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DRAMATIC TECHNIQUE IN THE MAJOR FICTIONAL
WORKS OF DIDEROT

THESIS

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The purpose of this thesis is to examine evidences of dramatic technique in Diderot's three major fictional works, La Religieuse, Le Neveu de Rameau, and Jacques le fataliste. The management of dialogue, setting, and gesture is of particular concern, along with style and structure and the recurrent theme of the actor.

The conclusion reached is that the influence of dramatic technique is everywhere present in the three works under consideration. Diderot enlists the reader's visual and auditory participation by the use of fast-paced dialogue, striking gestures, and dynamic settings. He also borrows certain stylistic and structural devices from the theater and enhances the dramatic impression by presenting many of his main characters as actors playing their own special roles.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The name of Denis Diderot is usually associated with the band of philosophes¹ that helped to bring about a revolution in eighteenth-century French thought before the Revolution of 1789, and, more specifically, with his work as editor of the influential Encyclopédie. His efforts in the other literary genres, especially the novel, were largely neglected until the early part of the twentieth century. Part of the reason for this lack of attention lies in the fact that the best of Diderot's fiction was not published until long after his death,² for bitter experience, including a stay in the prison at Vincennes of approximately three and one-half months' duration in 1749, had taught the philosophe to be cautious about what he published. The revival of interest in Diderot that has taken place in recent years has established him as a major figure in the development of the eighteenth-century French novel, as well as in other areas of literary endeavor. Diderot entered whole-heartedly into the spirit of experimentation that characterized the eighteenth-century novel as a developing genre which would not settle into a comfortable mold until the nineteenth century. Accordingly, his novels

offer a wealth of material for consideration from the standpoint of technique. The purpose of the present study is to examine the evidences of dramatic technique that appear in the three most important fictional works of Diderot: La Religieuse, Le Neveu de Rameau, and Jacques le fataliste.

An explanation of what is meant by the expression dramatic technique should be undertaken at this point, for the ground covered by the term is by no means easy to delimit. The word drama is defined as follows by one authority:

[Drama is] that form of literary writing intended primarily for presentation by performers speaking and acting on a stage. Drama is further characterized, generally speaking, by the fact that it is a continuous art, by its frequent use of conflict, and by its dependence on visual and auditory communication.³

Logically, therefore, the term dramatic describes something whose very essence is active, not passive; in which a certain tension must be maintained, for the audience's attention must be held continuously for a considerable length of time; and in which the use of dialogue, gesture, and other visual and auditory effects is of paramount importance. The word technique, which derives from the Greek for art or skill, will be taken to mean the way in which the novelist presents his material, including the methods he employs to achieve certain effects, the structure and form of his work, and so forth. The term dramatic technique, then, will be used to designate the various means by which effects like those found in the theater are achieved.

It may be observed that the line that separates dramatic technique from what is merely novelistic technique is a thin one indeed. The distinctions between the two are often matters of degree rather than of any basic difference. For example, dialogue is indisputably a necessary part of most novels, but this does not mean that any novel that uses dialogue is dramatic in character. A modern critic has pointed out that dialogue which is very good and natural in a novel may lack the pace, concentration, and local vividness necessary for it to succeed on the stage.⁴ This suggests that the characteristics of good dramatic dialogue differ from those of good novelistic dialogue. To take another example, the use of gesture is a common novelistic device for the revelation of character. The reader draws certain conclusions about the character who is portrayed as unconsciously twisting and untwisting a strand of hair around her finger, or the one who shuffles his feet and seems to address the floor whenever he speaks, or the one who claps everyone he meets on the back and puffs on a cigar. The novelist, however, has other ways of revealing character, such as letting the reader directly in on what his characters are thinking. The dramatist lacks the latter tool. He must therefore depend all the more heavily on the use of gesture, with resulting differences in the degree and kind of gesture that can be considered dramatic. The difficulty in distinguishing between what is dramatic

and what is novelistic arises from the fact that the novel is, as the "irregular offspring of the essay and the drama," essentially "a dramatic form within a narrative framework."⁵ Yet despite the close relationship between the novel and the drama, they are separate genres. Judgment must therefore be exercised to determine what may properly be called dramatic technique and what may not.

