" (OC, VIII, 231).

Or maybe his blind spot is right there: in not understanding his own polytropic character.

3.2.3 Other types of character

Passion and cunning are two important themes in Diderot, and the types of character presented above (the naive and the shrewed) reflect these themes in opposite ways, at least seen from the point of view of cunning. But there is no passion-intelligence opposition in Diderot. For him, intelligence and reason are rooted in the 'animal economy', in the domain of instincts and passions, although they are typical only to humans and thus not reducible to the lower levels of organization.

Timo Kaitaro's main thesis in his study of Diderot's holism is that Diderot was a consistent antireductionist: the phenomena of the higher levels of organization could and should not, in the antireductionist view, be reduced to and explained by the laws governing the lower levels (1995, 111). This means, in practical terms, that even if reason and cunning may have their roots or motivational basis in passions and instincts, the fact that they belong to a higher level of organization gives them a potential controlling power over passions.

To use a navigation analogy, wind is the force (the motive force) which drives a sailboat, but the wind does not sail the boat, it is the navigator. Assuming that there are different 'styles' of navigation, we might as well state that differences in character are differences in navigation styles.

The naive navigator is the one who is surprised by the wind and hopes that some one would help him/her out of the trouble. The shrewed navigator is the one who tries to deceive the wind while skillfully co-operating with it. But passion (energy, wind) is always there, and some navigators go rashly against it in order to demonstrate their superiority, whatever the result. They are desperados, selfdestructive characters.

One of them is Madame de la Carliere. She also demonstrates unity of character in her conviction that a decent marriage has lost its dignity as soon as any sign of infidelity, be it how innocent or slight, occurs. When this principle is shared by the 'public' (as happens), she acts accordingly, consistently and uncompromisingly, no matter what the final cost will be. Her consistency - and blindness to all other aspects - destroys her and her child, and leaves her husband in misery. No one can say that Madame de la Carliere is not a deeply moral person, though her choice, the concentrated image of her character, far from exhausts the moral possibilities of her situation.

Then there are alienated characters who sail where the wind takes them, not because they do not have better ideas, but because they flatter themselves for being realists and seeing the world without illusions. Yet they control their lives from this self-constructed center, alienated from the reality of their true desires and capacities. This is the case of Rameau's nephew. His character and blind spots will be further discussed in chapter VI.

4 Forms of inner resistance

The problem or difficulty of judging oneself has not so far been discussed. If passions and emotions represent lower levels of organization, how should one understand moral emotions, such as remorse, and guilt? Do they stand for the lower levels or should they be allowed entrance to the controlling center? With Diderot one cannot be quite sure. In fact, one should be well aware that these emotions may on occasion even resist thoughts and actions initiated by reason and intelligence.

Are moral emotions obstacles to be overcome or obstacles to be respected and cherished? The question was not an easy one considering that these forms of inner resistance (especially guilt) were not only philosophical puzzles for idle brains, but also values protected by the church and the Christian religion.

4.1 Forgiveness

If friendship is a virtue, as it was in the Republic of Letters, what would its moral consequences be? Suppose I have hurt my friend's feelings. Afterwards I realize that I have done wrong to him. So I apologize. How? By telling him that when I offended him I did what was unavoidable at the moment?

This would seem to follow from a 'determinist' standpoint. However consistent Diderot may have been in his determinism, he cannot have ignored that in certain situations people express apologies and wish to be forgiven. Was it merely a social habit without any deeper meaning? Except for the meaning derived from Christianity... As sinners we should forgive other sinners?

The act of forgiving can be seen from two angles. There is the person who begs to be forgiven and the one who forgives. A person with unity of character is supposed to be the master of his movements: if he fails, he should logically blame himself. Being 'forgiven' is not the issue. The Christian moral doctrine differs from Diderot's approach in that Christianity presents man as weak: to beg for forgiveness is to confess one's weakness. For Diderot, no man was weak as such. Energy was a universal phenomenon, common to all living beings, only some people were not able to integrate their forces and to control them. Being forgiven (and forgiveness in general) was no remedy to life's problems.

Here his stance differs from Nietzsche's view, according to which Christianity was the religion of the weak, founded on the dominant emotion of the weak: resentment. Nietzsche's morality, if one may say so, called for a particular kind of resistance: resistance to resentment, the poisonous grudge of weakness, the wish to

take revenge on life. In different terms, this doctrine associated weakness with not being able to love/forgive life.

Instead of seeing weakness in grudge, Diderot had no problem in imagining a strong character with a powerful grudge and a desire to avenge. Madame de la Pommeraye, for example. She is motivated by resentment and shame. Her feeling of deep shame comes from seeing herself humiliated by the Marquis des Ards.

However, with Diderot's theory of character in mind, it would not be absurd to claim that by forgiving the Marquis des Arcis the fading away of his love (closer to a whim than a crime) Madame de la Pommeraye would have shown as much character. In fact, she is more controlled by her grudge than in control of it. True, her grudge is a form of energy, but energy as such does not explain a character's choices. It is the navigator, not the wind, that sails the boat.

Now, consider forgiveness in this context. By forgiving the Marquis the pain he had brought on her, Madame de la Pommeraye would have taken command over her boat rather than complied with the Marquis's wishes. She would not have accepted pain as 'given', a *fatum*, but resisted her grudge, and her pain.

Had this happened, the story would have been different. But once the story is told, one can ask whether such an outcome would have shown less integrity of character. Using an argument from the *Encyclopedie*, forgiveness could have provided Madame de la Pommeraye with the 'luxury' of new energies - energies she could have guided toward more enlightened ends.

Forgiving can also be a form of resistance and control (sign of unity of character).

4.2 Remorse

To be able to explain is one thing, to feel sorry another. The question is: how "scientific" an attitude is remorse?

For La Mettrie, the answer was clear: there was no scientific ground for "une ancienne habitude de sentir" like remorse. In his *Discours sur le bonheur ou l'Anti-Seneque* he argues that this "cruel enemy" should be overcome by other, better habits (1977, 154). According to Jacques Domenach, no other Enlightenment went as far as La Mettrie in banishing remorse. Jacques Domenach continues:

La Mettrie se propose de la traiter en adoptant 'la meilleure philosophie', c'est-a-dire 'celle des Medecins', recommandation que fera aussi Diderot, mais il faut croire que les deux penseurs ne partagent pas la meme conception de la medecine. (1989, 174)

Diderot had written that "il est bien difficile de faire de la bonne morale, sans etre anatomiste, physiologiste et medecin" (OC, XI, 512), but this did not mean that he was willing to side with La Mettrie. In his *Essai sur les regnes de Claude et Neron* Diderot - while singing praises to Seneca - lashes some of his contemporaries, among them La Mettrie, who is mentioned as "un ecrivain qui n'a pas les premieres idees des vrais fondements de la morale" (OC, III, 217). Whatever caused this harsh verdict, Diderot's own attitude to remorse was not so hospitable either.

Let us take an example from *Le Reve de d'Alembert*. Bordeu is a doctor, a man of science, who knows how to explain everything from inorganic to organic nature

all the way to human behavior. But when asked by Mademoiselle de l'Espinasse what he thinks of shame and remorse he replies: "Puerilite fondee sur l'ignorance et la vanite d'un etre qui s'impute a lui-meme le merite ou le demerite d'un instant necessaire" (OP, 365). The answer of a scientist! The sense of necessity seems to preclude over moral emotions.

In *Le Neveu de Rameau* the same idea appears: circumstances should be seen as necessities: "laissons la", Moi says, "le tout que nous ne connaissons pas assez pour le louer ou le blamer; et qui n'est peut-etre ni bien ni mal; s'il est necessaire" (1981, 46). The idea is, at least, symptomatic.

Of course, necessity is not coercion. Necessity implies that it is in the nature of things that they are bound to happen. Coercion, by contrast, goes against nature, against one's needs and dignity. But where exactly is the borderline between social coercion and natural necessity, if the social and the natural are interrelated in other respects?

Moral freedom is not distinct from social necessities, but those necessities must be distanced in one way or another. One way of distancing them is to accept some form of otherness in oneself, that is to carry out a dialogue within oneself, and to deal with "the old habit" of feeling remorse, if not shame and guilt - whenever necessity, or whatever takes its appearance, challenges us to reconsider our ways.

4.3 Shame and guilt

Are any of Diderot's characters prone to feel guilt or shame? Certainly: take for example the unfaithful husband of Madame de la Carliere - le chevalier Desroches. But the story shows less interest in his conscience than in the public judgement passed on him and in Madame de la Carliere's moral reaction. Shame on public opinion! The crime was not comparable to the punishment.

One could also name Mademoiselle de l'Espinasse who pretends that there is a point to which she can go "sans rougir" (OP, 375), which is hardly meant to be taken seriously. Diderot does not approach guilt in a straightforward way, without detours, and shame is mostly presented as a nasty encumbrance.

There is a difference between guilt and shame. In Bernard Williams' words, guilt is "more isolated than shame is from other elements of one's self-image, the rest of one's desires and needs" (1993, 94). It may be typical of guilt that one cannot understand it entirely (a sense of sin helps, of course), but this may also be due to a forward-looking attitude. If judging presupposes two ideas to compare, as Diderot claims (OP, 563), guilt can be based on comparing our present idea of ourselves to an idea more challenging, an idea we are only beginning to believe in.

On the other hand, it is easier to blind oneself from guilt, because it is an 'inside matter', at least more clearly than shame is. Shame embodies conceptions of what one is in relation to others. Which may be why "shame can understand guilt, but guilt cannot understand itself" (Williams 1993, 93).

In one of Diderot's stories called *Entretien d'un pere avec ses enfants*, there is an interesting sentence which pertains to what was stated above:

Le remords nait peut-etre moins de l'horreur de soi que de la crainte des autres; moins de la honte de l'action que du blame et du chatiment qui la suivraient s'il arrivait qu'on la decouvrit. (1977, 107)

It is Diderot speaking to himself. Instead of 'culpabilité' (guilt), he uses the expression 'honte' (shame) and contrasts it to the expectancy of blame, which actually is the very essence of the sense of shame. Guilt has been understood through shame, but at the same time a suspicious sentiment (l'horreur de soi) is mentioned, only to be excluded as a possible explanation of remorse. In the preceding conversation, however, conscience was the issue: "Va ou tu voudras, tu y trouveras ta conscience" (ib. 186). The conversation revolves around guilt morality; the word 'guilt' is omitted.

4.4 Detours of representation

When posing moral problems Diderot could not entirely avoid the problem of guilt. The problem was there, but the difficulty was in the concept imbued with religious meanings, above all with connotations of sin. By virtue of the Indirect View, that is, when dealing with character-psychology, Diderot had to be more perceptive than a Direct View on morality would have allowed. Shame and guilt were essential to human motivation, so naturally this dimension had to be included, in one way or another, in the actions, emotions, and evaluations of his characters. Diderot chose to approach the problem by means of irony and opacity.

Most probably he saw the possibility of secular forms of guilt, but it did not fit in with the 18th century Direct View, neither did it fit in with his own philosophical priorities. But in fiction one was free to discuss anything indirectly. Secular guilt was plausible, if there were crimes against nature, vices wearing a social disguise, vices related to power, h_{yp} ocrisy, repression, false morality. Polite society with its demands of noble appearances was one source of secular guilt. To expose polite repressions, and thereby hidden guilt, one had to invent detours for representing the problem.

What guilt stands for is the 'internalized Other', an element of otherness in oneself, an element one can find as difficult to distinguish from, as to integrate into, one's character. If this Other is God, it at least has a name, but if it represents human otherness (which again can take on different meanings, natural or unnatural), imprecision prevails.

In *Le Reve de d'Alembert* something analogous to guilt takes place, although in strictly naturalistic terms. When dreaming and expressing aloud his visions, d'Alembert is continuing his dialogue with Diderot. It is Diderot dreaming in d'Alembert. Yet this 'internalized Other' is no longer identifiable with Diderot. It has become a larger being. It gives an outsider, Mademoiselle de l'Espinasse, an impression of a strange maladie. She calls a doctor to see if anything is wrong with d'Alembert. The doctor's diagnosis is reassuring: there is nothing unnatural in d'Alembert's state of mind. Quite the contrary: his ravings make perfect sense!

There is also in *Le Neveu de Rameau* a passage touching on the question of otherness in people who pretend to be better, in their own eyes, than they are. They are satirized as h_{yp} ocrites: Lui says that a h_{yp} ocrite is ready to do "tout ce qu'il peut pour se persuader qu'il est un homme de coeur" (1981, 92).

The question is not raised why this performance should be necessary. Obviously there is a reason for everything. But since the h_{yp} ocrite is seen as being alone with himself, his behavior appears ridiculous. No effort is made (either by Moi

or Lui) to find a hidden necessity behind his performance. Hypocrisy may, in fact, stem from a failed dialogue with the internalized Other, from guilt denied and misrepresented.

Guilt is not only a backward-looking feeling, it is as much concerned with future actions and moral choices. In this sense it also involves the reader who is challenged to leave behind his passivity and to recognize to what degree he is the maker of his world - starting with his perceptions.

References

- 1 Diderot sees a connection between blindness and morality. The blind man has a special aversion to theft. For two reasons: it is easy to steal from him; it would be difficult for him to steal without being seen (OP, 92) - the argument is in perfect accordance with the principle of equal rights. But, above all, blindness is directly related to the sense of shame, the shame of being 'seen' in a undesired situation. The shame of being seen naked does not matter to the blind; why should one cover one part of the body rather than some other (ib)? With his example Diderot shows, in Schmitt's words, that "le sentiment de pudeur n'est pas inne, mais acquis" and that "l'origine de la pudeur est dans la relation sociale" (1997, 59-60). Schmitt seems to forget that the blind man is not cut off from social relations; the problem, as Diderot presents it, concerns the relation of seeing to the feelings aroused by being seen. If a blind man is "naturellement impudique" (ib. 59), it should be added that his natural outfit is not the same as that of seeing people. Even if the reasons for shame and bashfulness may differ from one culture to another, the experience of shame tends to emerge when people see and are seen in situations where they would rather not be seen. What about pity then, Diderot's other example? Pity is a universal feeling, at least potentially. But in the blind man's case it is related to visual perception. Pity aroused by sight does not touch the blind man: he sees no difference between a man urinating and a man bleeding (OP, 93). Does this prove that moral values are relative? Not quite (whatever we may think of relativism otherwise). Schmitt's interpretation is that Diderot's Lettre is "sa demonstration de la relativite des valeurs" (1977, 59).
- 2 When asked how he would define a mirror, the blind man of Puisseaux answers: "Une machine, qui met les choses en relief loin d'elles-memes, si elles se trouvent placees convenablement par rapport a elle. C'est comme ma main, qu'il ne faut pas que je pose a cote d'un objet pour le sentir." (OP, 84)
- 3 In Jacques le fataliste obstacles are seen as increasing energy and activity. The idea is presented in a comic light: "Pas de gens qui aiment plus à parler que les begues, pas de gens qui aiment plus à marcher que les boiteux" (1973, 115). As a child Jacques was accustomed to wear a gag which prevented him from talking: "et c'est à ce maudit baillon que je dois la rage de parler" (ib. 153).
- 4 In fact, for the myth of Oedipus there is both the shame- and guilt-interpretation. In *The Greeks and the irrational* (1957), Dodds has documented the transition in Greek history from an earlier Homeric shame culture to a later guilt culture, that of Classical Athens at the time of the tragedians and philosophers. In his essay *Beyond Morality* (1976), James Gilligan summarizes Dodds' reflexions on Greek morality and on Oedipus' predicament followingly: "By the time Greeks became a guilt culture (...) they worried not about experiencing too little pride and prestige, but too much - overweening pride or arrogance - for which they used the term hubris. Far from being the highest good, pride by this time was the 'prime evil' (...); the hamartia, or 'tragic flaw', for which, in Aristotle's analysis, Sophocles' Oedipus punished himself. In the earlier Homeric shame culture's version of the Oedipus myth, however, Oedipus continued to reign in Thebes, neither punishing himself nor feeling guilty" (147).

- 5 Extreme liberties are taken with d'Alembert. His life-history from infant to man of letters and science is resumed in few words. He is presented dreaming of his own sperm and expanding the idea into cosmic proportions, not to say anything about the daring portrayal of a distinguished man in his private sphere, not in control of himself and his public image. Having read the manuscript d'Alembert advised Diderot to destroy it. Diderot did not release it in his lifetime, the text remained unpublished till 1830.
- 6 Professor Tarmo Kunnas has pointed out to me that Nietzsche speaks here as a psychologist without moralizing. The term 'good conscience' would thus mean the same as 'composure'.
- 7 Paul Ricoeur comes to a similar conclusion when writing about h_{yp} ocrisy in the second part of *Philosophie de la volonté* (Finitude et culpabilité): " h_{yp} ocrisie est comme la grimace du scrupule. (...) le scrupule vire à h_{yp} ocrisie dès que la conscience scrupuleuse cesse d'être en mouvement" (1960, II, 289).

IV RHETORIC AND DIALOGUE

Differences in character and unity of character, when contrasted with general principles (the Direct View on morality), create in Diderot's novels and stories an atmosphere of moral irony and relativity, allowing the reader to negotiate with the text and to judge individually. Guiding the reader toward a conclusion or orienting him toward an independent judgement with necessary back-up (information, clues, open questions, stylistic delicacy) is what literary rhetoric is largely about.

Some readers may judge according to their characters (through identification or contempt), some may delight in the suspension of judgement - legitimized by the use of irony - and come to more abstract and reflected conclusions. The conditions for judging are there. As Diderot would say, in order to judge one needs at least two ideas to compare (OP, 563).

From the naturalistic world of 'organs' and 'organization' we enter again the public sphere of social interaction, but now with an idea of how higher levels of organization, once reached through 'despotism' and control of energy, allow that energy to transform into the 'luxury' of free dialogue.

Diderot's 'determinism' does not exclude the possibility of freedom; it only wishes to determine its conditions. Freedom is not something 'given'. It cannot be reduced to the lower levels of organization, nor is it a gift from God: it is the fruit of both evolution and individual struggle leading to the formation of 'character' with its inevitable 'blind spots'. This, again, creates the conditions for another kind of luxury: the virtue of sociability, the art of dialogue, moral interaction and irony, in one word, rhetoric.

1 Interpretations of rhetoric

1.1 The art of persuasion

During its history as a discipline 'rhetoric' has been defined in many ways, but its

most general and frequently encountered meaning is 'the art of expression and persuasion' (Robrieux 1993, 2).

Rhetoric once enjoyed a central place in the syllabus of the first three liberal arts, together with grammar and dialectic. After a decline, it recovered its vitality in the Renaissance. Then, so it is said, with the Enlightenment again began its long descent from the position of power and influence¹. This is to see rhetoric in academic terms, as a discipline distinguished from logic and scientific methodology.

It seems odd, however, to think of the 'Republic of Letters' (formed by learned men and women of letters, engaged in dialogue and correspondance, who established a 'public sphere' alongside the institutions of monarchy and church) without considering the rhetorical dimension of that republic. Certainly its citizens used words to persuade each other. Rhetoric can, in fact, take different guises. It is not only where and how it is taught, but where and how it is practiced, that matters. In any event, the language of the philosophes showed signs of rhetoricity: "Their language was redolent with metaphors of battle and the physical act of penetration: they spoke of the beam that pierces comers of darkness, the blow that levels barriers of censorship, the fresh wind that lifts the veil of religious authority", as Peter Gay has observed (1977, 132).

The naturalizing motto "*ars est artem celare*", postulating that art conceals itself, offers an example of one rhetorical strategy. Many philosophes of the Enlightenment, inheritors as they were of the Classical tradition, saw it as crucial to mark their opposition to bigotry and obscurantism by means of style as well - through 'natural' simplicity and clarity of language. Voltaire's style is a good example of an easy swiftness that tries to conceal its rhetorical artfulness².

Diderot did not think of clarity too highly when it came to poetry: "*La poesie veut quelque chose d'énorme, de barbare et de sauvage*" (OC, III, 481), and with 'poesie' he did not mean only writing poems, even painting could be poetic for Diderot. His motto was: "*Poetes, soyez tenebreux*" (OC, VII, 183). Poetry had more to do with passions than with reason and arguments. This is just another aspect of rhetoric.

One should also add to the definition of rhetoric (as an art of persuasion) that it is not allowed to reveal its identity as the representative of the power of the word (Cahn 1993, 79) or any other power. Persuasion, far from forcing one to think in a certain way, appeals to one's liberty to decide - but also alludes to the shameful disadvantages of not using that liberty wisely. In a persuasive discourse, the listener's liberty should be respected; at the same time, shame most likely sways as a shadow, as a warning, behind the invitation to agree.

The dialogues of Diderot do not hide their rhetorical nature. But obviously a paradox is involved here: Diderot often insists that his stories are 'true', and on the other hand his role as story-teller indicates a rhetorical self-consciousness: he knows that he cannot dictate the 'truth' to the reader but must leave space for readerly co-creation. Most likely this paradox points to the different truth-values of the oral and textual level: the spoken dialogue is intended to be true to life, to 'sound' real, and to convey an idea of individual characters speaking; on the other hand, the textual narration itself can afford the luxury of indetermination, irony and polytropy; at this level the text's meanings are open to negotiation.

Not to hide the rhetorical attitude means that the text is not 'ashamed' of being

a verbal construct, although this may be (rhetorically) denied. The title of a story may tell us that "this is not a story". We are likely to doubt it and take it for rhetoric. Already before Flaubert, whose description of Charles Bovary's cap made it difficult for the reader to imagine such an odd verbal construct, Diderot made his reader aware of his/her automatic interpretations and the need to have them confirmed by proper signs and titles. *Ceci n'est pas un conte* is the title in question. Using the terminology of rhetoric, we could call such a title an anti-phrase³.

The story itself is known for its opening words: "Lorsqu'on fait un conte, c'est a quelqu'un qui l'ecoute; et pour peu que le conte dure, il est rare que le conteur ne soit pas interrompu quelquefois par son auditeur" (1977, 123). Awareness of a public (listening, reading, interrupting) is what gives rhetoric its soul. The dialogue with the imagined reader has its persuasive aspects, although they can hardly be taken as seriously as the story itself: "Il faut avouer qu'il y a des hommes bien bons, et des femmes bien mechantes" (1977, 125).

This is like making fun of the art of persuasion. Yoichi Sumi claims that Diderot's style has the capacity of putting us into touch with "la vie universelle, etrangere au niveau manifeste du texte qui porte un message banal et plat" (1987, 257). *Ceci n'est pas un conte* serves as an example: its persuasive power is felt less on the level of dialogue and ideas than on the level of emotional experience. It is a story of passions, the marvels of strong passions - and the misery of weak passions which come abruptly to an end, as happens to Gardeil, Mademoiselle de la Chaux's lover. For Diderot, says Mauzi, the absence or sudden death of passion usually signifies mediocrity (1960, 438).

Gardeil is not ashamed of his mediocrity. The reader may feel that he should. Should he feel ashamed or guilty, this question is negotiable. But as the "story is not a story", the author is entitled to refer to the bare facts of life, and to officially free himself from any pretense of moral authority.

1.1.1 Arousing passions

Pathos belongs to the basic vocabulary of rhetoric, along with ethos. Pathos is the speaker's ability to arouse emotions and passions in his audience (Robrieux 1993, 18). Passions affect people's choices and judgements. Is the only conclusion from this that man is an irrational animal? But, says Renato Barilli, in the 18th century the 'irrational' was rationalized; feelings and passions had become tools (1989, 84).

This applies to the sentimental morality of the 18th century as well as to Diderot's "rehabilitation des passions" (Chouillet 1984, 14). At the beginning of his *Pensees philosophiques* we find this reflection:

On declame sans fin contre les passions; on leur impute toutes les peines de l'homme, et l'on oublie qu'elles sont aussi la source de tous ses plaisirs. C'est dans sa constitution un element dont on ne peut dire ni trop de bien ni trop de mal. Mais ce qui me donne de l'humeur, c'est qu'on ne les regarde jamais que du mauvais cote. On croirait faire injure a raison, si l'on disait un mot en faveur de ses rivales. Cependant il n'y a que les passions, et les grandes passions, qui puissent elever l'ame aux grandes choses." (OP, 9-10)

Passions have been a philosophically tender spot to many a rationalist, ever since Plato, for whom passions were analogous to a backward mob unrestrained by

any superior instance (formed in the ideal case by those who had wisdom, the philosophers). There is, however, a dilemma in Plato's 'moralizing' psychology, and that is, in Bernard Williams's words: "how is the dominion of reason over the desires sustained?" (1993, 156) At first glance, we have the same problem with Diderot's 'great man' who is in control of his emotive forces. 'Despotisme' may not be the best possible metaphor here, if we agree with Williams in that the problem cannot be solved by neglecting the rhetorical aspect of the matter. Reason should be able to persuade passions in order to master them, for it has no force to coerce them (ib.).

Diderot's advantage in regard to this problem is his notion of character, in which 'reason' has nothing of the supranatural and divine quality of Plato's 'reason': it has grown out of a system of physical interrelations, it is itself a form of energy as it is a vital part of the psychological structure of man. As Bernard Williams has pointed out, Plato's reason pertained to an "idea of moral self as characterless" (1993, 159) - which leads to the conclusion that with Plato the Indirect View is not yet fully developed (although beginning to develop).

What is interesting here is that, in Plato's philosophy, the relation between reason and passion corresponds to the relation between argument and persuasion, philosophy and rhetoric. This set of oppositions can be largely identified with rationalism. One wonders, however, whether it reflects an aristocratic view on the psychological structure of man and society. For Plato, the idea of reason and philosophy being 'luxury' would have been strange. It was, basically, a 'bourgeois' idea. It was Diderot's idea. Yet with Diderot, too, the aspect of self-persuasion in the governance of reason over 'lower levels' is not explicitly placed in a rhetorical context, and defined in terms of inner dialogue; the naturalistic viewpoint tends to determine the terms and metaphors for describing internal processes.

For modern rhetoricians, such as Chaim Perelman and Lucie Olbrechts-Tyteca, the traditional distinction between action on the mind and action on the will (passions) which presents the first kind of action as rational and the second as irrational is an error leading to an impasse. The error is that of conceiving man as made up of completely independent faculties. The impasse consists of removing all rationality from action based on will and choice, thus making the exercise of human freedom absurd. The determining element, these new rhetoricians argue, is the audience, not the speaker (Vickers 1993, 41). This corresponds to Diderot's theory of acting (*in Le Paradoxe sur le comédien*): the actor is selectively producing signs which the audience is free to experience both rationally and emotionally.

With this in mind we find ourselves faced with a new paradox concerning the 'inside' and the 'outside': passions should not be seen so much from the inside, that is as energy already existing before interaction, as from the outside, as awakening a sense of freedom, in the Diderotian sense, a desire to judge, inspired by the energy of language (verbal and nonverbal).

1.1.2 Argumentative figures

Rhetoric deals not only with concepts (defined or depending on a consensus), but also with figures and, among them, tropes.

A figure is argumentative if it produces a change of view and is designed to win the sympathy of the hearer to the argument. There are figures for increasing the

feeling of presence, those expressing analogy and contradiction, specific devices such as h_yp_{er}bole and litotes, antimetabole, paradox and oxymoron, and so on. We might say that fi_g_u_res are needed to bring energy to language. In this respect tropes (from the Greek word 'tropos' meaning conversion) are interesting. A trope is a procedure by which a term is substituted by another in order to enliven or renew its meaning.

One can say that Diderot used 'blindness' as an argumentative fi_g_u_re in *Lettre sur les aveugles*. When the text was published in 1749, it was understood as an subtle attack against Deism (if not religion in general), and Diderot was imprisoned for being its author. The metaphor of blindness is, however (as I tried to show in the previous chapter), richer in argumentative meaning.