A strong sense of the dramatic runs through much of Diderot's writing. Part of this tendency may be attributed to the heady, polemical quality of the times. Arthur M. Wilson observes that "there is a vein of theatricality in the philosophes (and in Diderot) which makes it a little difficult to take them quite so seriously as they took themselves."⁶ But the dramatic flavor found in the novels of Diderot goes much deeper than the propensity for self-righteous declamation that one finds in his purely polemical writings and in his early drama. Herbert Dieckmann has recognized that "la forme essentielle des romans de Diderot, ce n'est ni la description, ni la narration, mais le dialogue dramatique,"⁷ and another Diderot scholar goes even further: ". . . Diderot n'est grand dramaturge qu'en dehors du théâtre" Le Neveu de Rameau and certain other works have in fact been adapted for the stage and presented with some success.⁹

It should come as no surprise that dramatic technique should find its way into the work of an eighteenth-century

novelist. The drama had reached a much higher degree of development by the time of Diderot than had the novel, which as a separate literary form was still very much in the experimental stages. Thus it seems only natural that the more established drama should serve as a model in many ways for the newer and less highly developed genre of the novel.¹⁰ Additionally, Diderot himself had a good deal more respect for the drama than for the novel, despite his admiration for Samuel Richardson:

. . . le roman dont on ne pourra faire un bon drame, ne sera pas mauvais pour cela; mais . . . il n'y a point de bon drame dont on ne puisse faire un excellent roman.

.
Le romancier a le temps et l'espace qui manquent au poète dramatique: à titre égal, j'estimerai donc moins un roman qu'une pièce de théâtre.¹¹

He felt contempt for the technically extravagant romans d'intrigue and romans d'aventures which were so popular at the time, in which verisimilitude and simplicity were thrown to the winds.¹² It is common knowledge that although Diderot had started writing plays early in his career as a littérateur and had had every intention of gaining recognition and possibly admission to the Académie française as a playwright, Le Fils naturel and Le Père de famille were unsuccessful. Equally unsuccessful were the philosophe's efforts at completing several other plays whose plots he had sketched out, such as Le Shérif, Le Train du monde, ou Les Moeurs honnêtes comme elles le sont, and L'Infortunée, ou Les

Suites d'une grande passion. It seemed that inspiration failed him. Diderot finally gave up writing for the theater (at least until Est-il bon? Est-il méchant?), as he relates rather plaintively in a passage of the Paradoxe sur le comédien dealing with Le Père de famille: ". . . n'ayant pas obtenu le succès que je m'en étais promis, et ne me flattant pas de faire beaucoup mieux, je me dégoûtai d'une carrière pour laquelle je ne me crus pas assez de talent."¹³ For the above reasons, Diderot could be expected to inject something of a dramatic flavor into his fiction.

The analysis of dramatic technique in all of the fictional works of Diderot would be far too ambitious a goal for a study such as this one. Likewise, it would be an impossible task to give an exhaustive, scene-by-scene account of every evidence of dramatic technique to be found in Diderot's fiction without writing volumes. This thesis will therefore be subject to certain limitations. The first is that only the three most important novels of Diderot will be considered with regard to dramatic technique. As mentioned previously, these are La Religieuse, Le Neveu de Rameau, and Jacques le fataliste. Les Bijoux indiscrets has been eliminated from consideration, as have all of the shorter pieces of fiction. Les Bijoux indiscrets, although interestingly enough Diderot's most published work,¹⁴ is not generally considered to be the most worthy representative of his efforts from a technical standpoint.¹⁵ The shorter contes

will not be discussed so as to allow greater opportunity to focus on the three works that best demonstrate the application of dramatic technique. As a further limitation, only a survey of a variety of techniques associated with drama will be undertaken along with representative examples of their application in Diderot's major fictional works. No attempt will be made to cite all possible examples of any particular point. In this way it is hoped that an overview of the topic may be achieved.

This study is composed of five major areas of interest, in addition to the introductory and concluding remarks. The rather vast domain of dramatic technique has been divided into the smaller, more manageable sections described below, each of which represents a significant point of comparison with the three novels of Diderot presently under consideration. Although there is inevitably some overlapping between subjects, this method of organization presents an economical way of dealing with the topic at hand. The first major division serves as an introduction to Diderot's preoccupation with the theater, acting, and actors, and deals primarily with the theme of the actor which may be found in the novels. Diderot's use of dialogue, certainly an indispensable component of theatrical technique, is next investigated for its dramatic characteristics. The subject of the dramatic background, or setting, is dealt with in the third section. An examination of bodily expression is next

undertaken, including gesture, pantomime, and physiognomy, all important aspects of Diderot's dramatic theory. The final major division considers some ways in which the style and structure of the novels under investigation reveal the influence of dramatic technique.

In spite of Diderot's obvious close association with the drama, very little seems to have been written heretofore on the subject of his fiction in terms of dramatic technique. Studies on Diderot's alliance with the theater are plentiful, for the philosophe's dramatic theory and two early plays have long been known. Although the novels are almost the discovery of the twentieth century, an abundance of scholarly writing on the major ones also exists as a result of the resurgence of interest in Diderot which has taken place in recent years. Tantalizing references to a connection between the two genres in Diderot's work, usually made by scholars in passing during the course of a discussion on some other matter, have left ample room for exploration. It is hoped that this thesis may make a contribution toward the elaboration of that connection.

NOTES

¹ The philosophes were not metaphysical speculators, but extremely pragmatic thinkers. The term philosophe is therefore more precise than the word philosopher to denote the makers of the special movement which took place in eighteenth-century France, and will be used throughout this study to refer to Diderot. See J. Robert Loy's discussion of the matter in his introduction to Jacques le fataliste (New York: Dell Publishing Co., Inc., 1962), pp. 9-10.

² La Religieuse and Jacques le fataliste, written in 1760 and 1773-75 respectively, were available only to subscribers of the elite Correspondance littéraire until 1796, although the episode of Mme de La Pommeraye and then the entire text of Jacques appeared in Germany in translation before that date. The path of Le Neveu de Rameau toward publication was a tortuous one indeed. Goethe's German translation of Diderot's masterpiece, which seems to have been begun in 1761 and finished about 1774, was published in Germany in 1805. In 1821 a French translation from Goethe's German appeared. It was not until 1891, after the spectacular discovery of a copy of the Neveu in Diderot's own hand by Georges Monval in 1890, that the definitive version saw the light of day. See André Billy's excellent

notes on these works in his edition of Diderot's Oeuvres (Paris: Editions Gallimard, 1951), pp. 1383-1414.

3 Stephen Minot, Three Genres: The Writing of Fiction, Poetry, and Drama (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1965), p. 300, s. v. "Drama."

4 S. W. Dawson, Drama and the Dramatic, The Critical Idiom, No. 11, ed. John D. Jump (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1970), p. 82.

5 Ibid., pp. 79-80.

6 Arthur M. Wilson, Diderot (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972), p. 171.

7 Herbert Dieckmann, Cinq Leçons sur Diderot (Geneva: Librairie E. Droz, 1959), p. 29.

8 Roger Kempf, Diderot et le roman: ou Le Démon de la présence (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1964), p. 73.

9 John S. Wood, "Le Neveu de Rameau à la scène," Revue d'Histoire du Théâtre, 19 (1967), 387-92.

10 Georges May, Diderot et "La Religieuse": Etude historique et littéraire (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1954), p. 221..

11 Denis Diderot, De la poésie dramatique, Oeuvres

complètes de Diderot, ed. J. Assézat, VII (Paris: Garnier Frères, 1875), 330-31.

¹² Daniel Mornet, Diderot: L'Homme et l'oeuvre (Paris: Boivin et Cie, 1941), pp. 120-21.

¹³ Denis Diderot, Paradoxe sur le comédien, Oeuvres, ed. André Billy (Paris: Editions Gallimard, 1951), p. 1039.

¹⁴ Wilson, p. 86.

¹⁵ Ibid., pp. 83-87.