When Helvetius promoted 'interet' as the cornerstone of a new morality, he used the concept in the same way one uses a trope, that is, to give new vigor to a familiar idea. I would call this moral troping. The word referred back - via La Rochefoucauld - to the Augustinian (and medieval) notion of 'amour-propre' which, in its theological meaning, was close to 'sin' (turning away from God). It served Helvetius' rhetorical purposes to claim that La Rochefoucauld was misunderstood in his unabashed use of the term 'amour-propre'; the 17th century writer had identified it with 'interet personnel', self-interest.

Using the dichotomy guilt-shame morality, one can say that Helvetius, the 18th century man, inverted the moral context. Christian 'amour-propre' was deep seated in the context of guilt morality. But understood as legitimate self-interest it entered another context, that of shame morality. This is because shame morality places a positive value, and guilt morality a negative value, on the love of one's self (Gilligan 1976, 152). Through Helvetius' moral troping self-interest became a positive value.

The same concept is at work in Diderot, although he protested against the simplifications and the 'mechanical' in Helvetius' vision of man. His *Refutation suivie de l'ouvrage d'Helvetius intitule L'Homme* shows a difference in views between the two philosophes concerning self-interest as the universal motive of our actions. "Ne me parlez point d'interet" Diderot wrote, "on n'en fait point concevoir de vif aux tetes apathiques" (OP, 585). Instead of La Rochefoucauld's and Helvetius' abstract man, Diderot emphasized the individual and placed 'interet' in the context of individuality: "Chacun a sa sorte d'interet, et sa violence n'est pas mains variable dans chaque individu que sa nature" (ib. 608).

Argumentative fi_g_u_res used in *Le Reve de d'Alembert* have been mentioned: the sentient stone, the swarm of bees, the pol_y⁵, the spider's web. They were arguing for a way of seeing even the human being as a complex organization in which mind and matter were part of the same network of organs, functions, and energy.

As argumentative fi_g_u_res analogies are useful. Let us try to define analogy: it is a rhetorical conjunction, in which two terms are not formally equated, but related so that experience and judgement have to contribute to the understanding (and in the evaluation) of that relation.

What is interesting about analogies, is that once an analogy has been presented, reflecting the experience of one or several subjects, a new subject may see in the analogy other relations, recreating the experience by a new interpretation of the terms in question. For example, the nature-society analogy was typical of Enlightenment philosophy. Even Diderot was concerned with the relation between

nature and morality, although he was against reducing moral values to natural phenomena of a lower level. For him, the nature-society or nature-culture analogy had a strong poetic appeal, not only the nature-pole, but the ve7 meeting of the two, nature and culture, with both positive and negative aspects. Diderot's ideas on 'organization' and 'energy' interrelate natural and sociocultural phenomena, thus offering analogies.

The Marquis de Sade reversed the nature-morality analogy of the 18th century to the opposite of its usual meaning: that moral values were similiar to patterns of animal behavior, or to 'natural law'; and that the source of virtue was in nature. Even Sade founded his philosophy of vice on what he saw as 'la loi naturelle'. As far as the analogy goes, there is hardly any difference between Diderot and Sade; only their anthropologies differ: "l'un souhaite l'homme naturellement juste, l'autre jure qu'il est par nature fondamentalement injuste et que seule la vertu est contre nature" (Domenach 1989, 110).

Finding analogies between different phenomena was for Diderot also a way of practising the study of nature: analogies helped to combine facts and to invent scientific hypotheses (Kaitaro 1995, 51). In *De l'interpretation de la nature* Diderot values in a natural scientist the ability "de supposer ou d'apercevoir des oppositions ou des analogies" (OP, 197).

1.1.3 Persuasion and morality

What is the relation of persuasive rhetoric to morality?

As such, a moral judgement does not require rhetoric at all - provided that others already agree. But in the Direct View at least, morality is very much about persuasion. By making a moral judgement one does not necessarily convince others that the same judgement should be theirs - yet this is what advocates of the Direct View desire. Moral principles should concern everyone. From this perspective, a moral judgement unwilling to persuade looks like an 'idiotisme'⁷.

But how does this apply to Diderot's characterology?

Diderot is not trying to persuade his reader to accept Madame de la Pommeraye's deeds or her character. But suppose the reader is already persuaded in a sense. He/she firmly believes that a man, having seduced a woman, should love her, not only for a while, but keep loving her for years to come, before he deserves to be called a decent man. In this Direct View, Madame de la Pommeraye's actions should make perfect sense. They are based on common moral ideas of how a decent man should act. It is also commonly believed that if a person acts wrongly, he deserves a warning or a punishment. This is what Madame de la Pommeraye is preparing for the Marquis des Arcis.

Yet there is something strange about her character. Her values are shared values, but her character is unique. She takes those common values (and her shame) more seriously than an average person would do. She exaggerates. In brief, she is a personified *hyperbole*.

'Hyperbole' is a rhetorical device to increase the intensity of a proposition by magnifying or diminishing the qualities of its target (Robrieux 1993, 64-65). Hyperbole has its history: it was in frequent use in "le langage snob, celui des precieuses du XVII siecle" (ib.) and largely associated with flattery (with such

adjectives as 'geniale', 'merveilleux', and 'fantastique'). Flattery is also a form of persuasion, although its persuasive end may seem paradoxical: by flattery one seeks to persuade a person to think what he already most likely thinks of himself (but prefers some one else to say aloud). Flattery is not what one would expect from a writer like Diderot- unless combined with another rhetorical device: irony.

Irony, according to the conventional definition, means saying the opposite of what means⁸. If Diderot 'flatters' the reader by persuading him/her to believe in an idea that he/she already holds to, one can say that he confirms his reader's idea. But this is hardly the case. Diderot embodies this idea in a female 'monster' whom the reader cannot but see from the outside. "Yous pouvez hair, vouz pouvez redouter Madame de la Pommerayae; mais vous ne la mepriserez pas" - all verbs of distance. Irony seems to turn the confirming persuasion to its opposite: instead of believing more strongly in what one already believes (that love is not a passing adventure), one is rather persuaded to take distance to the character who acts in the spirit of that belief.

On the other hand, if the reader happens to be a 'libertin' (who believes that love is an adventure), would not he, too, be taken aback by the character of Madame de la Pommeraye? All this in the name of an impossible ideal! But what could then be a reasonable moral standard for such cases? How is one supposed to deal with the guilt of causing irrevocable shame to another?

Actually, irony comes from the Greek word 'eironeia' meaning inquiry⁹. Irony provokes questions, persuades one to rethink. Not only to think again, but to think more coolly than one does normally. Irony, says Vladimir Jankelevitch, tends to obstruct the logic of our feelings (1964, 34). By obstructing one's feelings one is free, for a while, from one's mental defences, which affect the way we normally feel when confronted with a challenge or a direct question. In such situations we feel, as the expression goes, "put against a wall"; we are embarrassed or ready to defend ourselves. But not necessarily if there is irony involved in the situation, and if we understand the irony as an invitation to step outside our roles as persons responsible for ourselves, or briefly, our selves. Irony frees us from feeling challenged emotionally, although intellectually it is clear that a challenge is presented, and we are free to either accept it or ignore it.

Would there be another way to express that rhetorical aim?

1.2 The art of distance

In his *Questions de rhétorique* Michel Meyer sees a difficulty in defining rhetoric merely in terms of persuasion. Persuasion is commonly understood as defending theses, which is quite true for a large part of rhetorical interactions. "Mais en fait, elles sont toutes des questions" (1993, 21). Persuasion would hardly be needed at all, if the thesis to be defended did not leave room for doubts and questions. There are other words, which come down to the same basic meaning: to persuade - such as 'seduce', 'please', and 'affirm' (to affirm one's identity by using only polite language, for example), although in these cases rational arguments have a minor role to play.

The intention to persuade may always be present in rhetorical practices, but as to other fundamental aspects of rhetoric, which can be overlooked by the traditional definition, Meyer has another definition to suggest:

La rhétorique est la négociation de la distance entre des hommes à propos d'une question, d'un problème. (1993, 22).

Rhetoric would be about 'negotiating' and measuring the distance between subjects in regard to a question. Even intimacy, intense closeness, would, according to this definition, be a measure of distance¹⁰. Regarding Diderot's rhetoric of fiction, we could understand 'distance' in three ways: 1. how the reader relates to a character, say, Madame de la Pommeraye; 2. how the reader relates to the author, Diderot; and 3. how Diderot relates to other authors in his way of handling distance.

How the reader relates to a character: by identification or by 'taking distance'. Even in identification there is distance: a character is a character only as an Other, to whose values and actions the reader consciously or unconsciously compares his/her values and the probability of acting in a similar way. Values and actions can, furthermore, be distanced from each other. By distancing himself from a character the reader is aware either of the artificial, fabricated nature of the character or of its moral otherness, or both.

How the reader relates to the author: by sharing the problem that the author presents or formulates in a certain way (from which the reader can infer or try to infer the author's stance) and by responding to the problem in his/her own way.

How the author relates to other authors: let us look into this question by comparing Diderot to two authors from two other periods of French history.

1.2.1 Three authors, three centuries

The two authors I have chosen for this comparison are Montaigne and La Rochefoucauld. The question is how their rhetorics, as defined above, differ from Diderot's. Far from giving a round picture of their work, I will discuss only their approaches to the reader and the rhetorical distances these approaches imply or propose ('negotiate', to use Meyer's term).

Michel de Montaigne's *Essais* are a representative example of Renaissance individualism. Montaigne did not live in a 'Republic of Letters', but one of his essays, *L'art de conferer*, expresses his admiration for the Italian model of conversation (1965, III, 154), as he probably had come to know it through the writings of Baldassare Castiglione, Jean della Casa, and Stefano Guazzo (Assoun 1980, 182). More important, however, was the idea of friendship, shaped by Montaigne's experience of friendship with Etienne de la Boetie. This idea guided him in the writing of his *Essais*: he sought the "directness and immediacy appropriate between friends, rather than the formality of public occasions, where individual personality is lost or muted" (Good 1988, 36).

The reader is approached as a potential friend. The author exposes his 'moi' to the reader as if there was an agreement to skip all formalities, and indeed there is, if the reader accepts to go on reading. The distance is cut down to the minimum, and yet some space is left for 'negotiation': is Montaigne merely talking about himself or Man¹¹ in general?

What matters most, however, is the fact that Montaigne feels free to 'undress' himself before the eyes of the reader, the Other, whose alterity is not an obstacle but rather a condition for the author's ironic openness, constantly playing with the

options of intimacy and generality. The model of friendship also conveys a strong sense of personal presence.

François de La Rochefoucauld belongs to another period, to the 17th century, and to the world of ruelles or salons¹². He received his literary training in the Hotel de Rambouillet, a center of social refinement and polite conversation. Here "good manners, wit, and, above all, conversational brilliance became the highest values" (DeJean 1989, 298). When La Rochefoucauld wrote his *Sentences et maximes de morale* his idea of the public was modelled on the habitués of the Hotel de Rambouillet and other similar salons, assemblies of honnetes hommes et femmes, or, to use another term, men and women of letters.

Polite distance is essential to the rhetorical decorum of the *Maximes*. Having amour-propre, self-love, as their theme, they present merely the most abstract variant of a quality which could - and in Montaigne's writing would - have been brought closer to the author's personal experience. Instead, the author prefers to treat his reader, not as a friend or a companion in sincerity, but as a formal acquaintance with whom one discusses moral topics on an abstract level. There is no finger pointing at anyone. The reader is supposed to know about human vices - how he does, is, of course, irrelevant. Guilt is a personal matter.

In his *Reflexions diverses* La Rochefoucauld gives us an idea of the basic rule of conversation: "Il faut écouter ceux qui parlent, si on veut être écouté" (1964, 509). The distance to the Other has grown from what it was in Montaigne. For Montaigne the awareness of the Other was coupled with self-expression; for La Rochefoucauld the Self is radically separated from the Other by the wall of egocentrism: both parties are willing to listen only if they are given a chance to talk. One should not try to contradict the Other and to cause him shame; on the contrary, one should show understanding and, if possible, respect (ib.) in order to be 'understood' in return. Respect for respect; this is how shame morality functions.

With Diderot we have moved on to the 18th century; polite conversation continues to be valued, but the mental atmosphere has become more permissive (within the Republic of Letters, that is) towards political debate as well as the liberty to dissent and contradict. Polite distance is seen as a security guarantee for posing problems and presenting differing views. In Diderot we find a combination of presence and distance, but the presence is no longer Montaignean nor the distance Laroche foucauldian.

It is the spirit of dialogue that stands for 'presence', not for the presence of 'moi' but of the 'synergy' created through intellectual co-operation. Distance is needed to regulate this co-operation, to establish a freedom for both parties, in this case for both author and reader. The author has his freedom to digress and state his views, the reader is free to judge. Both may have their inner lives, their secret reasons of the heart, but those secrets are not meant to be made public.

Diderot is not afraid of bringing his 'moi' to his dialogues, but this 'moi' is not there for the sake of introspection but for the sake of dialogue itself. The model of friendship that characterized Montaigne's essays has undergone a transformation: intellectual companionship has replaced confidential friendship. A 'friend' is someone who is willing to listen, not only out of politeness but because themes and problems are shared.

In Diderot 'distance' becomes an programmatically unsettled question to negotiate upon.

1.2.2 Paradox

Apart from the distances presented above, there are distances between terms brought together by a 'leap' of thought. Such thought-leaps are called paradoxes.

In October 1760 Diderot writes in a letter to Sophie Volland: "Donner des mœurs à un peuple, c'est augmenter son energie pour le bien et pour le mal, c'est l'encourager, s'il est permis de parler ainsi, aux grands crimes et aux grandes vertus" (1978, I, 331).

Assuming the statement reveals Diderot's honest opinion, what should we make out of it? It leaves us with a sense of paradox: despite the distinction between good and bad, great crimes and great virtues share the same quality of greatness. By reducing the distance between opposite terms another distance is created - between the thought and the thinking mind. But this may be the purpose of paradox: to test the recipient's readiness to move between belief and doubt, and to judge independently.

Schmitt sees the paradox in terms of two conflicting views: an aesthetic morality of heroism, on the one hand, and a social morality of virtue, on the other:

La morale esthetique de l'heroisme, qui conduit à l'irnmoralisme quand elle affirme son admiration pour le grand criminel, s'insere toujours clans un contexte antichretien, tandis que la morale sociale appartient à la reflexion proprement politique. Il n'y a donc pas contradiction entre les theses, mais une doctrine unitaire accentuee differement en fonction d u contexte. (1997, 194)

The problem is that the morality involved in my example ("donner des mœurs à un peuple") is not purely an aesthetic stance. It most certainly concerns also the social and political aspect of morality. And that leads us back to the paradox-as-paradox. One can try to 'explain away' the paradox by referring to the logic of the author's philosophical intentions, as Schmitt did, but this amounts to undermining the author's rhetorical intention, which is an 'open' one - a challenge to the reader, in this case Sophie Volland, to replace the paradox in another context, that of her own experience (or philosophy) of virtue and crime.

Paradox is obviously central to an understanding of Diderot's writing. As Daniel Brewer has pointed out, it has become vital to Diderot studies of our time to shake off a residual of 19th century positivism that reduces the question of paradox to one of style while attempting to neutralize Diderot ideologically. Brewer has in mind some 'threatening' aspects of his materialism (to which the morally paradoxical may be included). We have been told, in Brewer's words, for instance, "that Diderot's esthetics can be formulated sans paradoxe, that there is a 'secret unity' in *Jacques le fataliste*, that *Le Neveu de Rameau* contains a 'true meaning' (...) that contradiction can be resolved by dint of critical intervention" (1993, 186-187).

There is, however, one danger in this line of interpretation, the danger of ending up in a 'fetichism of paradox'. Paradox can be a way of challenging the reader, arousing a sense of guilt. Appearing in a dialogue it reminds us that the dialogic tension is not merely between the parties involved in dialogue, but also

within their ideas.

For what is a paradox? A figure of rhetoric, implicitly self-referential, characterized by the joining of antithetical terms into one statement so as to provoke thought to make a choice. The reader or listener must choose either to accept the external contradiction or to withdraw to himself, and to create space for private contemplation. This kind of 'spacing' amounts to suspending disbelief and judgement.

1.2.3 Digression

To his contemporaries Diderot, the man and the author, was known as "un faiseur des digressions perpetuelles" (Kempf 1976, 43). One understands why when reading *Jacques le fataliste*. Jacques agrees to tell the story of his loves to his master. The story is constantly interrupted by some sudden turn in the course of events or in the dialogue. Moreover, secondary characters met on the way have their own stories to narrate while we as readers are waiting for Jacques' story to be continued.

A digression, by Jean-Jacques Robrieux's definition, is "une parenthese mobile, generalement placee apres la confirmation" (1993, 22). In other words, if the speaker has a strong theme, a centripetal movement in his discourse, something to assert and to confirm, he can afford a centrifugal sidestep from his theme in order to ease or to tease the concentrated attention of his audience. In Robrieux's words: "C'est le moment de jouer sur les *pathe*, tantot en amusant, tantot en provoquant !'indignation ou la pitie par un recit ou une description qui s'ecartent du sujet *stricto sensu*" (ib.).

For Diderot, digression was a device for creating presence and distance. Presence in the sense that it turns the attention from the story to the narrator and to the situation in which he is faced with the disorders of life and the interventions of his public. Distance, again, in the sense that the reader has the option to detach his mind from the centripetal movement of the story and to create space for his own reactions and reflexions.

1.2.4 Opacity

Opacity is a sign of resistance. I have quoted Labrousse saying that the history of mentalities is a history of resistances to change. Individual characters may consciously or nonconsciously have the same tendency to protect themselves from change. First they must develop a version of who they are and how they see the world. This version may not entirely match the 'circumstantial evidence', as it were: the reader's distanced understanding of their actions and all the clues in context; such evidence may in fact depend on the reader's sense of irony, his readiness to detect incongruities. What a character says is not always the most valid description of what he is and how he relates to the world. However, if the character identifies with this mental construct (self-image), it serves as a shelter against fear of losing his identity through change. How he presents himself to others involves a 'mystification', a partial veiling of reality, a tale with a certain consistency, in which unexpected 'cracks' and incongruities may appear.

In fact, the same assumption guides the work of an analyst who listens to a patient's biographic tale. He is trained to place his listening above the level of the

story. His "working hypothesis is that the patient tells his story as a vehicle to communicate to the analyst, by means of transference, something that is not present in the semantic context of his words" (Daelemans and Maranhao 1990, 234). In other words, the analyst must face the rhetorical challenge of opacity in the character he is listening to. On the other hand, he has his anticipations: "The 'true' story that attempts to burst through the cracks of the patient's speech is generally about love and hate, dependence and independence, acceptance and rejection" (ib.), just as it might, for another analyst, be about shame and guilt.

Only by listening the analyst is engaged in a negotiation on meanings with the patient, like the reader of Diderot's *Le Neveu* finds himself negotiating with Moi and Lui when he reads their dialogue. These negotiations take place in his mind and come about when he suspects that their utterances could be placed in some other semantic and moral context that they themselves indicate. However, if the reader prefers to believe that the two characters are fully transparent, that is, reliable and straight in their communication, this procedure is obviously pointless. But then another kind of distance has been negotiated between the reader and the text. Also the moral irony involved in the dialogic text will appear weaker, less substantial.

1.2.5 Irony and polytropy

Moral irony is the kind of rhetorical situation, in which the reader is able to negotiate for himself the freedom to balance different attitudes against each other: empathy and detachment, acceptance and disapproval, confidence and suspicion, and even pleasure and guilt.

One source of moral irony in Diderot's novels and stories are the blind spots of characters (discussed in chapter III). In these cases, the metaphor of blindness concerns the limitations of a character's field of vision, the tensions between his/her self-image and the world to which that self-image is projected. Between one's self-image and the world there is both tension and interdependence: "Knowledge of reality does not come through its discovery but through its recreation in the mind", says Anthony Strugnell explaining Diderot's thought (1973, 67). The world is internalized, and the way one sees the world pertains to the way one sees oneself. Vision always brings with it a new blindness to be sought out by the reader, the third, and distanced, party in this interplay between the self-conscious spectator/actor and the world.

According to Jonathan Culler's definition of the novel, irony is the basic condition of the novel: "The novel is an ironic form, born of the discrepancy between meaning and experience, whose source of value lies in the interest of exploring that gap and filling it while knowing that any claim to have filled it derives from blindness" (1985, 24). This definition leaves us with a residual blindness, an uncertainty about how to bridge the space between the possible meaning(s) of the text and our spontaneous experience of plot, style, and characters.

Characters are tropes for human identity, and for characters to create ironic effects, polytropy is essential (Leitch 1986, 148). The word 'polytropy' indicates a tension between closure and discursive openness, or in other words, between pattern and contingency (ib. 81). The first word by which Homer identified Odysseus was 'polutropos': Homer's hero exemplifies a tension between a wish to

return home and an appetite for adventure.

Our sense of character is a range of general truths different characters are felt to embody. Characters can be defined in terms of their past (determinism), ends and goals (teleology), external appearances, mental attitudes, social roles, or by some specific existential or moral theme. Characters are individual amalgams of traits and functions which have a putative authority beyond that of any particular trait or function (ib. 159). Yet character is not to be confused with identity. To maintain that character is a trope for identity is to deny that character and identity are indiscriminable as concepts.

As to 'unity of character', Diderot's attempt to provide this ideal a materialist basis was incomplete in regard to literature and to the reader's experience. It should be completed with a rhetorical approach, in which the unity of different traits, unity growing out of polytropy, is left for the reader to judge, for the experience of unity and intelligibility of character is finally an experience of the audience.

Diderot's novels and stories bear witness to the variety of human individuality. Even if the complex motivational forces which animate his characters would remain obscure, they share an overriding desire, the desire so to exploit circumstances that they may realize their characteristic talents. Characters such as Madame de la Pommeraye, Hudson, Mademoiselle de la Chaux, just to mention a few, do not, as Anthony Strugnell has pointed out, conform to the norms of behaviour which Diderot has evolved from his philosophy. What is more, "changes in personality and attitude remain ultimately inexplicable" (1973, 54). Most likely this impression results from polytropy.

2 Questions concerning dialogue

The master and servant relation in *Jacques le fataliste et son maître* involves an analogy concerning liberty and dependence. Officially, Jacques is the Servant and his master is the Master; unofficially it goes the other way round: the servant leads his master, "Jacques mene son maître" (1973, 213). Roles are mixed, and a new meaning is created for 'liberty' and 'dependence' when seen as symbiotic terms.

The theme of freedom and dependence is essential to dialogue. If one is not 'free in mind', there is no dialogue. On the other hand, if there is only readiness to listen and to concede, or if the interlocutors have no character, the same result occurs, but for different reasons. In dialogue the two mental poles, freedom and dependence, modify each other.

The freedom aspect is not understood when it is said (and it is Meyer now speaking): "Il y a dialogue parce que la dimension dialectique du langage existe, et elle existe parce qu'il y a toujours quelqu'un a qui on destine sa réponse" (1993, 83). This may not be sufficient, if this 'quelqu'un' is unable to respect dissent, or if he is a yes-man, dependent on what others think of him. The kind of dependence that dialogue entails must be freely and independently accepted.

Dependence in dialogue means that "the subject is not at the center of dialogue as a source of meaning" (Maranhao 1990, 18). By getting involved in this process the

subject is committed to "a dialogical understanding of discourse and of 'truth' itself in contrast to a monological idea of an ideally exhaustive and definitive account of a fully mastered object of knowledge" (LaCapra 1985, 1).

No doubt, La Rochefoucauld understood this very well. That is why he did not speak of dialogue but of 'conversation' when he, in his *Reflexions diverses*, presented a few ideas concerning how to respect the 'amour-propre' of others if they showed interest in conversation. La Rochefoucauld advises the reader to keep his opinions (if they are reasonable!), but never to hurt the feelings of others or to appear upset by what the others have stated (1964, 510).

This is to say that, in a conversation, a subject may keep the idea of himself as the 'source of meaning' and as the master of his utterances, if he so chooses (and why wouldn't he?). As long as the conversation does not develop into a dialogue, the subject has no reason to give up one inch of his 'monological' autonomy; to expect something else, is to be offensive and to arouse shame.

This is hardly the case in most of Diderot's dialogues. Let us think what happened to d'Alembert after he allowed Diderot's ideas to provoke and disturb his well-ordered mind. Diderot has cast away all of La Rochefoucauld's taboos. Readiness to discuss any issue, from religion to sex, is the distinctive feature of the Diderotian dialogue.

But perhaps La Rochefoucauld had a point. All ideas may be debatable, but is man made of ideas only? The doctrine of 'amour-propre' seems to imply that there are deeper layers in man, something closer to beliefs than ideas: emotional layers that require delicacy when touched upon.

21 Dialogue and determinism

What a reader is invited to do in reading Diderot - at least his dialogues - is to continue the work of the author. A text of this kind engages the reader to participate in the creation of meaning and to take a moral (or philosophical) stand, that is, to judge. In this view, "la dimension dialectique du langage" (Meyer) not only allows dialogic speech-acts to 'say' something (to transmit information); it constitutes a form of action meant to have an effect on the reader and his attitude.

However, when talking about this 'effect' we should be as careful about simplifying as Diderot when judging Helvetius's text *De l'Homme*. In this manner:

Il dit: L'éducation fait tout. Dites: L'éducation fait beaucoup.

Il dit: L'organisation ne fait rien. Dites: L'organisation fait moins qu'on pense.

Il dit: Nos peines et nos plaisirs se résolvent toujours en peines et plaisirs. Dites: Assez souvent. (OP, 601).

And so on. At one point Diderot also refers to 'character' as an important notion overlooked by Helvetius (OP, 578). The notion of 'character' should be relevant also to a theory of language and its effects on the parties involved in dialogue. We may say that an interlocutor will most likely respond to a question or an utterance according to his/her character, but that dialogue also has a modifying effect on individual character by drawing it into the freedom-dependence symbiosis.

The notion of character, as Andre Leonard has claimed, can be problematic from a moral perspective as it seems to lead to determinism. If the notion is morally

problematic, it should be problematic also in regard to dialogue. But Leonard finds a perfectly Diderotian way out of this impasse: "le fait meme de se rendre compte d'un eventuel determinisme est deja une maniere de le transgresser" (1991, 56). This may happen in dialogue, though not necessarily. Take for example the dialogue between Moi et Lui in *Le Neveu de Rameau*: no changes in characters or attitudes seem to occur as the dialogue comes to an end.

In some of Diderot's dialogic texts characters are secondary to their roles as 'raisonneurs'. They can be called A and B, as in the *Supplement au voyage de Bougainville*, and their function is only to provide food for the reader's thought.

In her study on the *Supplement au Voyage de Bougainville* Dena Goodman contends that Diderot's handling of dialogue as a means of awakening the critical spirit in the reader was influenced by the comparative method in Montesquieu's *Lettres persanes*, "the first attempt to write political criticism for a public without writing for a prince, the first attempt at political writing for the modern age" (1989, 2).

I would see Diderot's interest in political reform as well as his debt to Montesquieu in the light of his moral beliefs, that is, above all, his belief in moral freedom.

This may sound paradoxical in view of Diderot's theoretical preference for determinism. But, as I have indicated, Diderot's determinism is largely a 'rhetorical question' in the sense that it offers to negotiate about the conditions of moral freedom. Freedom is not 'given', in the theological sense, it cannot be separated from its material conditions, but on the other hand, it is also related to a personal need of self-control. Before one can achieve such self-control and take responsibility for one's actions, however, there has to be an insight of how one is passively led to act, to think, and to perceive the world in a way one finds difficult to sustain - a way determined by muddled sentiments, on the one hand, by convention, on the other. This insight is a moment of guilt.