CHAPTER II

THE THEME OF THE ACTOR

Diderot's involvement with the theater included a lively interest in actors and their craft which began in his youth and was to develop into a lifelong preoccupation. Little is known about the philosophe's bohemian years from the time he earned the master of arts degree at the University of Paris in 1732 until about ten years later, but scattered references to this period in his later writings reveal that he frequented the theater, dreamed of becoming an actor himself, and was an admirer of theater people,¹ although not always for purely intellectual reasons:

Moi-même, jeune, je balançai entre la Sorbonne et la Comédie. J'allais, en hiver, par la saison la plus rigoureuse, réciter à haute voix des rôles de Molière et de Corneille dans les allées solitaires du Luxembourg. Quel était mon projet? d'être applaudi? Peut-être. De vivre familièrement avec les femmes de théâtre que je trouvais infiniment aimables et que je savais très faciles? Assurément. Je ne sais ce que je n'aurais pas fait pour plaire à la Gaussin, qui débutait alors et qui était la beauté personnifiée; à la Dangeville, qui avait tant d'attraits sur la scène.²

It is probably safe to assume that Diderot was a regular customer of the Café Procope, which at the time was just across the street from the Comédie-Française and was consequently a center for actors, playwrights, and men of letters.³ Perhaps his interest was aroused partially as a result of his

education with the Jesuits, who encouraged dramatic presentations in their instruction.⁴ It is also possible that the theater simply held a natural attraction for a youth of Diderot's temperament, and that he was drawn as a result to actors and actresses who shared his relatively unrestrained lifestyle. Whatever the reason for the initial attraction, it is clear that Diderot considered going to the theater an exciting occasion, and that he was aware of the adulation directed toward the actors.⁵

In light of Diderot's continuing concern for morality and the social aspect of human life in general, it is interesting that he considered the actor's role in society to be a beneficial one. This position is in sharp contrast to the low esteem traditionally accorded actors and actresses, who not only lacked respectability in the French social structure, but were actually condemned by the Church.⁶ The depth of this prejudice may be appreciated by considering such notable examples as Molière, himself an actor as well as the best of the seventeenth-century comic playwrights, who was permitted a Christian burial only as a result of Louis XIV's timely intervention with the archbishop of Paris.⁷ That the status of actors had changed little by Diderot's time is a well-established fact. The prevailing opinion is found in one of Diderot's early passages on the theater, chapter thirty-seven of Les Bijoux indiscrets, in which an account of drama as it currently existed in the Congo (meaning, of

course, eighteenth-century France) is given: "Un comédien! l'esclave du public! un baladin! Encore, si ces gens-là n'avaient que leur état contre eux; mais la plupart sont sans moeurs, sans sentiments"8 Diderot's feelings about actors were radically opposed to the traditional view. In his estimation, actors were artists and people of genius whose craft should ideally fulfill a moral function to replace that of the pulpit.9 At one point in a passage written in 1757, Diderot propounds the classical notion through his character Dorval that a fine tragedy has the power to teach a people to beware of passions, and a good comedy could inspire in them a love of duty.10 Diderot's convictions on the actor's status were essentially unchanged by the time he wrote his masterpiece on dramatic theory, the Paradoxe sur le comédien, about 1773. In it he speaks of acting as "une profession que j'aime et que j'estime," and refers to actors as "hommes d'un talent rare et d'une utilité réelle, [les] fléaux du ridicule et du vice, [les] prédicateurs les plus éloquents de l'honnêteté et des vertus, . . . la verge . . . pour châtier les méchants et les fous."11

It is not surprising that the philosophe's lifelong interest in actors and their craft should find its way into his novels. Actors and actresses are to be found throughout the three major works under consideration. Since no dramatic work could normally be considered complete without

actors to present it, it is appropriate to examine the presence of the actor as an element of dramatic technique.

In La Religieuse, the alert reader is struck by the many instances of role-playing that constitute everyday behavior in the cloistered life. Diderot is of course suggesting that the unnaturally confining existence of the convent or the monastery forces human beings into suppressing their true personalities and assuming other characteristics that enable them to cope more effectively with the demands placed upon them. In short, they are forced into putting on an act, as Roger Kempf has pointed out: "Religieux et religieuses, jusqu'aux plus honnêtes, se contiennent et se composent comme sur une scène de théâtre."¹² Sister Suzanne, the main character, is keenly aware of the roles that are constantly being played all around her: "Oh! monsieur, combien ces supérieures de couvent sont artificieuses! vous n'en avez point d'idée. . . . Savoir se contenir est leur grand art."¹³ The first mother superior in Suzanne's experience is a study in deception. As a key part of the carefully orchestrated effort to pressure Suzanne into her initial commitment, the mother superior plays a role calculated to win the girl's trust by seeming to pity her, by exhorting her not to enter a state for which she feels no inclination, and by promising her own prayers and efforts in Suzanne's behalf.¹⁴ When it looks as if Suzanne will be leaving the convent, she redoubles her efforts and

puts on a mask reflecting "la tristesse la mieux étudiée"¹⁵ as part of the act. Just before Suzanne's official entry into the novitiate, the superior gives her what amounts to an acting lesson relating to her new station in life. Suzanne's head, feet, hands, waist, and arms are carefully composed to reflect the monastic graces.¹⁶ One cannot forget the petty play-acting of the majority of the nuns with whom Sister Suzanne is associated in the course of her experiences. They form a sort of nameless cast, vying for the approval of the present superior, falling in and out of favor as circumstances change, and altering their behavior, just as actresses would do, according to the situation. Perhaps the most extreme example of the elaborate role-playing of the supporting cast of nuns occurs during Suzanne's persecution at the Longchamp convent. She is made to lie in a coffin, while the other sisters act out the office of the dead over her, complete with the appropriate props. As if on cue, each nun plays her own small part in this bizarre masquerade:

Le quatrième jour, ce fut une m^omerie qui marquait bien le caractère bizarre de la supérieure. A la fin de l'office, on me fit coucher dans une bière au milieu du chœur; on plaça des chandeliers à mes côtés, avec un bénitier; on me couvrit d'un suaire, et l'on récita l'office des morts, après lequel chaque religieuse, en sortant, me jeta de l'eau bénite, en disant: Requiescat in pace.¹⁷

As Kempf points out, even the confessor, Father Lemoine, is not entirely immune to the role-playing that characterizes

his station.¹⁸ His face is "douce, sereine, ouverte, riante, agréable quand il n'y pense pas"; he is "gai, très aimable quand il s'oublie."¹⁹

The star performer in La Religieuse is, of course, Sister Suzanne herself. Her tendency to play the actress has been observed by several major critics, among them Vivienne Mylne, who emphasizes Suzanne's acute awareness of her own feelings and of the effect that she produces on others. She observes and reacts to her audience, just as an actress would do.²⁰ Georges May finds in Suzanne's desire to please not only a humanizing quality, but also a tragic flaw in the Aristotelian sense. This characteristic of Suzanne, according to May, helps to explain why she likes to sing and play the clavichord,²¹ for by so doing she has the opportunity to win the favor of others by her performance. It is true, of course, that sometimes her efforts provoke the jealousy and resentment instead of the approval of the other nuns. Roger Kempf records the facts that "fêtée ou persécutée, soeur Suzanne s'offre inlassablement aux regards," and that "elle tient un compte minutieux et de ses attitudes et des regards qui lui sont prodigués ou refusés."²² Just as a performer must have an audience in order to fulfill his purpose on the stage, Suzanne seems genuinely to need people to watch and listen to her. Furthermore, she is like an actress in her almost obsessive preoccupation with the response of her spectators to her actions.