This moment of guilt can take the cognitive disguise of a need to create order, or to confront an obstacle. Whatever its cognitive appearance turns out to be, the opposite side of the struggle toward moral freedom is a sense of disorganisation, in Diderot's terminology, or a sense of guilt, in a more morally forthright language. Guilt is one of the conditions of moral freedom, although materialist-determinist language would rather propose outright naturalistic terms to describe that state of internal criticism. One way to do so is to treat guilt as a natural thrust to impose order on disorder or disorganization. The successful outcome of this tendency is, of course, nothing as static as 'good conscience' but something more tangible in terms of materialist metaphors, 'luxury', for example. Seen as increased control over energy, luxury constitutes the material and qualitative basis of moral freedom.

At any rate, only a dialogue between free individuals can be meaningful, and to respect the freedom of the other amounts to respecting his capacity for 'spacing' by leaving him room to think for himself and to check his inner organization, whatever expression you prefer. Here the art of distance acknowledges the role of freedom and free judgement within the social setting of reciprocity and mutual dependence. This corresponds to a modern, dialogic variant of guilt morality.

Diderot assumed that there were laws governing the processes of nature, that causes had effects, and that the task of science was to lay bare the mechanisms ruling

our lives. But, seen from the point of view of language, the best way to represent a world in which everything is determined, up to the point of making us mere observers of our destinies, would have been a descriptive language content to state "how things are" - a language not dynamic enough to challenge our free minds.

There is a clear tension between the language of freedom and the language of uncompromising determinism. Diderot chose to practice the language of freedom, challenging his reader to take personal responsibility - in the spirit of guilt morality.

2.2 Ideas and beliefs

Moral values and virtues cannot maintain any footing in society unless rooted in character and supported by shared beliefs. If basic beliefs are not shared, dialogue can do little to convert the vicious to virtue. "Since vice is attached to the inability to experience the pleasures of virtue", says Kaitaro explaining Diderot, "one cannot easily make the vicious really virtuous by rational arguments or persuasion alone" (1995 150). Is pleasure the issue here - or belief?

Seeking pleasure in virtue presupposes a belief: one has to believe in the virtue/pleasure analogy.

By the word 'belief' I am not covertly referring to religion - although the word "religion", coming from Latin (*religare*: to relate, to bind up), may help to understand the problem.

Ortega y Gasset says that beliefs are not something we have, beliefs are something we are (1945, 11). We relate to ourselves and to the world through our beliefs, but we do not always know what we believe in (ib. 17). Ortega distinguishes between ideas and beliefs. "Les ideas", he says, "sont done des 'choses' que d'une maniere consciente nous construisons ou nous elaborons, precisement parce que nous ne croyons pas en elles" (ib. 33). In this view, ideas are the stuff dialogues are made of, beliefs remain at the borders of the intelligible.

Between us and our ideas there is a huge distance, according to Ortega. Our ideas can be logical or not in relation to each other, but only our beliefs can guarantee our inner unity (ib. 20). La Rochefoucauld could have said the same of amour-propre.

Yet our beliefs, in the Ortegian sense, are not private sins. They are our roots in history. I am using a botanical metaphor together with a concept which implies movement. "Roots" indicate a stable position, being located somewhere, being related to the world as we experience it, whereas "history" seems to drive us forward, constantly threatening our mental roots and locations in the world, or rather "a" world we call ours. It is not "the" world, it is just the sphere of our beliefs, in which we move securely without asking questions. The moment we start asking questions is the moment when our beliefs cease to support us and invite us to either defend them or reinvent a new world. This is a moment of self-doubt and inner dialogue, of guilt.

Diderot's dialogues seek not only to imitate speech-acts between individuals, they also allow the author to take distance from his own 'world' and to try out ideas he is conscious of not believing in¹³. Not believing creates the need for rhetoric, both the persuasive and distancing kind. Persuading others is important when one is not quite convinced oneself. By the art of distance one respects the interlocutor's Indirect

View, his right to defy generalities and reorganize his beliefs in secret, according to his personal style of spacing.

The distance between ideas and beliefs is felt, for instance, in *Jacques le fataliste*. In the words of Michael Bell

Jacque's fatalism is always more assumed than real. As its most genuine level it is only an attempt to meet life's vicissitudes by living up to his former captain's philosophical precepts, and on frequent occasions he reacts to events as a common mortal rather than with the detachment of a convinced determinist. Once again, feeling and principle are at odds. (1983, 85)

Or, using different terms, beliefs and ideas are at odds. Ideas and beliefs (like public standards and peculiar characters) being juxtaposed is also a source of irony. I will deal with this question more closely in chapter VII

Diderot came from a solidly religious background. Is it so clear that he managed to cut himself completely off from it? According to Peter France, his writings display a continuing ability to identify with Christian attitudes (France 1983, 30-31). "Atheism, with its denial of free will", we are told by another expert, "repelled him even though he accepted it as true; while Catholicism, with its colorful ceremonial, moved him even though he rejected it as false" (Gay 1977, 64).

One cannot say that Diderot was a Christian. But he was not quite happy with nonreligious shame morality either. If he had secret beliefs, he believed in a kind of guilt that for him was not 'guilt'. It could be expressed indirectly with the rhetoric of shame and in contrast to it, by irony and distance. The notion of individual character was his symbol for guilt, not the Christian sense of sin but a sense of alienation and blind spots in the structuring of social and moral relations¹⁴.

References

- 1 The idea that the 18th century was a period of decline for rhetoric is a common one. See, for instance, the preface of *The Recovery of Rhetoric. Persuasive Discourse and Disciplinarity in the Human Sciences* (ed. by R.H. Roberts and J.M.M. Good). Renato Barilli contends in his *Rhetoric* that "from the eighteenth to the nineteenth century the attention Vico pays to rhetoric is virtually unparalleled (1989, 83).
- 2 When dealing with the word 'mechant' in his *Dictionnaire philosophique* Voltaire is not actually presenting a philosophical argument against the thesis he wishes to refute - that man is essentially evil, "enfant du diable" - but appeals to the reader in a very rhetorical manner: "Rien n'est plus mal avisé; car, mon ami, toi qui me prêches que tout le monde est né pervers, tu m'avertis donc que tu es né tel, qu'il faut que je me défie de toi comme d'un renard ou d'un crocodile." (1964, 278)
- 3 The anti-phrase, as Jean-Jacques Robrieux defines the term in *Elements de Rhétorique*, "est le procédé général qui consiste à dire le contraire de ce qu'on veut exprimer" (1993, 61). As to the title of Diderot's story, it not only states indirectly that it is a story; it also inspires to think of other possible meanings suggested by the negation. This is Furbank's interpretation: "It can mean, 'This is not a conventional story, obeying the timeworn formulae of fiction-writers'; or it can mean, 'This is not an invention, it actually happened'; and thirdly, since a certain kind of fiction tries to make the reader say to himself 'This must be true; no one could have invented a detail like that', it can mean, 'Trust no novelist, including the present one - for novelists love to pretend they are not writing a story'." (1992, 363) One

could continue the argument by saying that even the simplest anti-phrase 'The weather is lovely' - when it is raining - may inspire several guesses about what the speaker really has in mind.

- 4 In Maxime 510 La Rochefoucauld states: "L'interet est l'ame de l'amour-propre." In his *L'Esprit* Helvetius pays tribute to the "celebre M. de la Rochefoucauld (qui) dit que l'amour-propre est le principe de toutes nos actions" and continues: "Combien !l'ignorance de la vraie signification de ce mot amour-propre ne souleva-t-il pas de gens contre cet illustre auteur? On prit l'amour-propre pour orgueil et vanite; et l'on s'imagina, en consequence, que M. de la Roch foucauld plai;ait dans le vice la source de toutes les vertus" (Quoted in Domenach's *L'Ethique des lumieres*, 35). Rousseau, at least, understood amour-propre in the way Helvetius wanted to criticize. For him, 'amour-propre' and 'amour de soi' were entirely distinct concepts, the former meant pride (based on reflection, comparing oneself to others and feeling superior), the latter referred to a natural feeling. According to Rousseau, prior to reflection there was always 'amour de soi', whereby we innocently affirm our own existence (Starobinski 1988, 208). What Rousseau disliked about the philosophes and their unmasking of self-interest (in the manner of Helvetius) was that they did not see self-interest itself as evil (ib. 74).
- 5 An example of how the figure 'pol_yp' can be removed to a different conceptual context is Yoichi Sumi's essay concerning Diderot's pol_yp-like style: *Traduire Diderot: Style polype et style traduite* (1987, 255-260).
- 6 In this respect some of his ideas seem to anticipate Sigmund Freud's theories of civilization and the necessary 'repression' which goes together with being a civilized or cultured animal.
- 7 'Idiot' comes from a Greek word meaning 'singular'. An idiot, in this original sense, was some one who did not share the same values, norms, and symbols with others. The word 'idiotisme' has come to signify 'idiom', but in *Le Neveu de Rameau* Diderot uses the word 'idiotisme' in connection to morals giving it the meaning of unshared habits: "...chaque etat a ses exceptions a la conscience generale auxquelles je donnerais volontiers le nom d'idiotismes de metier" (1981, 78). *Le Petit Robert* dictionary gives as one of the ancient meanings of 'idiot': 'etranger a un metier'.
- 8 This is actually the definition of 'anti.phrase' (see note 1). It does not apply to all forms of irony. In his essays on irony (*The Crazy Fabric*), AD.Dyson quotes Oscar Wilde saying "The brotherhood of man is no mere poet's dream, it is a most depressing and humiliating reality". This is an ironic 'phrase', and the ironist actually means what he is saying "but not in the way in which his words would normally be understood" (1965, xi). Yet it is true that the sentence contrasts two meanings, the ideal meaning of 'brotherhood' and Wilde's own disillusioned meaning.
- 9 Jean-Jacques Robrieux's French translation of 'eironeia' is 'interrogation'. "Le destinataire d'un propos ironique doit en effet s'interroger sur ce qu'on a voulu lui dire" (1993, 61).
- 10 That love does not abolish, but rather conceal, distance was clear to La Rochefoucauld. In one of his maxims (312), he says that lovers are never bored when they feel free to speak of themselves, that is, as separate beings, happily distanced.
- 11 In his essay *Du repentir* Montaigne says: "... chaque homme porte la forme entiere de l'humaine condition" (1965, III, 25).
- 12 'Ruelle' was the term for 'salon' in the 17th century. "The word salon entered the French language only after the Revolution had brought the assemblies of the ancien regime to an end", to quote Joan DeJean (1989, 299).
- 13 Eric-Emmanuel Schitt's interpretation is the same. He draws an analogy between Diderot's philosophy and his ideas of acting: "Diderot pratique la philosophie comme l'acteur son art: de meme que le comedien sur scene joue son personnage, Diderot dans ses textes joue

sa philosophie. Garrick se tenait à distance de ses rôles, ne se prenait jamais pour celui qu'il jouait, Othello ou Hamlet; il l'était tout en ne l'étant pas, il le représentait. Diderot, pareillement, affirme et n'affirme pas sa philosophie, il la propose. Il est toujours à distance de ce qu'il dit (...) Il peut multiplier les hypothèses comme l'acteur multiplie les rôles" (1997, 296).

- 14 For Diderot, the concept of 'character' was central to his idea of an individual responsible for his actions in regard to others. The fact that his psychology of character is rooted in physiology, made it difficult for him to distinguish this notion from that of the self and the problem of identity, which can be seen as separate issues. As Amelie Oksenberg Rorty has pointed out in an essay concerning the semantic differences between such notions as 'character', 'figure' 'person', and 'self, unity of character is not what defines the identity of a moral self. Nor do characters have identity crises. "Disharmony among characteristics bodes trouble: it is likely to lead to failure in action but not to a crisis of identity" (1976, 305). As to the idea of a person, it is, according to the writer, "the idea of a unified center of choice and action, the unit of legal and theological responsibility" (ib. 309). The concept of person is transformed to a concept of self, "when a society has changed so that individuals acquire their rights by virtue of their powers, rather than having their powers defined by their rights" (ib. 313). And finally "it is in the search for a concept that will fuse the notion of inalienable properties and principles of rational choice that the concept of self is transformed into the concept of an individual" (ib. 315). These distinctions may be useful as terminological propositions, but they cannot be applied as such to Diderot's psychology. What seems obvious, though, is that Diderot's 'naturalistic' characterology is to a certain extent blind to the problem of self and self-alienation as a source of guilt. By stating that the notion of individual character was Diderot's symbol for guilt, I assume that it indirectly deals with the problem of self and self-responsibility, without which 'my' conscience or moral identity would be simply the function of social expectations and fear of shame before others.

V MORALITY IN TWO CULTURES

On *Supplement au voyage de Bougainville*

In the Republic of Letters an undercurrent of malaise (chapter II) made itself felt. The sophisticated shame morality of this literate world (literate and obliged to immolate the instinctual and spontaneous to the 'artificial' and static, symbolized by writing) created the need to escape the norms and pressures of polite society by proposing alternative, more 'natural' ways of life. Primitivism, says Peter France, "seems paradoxically to be a constituent part of the Enlightenment" (1992, 187). Journeys to distant, illiterate, and un-Christianized parts of the world, reported by travellers, often Jesuits, stirred an increased interest in the cultural Other. Eric-Emmanuel Schmitt says that the destabilization of the Christian religion was accomplished "par des peres jesuites qui redigent des souvenirs de voyage" (1997, 65). This was not the only paradox: literacy itself acted as the mediator between people whose world view was formed by writing and people living in oral cultures.

Rousseau's reflections on nature and civilization represent a search for alternatives. Although the slogan 'return to nature' can be regarded as a simplification of his thought, Rousseau did see advantages in the primitive independent state, advantages that could be gained without losing the benefits of the social state (France 1992, 188). Rousseau's theories, along with other utopian writings of the time continued the tradition of Thomas More's *Utopia* from 1516. Distant, often bizarre worlds inhabited by noble savages of great variety were presented in the utopian writings of Louis Sebastien Mercier and others. Even Diderot's *Supplement au voyage de Bougainville* is often attributed to the genre of utopian literature (Poster 1989, 525). This classification is, as I intend to show, questionable.

My interpretation of Diderot's *Supplement* partly follows the inventive readings of Wilda Anderson and Dena Goodman in their respective studies on this text (Anderson: *Diderot's Dream*, and Goodman: *Criticism in Action*), but adds the theme

of guilt and shame, which they seem to neglect. Along with this theme I wish to point out the problem of opacity, the mystifying, defensive traits in the Tahitian self-understanding. All is not as simple as presented to the Europeans, judging by the cracks and clues we can find in the Tahitian rhetoric.

To catch these clues we must study the rhetorical structure of the text and the way the embedded dialogues operate in it. As to its possible persuasive end, we should tentatively ask: who is trying to persuade whom and how?

1 Background

In 1766 Louis-Antoine Bougainville set out for a voyage around the world. In 1772 the French mariner and adventurer published an account of his observations: *Voyage autour du monde*. In Paris his book was already preceded by his legend. It was known that he had brought with him from Tahiti a man called Aotorou, a 'savage', whom he had introduced to the king as well as to the 'savants' of Paris. Diderot had read Bougainville's book and was particularly interested in the descriptions of Tahiti and its people: were they really living in harmony with nature, unlike the civilized albeit unhappy and corrupt Europeans? The question was in the air, it would interest not only those of Rousseau's party; it was equally intriguing to Diderot, the materialist in search of naturalist solutions to cultural problems.

Diderot's *Supplement au Voyage de Bougainville* was written shortly after the publication of Bougainville's report, as an extension of an article on the French globe-trotter. The article was meant for the *Correspondance litteraire*, but it remained in the archives of Grimm, and as many of the writings of Diderot, the *Supplement* also appeared posthumously (in 1796).

The subtitle of the work *Sur l'inconvenient d'attacher des idees morales a certaines actions physiques qui n'en comportent pas* (OP, 455) suggests that it will approach, in a 'scientific' manner, topics related to the libertine tradition, most likely sexual relations, which had, according to the materialist view, been overmoralized by religion. The subtitle helps to tune the expectations of the reader: one expects to read about how sexual desires are less constrained or not constrained at all in other cultural environments than in 18th century France. It promises a materialistic overlook of an essentially 'physical' subject common to all people irrespective of cultural differences.

However, as it turns out, this is not exactly what the reader is given. The reader is given only the information and the tools necessary to form his/her own judgement. The responsibility for the interpretation of the Tahitian-European dialogue is left to the reader; he/she is expected to avoid the traps of a naive reading and to provide a critical evaluation of the arguments presented.

Diderot's *Supplement* takes us to Tahiti by means of reading. Diderot was never there himself, and it is irrelevant whether the reader was. The point is not in the experience, but in how the details conveyed by Bougainville and the embedded dialogues in Diderot's supplement are submitted to criticism and seen as interrelated components of a rhetorical structure. The structure leaves space for the reader's

judgement. As Diderot contends in *Refutation d'Helvetius*, "le jugement suppose la comparaison de deux idées" (OP, 563).

The two ideas in the *Supplement* are most clearly confronted in the dialogue between the European monk (l'aumônier) and the Tahitian father (Orou), whereas the dialogue between A and B is situated in a shared cultural context. A and B are two Frenchmen who have the same points of reference, the same tradition and even similar philosophical views.

The A-B dialogue, taking place in France, reveals also one difference to the European-Tahitian dialogue, taking place in Tahiti after the arrival of Bougainville's crew: if the latter is about life, the former is about reading. The former dialogue involves the cultural context implicitly by showing that for A and B reading and judging are not mere surrogates for travelling and what we might call 'immediate experience', if there is such a thing as unmediated experience. This is a question to be asked after reading the *Supplement*. Already this attitude defines how much France is different from Tahiti where the need for literary culture is absent or regarded as unnatural, which may also be the reason why the Tahitians fail to see their conventions as culturally formed and distinct from an unmediated natural order.

2 The Direct View on the text

2.1 The trial and failure view

The Supplement has been interpreted as if it had a cultural reform proposal to make about how society should be shaped on the model of nature. A reading of this kind may produce disappointment: it may look as if Diderot failed. In *A New History of French Literature* this failure is described by Mark Poster in the following words:

On the one hand, Diderot calls into question the Enlightenment idea of progress through the development of arts and sciences by presenting primitive Tahiti, without highly developed arts and sciences, as morally superior to Europe. On the other hand, he also challenges primitivism, the celebration of natural simplicity: Tahitian society is troubled by internal difficulties and practices infanticide. In this manuscript that he chose not to publish, Diderot was willing to acknowledge doubts concerning his moral choices that he would not allow in his public statements. (1989, 526)

If so, can one really derive a philosophical message (in terms of a thesis) from Diderot's text which, according to Poster, puts into question the author's own ideas? Tzvetan Todorov seems to think so.

2.2 The trial and error view

The principles of Todorov's 'critique dialogique' were discussed earlier (chapter I). We shall see how this approach, clinging to the assumption of an authorial message prior to the dialogue with the reader, functions in regard to the *Supplement*.

The Todorovian approach presupposes that Diderot's text(s) can be explained "sans paradoxe", as if Diderot never doubted his ideas and thought against himself. On the contrary, as a writer of fiction, he frequently did. Fiction offered him the luxury of playing with the ideas he took seriously as a philosophe.

This observation concerns particularly Diderot's naturalism. In the *Supplement* a Tahitian host thinks it would be natural if a monk, being his guest, slept with his wife or one of his daughters, preferably with the youngest daughter who has no children. After resisting the offer for ideological reasons, the monk finally accepts the Tahitian hospitality, and nature takes its course. In this example, 'nature' and the Tahitian way seem to coincide. Yet the critic should be careful about judging the whole on the grounds of a detail: it does not prove that the analogy between 'nature' and Tahitian customs will hold in every respect.

In *Nous et les autres*, in which 'la critique dialogique' is applied to works dealing with cultural diversity and otherness, among them Diderot's *Supplement*, Todorov modifies his direct approach by taking notice of the many 'centers' in the text (1989, 31), but this is only a passing notion; he then moves forward to define Diderot's ideas - first of all, historically:

La philosophie antique erigait en effet la nature en critère ultime des valeurs (d'où l'expression 'droit naturel'); la morale elle-même était censée se fonder dans la nature et l'ordre cosmique. Mais, depuis la Renaissance au moins, la certitude d'une référence à la nature a été ébranlée: le relativisme et l'empirisme de Montaigne, comme de bien d'autres, ont fait douter de l'existence d'une norme dépassant les coutumes particulières. Le 'naturalisme' des anciens a été à peu près évincé par l'artificialisme des modernes. L'intervention de Diderot, pourrait-on croire, consiste à renouer avec la vue traditionnelle. En fait, il n'en est rien, car les relations entre nature et morale sont chez lui tout autres qu'elles ne l'étaient chez ses prédécesseurs, ce qui n'est que la conséquence d'un changement brutal survenu dans le sens du mot 'nature'. (ib. 32-33)

The historical perspective cannot be neglected. True: meanings ascribed to 'nature' have changed in the course of history. But the particular text we are dealing with complicates the issue. It presents an alleged Tahitian idea of 'nature', which should not be directly equated with the author's ideas. Upon a closer reading it becomes clear that all interpretations of nature are culturally produced, both French and Tahitian. It follows that Tahitian interpretations are not identical with nor immediately transparent to French (European) interpretations.

When A and B discuss this question, there seems to be a 'metaphysical consensus' that nature means the same to Europeans as to Tahitians. But the very fact that there are many 'centers' in the text makes this assumption negotiable, and the reader is expected to give it a critical thought. This has to do with the 'artificial' in morality, which again, as Todorov would say, is an European idea.

Let us assume so. The Tahitian morality is non-European in exactly that sense: it is not aware of its artificial nature, it is aware of itself only as nature. Whatever a Tahitian (like Orou, though he is a borderline case) says about incest cannot be taken as Diderot's opinion. This is, however, what Todorov assumes. He confuses Diderot's 'artificialism' with Tahitian 'naturalism' in one sentence:

Diderot pousse la logique artificialiste à l'extrême, et du coup il l'inverse: si une chose n'est pas naturelle, elle ne mérite pas d'être respectée; donc l'inceste n'est pas condamnable. (ib. 34)

It is Orou who thinks that incest is natural, and Orou speaks for his culture, not for Diderot. From the *Supplement* we do not learn much about Diderot's attitude to incest. Moreover, one can doubt Todorov's interpretation of Diderot's attitude to morality as it is presented, in rather simplifying terms:

Nature et morale sont donc devenues deux prétendants au même trône, celui de guide du comportement; et Diderot préfère la première à la seconde. (ib. 33)

Even if this were correct, the preference given to nature over morality would be a moral choice, and the concept of 'nature' would require an interpolated interpretation: 'nature' would be seen as a source of authenticity, and that is a moral standard insofar as it concerns judging human actions as good or bad, 'good' being authentic, 'bad', the opposite. Thus anti-moralism would turn into moralism. The *Supplement* was not aimed against all morality. Posing problems is not equivalent to opposing. It is rather the beginning of a negotiation between the reader and the text to resolve those problems.

In order to understand the meaning of this co-operation, we should, first of all, look into the rhetorical structure of the text under study.

3 The Indirect View on the text

3.1 Rhetorical structure

In the *Supplement*, different scenes and embedded dialogues form a structured whole. There are written 'oral' dialogues in the text, and one can imagine the author, Diderot, 'present' in the A-B dialogue as B. Even this dialogue is related to a text—two texts, to be accurate, Bougainville's report and the supplement presented in the dialogue. Thus Diderot's text incorporates or presupposes another authorship, Bougainville's, whose style and personality are discussed by A and B. The A-B dialogue is thus a textually mediated oral dialogue related to another text.

An oral speech usually implies the presence of the speaker. The oral speech can be planned in advance and structured in the mind of the speaker, though the structure of his speech must pay heed to immediacy: the logic of the thought is to be heard and understood at once. In case a dialogue ensues, the speaker can be more specific about his ideas and intentions; he may even be persuaded to admit he was wrong at some point. In the presence of the speaker the attention of the interlocutor(s) turns to the speaker's intentions.

In any event, there can be no doubt about the textual nature of Diderot's method. Writing and reading are the two necessary conditions for exploring the limits and possibilities of orality and of a culture based on orality, like the Tahitian. Textual cultures have the advantage of 'backward scanning' which makes it possible in writing to eliminate inconsistencies, or to use them for ironic purposes, whereas in oral cultures, the oral development of thought tends to manage discrepancies by glossing over them (Ong 1982, 104). The Indirect View we encounter in the

Supplement is not so much founded on character-psychology as on the insufficiency and blindness of the oral exchanges, in the same way as blindness can be attributed to literary language¹. The Indirect View appears in the irony of the interplay between the oral and the textual.

Irony, not to say anything about moral irony, the acceptance of relativity in the realm of moral evaluations, presupposes the existence of textual communication as a method of obstructing the need for immediate understanding. Vladimir Jankelevitch sees in irony a tendency to look backwards, not for an innocence once lost but for an intensification of our present consciousness (1964, 56), that is, our awareness of some incongruity. Oral communication favors the ideal of immediate understanding by offering the interlocutors chances to dispell their distances, as if they were only momentary gaps in the information needed to obtain the ideal (innocence): a sense of shared meanings.

This is what happens in the A-B dialogue. A asks B questions in order to grasp B's aims: "Comment cela?", "Qu'entendez-vous done par des moeurs?" etc.

When reading a text, the author's intentions may be asked as well, but the author is not there to answer them; the dialogue must settle for the subtleties of the text itself. One of those subtleties is the order of the parts organized by a theme or a framing discourse, the rhetorical structure of the text. As to the order in the *Supplement*, Anderson claims justly that

the order in which the reader encounters the various scenes is crucial. Each scene provides the ethical framework in which to situate and therefore to interpret correctly the text that follows it. Following the textual order, however, is an inefficient way to display the results of this reading experience. Explicating the functioning of the text from the focal point out works better, but it requires keeping in mind the basic structure of the text. A framing dialogue between two European philosophers in a French garden begins the text, links two embedded dialogues, and wraps up the discussion at the end. (1990, 129)

Due to the non-chronological order of two embedded dialogues it becomes possible for the reader to understand the former in the light of the latter - a change in perspective that Aristotle would have called 'recognition' - and thereby carry on his or her dialogue with the clues and problems presented by the text.

3.2 The old man's speech

The first scene is entitled *Jugement du voyage de Bougainville* and introduces two unnamed voices, A and B. It appears that B is reading about Bougainville's journey, and a kind of dialogic criticism sets about when A takes up the issue and gives his impression of the author as a person: a mathematician leading a sedentary life; all of a sudden he turns into a man of action, a voyageur; Bougainville is mentioned as "un veritable Fran^{çais}". This prepares us for the problem to be discussed, national customs and cultural alterity, ethnocentrism and universalism.

A asks B about his reading experience: "Que pensez-vous de son Voyage?" When answering A's questions B mentions that there is also a supplement to Bougainville's report, which happens to be right there on his table. They decide to take a glance at it together and start from the farewell sermon of an old Tahitian patriarch- *Les Adieux du vieillard*-which opens the second chapter.