Sister Suzanne has essentially two audiences: the one composed of the other characters in the novel and the unseen one made up of the Marquis de Croismare and the reader. She is consistently aware of both. Indeed, the reader is somewhat jolted to find that Suzanne is not writing her story solely for the eyes of her benefactor. She obviously expects her account to be read by others as well: "Je vous entends, vous monsieur le marquis, et la plupart de ceux qui liront ces mémoires"23 That she tends to think of herself as an actress whose function it is to perform for those who see her or read her story is clear from certain explicit clues that she drops along the way. For example, she speaks of the episode when she will refuse to take her vows as if it were a part to be played: ". . . je me représentais mon rôle au pied des autels, une jeune fille protestant à haute voix contre une action à laquelle elle paraît avoir consenti"24 Even as she prays during her persecution at Longchamp, she does not forget that she is, in a sense, on stage:

Je ne sais combien je restai dans cette position, ni combien j'y serais encore restée; mais je fus un spectacle bien touchant, il le faut croire, pour ma compagne et pour les deux religieuses qui survinrent.²⁵

The extent of her self-awareness is at times disconcerting. Every detail of her behavior and appearance, even during the most adverse of circumstances, is carefully recorded, seemingly so that the unseen audience will find it easier to

visualize her situation and thus lose none of the dramatic impact. When Suzanne relates the trouble that she will undergo in the convent as a result of her legal action, she does not stop after enumerating the punishments meted out to her. It is consistent with her character as an actress that she continues by describing her physical appearance: "J'étais à genoux, le voile baissé, tandis que cette sentence m'était prononcée."²⁶

Both sympathetic and unsympathetic audience reactions are recorded with equal lucidity by Sister Suzanne. Of course, she is desirous of making a good impression, and her efforts in this direction resemble those of an actress preparing to play a role. She openly confesses that on several occasions, before going to meet someone from outside the convent, she had found herself stopping to straighten her clothing and to assume an attitude of composure which she did not feel.²⁷ The sympathetic reaction of the archdeacon's acolytes is quite obviously gratifying to Suzanne, and she is keenly aware of the elements of her performance which are capable of producing such an effect:

J'ai la figure intéressante; la profonde douleur l'avait altérée, mais ne lui avait rien ôté de son caractère; j'ai un son de voix qui touche; on sent que mon expression est celle de la vérité. Ces qualités réunies firent une forte impression de pitié sur les jeunes acolytes de l'archidiacre²⁸

The basically unfriendly response of the sisters at the Arpajon convent to Suzanne's singing is interesting in view of

the fact that they pretend to be enchanted with her. Thus Suzanne is not the only one to play a role in this scene. She proves herself to be capable of cutting through their pretensions to the underlying resentment, for she specifically notes that their applause is not to be taken at face value:

Je chantai donc une chansonnette assez délicate; et toutes battirent des mains, me louèrent, m'embrassèrent, me caressèrent, m'en demandèrent une seconde; petites minauderies fausses, dictées par la réponse de la supérieure; il n'y en avait presque pas une là qui ne m'eût ôtée ma voix et rompu les doigts, si elle l'avait pu.²⁹

Suzanne admits her desire for the favorable reaction of the invisible audience in a curiously candid paragraph addressed directly to the marquis. In it one can discern her desire to please as a major motivation behind her role-playing, for she observes that she is able to express herself readily when her experiences are likely to excite the marquis' sympathy. When she is forced to present herself in a less favorable light, however, she finds it difficult to write, and she nurtures the secret hope that the unfavorable sections will not even be read.³⁰

In a sense, Suzanne Simonin becomes an actress primarily as a result of her desire to please. Rameau's nephew is also an actor, and a remarkable one, but his motives are more difficult to assess because of the extreme complexity of his character. He seems at times to want approval, as when he asks the character Moi for his opinion after a scene

("Hé bien, me disait-il, qu'en pensez-vous?"),³¹ and at others to be driven by some inexplicable force that finds expression in his recreation of the various roles played every day in society as a whole. Under the influence of the latter impulse, the character Lui seems oblivious to the existence of his audience and indifferent to its reaction. His conduct after one particularly strenuous performance appears to reinforce this impression, for he behaves as if he were only gradually returning to reality from a dream world of his own creation:

Sa tête était tout à fait perdue. Epuisé de fatigue, tel qu'un homme qui sort d'un profond sommeil ou d'une longue distraction, il resta immobile, stupide, étonné. Il tournait ses regards autour de lui comme un homme égaré qui cherche à reconnaître le lieu où il se trouve; il attendait le retour de ses forces et de ses esprits; il essayait machinalement son visage. Semblable à celui qui verrait à son réveil son lit environné d'un grand nombre de personnes dans un entier oubli ou dans une profonde ignorance de ce qu'il a fait, il s'écria dans le premier moment: "Hé bien, Messieurs, qu'est-ce qu'il y a? D'où viennent vos ris et votre surprise? Qu'est-ce qu'il y a?"³²

Yet the sudden transition immediately following this passage seems to suggest that his disorientation is at least partly feigned: "Ensuite il ajouta: 'Voilà ce qu'on doit appeler de la musique et un musicien. Cependant, Messieurs, il ne faut pas mépriser certains morceaux de Lulli.'"³³ Despite the intensity of the impulse that drives him to become society's mimic, and regardless of his apparent unawareness of his surroundings, Rameau's nephew is able to switch moods

abruptly and begin a relatively dispassionate discussion about the merits of certain composers. This flexibility implies that Lui never entirely forgets that he is only acting and that an audience, in this case Moi and the patrons of the Café de la Régence, is looking on. One is reminded of the similar, if more highly developed, abilities of Garrick, an actor whom Diderot admired and mentioned in his Paradoxe sur le comédien as being capable of portraying ten different emotions in a space of four or five seconds, although he could not possibly experience them all in such a short period of time.³⁴ Herbert Dieckmann judges Lui to be "le mime par excellence." He is relegated to the role of imitating the genius that he envies. Because he must be an actor and amuse others, Dieckmann argues, he turns his attention to snatching away the masks that conceal the great comedy of society. The Café de la Régence becomes a theater where Moi is the spectator and the nephew is the actor.³⁵ Thus, unable to assume the place in society that he would like to claim, Lui finds himself creating a cynical sort of human comedy in which he plays all the roles.

The nephew's acting seems to fall into two general categories: the obvious, and often excessive, mimicry that takes place at the Café de la Régence, and the subtler but no less vivid roles that constitute his way of coping with life. Examples falling into the first category are numerous and striking. The nephew is forever jumping up to dramatize

the person, place, or situation under discussion. He demonstrates an astounding ability to portray all emotions and all kinds of natural phenomena in quick succession, as this passage discloses:

Que ne lui vis-je pas faire? Il pleurait, il criait, il soupirait; il regardait ou attendri, ou tranquille, ou furieux; c'était une femme qui se pâme de douleur; c'était un malheureux livré à tout son désespoir; un temple qui s'élève; des oiseaux qui se taisent au soleil couchant; des eaux ou qui murmurent dans un lieu solitaire et frais, ou qui descendent en torrent du haut des montagnes; un orage, une tempête, la plainte de ceux qui vont périr, mêlée au sifflement des vents, au fracas du tonnerre. C'était la nuit avec ses ténèbres; c'était l'ombre et le silence, car le silence même se peint par des sons.³⁶

If Rameau's nephew excels in this sort of play-acting, he is a master at playing the roles falling into the second category. As one of society's parasites, his livelihood depends upon his ability to deceive. He is conscious of what it takes to be a convincing actor before the real-life audience of influential people with whom he must curry favor in order to survive. In a passage that reveals his capacity for cold, objective self-analysis, Lui enumerates for his interlocutor some of the traits which equip him for success as an actor-parasite. The nephew's assessment of his own talents indicates that he has a firm grasp on the art of deception:

Au commencement je voyais faire les autres, et je faisais comme eux, même un peu mieux, parce que je suis plus franchement impudent, meilleur comédien, plus affamé, fourni de meilleurs poumons. Je descends apparemment en droite ligne du fameux Stentor.