The old man of the second scene is presented as a father of a large family. He represents the Tahitian way of life and sees the arrival of the Europeans as a danger to his people. It is mentioned that when the Europeans came he showed no curiosity nor hospitality, only disdain. He retired to his hut. Finally he breaks his silence and expresses his fears. First he addresses his fellow-Tahitians:

Pleurez, malheureux Tahitiens! pleurez; mais que ce soit de l'arrivee, et non du depart de ces hornrnes ambitieux et mechants: un jour, vous les connaissez rnieux. Un jour, ils reviendront (...) vous enchamer, vous egorger, ou vous assujettir à leurs extravagances et a leur vices; un jour vous servirez sous eux, aussi corrompus, aussi vils, aussi malheureux qu'eux. Mais je me console; je touche à la fin de ma carriere; et la calarnite que je vous annonce, je ne la verrai point. (OP, 466)

And then Bougainville and the culture he stands for:

L'idee de crime et le peril de la maladie sont entres avec toi parnni nous. Nos jouissances, autrefois si douces, sont accompagnees de remords et d'effroi. (...) Enfonce-toi, si tu veux, dans la foret obscure avec la compagne perverse de tes plaisirs; mais accorde aux bans et simples Tahitiens de se reproduire sans honte, à la face du ciel et au grand jour. (OP, 470)

The old man accuses the Europeans for bringing along crime and diseases and feelings of remorse and shame which had until then been unknown in Tahiti. If we assume that among the Europeans there was any understanding for a culture doing well without crime, shame and remorse (and it can be imagined), then it is possible that a sense of guilt was produced. Such feelings are not openly dealt with in the following comments by A and B, but there is a presentiment of something odd in A's reply:

Ce discours me parait vehement; mais à travers je ne sais quoi d'abrupt et de sauvage, il me semble retrouver des idees et des tournures europeennes. (OP, 472)

B explains the impression by translation: the old man's speech was translated into and even written in Spanish by Orou, another Tahitian. This, curiously enough, indicates an earlier contact with Europeans. But, as far as the second chapter goes, these details seem less important: we are more touched by the old man's grief; we see him lamenting the loss of Tahitian felicity; we feel sorry for him and blame 'those' Europeans for pestering an innocent people - why shouldn't they practice free love, live in harmony with nature, prosper without shame, vice and disease?

3.3 Orou: Tahitian universalism

The third and best-known chapter of the *Supplement* presents a dialogue that had taken place earlier between an European monk and Orou, the Tahitian who had learned Spanish - maybe from a Spanish missionary, we do not know. Later we read that, for A, his discourse sounds "un peu modele a l'europeenne" (OP, 503).

Orou is perhaps not quite so innocent as he seems: apart from the Spanish language, he has also learned to present arguments in support of his claims and to question his interlocutor's views. One hesitates to credit his Tahitian 'training' for those skills - in view of the 'consensual' nature of that culture: Tahitians have no

need to regulate conflicts between them nor between man and nature. But this can be an illusion... Let us, for the time being, just notice the incongruency. It may be a clue; so far we do not know what to make out of it.

At any rate, Orou acts as if he had no previous knowledge of European customs nor of the moral ideals binding in particular a monk. As a token of his hospitality, he offers the monk a choice between his wife and his daughters: the monk may sleep with the one he desires. The monk turns down the offer. He claims that he would commit a crime against his religion, his state and good manners if he accepted (OP, 475). Orou refuses to understand such talk. Later on, he asks the monk:

Veux-tu savoir, en tout temps et tout lieu, ce qui est bon et mauvais? Attache-toi a la nature des choses et des actions; à tes rapports avec ton semblable; à l'influence de ta conduite sur ton utilite particuliere et le bien general. (OP, 482)

This is more than a conventional defense of local customs. Orou is not reacting conventionally to the monk's refusal. Instead of being offended, he plays the role of Socrates, he pretends to be ignorant of the authorities mentioned and brings the dialogue to a universal-philosophical level. Never mind if the local customs are violated, the crucial issue is whether the Tahitian way can be justified in universal terms by such concepts as 'utilite' and 'bien general'. Orou acts like an ethnocentrist, but speaks like an universalist.

34 Recognition

The monk, however, is not merely answering Orou's questions, he has a few questions of his own. What kind of a family structure can one expect, he wonders, if love and sex are as liberated in Tahiti as Orou claims they are. In answering the question Orou suddenly changes his rhetoric; the universalist view is replaced by Tahitian conventionalism:

Un enfant qui nait, occasionne la joie domestique et publique: c'est un accroissement de fortune pour la cabane, et de force pour la nation.(...) En repassant de la cabane de son mari dans celle de ses parents, une femme emmene avec elle ses enfants qu'elle avait apportés en dot: on partage ceux qui sont nés pendant la cohabitation commune; et l'on compense, autant qu'il est possible, les males par les femelles (OP, 485)

The explanation continues: Orou takes up one feature peculiar to the Tahitian economy, and thus to the social structure: the more children there are in a family, the richer it is, and the higher its social position. This leads Wilda Anderson to observe "a directional development of a sort" in Tahitian society:

It must have been more egalitarian years before; it becomes relentlessly more hierarchized as years go by, according to the principle of a single-parameter meritocracy. The Tahitians, however, do not perceive this vector. They do not see that their own culture is being shaped by forces that it itself creates but that they cannot deal with because the forces escape perception. Their perception is set by the closed tautology of this natural economic-social-moral exchange system. (1990, 141)

Maybe this is true. But how do we know? If it is true, it offers a serious sociological counter-argument to Ourou's belief in free, because natural, sex: how can there be any 'free love', if love is associated with fertility, fertility with productivity and productivity with wealth and power? In fact, sexuality has become a determining factor in the Tahitian social hierarchy: it is a means of power, like genealogy in an aristocratic society or money in a capitalist society. Still it can be associated with freedom in the mind, particularly in the minds of those who have the means and symbols of power.

We start looking for a glimpse of the past, any mention of how things were before in Tahiti, and this is when a moment of recognition offers itself: - le vieillard, the old man!

He was presented as the head of a large family, and from the importance attached to his silence and his decision to speak - *nota bene*: both to and on behalf of the Tahitians - we can infer that he is an eminence in that society, a patriarch.

Anderson asks: this old man who "supposedly incarnates in the greatest concentration the qualities distinguished and valorized in Tahiti" - should he not, instead of moping and lamenting, acknowledge his responsibility and "lead his people to find the most productive and least damaging adaptation to the arrival of the Europeans" (1990, 142)? Probably yes, but it is not what he does, and now we see him from quite a different angle.

Anderson's interpretation shows a sudden turning-point in the text (a turning-point to be discovered by the reader, for the author is not pointing it out). But this interpretation remains silent about the aspect of guilt. Even Anderson is focusing on Diderot's ideas, and as to guilt Diderot had no other 'ideas' than negative. Still it is obvious that the turning-point in the text, as she describes it, raises the question: with whose guilt are we dealing here, ours (as Europeans) or the old man's? First we feel sorry for him and his people; after further reading we are more inclined to see him struggling with his guilt, for he, as Anderson puts it, "abdicated the authority he had earned; he turned his back less on the Europeans than on his duty" (1990, 143).

3.5 Demystification

In the third chapter there is an interpolated story of a morally astute prostitute from the American colonies. This is a typical Diderotian digression, followed by the comments of A and B.

Ourou's conversation with the monk continues in the fourth chapter. Ourou is still persuading the monk to accept his offer, but this time we may have doubts about his good intentions. We remember Ourou wishing, primarily, that his youngest daughter be chosen for intercourse: the youngest had no children yet. Ourou had used the words: "Sois genereux!" (OP, 476) But whose task is it to be generous? Is one generous when accepting a gift - or was the ulterior thought that the guest should contribute to the production of children for Ourou's benefit, so that he could claim himself the father after the monk has gone? Consequently, the dialogue now turns to the question of fatherhood. This is what interests the monk: how does one know who is the father? If there are two candidates, to whom does the child belong? Ourou answers: to the one who pleases the mother:

A celui des deux a qui il lui plait de la dormir: voila tout son privilege; et un enfant etant par lui-meme un objet d'interet et de richesse, tu corn;ois que, parmi nous, les libertines sont rares... (OP, 493)

As children make their fathers "rich", it seems likely that some sort of competition is going on between the potential fathers. In this case, assuming the monk procreates a child, would there be competition? Hardly: the child would be a gift from the monk to Orou, by the rules of 'hospitality' and 'generosity'. Orou is clearly after his own interest; he is not as 'unselfish' as it first seemed. But it slips from him that there are only a few 'libertines' in Tahiti. Obviously the word refers to someone who is more interested in sex than in responsibility (or wealth). The irony of that remark is that the monk, coming from Europe, is being treated as a possible libertine². At the same time, he naively ignores his host's condescending attitude.

3.6 Transgression

Soon the dialogue turns on acts that are considered criminal in Europe but perfectly natural in Tahiti, such as fornication, incest and adultery. Faithful to his logic, according to which nothing 'natural' can be wrong, Orou pursues his logic further by saying that the natural consequence from moral prohibitions is that they are continually transgressed:

partout ou il y a defense, il faut qu'on soit tente de faire la chose defendue et qu'on la fasse.
(OP, 498)

This is again an universalizing argument. Only the Tahitians are of course protected from transgressive temptations, because they have no unnatural virtues nor prohibitions. Why would that be so? We have already learned that Tahitians have rules. Besides, the old man was very clear at one point: the Europeans should let the Tahitians keep their own rules and customs (OP, 468). He seemed to fear the 'snake' that the Europeans would bring to the Tahitian paradise, a new dangerous form of sexual desire. In Wilda Anderson's words:

In a culture where desire is created by and strictly limited to the recognition of productivity, the notion of sexual desire as being provoked by something other than the strict notion of wealth-producing fecundity upsets the entire system of exchange and especially the forces regulating this exchange.(...) Whatever the source of the European notions of physical beauty and sexual desire, they are not in accord with those regulating Tahiti. (1990, 146)

One can hardly state more clearly that the Tahitian culture so described has its prohibitions: it does not accept 'free love' any more than Christianized societies do; it cannot preserve its identity when its beliefs and conventions are violated. The old man stood for convention; Orou has learned to universalize and thereby to transgress the sacred principle of innocence: for him the Tahitian beliefs have become ideas, in the Ortegaian sense; they are Orou's 'catins', whores, as Moi calls his thoughts at the beginning of *Le Neveu de Rameau* (1981, 29). With these ideas Orou can now persuade Europeans to take the Tahitian paradise seriously and thus serve

his interests.

And as the story goes, on the fourth night of his stay the monk accepts to sleep with Orou's wife. Whether a child is born or not, is not reported.

4 Reader and writer

4.1 Double-meanings

The first chapter of Diderot's text was entitled Jugement du Voyage de Bougainville. Why should there be a judgement so early- considering that the A-B dialogue is still, so to speak, in its introductory stage? Why should one begin with a jud_{g m}ent and then proceed to examine the text to be judged? But perhaps the word "jugement" has a double-meaning, just like the word 'supplement'. In both cases there is a movement linking what is 'in' to what is 'outside' the text we are "now" reading. As to the word "supplement", this is how Dena Goodman sees the double- meaning:

For those of us outside the text, B's mention of a supplement comes as a surprise because we thought we were already reading it. When A asks where the supplement is B points to it by using the pointing word "la"; we, in following the word, as A presumably follows the gesture, find ourselves looking at the same book, the one we have been reading and the one we are about to read. As the two texts merge, so do two of the readers: A and us. (1989, 175)

In the same way, the 'jugement' refers both to the A-B dialogue and to Diderot's initial decision to review Bougainville's book for the Correspondance litteraire. As soon as the distinction between the dialogue and the review is made, it practically disappears, but its critical significance remains. A similar distinction goes for reading mimetic fiction: we are supposed to believe in what we are told and, at the same time, realize that it is not true in any other sense than that it might be true; the latter aspect, however, bears on the probability of the first. It therefore has a critical significance.

What distinguishes Diderot's text from 'believable' fiction is that it is less concerned with our capacity to believe in the dialogue, as a psychological drama between two men called A and B, than with our capacity to keep a critical distance to their ideas and, possibly, to their prejudices³.

Practically speaking, we do not have to remind ourselves of how a conventional book review differs from a dialogue: while following the dialogue we are already involved in a reviewing experiment and dealing with questions a reviewer would pose as a reader - in the double-meaning of the word: as a reader of the text reviewed and as the reader of the review under work.

4.2 The non-Platonic strategy

Especially the A-B dialogue is characterized by a non-Platonic strategy, at least in one respect. This does not, let me be clear on this point, imply a total rejection of the

Platonic model, that is of dialogic drama based on a particular kind of plot (muthos), a thematic organization that was not defined as such before Aristotle's *Poetics*. C. Jan Swearingen's definition of this model applies to Diderot's dialogue as well, as far as the following criteria are used:

Plato's dialogue scripts place ideas, concepts, and statements alongside persons as interlocutors, entities, for consideration as real or unreal beings. The questions are not What happened? Why? and was Justice done? but rather What is? How do we talk about it? (Maranhao 1990, 50)

The difference appears rather in the 'aristocratic' as opposed to the 'democratic' constitution of the dialogic exchange. In Plato's model a 'master' (Socrates), pretending to be ignorant, controls the dialogue with his questions and guides it through predefined stages (Goldschmidt 1947, 12). In Diderot's dialogue, by contrast, there is no master but someone who has read a book and has no need to pretend ignorance. He is willing to answer the questions of his interlocutor who is in no way superior or inferior but who in the process of asking becomes gradually more active and independent.

If we consider B a writer, possibly Diderot's alter ego, and A a potential reader, representing us as implied readers, we can agree with Goodman on the assumption that the text offers us a model of reading and, provided that we can h_{yp} othetically identify ourselves with A, that the 'Jugement' is directed by the implied reader in his desire to understand (1989, 177). In Goodman's words:

When Diderot transformed his review into a dialogue between A and B, he made of the reader an active participant in the analysis of that text, making explicit the implicit exigencies of the reader which guide the writer. (ib.)

If we can " h_{yp} othetically identify" with A, it means that we accept his role as a working h_{yp} othesis, not as a personality model - no character description is given. The hypothesis can be further developed in our minds, but this h_{yp} othesis is of a special sort. It involves not only logical thinking, but also moral reflection.

4.3 Persuasion and distance

How does the rhetorical structure analyzed above carry out its persuasive function? On the grounds of what has been said it seems false to claim that the *Supplement* seeks to persuade the reader to admire the 'Tahitian paradise' as a naturalist ideal worthy of imitating in Europe. A critical reading of the text, observant of certain clues and contradictions, will nourish the kind of scepticism, of which we find signs in A's attitude.

A smells something artificial in Ourou's argumentation as well as in the rendering of the old man's speech: neither of them are to be taken at face value; they may in fact mirror an European dream of harmony with nature. Now let us put this into relation with the remark on Aotourou, the Tahitian brought to Europe with Bougainville: had he been able to convey his experiences to his country-men, he would not have found in his language the proper terms for what he had experienced, and, moreover, if he had, no one would have believed him (OP, 464).

This already puts an authentic communication between the two cultures into doubt.

The text persuades us to doubt the same ideas it puts forth, for instance, through the speech of the old man, who claims that he does not understand the European notion of property: here, he says, there is no distinction between 'yours' and 'mine'; sexual possession is unfamiliar in Tahiti - therefore, love is free, as we understand the message.

Later, however, Orou refers to his wife and daughters in these somewhat contradictory words: They belong to me, and they belong to themselves (OP, 476). Who belongs to whom may be difficult to explain (unless Orou is trying to mystify the matter). Anyway, possession is not entirely unknown in Tahiti.

The text allows the reader to demystify the charm with which many of its ideas at first present themselves. This unmasking is summarized by Anderson followingly:

The culture that to the Europeans had at first appeared to be founded on free love now shows itself to be ruled by just as constrained a definition of desire and of acceptable sexual exchange as existed in Europe. The Tahitians' love is anything but free, in either meaning of the word. The Europeans do not see this at first, because the Tahitians' rules are orthogonal to their own. (1990, 146)

Thus the rhetorical structure of Diderot's text provides the reader with a number of clues and paradoxes. The aim can hardly be to persuade the reader to share with the author a dream of 'free love' but rather to be suspicious of the cultural rules underlying all cognitive combinations of nature, freedom, and morality, for the meanings of the terms are very unlikely shared by people coming from different cultures and back_grounds.

In this sense, Diderot's text is not utopian. It represents a literature of suspicion. It is neither an attack on the Tahitian model nor a defense of primitivism. What comes out of the text is a paradox: oral and primitive cultures are no less cultures than those which, by virtue of their literacy, are aware of the artificial, not to say textual and prescribed, nature of their conventions and moral codes, but even primitive cultures follow a 'text', although not a written one - for which reason they are less disposed to distinguish between nature and artifice. What civilized men experience as 'freedom' in the primitive state is basically a limitation of self-understanding.

This point is not quite identical - but not in contradiction either - with the doubts Sigmund Freud had toward the longing of his European contemporaries for primitive conditions. This was one of Freud's themes in *Der Unbehagen in der Kultur* (1930): as there was an irremediable antagonism between demands of natural drives and the restrictions of culture, the civilized man was bound to feel discontent and to dream of a primitive state of freedom and happiness. Freud warned that such dreams were not realistic: primitive cultures were subject to restrictions of a different kind, perhaps of_g_r eater severity than those attached to modern culture. There was no reason to envy the 'freedom' of primitive people, Freud assured (1962, 62).

5 Tahitian beliefs

51 Beliefs confronted

In the old man's speech we can find signs of Tahitian beliefs which have not yet become ideas. In Orou's case this development is more evident. According to Ortega's distinction, beliefs are not yet quite conscious, albeit active forces and motives behind unquestioned attitudes and behavior. Ideas are conscious. Thus they also are usable for different rhetorical purposes: one can be dogmatic or pragmatic with ideas, take them as revealed truths or as tools to be deployed for some practical purpose. What distinguishes an idea from a belief is that ideas are open to doubt. But what happens when one has to defend one's beliefs against external threat?

This is the old man's situation: he is not prepared to defend his beliefs in an open argument-for-argument dialogue with the Europeans. But he immediately recognizes the threat and retires to his hut. His murky silence shows that, for a moment at least, his beliefs have ceased to guide him, and he is puzzled, not only by the external threat, but also by an inner contradiction due to his beliefs. How should one understand the contradiction? Wilda Anderson offers one clue: the Tahitian patriarch believes in the virtues of harmony, hence his "inability to be cruel" (1990, 146). He sees only one way to rescue the Tahitian way of life from the danger of European enslavement:

O Tahitiens! O mes amis! vous auriez un moyen d'échapper à un funeste avenir; mais j'aimerais mieux mourir que de vous en donner le conseil. Qu'ils s'éloignent, et qu'ils vivent. (OP, 466)

To consider violence as a solution goes against his beliefs. On the other hand, submission to the European influence amounts to the decay and disruption of the culture he strongly believes in. This inner contradiction forces him to silence. When he finally decides to speak we see only a shadow of the man of beliefs. He still has beliefs, but he has lost his faith in their future, and he would rather die than see the Europeans slaughtered or the Tahitians enslaved. The only way out of the impasse is an unlikely one: that the Europeans would go away and leave them alone. This is "his abdication of responsibility" (Anderson) stemming from a conflict in beliefs.

52 Logic and levels of discourse

For an interpreter sensitive to ideas there is also another kind of conflict to be seen in the Tahitian self-image. Tahitians wish to live in harmony with nature, yet nature is never stable and immobile - at least not to Diderot. But this is not obvious to the Tahitians.

One of the unquestioned Tahitian beliefs is that their culture is a product of nature, it has not been 'fixed' according to a human design. In logical terms: if there is no fixity, why should there be resistance to change? In theory, all changes are not 'natural', but in practice: how do we know - and how would the Tahitiens know - whether the arrival of Europeans is natural or not? For Bougainville (as for Diderot

the author) few things were as natural as the desire to explore the world. If so, would it be less natural to spread European influence in the places one explored?

For the old man, the change brought about by this 'natural' motive is a death-trap for everything 'natural' in his society. Logically, the old man's belief in the naturality of Tahitian mores represents a fixed notion of nature, although he cannot recognize it as such. This is his blind spot.

The unnoticed contradiction is observed by Anderson:

They seem not to recognize that they see their social organization as fixed; in other words, they have institutionalized it unknowingly. This is because their focus is on the changeability of nature, and their culture is minimized and hence hardly visible. (...) The Tahitians' perception of their culture as naturally fixed - an oxymoron in terms of their own theory - keeps them from seeing the changes taking place and makes them incapable of dealing with either those changes or, most importantly, changes that come from their environment. (1990, 141)

This reads as an ideational description of the Tahitian beliefs that the old man stands for. But do Anderson's words apply to Orou? Is Orou able to see the contradiction? The answer is: yes, at least potentially. As we observed, he can switch levels of discourse and move from the conventional to the universal level and vice versa.

This means that he can deal with beliefs as ideas and use them for either dogmatic or pragmatic purposes. He is not dogmatic, at least he does not behave that way in his dialogue with the monk. A dogmatic wants to be convinced without confronting his (suppressed) doubts. But Orou is more interested in persuading the monk - and for reasons other than purely doctrinal. He is a pragmatic rhetorician: he is not bothered by his doubts but has learned from them how to argue out an idea. The way he does this - and his reasons for doing it - goes beyond all idealism. He has 'profit' and 'utilite' in mind.

6 Guilt and shame

Yet it is possible that even Orou, as a Tahitian, feels deep down guilt for being alienated from 'nature' and the beliefs, according to which he has been brought up. It may be that his lip service to Tahitian principles betrays his wish to believe in them, and as Nietzsche claimed in regard to Carlyle: wishing to have faith is the opposite of having faith (*Gotzen-Dammerung* 1964, 138). But this is pure speculation: the assumption of Orou's guilt or wish to believe cannot be based on any evidence found in the text.

The old man's position is different. From his insistence that the Tahitians were unspoiled 'naturalists' till the Europeans came, and from his inability to take responsibility for his people, follows that he feels guilt and cannot do anything about it, except 'confess' his weakness and his despair. His guilt is, however, a delicate subject: he cannot express it openly.

This can be understood. It would show his alienation from his culture, to

which, as he contends, even feelings of shame and remorse have so far been unknown (OF 470). In this context shame and remorse can hardly derive from European influences, it would have taken a longer time to take root in the Tahitians, but from a more immediate source: the shocking experience of a new form of sexual desire (Anderson 1990, 145).

For feelings of shame and remorse to be awakened among the Tahitians, these feelings must have been kept under the cultural surface and strictly controlled by taboos before the Europeans came. It would seem that some aspects of the Tahitian system point to shame morality (sexual productivity as a sign of social prestige), others to guilt morality (passivity in the face of aggression). But these moral sanctions were hidden and dimmed by the dominant and unwritten ideology of 'nature'.

The old man, however, blames the Europeans for bringing these feelings to Tahiti. He addresses Bougainville with these words:

T u n'es pas esclave: tu souffrirais plutot la mort que de l'etre, et tu veux nous asservir! (OP, 467)

This is to say that if Bougainville was in his position, there would be no question what he would do: he would fight back and rather die than be enslaved; otherwise he would feel guilty (or ashamed) for the rest of his life. The old man has no intention of fighting: his only weapon against Bougainville is the guilt he feels, and he wishes Bougainville to imagine himself in his position.

Assuming with Anderson that the Tahitian culture is unable to be cruel - it is restrained in regard to aggressivity - the question arises what happens when a Tahitian's aggressions are aroused. Keeping in mind what Freud said about the severity of restrictions in primitive cultures, it would seem plausible that a Tahitian, not being allowed to express aggressivity openly, should direct his aggressions towards himself. One consequence of this would be a feeling of guilt. When this happens, there is a way to dissipate such feelings without actually becoming aware of them: the detours of empathy. The feeling is externalized, the subject is consoled by the community's concern and advices, he is not allowed to plunge into himself and reflect upon his values, as in the process of solitary reading and meditation. Among Tahitians the method may have worked, but the old man's appeal has not the desired effect on Bougainville, the European. So we may assume: his reactions are not reported.

Is the old man's guilt, then, cruelty and aggression turned inwards? Let us assume that some one with a sense of interiority (made possible by civilization and individualization) feels guilty. Such a person is, in principle, able to accept guilt as a 'normal' feeling and to negotiate with his internalized Other; aggression is kept in check; self-criticism knows its difference from self-torture; a change in attitude may be worked out. But when one lacks the means to dialogue with the Other in oneself (the old man's case), one may end up in self-hatred and feeling ashamed, overly dependent on public opinion, and simply wishing to vanish from the face of earth, as the effect of shame is often described.

Diderot's attitude to shame was contradictory and ambiguous. Officially, in his advocacy of virtue and consideration for the 'good opinion' of others, he stood for

shame morality; yet he was unwilling to grant shame the status it deserved in this system. If one is to avoid dishonor, shame should be ascribed a positive function: to fear shame is to respect it. Diderot's attitude is one of disrespect. It did not occur to him that guilt also entails a disrespect for shame, not because guilt would rather have its punishment in secret, but because it is more optional, more interested in alternatives than in complying with the expectations of others, like shame is. Basically, shame is the attitude of the one who wishes to go unseen. This is how the old man reacted at first: he wanted to hide himself from the Europeans and from his own people; guilt forced him to take a stand; shame got the last word: the old man wished to die, to vanish.

One form of shame is the reader's wish to remain hidden, not seen, protected from public attention. Dena Goodman calls this "complacency": "Part of the readers complacency lies simply in his sense of anonymity and hiddenness" (1989, 178). I call it shame. Diderot's aim, in a sense, was to free the reader from shame and to urge him/her to act as if he/she knew what guilt was about: contemplating on one's responsibility and facing the challenge of coming up with personal choices.

References

- 1 In his well-known essay *Blindness and insight* Paul de Man deals with the problem - or inevitability - of misreading in the interpretation of literary works. He seeks to locate the blind spot of the literary language as the organizer of the space of vision contained in the text. The paradox is that insight can be the consequence of blindness. The central point of his essay is: "it follows from the rhetorical nature of literary language that the cognitive function resides in the language". For De Man "the question as to whether the author himself is blinded is to some extent irrelevant; it can only be asked heuristically, as a means to accede to the true question: whether language is blind to its own statement" (1989, 137). In this view, it is possible to claim that Diderot's literary and philosophical language was blind to its own rhetoricity of guilt. The 'blindness' of the oral dialogues in the Supplement is, however, another case, one that can be discovered through the textual organization.
- 2 It seems odd that Orou knows the word 'libertine'. If he thinks of the monk as a possible libertin, he should also know that the idea is very ironic. Already in the 16th century, the French word 'libertin' denoted a person who did not follow the laws of religion: it was synonymous with impious, irreligious. The characteristic common to libertins in the 17th century was their aggressive atheism. Later forms of libertinism evolved along the lines of epicureanism and hedonism (see DiPiero 1992, 340-242).
- 3 The experimental nature of the Supplement should be obvious. The attitude that fiction's conventions should remain invisible was common in the 18th century. Thomas DiPiero has pointed out that novelists in the 18th century went to great lengths to claim veracity for their works (1992, 315). To a certain degree this applies to Diderot as well. He did not wish his fiction to be read as pure fiction and make-believe. In the Supplement the veracity principle is supported by the anchoring of the text to Bougainville's nonfiction. But by inviting the reader to take critical distance to the embedded, fictional dialogues Diderot could not follow the rule of hiding the fictitiousness of his text. The reader is, as we have seen, expected to pay attention to the rhetorical structure of the text, which implies that one should understand it as a literary and intellectual construct, and therefore, as a self-conscious narrative. This did not mean a defense of fiction-as-lie against nonfiction-as-truth. Fiction was just as much about reality as nonfiction. What distinguished the one from the other was not a different ethics of honesty, but rather a different rhetorical

attitude. The commitments of fiction are more tropic or figural: unlike nonfiction, fiction is not committed at the level of the propositions it advances, but rather at the level of what those propositions implicate. Of course, even nonfictional narratives implicate meanings, and it is therefore important to make a further distinction between 'implicature' (the act of implicating) and 'implicatum' (what is implicated). Nonfictional narratives display their implicata, fictional narratives their implicatures (allowing the audience to supply the unspecified connections and interpretations). What matters most, however is, in the words of Thomas M. Leitch, that "an audience, which is capable of recovering anything as a story, is already moving away from the experience of story to the experience of analysis" (1986, 201).

- 4 The same has been said of Sigmund Freud: "Freud's attitude and the attitude of later psychoanalysts toward shame was one of disrespect. Shame was viewed as one of the major forces promoting repression and resistance to the analytic process" (Bronck 1991, 12).

VI IDENTITY AND ALIENATION

On Le Neveu de Rameau

In this chapter I will examine *Le Neveu de Rameau* as a dialogic portrait of one of Diderot's 'moral monsters' who in the text is named "Lui". His identity is no secret: it is revealed already in the title, indirectly by reference to his uncle, the composer Philippe Rameau. Lui (as I will call him) had a model in real life: Jean-François Rameau, the son of Philippe Rameau's brother Claude, a musician himself, though a less distinguished one than Philippe. Philippe Rameau's nephew Jean-François became a composer, too, unsuccessful like his father (Furbank 1992, 242). Identifying his interlocutor as the nephew of the famous Rameau was for Diderot a way, not only of nullifying Lui's artistic achievements but also of suggesting that with Lui we are faced with a problem of identity.

I distinguish two manifestations of identity in this dialogue: the public and the private. Just as the nephew's role reflects Lui's 'private self', Moi relates to Diderot's public role as philosophe, and is distanced from it by the private, self-ironic role he plays in this identity game.

The relation between fiction and reality presents itself in an ambiguous light. Diderot's rhetorical strategy departs from an ironic double-perspective, in which the identities of the two characters are both affirmed and questioned.

1 Belonging and strangeness

Michael Ignatieff credits the 19th century for "the richness of its invention of new forms and possibilities of belonging":

Those great cities - Manchester, New York, Paris - were as strange to those who had to live in them for the first time as ours may seem to us. Yet we look back at them now as a time of civic invention - the boulevard, the public park, the museum, the cafe, the trolley car, street lighting, the subway, the railway, the apartment house. Each of these humble institutions created a new possibility for fraternity among strangers in public places. (1994, 140)

Ignatieff touches upon an important element in the conditions contributing to the birth of the modern character: the element of strangeness. The "time of civic invention", however, started earlier than in the 19th century. The "transient solidarity" (ib. 141) between strangers in public places was a fact of life already in the 18th century, as we see from *Le Neveu de Rameau*. Yet this solidarity should not be confused with losing the sense of distances, which occurs in a dense crowd, a feast crowd, for example.

In his extensive essay on mass psychology, *Masse und Macht*, Elias Canetti applies the term 'die Entladung' (discharge) to the latter crowd phenomenon. In *Le Neveu de Rameau* we are closer to something I would call a semi-discharge. The interlocutors cannot quite forget the distance between them, yet they act as if seeing each other in a place where people meet for the sake of meeting - the beginning of crowd-behavior - would offer them a chance to come closer. It is the strangeness they experience in this situation that creates the dialogic dependence between them. Strangeness and familiarity - the dialectic of these two qualities in the dialogue between Moi and Lui offer us an idea of the polytropic nature of the situation and the characters.

11 Types and individuals

The modern conception of character arose in the 18th century, more or less simultaneously with the rise of the novel (Hochman 1985, 57). But the notion of 'character' itself is an old one. In Aristotle's *Poetics*, "the mimesis of character comes second in importance" in relation to the plot, "the principle of life" (1989, 59). Furthermore, there were rules for representing a character (in tragedy), the first being that the character should be "morally good" (ib. 69). This means that before any character is represented, it should be obvious that he belongs to the same moral universe as the spectator and corresponds to familiar ideas of virtue and excellence.

According to Bernard Williams, the Greek sense of morality was concerned with "the articulation of shame" (1993, 97). In a shame culture, from which the Greek tragedy emerged, a character moves in a world where he is constantly defined in the eyes of the surrounding community to which he belongs. "The Homeric, tragic, in particular Sophoclean, characters are represented to us as experiencing a necessity to act in certain ways (...) We should understand this in terms of the mechanisms of shame" (ib. 103).

A shame culture must have a typology for characters: one is, for instance, a courageous man, another is a coward. This kind of typology reduces the strangeness of individual features in a character to a set of familiar rules, by which any conduct can be either praised or claimed shameful. Feelings of guilt, by contrast, seem to require that the individual sees himself as an individual and to a certain extent distanced from those who are to judge him from the outside.

Williams points to one significant difference between shame and guilt. Shame itself is neutral to the distinction between moral and nonmoral qualities:

(...) we, like the Greeks, can be mortified or disgraced by a failure in prowess or cunning as by a failure of generosity or loyalty. Guilt, on the other hand, is closely related to the conceptions of morality, and to insist on its particular importance is to insist on those conceptions. (1993, 92).

It follows that guilt can be more severe in its judgements where purely moral matters are concerned. Shame can befall a person who thinks he has done the right thing but is judged by others for acting foolishly. Being 'foolish' is not exactly a moral quality of behavior, but in a shame culture it can result in moral disapproval, as showing shrewdness in an nonmoral venture can arouse moral respect and admiration. In this view my earlier attempt to classify certain Diderotian characters as 'naive' or 'shrewed' can make sense only against the background of a shame culture, in which such types, however ambiguous, are needed to guide feelings of pity, awe, contempt or solidarity, according to the witnesses' preferences.

The point is that in a solid shame culture characters never primarily appear singular and unknown (strange in that meaning) but always belonging to a community and to a character-type.

In 17th century France the typologies of shame culture are still powerful in the art of les moralistes. Yet Erich Auerbach sees a significant difference between Moliere and La Bruyere:

Moliere is much less concerned with character *types*, he is much more intent upon rendering the individual reality, than the majority of the moralists of his century. He did not present 'the miser' but a perfectly specific coughing old monomaniac; not 'the misanthropist' but a young man of the best society, an unyielding fanatic of sincerity, who is steeped in his own opinions, sits in judgement upon the world, and finds it unworthy of himself; not 'the hypochondiac' but a wealthy, extremely robust, healthy, and choleric family tyrant who keeps forgetting his role of invalid. And yet no one can help feeling that Moliere fits perfectly into his moralizing and *typifying* century, for he seeks the individually real only for the sake of its ridiculousness, and to him ridiculousness means deviation from the normal and customary. For him too a character taken seriously would be '*typical*'. (...) The short-winded and finicky technique of La Bruyere, who builds up the abstractly moral *type* from a mass of traits and anecdotes, is unsuited to the stage; for the stage requires striking effects and greater homogeneity in the realm of the concrete and individual than in that of the abstract and *typical*. (1974, 361-2)

However, with both authors, Auerbach concludes, the moralistic attitude is essentially the same. They see their characters from the outside, as social agents belonging to some social group or category of people, not as strangers whose thoughts and feelings are unknown. Diderot's Lui is closer to the complex character of a stranger. Our access to his inner feelings depends on how he externalizes them in the dialogue with Moi. The reader is left with the feeling that some private truths may remain unsaid.

1.2 Public and private self

Remembering Jurgen Habermas' distinction between the public and private sphere, we may now ask whether this distinction is of any consequence to 18th century

characterology.

In the 18th century novel the emphasis on individual character (which is also reflected in the titles of novels: *Pamela*, *Tom Jones*, *Tristram Shandy*, *Emile*, *Manon Lescaut*) began to develop alongside contradictory assumptions about community and social identity. The typical novel of this period concerns the effort of the individual to find his or her place in a society where place and identity are matters of worth, not birth (Kraft 1992, 5-7).

This may be one reason why the century showed a "considerable interest in orphans, foundlings, abandoned children and social beginners" (Turnell 1978, 38). Suzanne, the heroine of Diderot's novel *La Religieuse*, learns of her bastardy when she still has hopes of avoiding nunnery; she is left alone in the cold world of the religious community. Dorval, in the *Fils naturel*, reaches the age of an adult without knowing his father. In a way, even Rameau's nephew belongs to this category of people, 'outsiders' struggling for their worth somewhere between family and society, not finding a secured and satisfying position in either.

1.2.1 The split

In *The Fall of Public Man*, Richard Sennett contends that the 18th century's effort to come to terms with its newly acquired public diversity resulted in a splitting of the self into public and private. This split would have been unnecessary in a culture of social stability based on either birthright or material wealth, but the 18th century as a time of transition from one (the feudal order) to the other (the early capitalist order) tried to mediate between the demands of both (1977, 54-63). This aristocratic-bourgeois public order was conceived in opposition to and defined in terms of a newly found 'private' identity:

The line between public and private was essentially one on which the claims of civility - epitomized by cosmopolitan, public behavior - were balanced against the claims of nature - epitomized by the family. They saw these claims in conflict, and the complexity of their vision lay in that they refused to prefer the one over the other, but held the two in a state of equilibrium. Behaving with strangers in an emotionally satisfying way and yet remaining aloof from them was seen by the mid-18th Century as the means by which the human animal was transformed into a social being. The capacities for parenthood and deep friendship were seen in turn to be natural potentialities, rather than human creations; while man made himself in public, he realized his nature in the private realm, above all in his experiences within the family (1977, 18-19).

Sennett's description of the 18th century mental scenery fits in with the circumstances and relations presented in Diderot's text. Moi and Lui meet in a public place, in a cafe; they are not close friends; they start talking as acquaintances (choosing some public subject, in this case the chess played in the cafe); soon the dialogue becomes more personal as if the interlocutors had decided to break the ice between them. This, however, is not what really happens, for they "remain aloof" while simulating an "emotionally satisfying" openness and sincerity.

Moi's and Lui's family relations are discussed (they are both parents); at the same time they appear as separate individuals having their own problems and views distinguishable from their private lives. They do their best to maintain the equilibrium between their private and public ('made' and 'natural') selves. This

equilibrium takes precedence over the self-as-interiority which became more topical with the rise of Romanticism and as much as the trademark of the modern consciousness-centered novel. But this was a later development.

Yet the 18th century did witness the birth of this inner self: "It was a difficult birth, occurring as it did in an orthodoxy that disallowed it" (Kraft 1992, 18). By 'orthodoxy' Elizabeth Kraft means the not yet fully 'bourgeois' ideology of the mid-18th century, when Diderot started writing *Le Neveu*, precisely speaking in 1762. This orthodoxy bore the imprint of aristocratic ideology: man was seen in hereditary terms, as a member of a family, and this membership was assumed to satisfy his need to define his private or natural identity (in contrast to his public identity). The importance of family-membership is evident already in the title of Diderot's text, although it also can be seen as understating Lui's merits as a 'public man'.

This presents a problem especially to philosophers who read *Le Neveu* with a determination to reduce ambiguities concerning Diderot's ideas. In his study on Diderot's holism Timo Kaitaro maintains that "the insensibility of the nephew of Rameau to the beauties of morality is explained by a hereditary defect of constitution" or - he continues moderating the explanation - 'by the influence of bad company' (1995, 139).

Actually, it is Lui who gives this 'orthodox' comment on his not fulfilling the demands of the moral 'orthodoxy' of the time, that is, the doctrine of moral sensibility. He refers to 'blood' and 'company' (1981, 157), thus covering both the private and the public aspects of his supposed insensibility. As to Lui, one should not forget the ambiguity of his character: he is both a private man, moved to tears by the memory of a beloved woman, and a public jester, always ready to toss in a paradox. In his dialogue with Moi, he moves between the two roles. The dialogue as such offers no 'explanation' to something we might call the nephew's "insensibility". Instead, we may offer the explanation of polytropy to the number of causes which might explain Lui's character. Lui may be a cynic, but cynicism is not always due to insensibility. In fact, many of Lui's statements indicate a half-hidden sensibility behind his hard-boiled public self. Most clearly this is expressed at the end of the dialogue, in Lui's sobbing about a lost love:

Mais hélas je l'ai perdue; et mes espérances de fortune se sont toutes évanouies avec elle. J'en avais prise que pour cela, je lui avais confié mes projets; et elle avait trop de sagacité pour n'en pas concevoir la certitude, et trop de jugement pour ne les pas approuver. (ib.186).

Quite obviously, it takes a woman to bring out the vulnerability in a cynic, and for a passing moment Lui forgets that he is in male company. For this moment we see him without a mask, as a man who had a dream, a goal. Just as Jacques is not necessarily the fatalist he takes himself for, Lui's insensibility may also be a public pose, or one aspect of his self-image.

1.2.2 Character on stage

Let us not forget 'le paradoxe sur le comédien': what the actor feels inside is not what his art is about; his acting is what he 'makes' of himself, not what he actually 'is' or feels. This 'paradox' is parallel to the 18th century idea of the self split between

its private and public aspects. *Le Paradoxe* formulates the following play/society analogy: "Il en est du spectacle comme d'une société bien ordonnée, où chacun sacrifie de ses droits pour le bien de l'ensemble et du tout" (OC, VIII, 375).

Self-interest reconciled with public interest: in order to make this come true one should see society as a theatre-play in which roles are interrelated and modified by the whole. This was also the fundamental principle in the Republic of Letters. A good actor is inspired by the virtue of reciprocity; he is able to adapt himself to the way others enact their roles. A mediocre actor, always carried away by his 'sensibility', is aware only of himself. It is in this light that Lui jokingly presents his moral code: "jamais faux, pour peu que j'aie intérêt d'être vrai, jamais vrai pour peu que j'ai intérêt d'être faux" (1981, 109). This apology of moral egoism ends in a paradox: "Aussi je n'offense personne" (ib.). Lui the buffoon is artfully balancing between the public and the private aspects of morality.

Maintaining an equilibrium between the two selves comes down to the idea that life in society is acting on a stage. There are two consequences: what matters is not only acting 'well' in the theatrical sense, the social actor should also choose his role wisely, with dignity and self-esteem. These two aspects, the theatrical and the moral, are both present in Lui's portrait.

The theatrical aspect seems to overshadow and at times engulf the moral aspect. Lui has a talent for pantomime. His gestural performances often bring out the moralist in him. He excels in imitating different forms of parasitism and moral mediocrity. This 'moralism', however, is played down by his way of seeing vices in artistic-aesthetic terms, as performing a theatrical role. Vice is thus estranged from its moral nature; instead of belonging to the sphere of morality it is redefined in relation to artistic representation: in its new appearance vice is mostly about revealing and concealing.

'Mediocrity', in the nonmoral meaning of the word, is what Lui hates most of all, even in himself (1981, 47). Yet he displays a rather paradoxical sense of moral dignity:

MOI: Oui, votre dignité me fait rire.

LUI: Chacun a la sienne; je veux bien oublier la mienne, mais à ma discrétion, et non à l'ordre d'autrui. (1981, 95)

Who can say whether this sense of dignity is corrupted or not. It depends on whether we look at it from the private or public perspective. In his public role Lui is a buffoon - so he has to sing for his soup and play the fool. But as a private person he has his pride: it is of his own choice, not by blind obedience to his masters, that he degrades himself in the eyes of others. Vive la petite différence!

According to Lui, in buffoonery the standards of quality are higher than in other, for example, moral matters: "On est plus difficile en sottise qu'en talent ou en vertu" (ib. 122). On the other hand, even morally charged roles are for Lui basically questions of how skillfully one masters and manipulates the signs attached to these roles. He mentions having read Molière and La Bruyère. Moi is impressed, prematurely:

LUI: Moi, j'y recueille tout ce qu'il faut faire, et tout ce qu'il ne faut pas dire. Ainsi quand je lis l'Avare, je me dis: Sois avare, si tu veux; mais garde-toi de parler comme l'avare.

Quand je lis Tartuffe, je me dis: Sois hypocrite, si tu veux; mais ne parle pas comme l'hypocrite. Garde des vices qu'on dit utiles; mais n'en aie ni le ton ni les apparences qui te rendraient ridicule. (1981, 115)

At first glance, the jest is directed against Moliere's didactic intentions. But the final target of Lui's scorn seems to be the shame culture which has produced both Moliere and Lui's own art of buffoonery. Actually, Lui is a specialist in the ridiculous. He knows that people are more afraid of being laughed at than being seen as vicious, and since being ridiculous is his job, we can be sure that he is merely displaying his rhetorical skills. We may assume that he takes a Larochefoucauldian distance to the vices he pretends to impersonate in a mock-Montaignean way, by using the confidential 'je'-pronoun. So let Moi laugh at him; by doing so Moi is also laughing at himself as a victim of shame culture: projecting his fear of being ridiculous on a substitute victim, who is not so much a victim as a professional clown, and, therefore, above the tyranny of shame.

Shame is Lui's employer, and he pokes fun at his employer's expense, just as the court jester does to his king's. Actually, Lui is aware of his kinship with "le fou du roi au titre" seeing himself as the fool in the bourgeois family of Bertin's and why not even in the company of Moi: "Moi je suis le fou de Bertin et de beaucoup d'autres, le votre peut-etre dans ce moment; ou peut-etre vous le mien" (ib. 116).

2 Contrast and convergence

According to one rather conventional interpretation *Le Neveu de Rameau* is about Diderot himself, his "double identity", as his biographer P.N.Furbank defines the problem. "On the one side there is the enlightened honnête homme", he says, "on the other side there is the hostile alter ego" (1992, 226-247). Convenient as this approach may be to a biographer, it is not convincing in its attempt to simplify the question of duality in the dialogue. Paradoxically, this monologue-dialogue approach often leads to the idea that the two egos are contrasted and antithetical to one another, although they should represent the same person.

If so, there is a contrast between the dialogue and Diderot's theory of dramatic representation: "Pourquoi a-t-on imaginé de faire contraster un caractère avec un autre?" he asks in *De la poésie dramatique*. "Quelle monotonie pour le dialogue!" Instead, Diderot prefers to contrast characters with situations (OC, VII, 348-347).

But what is the 'situation' in *Le Neveu*? Is it a situation typical of the Republic of Letters: people exchanging ideas and testing their tolerance? Or are the two interlocutors drawn to each other because of some common denominator which they prefer not to discuss openly? Should we contrast their self-definitions with this obscure zone (an existential situation, so to speak)? Or should the situation be defined as an intellectual carnival?

2.1 A dialogic portrait

As a dialogic portrait *Le Neveu* is not only a description of a real-life person but a dialogue in which we see two subjects in a reciprocal process of self-definition. Far from being a 'cold eye' observing his object afar, Moi is also portraying himself in regard to Lui. The way Moi sees Lui reflects the way he sees himself. Lui is the prime object of portrayal, but one always reveals oneself in showing interest in others.

If the text is a satire, as the subtitle indicates, 'both (Moi and Lui) are the objects of Diderot's satire', as Leslie G. Crocker has observed (1974, 95). Identity is the crucial issue in this dialogue, that is, identity and alienation. Here is what Crocker has to say about Lui and Moi:

Lui's acute self-awareness, his perception that he is not wholly any of his roles, leads to his cynicism, nihilism, and self-alienation.(...) Moi, on the other hand, is in secure possession of his identity. His personality and his life, antithetical to Lui's, are ordered. He has founded his inner stability on the acceptance of recognized values and on a role in which he has succeeded, to his own rather smug satisfaction, in winning the esteem of others. (1974, 94)

Antithetical personalities, once again. Could it be possible that the antithesis is only an appearance - although one which both Moi and Lui take for real - and turns into a convergence of interests at some deeper level? Crocker does not ask why Moi so persistently continues his dialogue with Lui despite the fact that his opponent's "uncompromising cynicism becomes more and more a danger for his security and his values" (ib.). Yet, by saying that Moi's satisfaction is 'smug' Crocker allows us to think further. If some one is 'smug', there is reason to wonder whether he really is satisfied with himself.

Why assume that a philosophe of the 18th century would be so confident about the esteem of others? Diderot was imprisoned for the ideas he expressed in *Lettre sur les aveugles*. We know that being a 'philosophe' at that time was not quite the same as being a respected honnête homme¹. It is possible that Diderot (more than Moi, at least) was aware of the buffoon-aspect in himself, thus anticipating later critics, like Georges Sorel, who described Voltaire and Diderot as 'buffoons of a degenerate aristocracy', as bourgeois who aspired to ape the tastes of an idle and pleasure-loving nobility (Berlin 1980, 303). Moi may well feel the same kind of 'inquietude', or strangeness, that Lui finds in himself. One should also remember how he describes his thoughts: "ce sont mes catins" (1981, 29). The reader- the serious one, at least - is allowed to take distance from Moi.

The concept of a 'dialogic portrait' also has to take into account those shadowy aspects which emerge with the dialogue and the partial 'self-denial' that the dialogue necessarily entails. Since "the subject is not at the center of dialogue as a source of meaning" (Maranhao 1990, 18), the dialogue itself creates new meanings which cannot be reduced to what the subjects separately say. In analogic terms, the art of portrait is not only about showing what is expressly brought to light but also about the hidden, shadowy aspects of the model. In a study on Montaigne's essays, Marc E. Blanchard draws the following analogy between Montaigne's essays and the new style of portrait painting:

Deja chez Montaigne, comme chez les portraitistes du temps, l'ombre commence a designer ce qui, effet de l'art et de la lumiere, est donne a voir, et n'existe que dans le contexte d'une specularite. (1990, 75)

Diderot expressed his own views on the question of clair-obscur in his *Essai sur la peinture*. In rather similiar fashion, he states that "il n'y a pas une loi pour les couleurs, une loi pour la lumiere, une loi pour les ombres; c'est partout la meme" (OC, X, 479). As to portrait painting, Diderot insists on making a distinction between republican and monarchic portraits:

La peinture en portrait et l'art de buste doivent etre honores chez un peuple republicain, ou il convient d'attacher sans cesse les regards des citoyens sur les defenseurs de leur droits et leur liberte. Dans un Etat monarchique c'est autre chose; il n'y a que Dieu et roi. (ib. 507)

One wonders whether the same distinction applies to the art of verbal portrayal. If so, how 'republican' is the portrait of Lui who continues the tradition of the king's fool in a monarchy where the fool has already been replaced by a new public sphere, by men and women of letters, increasingly aware of their role as forerunners of a new republican order? Obviously, Lui does not belong to the Republic of Letters, but the monarchy has no use for his services either. As a bourgeois fool, he is caught in between the two orders. An outsider in society, he is without the official status of the king's fool and also without the public merits (incomes or achievements) which would give him respectability in the eyes of his new bourgeois hosts (Bertins and others).

But it is exactly in his role as an outsider that Lui is worthy of being portrayed together with Moi the republicain. He is good, and better than Moi, in one 'republican' virtue: "il secoue, il agite; il fait approuver ou blamer; il fait sortir la verite" (1981, 32). Not that Lui himself embodies the virtue of honesty, but he represents a challenge to intellectual honesty and thus to the moral self-image of our philosophe. What is Lui's secret? He stands for marginality and distance, the zone where the faceless city-crowd produces strange individuals and potential opposition to the centers of power. Lui's outsiderism and strangeness is the quality that Moi finds both appalling and appealing in him, and partly for personal reasons.

2.2 The carnival aspect

The situation in which Lui et Moi find themselves incorporates aspects of a carnival. In the words of Huguette Cohen:

Le texte dans sa totalite est une ceremonie de detronement de la philosophie, poussee dans ses derniers retranchements 'une fois l'an'. L'image du jeu d'echecs, glissee des les premieres lignes du texte, introduit celle du roi de fete que sera Rameau, l'espace d'un moment, 'aujourd'hui au sommet, demain au bas de la roue'.¹¹ se voit en pensee 'le plus insolent maroufle', renvoyant dos a dos Voltaire et Buffon, Montesquieu et d'Alembert. L'acte qui le transforme en authentique roi de carnaval consiste, pour lui, a rabaisser l'homme en l'animalisant. Les boyaux qui crient remplacent 'la voix de la conscience et de l'honneur'. Dans un jeu identique de renversement, semantique celui-ci, Rameau pense qu'il pourrait lui arriver d'appeler vice ce qu'on appelle ordinairement vertu'. (1985, 233)

This is a very concise account of some of the clues and tropes in the text. That chess is played in le Cafe de la Regence is not, for Cohen, an accidental detail: chess is about 'killing' (dethroning) the adversary's king, and killing the king amounts to reversing the prevailing order, like in a medieval carnival. This interpretation is clearly influenced by Mihail Bahtin's study on François Rabelais and his carnival laughter. The word 'carnival' comes from latin: caro, carnis, meaning flesh². Lui is portrayed in carnal terms: apart from his esprit he is conscious of his bowels; instead of mirroring his soul his face reflects the state of his stomach:

MOI: Comment? vous voila avec un ventre de Silene; et un visage...

LUI: Un visage qu'on prendrait pour son antagoniste. C'est que l'humeur qui fait secher mon cher oncle engraisse apparemment son cher neveu. (1981, 36)

Due to his irregular life, Lui's physical state changes all the time. One day he is thin as a skeleton, a month later he is fat and fleshy. "Rien ne dissemble plus de lui que lui-meme" (ib. 30-31). In Bahtinian terms, the carnal dimension in Lui seems to overrule the spiritual dimension: not only values prescribed by religion but also the order created by reason and philosophy. For Lui, it is easier to identify with Diogenes the cynic than with Socrates the lover of virtue and wisdom (ib. 36).

As to debasing man by animalizing him, it is true that animal imagery plays a part in Lui's rhetoric. Where Socrates listened to his daimon, Lui's man consults "his ape and his parrot" (ib. 126). To argue that Diderot was a "consistent anti-reductionist" (Kaitaro) opposed to reducing higher levels of organization to lower levels is obviously pointless here. After all, rhetoric and philosophy can go separate ways, and rhetoric may even take on the function of 'camevalizing' philosophy, which seems to be the case in Lui's philosophical pranks. Reason, he says, goes where he decides to push it (ib. 147). Such an idea would have horrified Plato, but Diderot the psychologist could afford the joke. In a psychological context the reply should tell us more about Lui's character than about reason itself.

No doubt, a carnival aspect can be extracted from *Le Neveu*, but there is one problem with this 'Bahtinian' interpretation. It blurs the distinction between the public and private self.

The medieval carnival culture emerged from the feudal order based on hierarchical distinctions between high and low values, spiritual values being superior and carnal values inferior. The public-private distinction, by contrast, was not hierarchical; it did not call for a reversal of public order, the goal was to maintain an equilibrium between the two selves.

The carnival culture strove to reverse the established order, at least temporarily. As we have seen, there is a hierarchy of high and low levels also in Diderot's theory of organization. Every man is a particular kind of organization, which defines his individual character. A loosely organized character would, in this view, be constantly carnivalized, at the mercy of its lower levels: sensibility would rule over reason and reflexion. In the Bahtinian model, carnivalization is an outburst of vulgar energy and laughter. In Diderot's philosophical model, it would mean something else: the triumph of mediocrity if not complete mental disintegration.

Lui would be the first to admit his mediocrity, but he is not pleased with it. He hates mediocrity. The question of unity of character is touched upon in the dialogue. Moi claims that Lui is still far from inner unity (in evil): "Je vous trouve de temps en

temps vacillant dans vos principes" (ib. 132). Lui says he has done his best to achieve such unity. The question remains unsettled³. I would say that Lui's unity of character resides in his freedom from the tyranny of shame. He has payed a high price for that freedom (humiliation, poverty, lovelessness), and has learned to control his sentiments - which, as he fears, would only make him unhappy by creating false hopes. His self- control, however, is not based on moral principles, except for his sense of personal dignity (his moral egoism).

In this sense, the carnival theory is problematic. For Lui, life is a carnival, and life-as-carnival is a discipline. On the other hand, the carneval theory is about crowd psychology, and in this field further problems arise.

2.3 The semi-discharge

In *Masse und Macht* Elias Canetti coins the term 'discharge' to explain what happens in a crowd that is conscious of itself as one collective personality. It is the discharge which creates the crowd: This is the moment when all who belong to the crowd get rid of their differences and feel equal, Cannetti says.

Unter diesen Verschiedenheiten sind besonders ausserlich auferlegte zu verstehen, Unterschiede des Ranges, Standes und Besitzes. Die Menschen als einzelne sind sich dieser Unterschiede immer bewusst. Sie lasten schwer auf ihnen, sie zwingen sie mit grossen Nachdruck auseinander. (...) In verschiedenen Gesellschaften sind diese Distanzen verschieden gegeneinander ausbalanciert. In manchen liegt der Nachdruck auf den Unterschieden der Herkunft, in anderen auf denen der Beschäftigung oder des Besitzes. (1973, 14).

In the French mid-18th century society the stress was on both, on birth and occupation, which created the need for a balance. This balancing between the private and public self, together with the presence of other people, mostly strangers, gathered at the same place on some pretext (playing chess and watching chess played), gives us an idea of a crowd-like situation in which Moi and Lui, otherwise distanced from one another, can engage in dialogue on equal terms while not forgetting their differences. This is what I would call a semi-discharge.

Because of their differences Moi would probably never invite Lui to his home, and vice versa. The same condition applies to the crowd: the Canettian discharge (equality in a crowd) becomes possible only between strangers, whereas the idea of meeting privately would immediately revoke the discharge and restore the sense of differences. Moi and Lui are not complete strangers, they know each other by name and reputation, and they have met each other before. But the nature of their relation is such that they can meet only among strangers, as if they were strangers themselves. This 'as if' is exactly what defines their bond.

Canetti distinguishes between closed and open crowds. An open crowd is aware of itself as a crowd and willing to grow. When it ceases to grow it disintegrates. The closed crowds of the past were not always conscious of their crowd-nature. They had turned into familiar institutions. People coming together in a church, a theatre, or a cafe, had domesticated their experience of belonging to a crowd: the situation seemed natural and familiar. Yet this was not quite so, according to Canetti:

Wer einer Predigt beiwohnte, war gewiss im guten Glauben, dass es ihm auf die Predigt ankam, und er war erstaunt und vielleicht auch empört gewesen, hatte ihm jemand auseinandergesetzt, dass die grosse Zahl der anwesenden Hörer ihm mehr Befriedigung gewähre als die Predigt selbst. (ib. 18)

Obviously, Moi and Lui are not aware of the extent to which the "closed crowd" in the café urges them to pursue their dialogue which only remotely resembles a chat between friends. As they are not friends, and not complete strangers either, they must justify the magnetism (or semi-discharge) between them as some kind of familiarity. The solidarity between strangers is thus domesticated in two ways: by the pretence of friendship, and by the agreement to represent one another as character-types. Lui is the buffoon, the parasite, the cynic. Moi is le philosophe and the man of virtue.

But their agreement is not water-tight. Lui is not "wholly any of his roles" (Crocker), and Moi has to remind him that he is still far from "cette estimable unité de caractère" (...) *Je vous trouve de temps en temps vacillant dans vos principes*" (1981, 132). What Moi seems to mean is that Lui's character-type is not as coherent as it should be in terms of shame morality. But Lui is less concerned with shame culture than Moi is, he knows its demands only too well and can even laugh at them. Yet he has a difficulty in expressing his inner self. In this regard Moi is not remarkably different.

The crowd-like situation in which they meet helps them to be in touch with the stranger inside them, while at the same time they are blinded to this dimension. It is their blind spot, as it is an indication of their polytropic characters.

Canetti states that in the crowd the individual feels that he is transcending the limits of his own person (1973, 17). In their dialogue Moi and Lui are in the process of transcending their character-types fixed by centuries of shame culture. One effect of the semi-discharge in which one cannot separate the experiences of strangeness and familiarity - as if one signified the other - can be the escape inward, the need to explore one's inner self. This does not happen in *Le Neveu*, but Moi and Lui are at the gates of that possibility.

At the gates of the individual conscience. And guilt.

3 Virtue at stake

As all professions, according to Lui, have their 'idiotismes', special deviations from the general rule, one should not expect any more from moral rules or the universal validity of virtues. Here the stress is on individual differences. In itself the idea is not in contradiction with morality. One individual can have a moral disagreement with another individual without it being obvious a priori that the other one is immoral. But Lui hastily assumes that all deviations from what he calls "la conscience générale" (1981, 80) must be morally suspicious. He contradicts himself: in order to assume so, one should set a high value on the idea of a universal morality. Lui believes in no such thing.

Soon we find out why. Like the Marquis de Sade⁴, he thinks that the ferocity

of nature provides a universal proof against morality and virtues: "Dans la nature", Lui says", toutes les especes se devorent, toutes les conditions se devorent dans la societe" (ib. 81). When discussing 'vicious' human nature, Moi, reacting to Lui's cynical views, adopts an ironic tone and takes a rather paradoxical stand to the question of what would happen to an unraised child, left to the mercy of nature: "Si le petit Sauvage etait abandonne à lui-meme; qu'il conservat toute son imbecillite et qu'il reunite au peu de raison de l'enfant au berceau, la violence des passions de l'homme de trente ans, il tordrait le col à son pere, et coucherait avec sa mere" (ib. 166). Lui's response to this pre-Freudian paradox⁵, a paradox when coming from the mouth of an idealist, is approval: "Cela prouve la necessite d'une bonne education" (ib.). The cynic sees the necessity of raising children properly⁶: it is nothing but sound self-protection!

Moi is left alone in his belief that in virtue one can find great pleasure if not happiness.

3.1 Virtue and pleasure

This was, of course, not only Diderot's view but a view typical of the 18th century and the Republic of Letters. Helvetius thought that all pleasure was basically a physical sensation; in other words he reduced the specifically human pleasure found in virtue to a lower level of animality. Diderot disagreed: "Vous n'admettez que des plaisirs et des douleurs corporelles", he wrote addressing his words to Helvetius, "et j'en ai eprouve d'autres" (OP, 568).

All pleasures were not physical. The idea that virtue might be about something else (more moral) than enjoying pleasure is not questioned. In this sense, Diderot cannot escape reductionism. Whether virtue is reduced to a 'lower' or 'higher' pleasure, is secondary; it is still reductionism.

Anyway, Lui argues against Moi's sophisticated reductionism from a different point of view: all pleasure is individual, one cannot reduce its variations to some general law: "Vous croyez que le meme bonheur est fait pour tous! Quelle etrange vision! Le votre suppose uncertain tour d'esprit romanesque que nous n'avons pas" (1981, 84).

Moi defends himself by claiming that there is a particular pleasure to be found in helping some poor creature, in solving a difficult problem, in giving good advice to a neighbor (ib. 88) and so on. But he has already lost the battle. Not being able to present any other, genuinely moral, argument in favor of virtue, he cannot refute the conclusion that any one may be happy in his own way.

The problem seems to be that they are discussing morality in terms of shame culture - from the perspective of a set of rules and virtues considered appropriate for a respectable citizen who wishes to avoid shame - and, at the same time, applying internal criteria (pleasure, happiness) to actions conforming to these external expectations and valuations. As to the mixing of these two languages, the external and the internal, one emphasizing social expectations and the other moral sentiments, Lui cannot disregard his feeling that such a morality is false, nothing but double-morality. Lui has lost his respect for shame morality, and is not yet familiar with guilt in the modern sense.

32 Conscience

Conscience is hardly mentioned, except the "general conscience", which can only be understood in the context of shame culture. This is not surprising. Both 'consciousness' and 'conscience' derive from the Latin roots *con* and *scire*, meaning 'together' and 'to know'. Both words in their earliest meanings denoted shared knowledge (Kraft 1992, 28). A private conscience, then, would have been nothing but a "moral idiotism" or sensibility related to family and the natural self.

Robert Mauzi takes up the problem of conscience when dealing with 18th century naturalism. If conscience is rooted in nature, can it resist natural drives? If conscience is nature, Mauzi asks, "avec qui dialoguerait-elle?" (1960, 615)

In the Christian meaning of the word, conscience was dependent on God's presence in man. Even in this moral context, conscience implied an external sanction for Right and Wrong. Society with its habits, laws and values could only replace God as authority, as "general conscience". The idea that conscience could be an inner dialogue - a personal matter - was to be born later. Not so very much later. The modern city-crowd has contributed to its birth by detaching individuals from social hierarchies and distinctions which traditionally defined their identity. To come about the modern interiority needed a degree of alienation, the kind of semi-discharge we find in *Le Neveu de Rameau*. But there is also an equivalent to this sociological notion in rhetoric: irony. Balancing different attitudes against each other, irony resembles the ambiguity of strangeness and familiarity to which the term semi-discharge refers.

An ironist is at a certain distance from himself. Identity, for him, is not a matter of being oneself but becoming oneself through detours and masks. He is like Odysseus in Homer's word: *polutropos*, many-turning. Identity and home-coming have their importance, but so does learning to know the world of otherness and thereby oneself. This duality corresponds to the rhetorical commitment of a dialogic attitude, the voluntary act of stepping out of oneself and returning home to judge oneself by criteria which have become one's own.

Without rhetoric - irony, dialogue, polytropy - there would be no internalized Other, conscience in terms of inner dialogue, as opposed to internalized authority. Modern guilt, the concern for one's moral identity, would in fact be unimaginable without the rhetoric of distance, and urbanity.

Shame, not guilt, is still the leading tune in the dialogue between *Moi* and *Lui*. But the reader, the third party, is left with his conscience and inner self, to judge their dialogue.

References

- 1 In 1760, Charles Palissot ridiculed Diderot in his play *Les Philosophes*, and Palissot is mentioned in the dialogue. The term 'philosophe' came close to an invective during Diderot's century, and, in the bookselling trade, the term 'philosophical books' was used to include pornography (Furbank 1992, 23). The dictionary of the Académie Française defined 'le philosophe' in such a way that any opinion or conduct regarded as 'natural', shocking, irreligious, or self-concerned could be maliciously described as 'philosophic'.

Any man who was "surly, dirty, uncivil, unconcerned with the duties and proprieties of social life" could be labeled a 'philosophe' (Undank 1989, 423). Curiously enough, Lui's ideas and conduct correspond to this caricature of a philosophe better than Mai's.

- 2 Bahtin explains the timing of the carnival feasts briefly and emphasizes that carnivals were not connected to religion or any holy events, even if they usually took place before Lent, "dans les derniers jours precedant le grand careme" (1970, 16). For Bahtin, carnival represents feast and laughter in general (but within certain historical boundaries). In his study of Francois Rabelais' carnival laughter Diderot is mentioned as the author of *Les Bijoux indiscrets* and *Jacques le fataliste* (not of *Le Neveu de Rameau*); these novels, together with other examples (like Moliere's comedies), are seen as symptoms of the rationalization and formalisation of the carnival spirit during the 17th and 18th centuries: "Ayant perdu ses liens vivants avec la culture populaire de la place publique, etant devenu une pure tradition litteraire, le grotesque se degenerate. On assiste a une formalisation des images grotesques du carnaval" (ib. 43).
- 3 To some critics, it is true, the question is not unsettled but clear. Donal O'Gorman has observed inconsistencies in Lui's ideas, which, in his interpretation, betrays "inconsistency of character", and thus moral mediocrity, whereas Mai represents "consistency and rational control" (1971, 86). It is easy to see that this interpretation stands for the Direct View: ideas are directly equated with character. In the Indirect View, contrasts and inconsistencies in ideas do not exclude a hidden logic in a character's self-presentation. To find that logic, the Indirect View would rather look at them as 'cracks' in the tale that the character has constructed for its self-defense or as symptoms of the split between the private and public self. The Direct View has difficulties with regard to polytropy. For O'Gorman, the premise is that *Le Neveu* is a satire, and its object is Lui. Mai (= Diderot) is the satirist. Diderot the satirist is the title of O'Gorman's work.
- 4 Lui has been compared to the Marquis de Sade before. But so has Sade been compared to Jane Austen! Both are said to be "concerned (though for somewhat different reasons) with exposing the weakness of sensibility" (R.F. Brissenden: *Virtue in Distress*, 272). Sade is, however, more famous for his cult of violence and cruelty. It has been seen as a sign of his alienation. Brissenden gives us a colourful picture of the Marquis: "Sade is a man terribly and hopelessly alienated from human society; and his alienation presents itself in such a grotesque manner that one is tempted to regard him as totally abnormal, uniquely aberrant. But it would be a mistake to do so." Maybe the same description (and absolution) would apply to Lui? Brissenden adds: "A sense of alienation, of intellectual and cultural dislocation, begins to manifest itself more and more widely in European literature as the eighteenth century draws to a close and the nineteenth century begins" (ib. 66).
- 5 Sigmund Freud was aware of this passage and wrote: "It should also be remarked that long before the time of psychoanalysis the two criminal offences of Oedipus were recognized as the true expressions of unbridled instinct. Among the works of the Encyclopedist Diderot you will find the famous dialogue, *Le Neveu de Rameau*..." (1935, 296). Obviously, Freud was not interested in the possible irony of Mai's statement.
- 6 Diderot's 'official theory' of raising children, as expressed in his *Lettre a Madame la Comtesse de Forbach sur l'education des enfants*, is highly idealistic. In bringing up a child the first problem seems to be whether the child should be a genius or merely a good person. Diderot opts for goodness: "Qu'il soit bon, premierement; il sera grand apres, s'il peut l'etre" (OC, III, 540). Secondly, it is important to teach the child to fear the right things, that is, to fear shame more than death: "Plus on craint de se deshonorar, mains on craint de mourir" (ib. 541). Officially, Diderot sided with shame morality.

VII RESISTANCE AND RESPONSIBILITY

In this chapter I will study moral tropes in Diderot's fiction, excepting the two texts (the *Supplement* and *Le Neveu*) which have been discussed in chapters V and VI. By moral tropes I mean ways in which the themes of shame and guilt are implied and mystified - indeed, 'mystification' is itself a term to be elucidated - in Diderot's novels, stories, and plays. I will bring out details, which concern resistances to change - changes in a character's moral position in society - and the issue of individual moral responsibility- that is, how a character relates, directly or indirectly, to the question: How should I live?

1 Novels

1.1 Les Bijoux indiscrets

Diderot's first novel *Les Bijoux indiscrets* (1748) was written in 'oriental' style, popularized by Montesquieu's novel *Lettres persanes*, and presents as its main characters Mangogul, Sultan of Congo, and his mistress Mirzoza.

The novel was published anonymously. There was reason to fear that it would be seen as dangerous to public morality. In many ways it is a philosophical novel, containing for instance a description of a dream-journey "dans la region des hypotheses". But what helped to confuse its reputation was the 'pomographic' element, its light-hearted treatment of the issue of sexual infidelity, and its central metaphor, le bijou parlant, bijou meaning jewel, but referring also, in popular language, to the genitals (female and masculine, in this case mainly to vagina). This device of the speaking jewel seems to have been borrowed from an earlier novel, by or attributed to the Comte de Caylus (Furbank 1992, 44).

The influence of oriental tradition, notably of the *Thousand and One Nights*, can

be noticed in the way stories are multiplied within a framing story, but this is as far as the analogy goes: the writer is clearly a French philosophe using oriental names and misnaming ("Congo") to disguise French realities. Mangogul has been taken for Louis XV and Mirzoza for Madame de Pompadour, not to mention code-names for representatives of the aurora of European culture, such as Eurisope and Azophe (Euripides and Sophocles).

In this early novel Diderot's concern for characterization is still meager and in its initial stage. We learn from Mangogul that he is inclined to boredom, which not even his favorite mistress Mirzoza is always able to disperse. His boredom is accompanied by a *tenden_{cy}* to plunge into solitary monologues: he is a "*gr* and *faiseur de monologues*" (1981, 80). This feature may be partly due to his position as Sultan. His power condemns him to the sphere of '*secre_{cy}*', as opposed to the 'public sphere' in which the *poli_{cy}* of openness and ratio is supposed to rule over cunning and voluntas. Consequently, he is a sly person, and his use of the magic ring, given to him by a genie, bears witness to this personal or political quality.

But let us stop for a while to look into his '*ennui*'. Is it significant, and if we presume it is, how should we understand it? Vladimir Jankelevitch gives the following account of ennui in *L'aventure, l'ennui, le serieux*:

On s'ennuie par excès d'intelligence, mais aussi par trop de vie intérieure; la pratique de l'introspection (...) et l'entretien avec soi développent une tristesse pénétrante qui n'est pas tellement due au monologue égoïste ou ils nous confinent qu'à la détresse de la conscience en général. (1963, 87)

This description, written by a 20th century thinker, fits in with what we know of Mangogul: his inclination to soliloquy is emphasized on several occasions. But does he suffer from "too much interiority"? The notion seems to owe more to Romanticism and its rhetoric than to the Age of Reason. On the contrary, the expression "too much" conveys exactly the idea of 'bizarre' for which the 18th century was liable to take most deviances from man's natural 'sociability'. Solitary practices were seen as instigating the alienation of the individual from society and his fellow-men. The Romantic movement, by contrast, was more favorable to solitude, and for many Romantics, like Rousseau, the author of *Les Reveries du promeneur solitaire*¹, there was something far more profound in man's inner life than the Age of Reason was willing to acknowledge.

Whether Diderot intended to allude to the negative aspects of Mangogul's character by his description or not, the fact is that Mangogul is far more ambiguous a character than his position and bizarre manners would seem to imply. According to some critics, the novel displays a "fundamental contradiction" between its aristocratic perspective, represented by Mangogul and Mirzoza, and the bourgeois morality, which would seem closer to Diderot's viewpoint and for which the first priority should have been to rebuff 'libertine' aristocratic ways (Rustin 1981, 27). In this light, it is rather puzzling that Mangogul should appear as "*l'allegorie typique du Philosophe des Lumières*" (ib. 20). No doubt, his curiosity and search for knowledge make him resemble a philosophe, but only if we look at Mangogul from the outside and disregard the description of his character.

With his "*entretien avec soi*" Mangogul places himself in the tradition of guilt morality², although his princely power and aristocratic origin do not allow him to

deal with his guilt. He is tied back by the shame morality of his social rank. He is not free to revise his life, and to become a true philosophe, by letting his inner voice (reason or conscience) change his fixed and prescribed princely duties and responsibilities. Therefore, he can only dream philosophical dreams and play truth-games with his magic ring, that is, spy for people's private secrets. In a way, Mirzoza becomes his external conscience, by reminding him of the limits and dangers of such activities and of the importance of trust. Mangogul replies: "vous moralisez comme Nicole!" (1981, 55) Pierre Nicole was a Jansenist writer from the 17th century, and a representative of Christian guilt morality.

But Mirzoza cannot prevent Mangogul from doing his "essais" in the field of shame, knowing how incurable is his boredom, the consequence of an unlived life. What is bothering you, she asks Mangogul. "Jene sais", he answers (ib. 44). He has all it takes to be happy, but happy he is not. Jankelevitch says: "dans l'ennui c'est le bonheur qui fabrique le malheur comme un fruit trop mûr et déjà presque pourri" (1963, 82). Happiness is to boredom what guilt is to h_{yp} ocrisy: in boredom the motion of happiness has ceased (Diderot would probably have used the term 'inertia'), just as in h_{yp} ocrisy, in Paul Ricoeur's words, "le scrupule vire à l' h_{yp} ocrisie des que la conscience scrupuleuse cesse d'être en mouvement" (1960, 289). Between Mangogul's ennui and his guilt one can see a semiotic link; the former is a trope of the latter.

Let us turn to the other central trope, the jewel. It is a trope of shame (as well as sexual pride). Williams writes about the Greek notion of shame:

The basic experience connected with shame is that of being seen, inappropriately, by the wrong people, in the wrong condition. It is straightforwardly connected with nakedness, particularly in sexual connections. The word 'aidōia', a derivative of 'aidos', shame, is a standard Greek word for the genitals, and similar terms are found in other languages. The reaction is to cover oneself or to hide, and people naturally take steps to avoid the situations that call for it. (1993, 78).

In Diderot's novel this reaction is connected with h_{yp} ocrisy as soon as "la bouche et le bijou d'une femme se contredisent" (1981, 59). When a jewel becomes, by the influence of Mangogul's ring, a shameless organ of truth, it contradicts the honorable version of the lady's mouth. Philosophically, Mangogul's truth-game is naturalist, showing how the body, perennially silent, 'speaks' when given a voice and when deprived of the sense of shame that civilization has implanted in our minds. (The mind-body dualism is presented, paradoxically, in materialist terms; this time the body is given the upper hand, it is on the side of the truth, whereas the mind sides with lies). "In many respects", says Daniel Brewer, "the female body made audible in *Les Bijoux* belongs to an ancient dream of Western (masculine) imagination: presenting the body in such a way as to find there access to truth" (1993, 173).

Morally, the theme of Mangogul's game is shame. Religion soon introduces the theme of guilt, as the women whose jewels put them into constant danger are consoled by the idea that they can acquire "muselières" to silence their jewels (1981, 97). The reaction of "les bramines" - the priests of Congo - is hostile to the use of such prevention. Taking the chatter of the jewels for "divine punishment", they declare to the women of Congo:

"Femmes riondaines, quittez vos rnu selieres; sournettez- vous, s'ecrierent-ils, a la volonte de Brarna. Laissez a la voix de vos bijoux reveiller celle de vos consciences; et ne rougisiez point d'avouer des crimes que vous n'avez point eu honte de commettre." (ib.)

The priests appeal to the sense of guilt; 'honte', shame, is not mentioned as the ultimate sanction, for the priests know well that shame is a 'wordly' emotion concerned with secrecy and external appearances. The message is that the (primitive) sense of guilt should prevent women from doing what they obviously are not ashamed of doing, if there is a chance of not being caught in action or in lying. The theme of shame is present in the wish of the jewel-carrying women that they should somehow manage to "concilier la reputation et les plaisirs" (ib. 119).

Except for the priestly rhetoric, guilt remains hidden in the novel. Without the religious context, or the personal context of a value-oriented Self, guilt has trouble in understanding itself (why should one abstain from pleasures if not to maintain a good reputation or not to hurt someone else's feelings, and if the same result can be achieved by other means, simply by keeping silent, so why feel guilty?). Yet there is a potential passage from shame to guilt. In William's words: "Shame can understand guilt, but guilt cannot understand itself" (1993, 93).

This seems to be the case of the women in *Les bijoux*. When Mangogul turns his magic ring upon their jewels, it forces them to reveal the most intimate of truths. The women of Mangogul's court are put to shame by confessions they would never have made voluntarily; their shame points to their actual guilt, to the fact if not to the experience. The experience is there, but it has been silenced by shame morality, the primacy of shame.

On the other hand, by using the ring Mangogul makes himself guilty of not understanding the love of women - nor himself as a love-desiring man. He condemns himself to voyeurism, and to the impossibility of reaching the minds and hearts of women in any other way than by external force. His 'magic' is not innocent but a form of violence. He is lost in his guilt, and unable to see it. This can be called his blind spot.

He sees the world divided into two spheres: that of reality (hidden truths) and that of representation (hypocrisy, official lies, facades of virtue). If we see morality as a primary force in the shaping of man's conception(s) of the world, we might say that shame and guilt can go as far as creating their respective ontologies. For shame morality the world is essentially what it seems to be, and the perceived consequences of actions are more important than their ulterior motives; behind a chair there is no 'idea' of a chair just as there is no 'goodness' prior to a good deed, a deed becomes good by its consequences. For guilt morality, the appearance of the world is secondary to the hidden dimension of reality, the secret motives, the underlying logic of events which call for conscientious demystification. In fact, Mangogul's ontology reminds us of the Larochefoucauldian one, a mixture of guilt and shame morality, in which shame finds its justification in the unavoidable threat of a hidden reality (of amour-propre or savage hedonism) to social order, and from which a certain pessimism necessarily ensues³.

Diderot was sensitive to the mysterious quality of guilt, but the notion of 'sin' made him suspicious; satire and irony were his means of dealing with the theme. What we see in *Les Bijoux* is a shift of emphasis from 'sin' - the infidelity of women, seen as natural: there are no chaste women, the story argues - to the duality in

Mangogul, who seeks power to know what power over others prevents from knowing. Power gives access only to representations, not to the understanding of others. It is this duality- isolation, secrecy, guilt-ridden ennui, on the one hand, and forced representation, shame morality, and contempt for shame, on the other hand - that characterizes Mangogul and his intricate relation to shame and guilt.

Mirzoza, his female conscience⁴, resists his temptation to turn his ring upon her. She appeals to the Sultan's sense of responsibility: if he did such a thing, the trust between them would be destroyed. She would feel offended (1981, 49). Mangogul promises to make an exception with his favorite, the only one whose fidelity really matters to him.

12 La Religieuse

Diderot started writing *La Religieuse* in 1760. Years later it was serialized for the *Correspondance litteraire* (1780-1783). It was not published in book form in Diderot's lifetime. Furbank contends that for a long time after its publication the work, like *Les Bijoux*, was regarded as a pornographic novel (1992, 221). I have (in chapter III) already referred to the reasons which make this (mis)conception understandable: Diderot did not hesitate to describe the role of sexuality in monastic seclusion - from a naturalistic (pre-Freudian) point of view.

It is a dangerous illusion, the novel seems to say, that one can free oneself from sexual needs; when suppressed they easily take unexpected forms, such as sadism or lesbianism wearing the mask of ardent motherly love, as in the case of the prioress of Saint-Eutrope. Suzanne, the main character and narrator, who has been placed in a convent against her will, appears to remain sexually innocent - notwithstanding her 'weakness' for mere de Moni whose power over her (and other sisters) is described as "seduction" (1966, 53).

Suzanne Simonin is, as I said, a naive character, but if we look at her from the perspective of guilt and shame, it seems that her misfortunes are largely due to shame morality, whereas all the sympathy and understanding she receives comes mainly from people who are more prone to guilt morality. As an outsider in the monastic community, standing alone for her conviction, the inner certainty that she lacks the vocation to be a nun, and thus defying the expectations of the community, she herself represents the inward-looking attitude characteristic of guilt morality. She is not motivated by shame as much as by guilt, the prospective guilt of acting against her conscience, that is, her idea of a good life versus a wasted life. Responsibility for herself finds expression in her resistance to the life of a nun, which for her would mean a wasted life.

The reasons why she is put to a convent have to do with family shame, of which she is not aware at the beginning. Her mother has been too proud to inform her daughter about her bastardy. Suzanne has grown up believing that the husband of her mother is her father. He is not. The information is passed on to her, not by her mother directly, but through pere Seraphin, with this explanation: "il est dur pour une mere d'avouer une faute grave a son enfant; vous connaissez son caractere; il ne va guere avec la sorte d'humiliation d'un certain aveu" (1966, 34-35).

There is also an economic aspect to the decision of placing Suzanne in a convent. The financial arguments, as Roger Lewinter has pointed out, are "absurd"

and barely convincing (1976, 75). Suzanne would agree to give up all claims to her dowry. Madame Simonin rejects the idea by saying that such an arrangement would look highly inappropriate, and the consequences would be dishonorable for Suzanne herself (1966, 43-44). The argument is once again based on shame morality.

In Madame Simonin, pride and shame rule out empathy for her daughter, which, in view of modern psychology, is typical of shame-oriented people: it has been established that empathy and shame are negatively related. Guilt and empathy, by contrast, are positively correlated. People who show a great deal of shame are less likely to show empathy (Lewis 1992, 97). Diderot may not have intended to generalize, but the same conclusion can be drawn from his portrayal of Madame Simonin's behavior toward her daughter. Let us take the incident of Suzanne's nosebleed for example. Suzanne and her mother face each other in silence in a carriage, and suddenly...

Jene sais ce qui se passait dans mon ame; mais tout a coup je me jetai a ses pieds, et je penchai ma tete sur ses genoux; je ne lui parlais pas, mais je sanglotais et j'etouffais. Elle me repoussa durement. Jene me relevai pas; le sang me vint au nez; je saisis une de ses mains malgre qu'elle en eut; et l'arrosant de mes larmes et de mon sang qui coulait, appuyant ma bouche sur cette main, je la baisais et je lui disais: "Vous etes toujours ma mere, je suis toujours votre enfant..." Et elle me repondit (en me poussant encore plus rudement, et en arrachant sa main d'entre les miennes): "Relevez- vous, malheureuse, relevez-vous." Je lui obeis, je me rassis, et je tirai ma coiffe sur mon visage. Elle avait mis tant d'autorite et de fermete dans sa voix, que je crus devoir me dérober a ses yeux. Mes larmes et le sang qui coulait de mon nez se melaient ensemble, descendaient le long de mes bras, et j'en etais toute couverte sans que je m'en aperçusse. A quelques mots qu'elle dit, je concus que sa robe et son linge en avaient ete taches, et que cela lui déplaisait. (1966, 30-31)

Furbank praises this scene for its "impressive coldness" (1992, 220), and one can see that details speak for themselves. Still, it is all about sentiments. Madame Simonin's sentiments are the socially correct ones, Suzanne's sentiments are personal and private. Suzanne is not ashamed to show her weakness, Madame Simonin feels only shame: she sees her daughter's behavior as well as the stains on her dress through the eyes of the world, and the world, to the eyes of the shame-ridden person, is always ready to judge and condemn by appearances, never interested in the internal reasons behind them.

Diderot was careful not to attack monastic life and religion in a simplistic and generalizing way. Persons of genuine faith are allowed to come reasonably well out of the story, as Michael Bell has remarked (1983, 67). One example is mere de Moni who shows sympathy and understanding to Suzanne. Suzanne describes her as a person who has a distaste for physical punishments and for self-torture: "Elle disait de ces penitences, qu'elles ne corrigeaient pas d'aucun défaut, et qu'elle ne servaient qu'a dormir de l'orgueil" (1966, 67). The argument clearly stems from guilt morality: by torturing one's flesh one wishes to impress others and thereby oneself, which only nourishes one's pride; the argument goes against shame morality; guilt morality, by contrast, devalues pride and hypocrisy.

On the other hand, mere de Moni, faithful as she is to her inner tribunal, is not always sensitive to the requirements of her social role, above all to the principle of equality: "Il etait rare qu'une religieuse qui ne lui plaisait pas d'abord, lui plut jamais" (ib. 52). This is, however, not so exceptional in monastic life, as Suzanne is

ready to add. But mere de Moni's favoritism is clearly determined by her own personal judgement, whereas her shame-oriented successor Sainte-Christine chooses to reverse the former system (ib. 67), acting upon the socially 'given'. As to mere de Moni, one particular feature deserves our attention: her personal charm is seductive: "Son dessein n'était pas de séduire; mais certainement c'est ce qu'elle faisait" (ib. 53), and she manages to seduce Suzanne to take religious vows, which Suzanne later regrets.

The "seduction" is easy to understand in psychosexual terms, as a need of intimate union. This is how Roger Lewinter presents the case in his psychoanalytic interpretation (1976, 77-82), but it is questionable whether mere de Moni would have had any power over Suzanne without the spell of her guilt morality. It leads her to respect Suzanne as a responsible subject, but also to severe self-doubts concerning her spiritual talents as God's servant. Paradoxically, her guilt morality becomes a fatal trap for Suzanne who is more fit to resist the sanctions and perils of shame morality.

Following the death of mere de Moni a new superior takes over and changes life in the convent. Sainte-Christine, with the assistance of her "satellites" (1966, 133), brings on Suzanne a series of persecutions. Motivated by shame morality she finds Suzanne's efforts to repudiate her vows scandalous: "Que dira le monde? Que diront nos sœurs?" she exclaims (ib. 108). Suzanne is stigmatized as an "apostate" (ib. 114, 116), a traitor of the Catholic faith. At this point monastic sadism breaks through the barriers of Christian morality; more precisely, the emergence of 'shame' in the convent arouses a lust for cruelty and occasions punitive actions against the rule-breaker. As 'nonmoral' as they seem to us, they appear justified to the persecutors from the perspective of shame morality: if some one turns against the community and betrays its expectations, the community has the right to avenge itself and punish the rebel.

This kind of shame morality brings out the herd-instinct in the members of the community; individual conscience has no say when group-cohesion takes over. Yet one can ask, which form of morality is less fatal and dangerous to Suzanne's resolution, the 'soft' guilt morality of mere de Moni or the 'hard' shame morality of her successor. These are Suzanne's words on mere de Moni: "je ne puis vous en dire trop de bien; c'est pourtant sa bonté qui m'a perdue" (ib. 51). If some one has to be blamed, mere de Moni is an easy target. But, basically, it is Suzanne's character that makes her more vulnerable to the gentle approach, she appeals to her inner self, than to external pressures. The shame-oriented treatment only strengthens her resistance.

After a while, Suzanne is removed to another convent. Here, in Sainte-Eutrope, she meets the unnamed lesbian prioress who becomes fond of her. The victim in this case is not Suzanne, but the prioress herself, to whose feelings Suzanne cannot respond. Diderot is "treating the Mother Superior, very compassionately but 'scientifically', as a 'system of deformity, with a 'skew' running visibly right through her moral as through her physical makeup" (Furbank 1992, 229). There is something careless and disorderly about her character: "elle vous interroge; vous lui répondez, et elle ne vous écoute pas; elle vous parle, et elle se perd" (1966, 185). One detail seems to take on both erotic and moral meaning: her eyes are half-closed, "presque jamais entièrement ouverts" (1966, 242). The moral meaning is that "she does not want to see what she is doing" (Furbank 1992, 229).

One may suppose that the prioress is unconsciously resisting a feeling of guilt. When it finally comes to the surface, she is driven to a tragic end. Suzanne, hidden behind a door - Roger Kempf refers to "le sens de la palissade" in Diderot as a device analogous to the ubiquity of 'God's eye, to seeing without being seen (1976, 28) - hears her confession: "Mon pere, je suis damnee" (1966, 288). The personal inferno of the prioress makes out a case of primitive guilt. The prioress can be seen as a victim of the 'perverse' institution or of her disconnected character. In any event, guilt is definitely in the picture. Hidden, mostly.

1.3 Jacques le fataliste

Diderot began to write *Jacques le fataliste et son maître* around 1771. It is a many-faceted, labyrinthine, and comic work, which "prefigures the modern novel in its highlighting of the codes of writing" (France 1983, 107). Its self-conscious narratology is an interesting subject in itself. My interest lies, however, in the indirectness of Diderot's moral rhetoric, that is, the way he develops side by side two major themes, which run parallel to the themes of shame and guilt, namely that of mystification and that of determinism.

In other words: the relation between fiction and reality, and fatalism. The first theme involves the problem of analogy: as we approach reality by telling stories, would stories be the more true the more they reflect the fictional and deceptive aspects of reality, and if so, what is the part played by the reader's intervening experience? The second theme involves a paradox: if all our actions are predetermined and "written above", as fatalism teaches, we find ourselves in a metaphysical impasse: can we distinguish reality from fiction, the pre-existing story of our lives, and if not, a fundamental decision is in order: we have to decide what is the meaning of this assumption for us.

Jacques le fataliste is, in Furbank's words, "a fiction about fiction-telling", the frame story of Jacques and his master being imbricated, by a system of relays, overlays and Chinese-box effects, with a multitude of other stories (1992, 432). One of them is the landlady's story of Madame de la Pommeraye and the Marquis des Arcis. The Marquis, appearing in one story, tells another story about Father Hudson. Jacques tells stories from his rustic past, of how he tricked two peasant wives to teach him the abc's of sex, how he came to sleep with his friend Bigre's beloved, and so on. All these stories are variations of the same theme: deception, the moulding of reality by means of deceit and cunning.

Although Diderot must have enjoyed writing fiction, 'fiction for fiction's sake' could hardly have been his programme. As in the title *Ceci n'est pas un conte*, he now persuades the reader of *Jacques le fataliste* not to regard it as a novel:

Il est bien evident que je ne fais pas un roman. (.). Celui qui prendrait ce que j'ecriis pour la verite, serait peut-etre moins dans l'erreur que celui qui le prendrait pour une fable. (1973, 47)

The reader will most likely take this as irony. But the irony has an extra-literary meaning, too. Not only is the novelist, who pretends to tell the truth, a suspect character, but so is any person who allows us to believe in his absolute honesty. To

tell the truth is a well known moral precept, but one who cares for the truth should not expect to hear the whole truth from people who have more to gain by deceiving and, moreover, who do not always know the whole truth themselves. The Indirect View differs from the Direct even here. From the Indirect View it would seem an impossible goal to stand for the Truth in general: the best one can do is to be honest about one's own motives, which are always based on a partial understanding of reality. Reality, again, is what people make of it by pursuing their own interests. It is a network of fictions and mystifications. And this is exactly the 'verite' Diderot is telling us.

We should not take the word 'mystification' for a synonym of lie. Roger Kempf explains the word's meaning: "(La) discretion dans la deloyaute, (le) sens du peu sont un des ressorts de la mystification. Le mystificateur c6toie la verite 'd'assez pres'" (1976, 215).

Madame de la Pommeraye's plan is a mystification. She is not telling the Marquis the whole truth, but her willingness to 'assist' the Marquis is not to be doubted; only some essential details are missing from the picture. Also Father Hudson knows how to use the truth against itself to save his own neck. These mystifications involve analogies between reality and appearance; they are basically actions 'determined', as it were, by shame morality, by the wisdom of mastering appearances. The sense of shame is always one motive in these actions, and it should be clear to the reader, through his/her own shame experience, that the actor must display practical inventiveness not to be caught doing something 'wrong', while it is obvious that the actions do not conform with the moral expectations of the counter-actors.

The entrancing story of Jacques' ex-master, the captain from whom Jacques has inherited his fatalism, should perhaps also be seen in this light: accustomed to fighting a duel every now and then with his dear friend, the captain suffered from a strange obsession, or folly, difficult to explain rationally to others, if not using the sublime pretext of fatality. Even folly has to account for shame morality, to explain itself in order to appear honorable, particularly if the folly springs from an ancient cult of honor, a form of chivalric shame morality.

From his captain Jacques has learned that "tout 6e qui nous arrive de bien et de mal ici-bas 6tait 6crit la-haut" (1973, 35). If fate is responsible for our actions, we do not have to feel guilty or ashamed of them; this explanation - or fiction - seems to give the captain the right to go on duelling with his friend, till he finally dies of sheer grief when this privilege is denied him.

In other words, the captain's fatalism is a mystification of his obsessed character, to which the narrator adds the dimension of anachronism: the captain was a man of the past, his folly was the folly of Europe for centuries:

on l'appelait !'esprit de chevalerie. (...) Eh bien! nos deux officiers n'etaient que deux paladins, nes de nos jours, avec les moeurs des anciens. Chaque vertu et chaque vice se montre et passe de mode. (ib. 104)

Jacques, with his peasant background and short military career, cannot have the same motives for his fatalism as his captain. Jacques' fatalism is simply a "parrot doctrine, like that of Voltaire's Pangloss" (Furbank 1992, 436), maybe a mystification of his unconscious homoerotic attachment to his ex-master - as he himself interprets

the concealed meaning of his new master's consoling words (ib. 85).

What is essential, however, is that the captain has become for Jacques an 'internalized Other', that is, paradoxically, a figure of guilt morality devoid of all moral content. If we see the captain's fatalism connected to an outmoded shame morality, we realize that the same connection does not apply to Jacques. Even the captain's shame morality had turned into a folly (or a parody of chivalric spirit), and his fatalism only rationalized that folly. Now the captain is dead, and yet alive in Jacques, as an inner voice, which fails to function as his conscience. It has become a perverse form of conscience, reminding Jacques that we never understand what we are doing nor what we want (ib. 44). If that were so, it would not matter what we do.

Bernard Williams defined the internalized Other as "one whose reactions I would respect" (1993, 84). There is no doubt about Jacques' respect for his ex-master, but the question regarding his moral reactions is an obscure one. Were his moral reactions anything other than those determined by the social hierarchy of 18th century society, reactions of a master facing a servant? Likewise, by internalizing his master's voice, is not Jacques motivated by this difference in rank, that is, imagining himself as 'master'? There is a moral implication in this desire. To be a master is not only a social privilege, it is also a moral challenge, as morality requires that one should be the master of one's life in order to take responsibility for one's actions. This is not what happens with Jacques' internalized mastership: the master's fatalism, the mystification of his folly, passes on to his servant as a mystification of the latter's desire to be a free man, free from both servitude and responsibility. To use a Greek term, Jacques' desire is a form of hubris.

The master and servant relation is analogous to the theme of fatalism/determinism. As Furbank points out, determinism "talks as if human beings were compelled to do certain things, that they were the slaves of some active force of destiny" (1992, 436). In this light, the captain had already ceased to recognize himself as master (in the moral sense), while his servant, by adopting his master's 'slave-morality', may simulate mastership (in the social sense) by imitating his master's philosophy. The same reversal of roles can be seen in his relation to his new master, who jokingly admits that he is the servant of Jacques, and Jacques is his master (1973, 215). This analogy between the two master-servant relations, the social and the metaphysical, persuades us to look at both relations with equal reserve, just as with the analogy between reality and artifice (fictivity).

But we should also face the paradox of fatalism leading to a metaphysical impasse: believing that we are not responsible for what we do is the same as believing that whatever we say has no meaning in itself- its meaning, if there is any, comes from a higher source, from what is "écrit la-haut". Jacques says that we do not understand what we do and want, but one could add to the consequences of fatalism that we do not understand what we say, for we are not responsible for the meanings of our words either. If this is so, we have crossed the borderline between intelligible and nonintelligible meanings, or, from the human point of view, meaning and nonmeaning - which challenges us to decide: do we believe in our own intelligible meanings or not? If not, we are true fatalists: we will never know whether we are lying or telling the truth, and there is no reason to feel shame or guilt for anything we say. But if we believe in our meanings, we are also responsible for our words, and thereby within reach of shame and guilt.

Jacques seems to be aware of the problem of meaning, although primarily on the social and interhuman level: "on ne dit presque rien dans ce monde, qui soit entendu comme on le dit" (ib. 90). Yet he strongly believes in his - or his captain's - teachings, and his notion of how meanings change when they travel from the sender to the recipient presupposes that the sender knows what he means by his words. If we see him as a fictional being, this is of course true, for he only says what Diderot has made him say, but he is a fictional character also in another sense, by his 'own' conviction that everything is written above, that is, beforehand. This idea, as Michael Bell has remarked, "punningly associates a determinist conception of human personality with the fictional status of character" (1983, 85). Not only Diderot, but also Jacques himself, as a character and a moral subject, is responsible for this fictional status: he lives, or rather sees himself living, as if life was fiction, a text written and imagined before he performs his predestined role in it.

With Jacques' fatalism Diderot presented the same problem he had faced when reading Berkeley: "systeme qui, a la honte de l'esprit humain et de la philosophie, est le plus difficile a combattre, quoique le plus absurde de tous" (OP, 114). Fatalism is as impossible to refute as Berkeley's idealism. The problem can be solved only on a metaphysical level. According to Bernard Williams, the cardinal fact is that the problem of free/unfree will exists only for those "who think that the notion of the voluntary can be metaphysically deepened. In truth, though it may be extended or contracted in various ways, it can hardly be deepened at all. What threatens it is the attempt to make it profound" (1993, 68). One crucial question concerning human will is what the agent demands of himself (ib.), not what fate or the others expect from him. This is the guilt morality version of responsibility. Fatalism is the most extreme and 'profound' form of shame morality, in its submission to the unknown Other; it has only removed shame and willing beyond all recognition.

I mentioned social hierarchy. The 'life as fiction'-strategy reflects the reality of hierarchy in the sense that it becomes important to contemplate one's life from a superior position to the one in which one really lives. What is "written above" gives Jacques the idea of mastery and superiority. Fatalism is his way upwards: he identifies himself, through his captain's example, with that superior force. At the same time he takes a distance from the peasant world from which he has risen to the position of a gentleman's valet (and imaginary master). Another paradox: he becomes a fatalist by resisting his social 'destiny', the fact that he is born a commoner. In other words, he does not share the shame morality of those socially superior to him, for all we learn about these people (nobles, bourgeois, soldiers, clerics) is that they represent variations of shame morality and resist changes threatening their position and privileges.

According to Peter France, in Jacques' tales from his peasant youth we find again the contrast between the polite society and the primitive world of Tahiti:

It has to be said that whatever nostalgia Diderot felt for a happier rustic state, his treatment of the peasants, in the later part of *Jacques* at least, tends to reduce them (as they were so often reduced) to the role of charming but unreflecting children. (...) none of the peasant figures in the novel can be given the status of Madame de la Pornneraye, who struck Schiller as sublime. If Jacques is more than a match for his master, it is because he has risen in the world. (1992, 185)

In contrast to the Tahiti of the *Supplement*, the 'primitive' world of peasants is portrayed in *Jacques le fataliste* by means of comedy and laughter. According to the 17th century thinker Thomas Hobbes, laughter is an expression of superiority in a world of constant struggle for power and mastery:

...the passion of laughter is nothing else but sudden glory arising from some sudden conception of some eminency in ourselves, by comparison with the infirmity of others, or with our own formerly. (1987, 20)

Due to this comic treatment of the lower classes, the peasants seem more free from the constraints of shame morality than the members of polite society. But one should be aware that this may again be a mystification. However strict the moral rules are or were in the 'real' peasant world, as readers of *Jacques le fataliste* we are dealing with a comic representation, which has its moral basis in Jacques' wish to gain mastery over his fate. As soon as we see it as a moral motive, it appears, from the perspective of guilt morality, as pride wearing the disguise of humble fatalism. The internalized Other in Jacques, his master's voice (an anachronism of chivalric shame morality), is blind to the guilt aspect, the identity problem, in Jacques' hubris.

2 Stories

Diderot's first stories do not pose ambiguous moral problems, and the author has not yet found his way to the art of individual characterization, which is the distinctive feature of his mature period as a story-teller. To this early period we may include an oriental story entitled *L'Oiseau blanc*, written about the same time as *Les Bijoux*, and dialogues such as *La Marquise de Claye et Saint-Alban*, *Cinqmars et Derville* and *Mon pere et moi*. There is also the apocryphal text entitled *Qu'en pensez-vous?* which may have been co-created by Rousseau and Diderot, and of which we find a condensed version embedded in Diderot's later dialogue *Entretien d'un philosophe avec la Maréchale de****, that is, the story of the Mexican who is washed ashore in an unknown place resembling the Christian Heaven, and is judged by a God-like old sage. The hypothetical question is: can one fare well 'beyond' without having believed in an omniscient sage?

L'Oiseau blanc is a chain-story, told by two women and two men by turns, following the demands of 'la sultane', and serves as an example of sociable, co-creative narration. The story is set in an oriental court and represents the period when Diderot did not yet question the legitimacy of autocracy. At this time the author was committed to the ideal of 'universal morality', which would concern every one, regardless of time, place, and person. This ideal would later, along with Diderot's developing sense of psychology and individual character, yield to another kind of moral and political stance, with the stress on popular sovereignty in the political domain, on character and relativity in the moral domain (Strugnell 1973, 59).

While the dialogue *Cinqmars et Derville* attempts to find the reason for laughter,

and suggests that it is "l'idée de défaut" that makes us laugh (OC, IV, 469), the dialogues *La Marquise de Claye et Saint-Alban* and *Mon père et moi* deal more directly with moral attitudes, the former with a young man's idle self-pity and passivity, and the other with a rich man's duties toward the poor. Diderot portrays his father as a wise man, a master.

These early stories were written between 1748 and 1760.

Most of Diderot's mature stories were written between 1768 and 1774. We know that he never intended to publish some of them, like *Mystification* (Perol 1977, 16). The themes they deal with are 'moral' in the broad meaning of the word: friendship, law and conscience, passion and fidelity, and public opinion.

Mystification is a story about cunning. It has no particular moral edge. A prince regrets having given a few portraits to his ex-mistress, and wishes to see them returned to his possession. As the gentleman cannot directly ask for them, a mystification (a plan or a set-up) is needed for that purpose. The plan does not work out as expected, but the story displays its author's interest in intelligent bluff. What is important to understand, according to Roger Kempf, is the primacy of the account: "le soi-disant constat est chez lui (Diderot) le couronnement d'une mystification. C'est le stratège qui prime, et non le détective" (1976, 200). In the act of revealing the strategy one could, of course, also find a confessional aspect: in this story Diderot is involved as a harmless accomplice to the chief charlatan, "uncertain brigande, Bonvalet-Desbrosses" (1977, 44), who plays the role of a Turkish physician so as to help Mademoiselle Dornet, the owner of the portraits, to make a difficult decision for the benefit of her own welfare.

Les Deux amis de Bourbonne is a story about the friendship of two smugglers, Felix and Olivier. Originally it was written in reaction to Marquis de Saint-Lambert's *Les Deux amis*, a tale of friendship set among the Iroquois (France 1992, 179). Diderot's aim was to show that there was no need to go as far as North America for the sublime qualities of noble savagery. His own story is set in the French countryside. The two friends have been devoted to each other from childhood: the responsibility they feel for one another is primitive and unquestionable; it is expressed in actions, not in words. When they fall in love with the same woman, the other immediately withdraws. Olivier is killed in rescuing his friend Felix from execution, and Felix is broken by grief when he learns of his friend's death. What is the moral of the story? "...en general il ne peut guère y avoir d'amitiés entières et solides qu'entre des hommes qui n'ont rien" (1977, 88). As to the potential readers, citizens of the Republic of Letters, the story poses the question: are civilized men who 'have everything', all the means to express respect and benevolence in elegant words, capable of such friendship? Or would they, more likely, feel appalled by the shameless two friends, who have no respect for law and public tribunals⁵?

Entretien d'un père avec ses enfants tackles the problem of law versus one's private sense of justice. Should one choose the lawful way - and go against one's conscience- or be a law unto oneself, by doing what one considers is right and just, if the two modes of justice are in conflict? The problem is introduced by Diderot's father, reminiscent of a difficult moment in his life. The discussion turns on a series of anecdotes. The central motif, however, is the old will of the vicar who has died after devoting his life to the poor. Diderot's father found the will and learned that the document, written years ago, deprived the rightful and poverty-stricken

inheritors of a small fortune in favor of a rich and undeserving family. Would it have been wrong to burn the will? Diderot the son, who appears as a character in this conversation piece, takes the stand that it would have been the right thing to do: "Est-ce que la raison de l'espece n'est pas tout autrement sacree que la raison d'un legislateur?" (ib. 114), he asks. The son's stand is rejected by the father, who has earlier stated that for him "la reputation d'homme de bien" is the most desirable thing (ib. 89). In spite of his wish to preserve his good reputation, as shame morality would imply, the father has obviously carried the problem in his conscience for a long time and still feels uncomfortable with it. For his son the question of conscience is a theoretical one, connected to his idea of nature, of the tribunal of natural justice (ib. 109), and he misses the point of his father's guilt - at least as the character in the story.

Ceci n'est pas un conte is a combination of two stories, one about the self-sacrificing Tanie and the vain Madame Reymer, and the other about the loving, unselfish Mademoiselle de La Chaux: and Cardell, a man who has just recovered from his passion and feels nausea at the sight of his ex-mistress. The lesson seems to be that as there are "des hommes bien bons et des femmes bien mechantes" (ib. 125), the contrary is also true. By introducing to his piece a critical auditor "qui fasse à peu pres le role du lecteur" (ib. 121), Diderot challenges the passive reader's readiness to sympathize with the good ones and detest the bad ones. What if those who believe blindly in love and sacrifice are just fools (ib. 130)? The auditor's comment is cynical, but also in harmony with the morality of self-interest and the idea of man as a rational animal. The final judgement is suspended and left to the reader. One answer to the problem might be that a purely naturalistic version of passion is not enough to allow a moral judgement; we must decide whether our idea of passion excludes or includes the notion of responsibility. From this perspective, we should ask whether the sacrifices of Tanie and Mademoiselle de La Chaux: indicate genuine responsibility, and moral choice, or mere obsession, inability to act otherwise. These questions concern the dilemma of determinism and freedom⁶.

The story *Madame de la Carliere, ou sur l'inconsequence du jugement public de nos actions particulieres* is, as the subtitle indicates, about public opinion. It is also about the character of a lady, who before marrying tells her future husband: "Refusez-moi, si vous croyez que je me mette à un trop haut prix. Loin d'en etre offensee, je jetterai mes bras autour de votre cou" (ib. 154). Madame de la Carliere has a strong sense of shame. She is more in fear of being betrayed than in love with Desroches. The devotion she offers to Desroches is a matter of honor and principle; no empathy is to be expected if her honor is tarnished. When she learns that Desroches, her husband, has been corresponding with another woman, she turns to a public tribunal of outsiders - outsiders regarding her marriage - and asks for its judgement. The consequences are devastating. One may ask whether the tribunal understood its responsibility. But it is Madame de Carliere who submits her case to public judgement. In no other story has Diderot so poignantly presented the neurotic aspect of moral idealism. Madame de Carliere's reaction could be compared to the 'styles'⁷ of obsessive-compulsive neurotics who, when confronted by a moral problem, attempt to turn the problem into a technical one by applying some unfailing rule. In contrast to the absence of dialogue between husband and wife, there is the dialogue between the two observers: the one has heard that Desroches

is mad, the other completes the picture. Furbank finds the interlocutors cynical and adds that cynicism in itself is "a kind of security" (1992, 365), a false one, no doubt, just as the heroine's intransigent shame morality is.

*Entretien d'un philosophe avec la Marechale de**** concerns the relation between religion and morality. Diderot has come to see the Marechale, but instead meets his beautiful, pious wife. While they are waiting for the husband to arrive they converse. The question that puzzles the pious lady is: How can one be good without having faith in God? The issue is religious guilt morality, although guilt is not mentioned directly. The lady's sense of guilt stems from the prospect of eternal punishment. Diderot argues that being good can have other advantages. His interest in guilt is purely hypothetical and concerns the logic of Christian morality: is a woman, who stirs a sinful thought in a man, guilty and responsible for the man's damnation (1977, 185)? The question is difficult to answer. The Marechale is no intellectual, but one can read between the lines that Diderot is charmed by her innocence and purity - and the expected arrival of the husband has its symbolic significance in the situation. Diderot's conduct is controlled by polite sociability, the form of shame morality expected from a man of letters. He abstains from persuading (seducing) the lady on his side. Only a few points on tolerance are to be made clear, with discretion.

3 Plays

In *Les Bijoux indiscrets* Diderot presented his first reflections on theatre, and in 1756 he was ready to write a play of his own. Although it was originally intended to be a "sort of a novel" (Kempf 1976, 58), it became the play known as *Le Fils nature*[, ou les preuves de la vertu], and was staged in 1771. In 1758 Diderot was working on *Le Pere defamille*, which was followed by an essay, *Discours sur la poesie dramatique*. His best known text on theatre, *Le paradoxe sur le comedien*, was published as late as 1830, but written and edited between 1773-1778.

He continued with his dramatic experiments, for instance, by modelling his play *Le Joueur* (written in 1760, published in 1819) on Edward Moore's *The Gamester*; in this "drame imite de l'anglais" the original tragedy was turned into a comedy. There was the unfinished *Le Sherif* (1769), a play set in England and influenced by Shakespeare's *Measure for measure*, on the theme of sacrifice of virtue. *Les Peres malheureux*, a modified version of *Eraste* by Salomon Gessner, was written in 1770, and a draft for a play, *Piece et le prologue, ou Celui qui les sert tous et qui n'en contente aucun* (1771), preceded the more elaborated and renowned play called *Est-il bon? est-il mechant?* (1781).

As a play-wright Diderot never was very successful in France, but he was well received in Germany, above all by Lessing, who translated *Le Fils nature* and made propaganda for *Le Pere defamille*. Lessing pursued similar aims for the drama as his French colleague, and many of his plays are strongly coloured by Diderot. As Furbank puts it, "Diderot became one of the founding fathers of the German national

drama" (1992, 147).

Le Fils naturel is an example of 'le drame sérieux' in which virtue is on trial. With his familial 'docu-drama' Diderot went on to oppose a culture of spectacle: in presenting his play, he used framing conventions similar to those of a typical editor-author of an 18th century epistolary novel (Mueke 1991, 92). In addition to the dramatic text Diderot provided an explanatory text entitled *Entretiens sur le Fils naturel*, in which he tells the story of his encounter with Dorval, the real-life hero of the play, who presents the events as they happened. At Diderot's questioning Dorval outlines a whole programme of realism for a new and reformed theatre. *Le Fils naturel* was to be read and seen in this light.

The play examines the paradoxical possibility that virtue may bring unhappiness to the virtuous. This possibility was, of course, confusing to the 18th century equation of happiness and virtue. The austere and melancholy hero of the play, Dorval, is in love with his friend Clairville's fiancée Rosalie, and has in turn been fallen in love by Clairville's sister Constance. Clairville asks Dorval to find out what is troubling Rosalie and to persuade her to accept Clairville's love. Dorval should make a personal sacrifice in carrying out his mission successfully. The solution to the problem is not morally satisfactory, as the situation resolves in the arrival of the father who announces that Dorval and Rosalie are brother and sister. As Robert Mauzi crystallizes the moral dilemma of the play: "Diderot oublie que le sacrifice moral est déchirement et rupture, pour en revenir à la conception rassurante d'une vertu immobile" (1960, 627). In the process Dorval feels guilty of loving his friend's fiancée and enters a weighty dialogue with Constance on virtue. In her idea of virtue the emphasis is on the sense of shame: "il est dans le cœur de l'homme un goût de l'ordre plus ancien qu'aucun sentiment réfléchi; que c'est ce goût qui nous rend sensible à la honte, la honte qui nous fait redouter le mépris au delà même du trépas" (OC, VII, 67). Dorval's guilt vanishes when he learns that his love for Rosalie has been, or is, purely brotherly.

Father-figures in Diderot's plays are usually troubled, as the title of a play indicates: *Les Pères malheureux*. Fathers are burdened by worries and hardships. Lysimond in *Le Fils naturel* has went through hard times in captivity before returning home to see his children. Monsieur D'Orbesson in *Le Père de famille* feels the burden of fatherly responsibility on his shoulders. Instead of a mother there is a male tyrant - le Commandeur - in the house, contributing to the tensions within the family and reminding the father of his duties. 'Honte' is a word he uses frequently. He represents the presence of 'others', the social authority of shame morality, which does not mean that his views are the most moral ones. The problem is the shame of an unwordly marriage: the son wants to marry "une fille de rien" (ib, 229). The father, supported by the commandor, opposes the idea - to the extent of threatening to deny his son. For a loving father the threat is difficult to execute. From Diderot's point of view this would imply that nature is at odds with principles, and principles should be revised. The problem of guilt is presented indirectly through the father's vacillation between love and principles of shame. The family finds its way to reconciliation, the commandor has to step aside, and in the end the father sighs: "Oh! qu'il est cruel...qu'il est doux d'être père" (ib. 298). The thematic setting of 'responsibility for family-honor versus resistance to unnatural shame morality' yields to the shared responsibility for family happiness. The ending of the

play leaves no doubts as to its moral message: the happiness of those who deserve it is the priority; it is not in contradiction with sound principles of honor and shame. Some guilt, however, is needed to establish the balance.

The main character of *Est-il bon? est-il méchant?*, Monsieur Hardouin, was introduced in chapter III: this schrewed character is an altruistic version of Rameau's nephew: he shows concern for other people's interests, but is freer from the constraints of shame than those whom he serves. Not that he seeks the joy, or the trouble, of offering his assistance, but he is easily persuaded to respond to the needs of others. He consents to solve, for instance, the problem of Madame Bertrand, the widow of a naval officer, who has tried to have her pension prolonged in favor of his son. Hardouin explains to the Naval Officer that Madame Bertrand's son is his illegitimate child and trusts that this 'personal approach' will bear fruit. The Naval Officer who already considers Hardouin "indigne" (OC, VIII, 191) - later Madame Bertrand will use the same expression (ib. 227) - finally promises to take the necessary steps. But this has cost Madame Bertrand her honor (Hardouin's honor is a secondary issue, for her and for him), and she feels offended, although the shameless strategy proved to be expedient. The question whether Hardouin is good or wicked comes down to the question of shame and guilt, depending on whether the reader looks at him from the outside, either approving or disapproving of his wit and boldness - or identifies with his internal dissatisfaction, the feeling that he is doing things he does not want to do, and leading a life he does not wish to lead: the guilt of not being able to resist people's wishes and high expectations.

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- 1 In this book, published in 1782, Rousseau declares that the happiest moments of his life were spent in solitary meditation (1972, 44). Dreaming and meditation are seen as more fundamental than reasoning and reflection, for they are roads to one's inner self. With Rousseau, as Starobinski has put it, reflection is aimed against reflection (1988, 211). Reflection originates in the encounter with obstacles, and guilt comes along with it (ib. 219). By dreaming one hurdles obstacles as if they did not exist at all, pleasures are immediate and actions direct; one is free, in harmony with oneself. Only in solitude is there freedom. In Rousseau's conception of freedom one finds an emphasis on guilt in the form of 'reflection aimed against reflection'. Freedom, Rousseau says, does not consist in doing whatever one wishes, for many of those wishes are produced by social circumstances, but in not doing what one does not want (1972, 117-118). To do what one does not want is the vicious and inescapable result of living in society under the dominion of others.
- 2 Bernard Williams mentions that as the experience of shame is usually connected with sight and being seen, it has also been suggested that guilt is rooted in hearing, "the sound in oneself of the voice of judgement; it is the moral sentiment of the word" (1993, 89). Mangogul's habit of talking to himself can be interpreted as talking over his inner voice, in order not to hear it; all the same, it is a guilt reaction.
- 3 Such pessimism also characterizes the thought of Freud. One only has to read *Der Unbehagen in der Kultur* (Civilization and its Discontents) to see how difficult it is to bring the basic reality of desires into harmony with the requirements of social reality. "The intention that man should be happy is not included in the plan of Creation", Freud says, and we are so made that "we can derive intense enjoyment only from a contrast and very

little from a state of things" (1961, 23). This seems to mean that some pleasure can be obtained in acting against the recommendations of civilization and common morality. As to the sense of guilt, Freud explains it as a threatened external unhappiness - loss of love, punishment on the part of the social authority - being exchanged for an internal unhappiness (ib. 75). When Freud speaks of guilt, he actually means the fear of consequences, which blurs the distinction between shame and guilt. Fear and desire are more characteristic of shame reactions. For guilt, the difference between the desire for acceptance and knowing what ought to be desired for its own sake is crucial.

- 4 In his letters to Sophie Volland Diderot himself expressed the idea that Sophie could be a kind of female conscience for him. In a letter dated the 2nd of June 1759 he claims that the love of Sophie will help him to be a better man and to refrain from vice.
- 5 As Peter France remarks, the two outlaw-friends "belong to a glamorous line which includes folk heroes such as Mandarin, or Robin Hood, Schiller's noble bandits(...), and the whole host of Romantic outlaws" (1992, 181).
- 6 Against the determinist (mechanistic) version of love one can argue that love is not merely an involuntary emotional reaction, but also involves conscious choices. In *The Ethics of Rendezvous* Maija-Riitta Ollila, who defends an ethical conception of love, sees its psychological consequences as follows: "Once we choose the object of love, we choose not only another person but also our future selves; we are not only mirroring ourselves in the present but also projecting our ideals onto our future selves" (1993, 181). If love is understood as a 'project', it is clear that one can fail in carrying it out. If so happens, the Self is not only faced with the loss of the loved object, but with a sense of self-alienation, of not being able to identify oneself by the values and ideals of good life one had cherished. I would therefore presume that love which is based on 'choosing to love' is more inclined to arouse guilt than shame at moments of crisis. A determinist conception of love, according to which one first 'falls' in love and then seeks to establish power over the other till one loses interest in the libidinal power-game (or is abandoned) opens up prospects of shame as the love story approaches its end.
- 7 The expression is borrowed from D. Shapiro who has studied the 'cognitive styles' of neurotic behavior. According to him, obsessive-compulsive neurotics typically try to reach a solution to a human relation problem by invoking some rule or external requirement which might provide a 'right' answer. However, from the fact that some people are neurotic it does not follow that they are less moral than 'normal' people, as Freud once pointed out. D. Shapiro's book is entitled *Neurotic styles* (1965, New York: Basic books).

VIII CONCLUSION

In this study I have tried to show how shame and guilt, as two distinctive forms of moral distress, were interpreted, averted and appropriated by the mentality of the 18th century literary world and reflected in the fiction of Denis Diderot. The moral system of the Republic of Letters grew out of the chivalric and polite shame morality of the aristocracy and developed into a republican and public opinion-oriented shame morality giving priority to external conduct, sociability and polite manners over the demands of authenticity and conscience. In his fiction Diderot, who officially, as a public philosophe, stood behind the tenets of the republic, in many ways problematized the shame morality of his century without consciously wishing to raise the question of guilt and its significance to modern morality. Yet his fiction can be said to raise that question.

Fiction, more than any affirmative account of virtue, tends to produce a space of ambiguity without filling that space with ready-made answers. This is particularly true as to Diderot's novels and stories, whereas his plays, at least his early plays, are more didactic and controlled by certain preconceived ideas and purposes (of showing how virtue finally pays off).

As shame and guilt are not 'ideas' but rather experiences which lurk at the bottom of all serious moral ideas (that is, ideas which are not proposed as gratuitous, without risks to be taken), they are, much like poetic experiences, easily obscured by abstract language and most efficiently conveyed through the intimations of concrete images, situations, characters, and the suggestive means of literary language. Character, for instance, is a trope for human identity: we can speak of characters to the degree that an agent's identity is displayed polytropically, as intelligible but not quite predictable. Assuming that a literary character has this quality, it is a rhetorical effect, produced by literary language.

Literary language, as Paul de Man has shown, allows for the author a certain blindness to his propositions or "tentative utterances" (1989, 102).

The metaphor of 'blindness' appears also in Jonathan Culler's definition of the novel: "The novel is an ironic form, born of the discrepancy between meaning and experience, whose source of value lies in the interest of exploring that gap and filling

it, while knowing that any claim to have filled it derives from blindness" (1985, 24).

Curiously enough, in his *Lettre sur les aveugles* Diderot was interested in the same question: how the blind man indirectly, through his metaphors, attributes meanings to the visible world - thus filling a sensory 'gap' - meanings producing new meanings when communicated to others (to Diderot). Judging by Culler's definition of the novel, Diderot's use of the blind man's verbal representation of 'mirror' would be novellistic: "une machine qui met les choses en relief loin d'elle-mêmes" (OP, 84). The blind man is aware of his blindness, but his answer to Diderot's question is not ironic. It becomes ironic in a text written by a seeing man. Obviously, there is a discrepancy between meaning and experience - from the seeing man's perspective -, and its source of value lies in the author's and the reader's interest in the rhetoric of blindness. Although Diderot's text itself is not fiction, at certain points it is about fiction.

One of the reasons why we would hesitate to call the *Lettre* a fiction is that the dialogue between Diderot and the blind man most probably took place in reality. But it is not a sufficient reason. Some of Diderot's plays (*Le Fils naturel*) and stories (*Entretien d'un père avec ses enfants*) are founded on real events. If they are fictions at all, they are fictions only in the sense that characters are allowed to speak for themselves as literary characters in a narrative; this rhetorical model can be named the Indirect View.

The *Lettre*, by contrast, establishes within the text a certain 'optics' for judging the author's experience and his thoughts, the author's own way of 'seeing' blindness: the Direct View of materialism. This theoretical framework, as the word implies, 'frames' the reader's understanding of the subject in all its presented aspects, the moral aspect included. The author wishes to communicate his ideas as he has thought them. The assumption is that he is in control of his language and message. The reader is not expected to co-create meanings, as in reading fiction.

The most important difference between fiction and nonfiction in Diderot's work can be expressed in terms of two rhetorics: the rhetoric of persuasion and the rhetoric of distance. Yet they do often intersect. Both use the same devices: dialogue, digression, paradox, metaphor. Not to mention the letter-form used in *La Religieuse* as well as in Diderot's philosophical letters. Distance allows the reader to form his own judgement, fosters his/her own perceptivity, and instead of validating one message it encourages one to respond creatively. But basically all philosophy boils down to rational persuasion. Even Diderot's materialism must first be considered in these terms.

What has Diderot's materialism, then, to say about morality?

Moral emotions, such as shame and guilt, are experienced in our minds, and for a materialist, who thinks that everything is ultimately physical or material, it is important to show how even the mental phenomenon known as morality relates to the physical. Shame can be understood as the experience of being seen in a state or a situation, in which one would wish rather not to be seen. Consequently, in the materialist view, shame is connected to sight. For Diderot, the moral meaning of blindness lied in the blind man's indifference to shame. The question of guilt remains open. If shame is connected to sight, would guilt be connected to hearing?

But hearing external sounds, hearing for example how people laugh at us, would not essentially differ from the experience of shame, of being seen and sneered

at. In its connection to shame, 'seeing' is already given a figur_{al} meaning. To some degree this undermines materialist assertions on blindness, unless materialism is seen as a rhetorical strategy playing with the figur_{al} meaning while pretending to be literally purported. No doubt, Diderot's "materialism of the relational" (Anderson 1990, 215) has this dimension. The dialogue on the 'sentient stone' in *Le Reve de d'Alembert* juxtaposes d'Alembert's literal and dualistic thought with Diderot's relational and metaphoric strategy.

Such a strategy runs into difficulty as soon as guilt becomes the issue. Shame is not only a metaphor for visual perception, for seeing and being seen, it is also a metaphor for the Direct View on morality, for the assessment of 'my' conduct from the perspective of some general principles. When one feels ashamed of being seen naked, it is primarily because nakedness as such is viewed as inappropriate, notwithstanding certain exceptions from the rule, and secondarily because one may feel badly about one's own body. Guilt, in its early and primitive form, was fear at anger (Williams 1993, 219), present in the *Old Testament's* image of God. In the aftermath of the Renaissance and under the influence of the Enlightenment, guilt developed into a more complex reaction. In its modern form, it relates to principles, which have become expressions of a person's moral identity.

According to the Christian interpretation, guilt is about hearing an 'inner voice', the voice of God. A materialist cannot take such a voice literally. On the other hand, relating guilt to the noises of the body would not help in providing metaphors for an emotion distinct from shame. For materialism, the problem of guilt has to be transformed into a problem of shame. This is what happens in Diderot's 'official' moral theory. One could therefore say that Diderot's materialism blinded him to his 'tentative utterances' concerning guilt.

John R. Searle has suggested in an article on David Chalmers that the motives of materialists, who attempt to "get rid of the mental by showing that no mental phenomena exist over and above physical phenomena", constitute a "hidden agenda". Searle claims that "it is a fascinating study to try to trace these efforts, because typically their motives are hidden" (The New York Book Review, March 6, 1997). In Diderot's case it is obvious that he, in that historical situation and in his role of an Enlightener, wanted to "get rid of" certain Christian assumptions, but not to the extent of reducing all mental phenomena to physical.

If guilt as a mental phenomenon is not reducible to the 'lower levels of organization', it would seem to belong to the higher levels involving self-consciousness and a capacity of reasoning and acknowledging values of one's own, that is, to the level of 'luxury' produced by the struggle for increased organization. The question of guilt is hereby not eliminated but indirectly raised by the theory of character as the agency of self-control.

As guilt is basically about the individual's responsibility to himself and implies distance to what others expect from him, Diderot's materialist theory of character has points of contact with this theme and provides the conditions to negotiate on its mental and moral implications. They would seem to justify a more complex interpretation of guilt than the theological notion of sin or Rousseau's idea of conscience as divine instinct.

Even the concept of 'sin' can, of course, take on different meanings. A personal sense of sin, as Dennis A. Foster has said, can signify a sense of self-alienation: "The

sense of self-unity is lost in the face of this representation of the self, and the actor asks, "Who am I?" (1987, 15). Consequently, a sense of sin would find its most typical expression in the agent's need to question and explain himself, but "this questioning itself is not subject to reflection or analysis" (ib. 16). The character of Lui in *Le Neveu* offers an interesting case for this kind of interpretation. In this study alienation and strangeness were mentioned as distinctive features in Lui's character as well as in the situation in which Lui and Moi meet. Indeed: if 'sin' can be given a secular meaning, regardless of what Diderot had in mind, it would offer a 'mythic' perspective to the historical split of the self, as described by Richard Sennett. Both the mythic and the historical interpretations are open to further theorizing about identity, alienation, and guilt. Both have in common the idea that a troubled sense of self-unity produces a rhetoric of selfhood, a need to define oneself in relation to the other.

If this happens through dialogue, the result is two-edged: a dialogic relation always involves a self-denial, a risk of being seen otherwise than one desires, and some characters - or indeed cultures - defend themselves against analysis and change. They create mystifications. This is the problem of opacity, which is also connected to seeing and blindness in the figural sense.

Another problem related to Diderot's characterology and to the question of guilt concerns the potential disparity between one's character and one's self. The self is not to be identified with character. "Character is the synthesis of all our systems of readiness, or sources of behavior. The synthesis may be weak because the self is weak" (McKenzie 1962, 115). Lui's character appears to have the quality of monstrous strength. He has created his character under the pressure of shame morality and in opposition to it. There is a space of ambiguity between, not only his private and public face, but also his character and his self-experience. If this self-experience consists of the split itself and the need to find a balance between two self-images, one can see the self so experienced as a void to be filled with meanings, or a weakness to be defended and strengthened.

In other words, a character can be a fiction, a mystification of the self, a fiction also in the rhetorical sense of telling a story as if the story was true. Here we should pay attention to the ambiguous nature of telling one's story - if not of telling stories in general as if they were true. On the one hand, this is done out of guilt, by the need to define oneself in relation to others, to reflect upon the relation between character and selfhood, fiction and reality, ideas and beliefs, artifice and nature, external events and inner values; on the other hand, stories are told for the mere pleasure of telling them.

Guilt and pleasure; Diderot's art of fiction combines both elements. His moral philosophy associates pleasure with virtue, whereas his moral rhetoric resorts to irony in presenting the problem of guilt and appeals to the reader's freedom to judge.

Psychologists usually associate guilt and shame with pain. In Diderot's storytelling the painful experiences of characters, like the shame of Madame de la Pommeraye, are distanced and transformed into pleasures of communication. Yet pleasure is not the final aim, but a stimulus for moral questioning: is she good or wicked, is she taking herself too seriously or only defending her honor, did she get what she really wanted? Moral questioning in a pleasurable way was for Diderot

more moral than being sure of what to do. That kind of knowledge usually brings pain to the world. "Morality creates the very dilemmas it claims to be able to resolve; and it does not resolve these dilemmas, for it structures them so that they are intrinsically insoluble, in the sense that somebody (oneself or others) ends up being hurt or destroyed" (Gilligan 1976, 157). Diderot could have said the same about conventional, unquestioned moral rules and taboos.

Arousing guilt in the reader was not his conscious aim, but he made it possible for the reader to examine his/her motives and values, thus encouraging an inner dialogue, which is another way of describing individual conscience and creative, enlightened guilt. Diderot's fiction was the experimental ground for the "liberation of the individual", for presenting moral problems, solutions and reactions - which did not stem from abstract ideas but individual characters - and the risks and ironies that these encounters between the self and the world entailed. They remind the reader that he/she also is a self facing the world and entitled to judge by his/her experience and conscience, not according to conventions and received ideas. If any 'conscience' exists, it is the creation of dialogue, tolerance, and moral irony, the creation of rhetoric.

Creative, enlightened guilt may not lead to a fixed system of rules, but it is essential to a modern conception of morality, combining the primacy of guilt over shame with the insistence on the moral freedom and personal responsibility of the individual. Diderot's philosophical determinism, as it is put forth in *Le Reve de d'Alembert*, left room for negotiating on the possibility of moral freedom as self-determination or self-control. In *Le Reve* this possibility was mainly attributed to the 'great man', but in Diderot's novels and stories the increasing interest in the role and meaning of individuality - expressed through moral irony and polytropic characters - brings the problem to a more general rhetorical level. It becomes the concern of every one, of any enlightened citizen and reader, responsible not only for the public opinion but for his/her own individual choices.

Chouillet states that Diderot was not always in accordance with himself, when it came to morality. "Et comment la theorie de l'energie s'arrange-t-il avec la conscience vertueuse dont Diderot, en depit de nombreuses declarations en sens contraire, n'a cesse de se faire le protagoniste?" Chouillet asks after declaring that Diderot's thought easily escapes all traditional definitions of good and bad (1984, 107). This concerns mainly the Direct View, or the problem of knowing 'too well' what to do. It concerns shame morality more than modern guilt morality, for one tends to know better what is good and bad in the eyes of others than one's own personal stand in the matter. A sense of shame is about knowing and predicting. Guilt questions.

The root of shame lies in what Bernard Williams has called, in a general phrase, "a loss of power" (1993, 220). In the 18th century public sphere, the Republic of Letters, this would have been understood as a loss of reputation. Reputation was based on public opinion, which had not only moral, but also political significance. Public opinion was to become the new authority capable of controlling and counterbalancing the state power. Diderot had no doubts about the role of public opinion in the political field. As to the way public-oriented shame morality served the interests of individuals in the social arena, or the private sphere, he was sceptical and questioned the same tenets of shame morality he accepted politically. If any

contradiction was to be seen between these two attitudes, it was explained away by the concern for every man's right to happiness.

He saw no hope for virtue unless it promised happiness to the individual. In *Refutation d'Helvetius* he confirms the validity of this principle, yet with doubts concerning his capacity to live up to it: "Je me disais: 'Si je ne sors pas victorieux de cette tentative, je deviens l'apologiste de la mechancete: j'aurai trahi la cause de la vertu, j'aurai encourage l'homme au vice. Non, je ne me sens pas bastant pour ce sublime travail: j'y consacrerai inutilement toute ma vie" (OP, 595). Instead of questioning the ideal of 'vertu-bonheur', Diderot, in a very guilt-like fashion, questions himself.

Whether Diderot had specific reasons to feel guilt is not the issue in this study, although some scholars have been interested in such biographical hypotheses as the author's "recherche du pardon du Pere" (Chartier 1987, 216). The problem of guilt can be posed without reducing it to the author's relation to his father, for the problem is a human one and perhaps irreducible to specific reasons. Although personally felt, guilt derives from the human condition: banally put, one does not always meet the demands one sets for oneself, one feels divorced from the sense of self-unity. "Any disruptive, transgressive experience", says Foster, "violates that totality we call the self, so that one sees oneself simultaneously as strange(...) and familiar" (1987, 15). Even reading can become such an experience when it challenges us to judge others and thereby ourselves, our ways of thinking, feeling, loving, and structuring the world.

Scholars have tried to establish a link between Diderot's seemingly disparate works, the link being - for example - his "idiosyncratic materialism" which denied any separation between mind and body (Anderson 1990, 4). When seeking to remove all doubts about the inner coherence of a writer's world-view, it helps to call that world-view "idiosyncratic", for it protects the claim of coherence against any trace of contradiction.

Attempts to efface contradictions from a writer's work seem to have one feature in common: intellectualism. Intellectualism is concerned with a person's ideas, not with his practices and implicatures. Contradiction is seen as inconsistency in ideas; inconsistencies are glossed over by a philosophical synthesis. Ideas are separated from the un- and half-conscious forces which operate alongside, often unnoticed by, the intellect. But the blind spots of the mind can play an active role in the act of troping and questioning. These blind spots inform the reader of obstacles with which the author has dealt indirectly, through his fiction. One obstacle, or 'organe-obstacle', to use Vladimir Jankelevitch's term, is perhaps the intellect itself: it cannot 'feel', but it can act as if it understood feelings. This is the paradox of Diderot's actor: the fact that the intellect has no feelings enables it to present them in an intelligible way. Inasmuch as the intellect reveals, it attempts to conceal what contradicts its premises. For Diderot, the pagan philosophe, guilt was something Pascalian and Christian, and connected to the myth of original sin.

Intellectually, Diderot was inclined to shame morality, but the moral rhetoric of his fiction invites us to consider, on a personal basis, the possibility and meaning of enlightened guilt.

YHTEENVETO

Tutkimus tarkastelee valistusfilosofi ja -kirjailija Denis Diderotin tuotantoa suhteessa häpeän ja syyllisyyden moraalitraditioihin sekä 1700-luvun Ranskan kirjalliseen yhteisöön, joka politisoitui julkista mielipidettä ja keskustelua korostavaksi "julkiseksi sääriksi", monarkian sisäiseksi "tasavallaksi", ja erottui työn, perheen ja salattujen asioiden "yksityisesä sääristä". Tutkimuksen painopiste on Diderotin kaunokirjallisessa tuotannossa: tarinoissa, romaaneissa ja näytelmissä. 1700-luvun julkinen sääri peri 1600-luvun sivistyneistön ja salonkien aristokraattisen häpeämoraalin ja kehitti siitä porvarillisen versionsa. Se määritteli erityisluonteensa antiteesinä kirkon ja kristinuskon traditiolle ja sen edustamalle syyllisyysmoraalille (synti, katumus, omatunto). Häpeämoraalin historialliset juuret olivat taas homeerisessa traditiossa (maine, kunnia, sosiaalinen arvostus). Tämä traditio oli transformoitunut militaarisista lähtökohdistaan kohteliaisuuden ja älyllisen kilvoittelun moraaliksi, joka asetti vallan vastapainoksi "julkisen mielipiteen". Valistusfilosofille häpeä oli myös helpommin selitettävissä suhteessa "luontoon" kuin syyllisyys.

Filosofina ja materialistina Diderot pyrki moraalin luonnontieteelliseen teoriaan tutkimalla mm. häpeän yhteyksiä näkemiseen ja sokeuteen. Hän esiintyi julkisissa kannanotoissaan valistuneen häpeämoraalin kannattajana. Kirjailijana hän lähestyi moraaliongelmia epäsuorasti syyllisyysmoraalin yksilökeskeisestä näkökulmasta painottaen luonnetta, luonteen ykseen, ongelmien monimielisyyttä, moraalista ironiaa, julkisen mielipiteen harhoja, mystifikaatioita, oman harkinnan ja tunnon tärkeyttä.

Sokeus oli Denis Diderotille filosofinen teema ja moraalisen haasteen metafora. Teema heijastuu hänen moraaliretoriikassaan ja henkilöhahmojen kuvauksessa. Joka henkilöllä on omat "sokeat pisteensä", jotka kuvaavat heidän arvostelukykynsä rajoja ja jättävät tilaa lukijan omakohtaiselle arviolle.

Myöhemmässä kirjallisuuden ja retoriikan tutkimuksessa on teorioitu kirjailijan "sokeudesta" lähtökohdille, joista hän kehittää "visionsa". Tässä mielessä myös Diderotin "eäisyyden retoriikka", erotukseksi julkisen taivuttelun retoriikasta, on "sokea" perusparadoksilleen eli yhteyksilleen syyllisyyden traditioon. Jako kahteen retoriikan linjaan (etäisyys, taivuttelu) on analoginen jaolle kahteen, moraalitraditioon (syyllisyys, häpeä).

Diderotin tarinoissa ja romaaneissa (enemmän kuin hänen suoremmin moralisoivissa näytelmissään) hahmottuu historiallisesti tärkeä "yksilön vapautuksen" projekti, johon implisiittisesti liittyy valistuneen syyllisyyden teema - maallistunut syyllisyys, joka ei nojaa niinkään "synnin" teologiaan kuin yksilön moraaliseen identiteettiin ja omiksi koettuihin arvoihin.

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