. . . j'ai des petis [sic] tons que j'accompagne

d'un sourire, une variété infinie de mines approbatives; là le nez, la bouche, le front, les yeux entrent en jeu; j'ai une souplesse de reins, une manière de contourner l'épine du dos, de hausser ou de baisser les épaules, d'étendre les doigts, d'incliner la tête, de fermer les yeux et d'être stupéfait comme si j'avais entendu descendre du ciel une voix angélique et divine.³⁷

Society offers numerous opportunities for putting his dramatic gifts into practice. For example, by his conduct as a clavichord master, he leaves the impression that he is socially much in demand. He rushes about as if he were in a great hurry, claiming that he is expected at the homes of several prominent citizens that very day, when in reality he has been invited nowhere.³⁸

The nephew's experience as a mime leads him to formulate a theory of acting which closely parallels that of Diderot himself. The philosophe seems to be speaking through his character in his plea for greater realism. The actor's art must be "plus énergique, moins maniéré, plus vrai."³⁹ Yet the younger Rameau is not content to speak only in theoretical terms. Interestingly enough, he draws from the theater a sort of personal code by which he resolves to live. In it the actor's art is of paramount importance, as the following passage proves:

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 le Tartuffe, je me dis: Sois hypocrite si tu veux, mais ne parle pas comme l'hypocrite. Garde des vices qui te sont utiles, mais n'en aie ni le ton ni les apparences qui te rendraient ridicule. Pour se garantir de ce ton, de ces apparences, il faut les connaître; or, ces auteurs en ont fait

des peintures excellentes. Je suis moi et je reste ce que je suis, mais j'agis et je parle comme il convient.⁴⁰

It is important to reiterate that Rameau's nephew is not the only actor mentioned in Le Neveu de Rameau, although of course he is the one examined in the greatest detail. His behavior reflects that which is always to be found in "la grande comédie, celle du monde."⁴¹ The character Moi recognizes that mimes are to be found everywhere, even in society's upper ranks:

Quiconque a besoin d'un autre est indigent et prend une position. Le roi prend une position devant sa maîtresse et devant Dieu; il fait son pas de pantomime. Le ministre fait le pas de courtisan, de flatteur, de valet ou de gueux devant son roi. La foule des ambitieux danse vos positions, en cent manières plus viles les unes que les autres, devant le ministre. L'abbé de condition, en rabat et en manteau long, au moins une fois la semaine, devant le dépositaire de la feuille des bénéfices. Ma foi, ce que vous appelez la pantomime des gueux est le grand branle de la terre.⁴²

The only difference between Lui and society's cast of thousands is that Rameau's nephew has no illusions about what he is really doing. His clearheaded, if cynical, approach to the roles that he plays allows him to present them more effectively. It is in this ability, rather than in any creative genius, that he must find satisfaction, for, as Moi observes, the nephew's lot in life will continue to be that of the mime: "Vous dansez, vous avez dansé et vous continuerez de danser la vile pantomime."⁴³

Appropriately, Rameau's nephew is the main actor in Le Neveu de Rameau, and Suzanne Simonin plays the leading role in La Religieuse. In Jacques le fataliste, a delightful but much more disjointed work than either of the other two, there is really no one main performer. Jacques himself is certainly not an actor in the same way that Suzanne or the nephew is, although it may be possible to construe the relationship between the valet and his master as a kind of role-playing. It is no secret that Jacques is, for all practical purposes, the master, and that the master in reality operates on the level of a valet. "Il fut arrêté que vous auriez les titres, et que j'aurais la chose,"⁴⁴ Jacques tells his master, and the statement can hardly be disputed. In this sense, perhaps Jacques is only playing the role of a valet, and his master the role of a master, because society ordains it. Francis Pruner sees a certain theatrical quality in Jacques's dealings with the troublesome rogues in the next room at an inn that appears early in the novel,⁴⁵ for the resourceful valet is able to bluff them into submission by the sheer believability of his manner and tone.⁴⁶ The talkative inn hostess feels led on one occasion to take on the role of a magistrate in order to settle a dispute between Jacques and his master.⁴⁷ At another point Diderot, as the author speaking directly to the reader, points out that the common people use role-playing as a device to enhance their feelings of worth and importance, an idea that

recalls, although in a less cynical vein, the panoramic human comedy of Le Neveu de Rameau:

[Le peuple] va chercher en Grève une scène qu'il puisse raconter à son retour dans le faubourg; celle-là ou une autre, cela lui est indifférent, pourvu qu'il fasse un rôle, qu'il rassemble ses voisins, et qu'il s'en fasse écouter.⁴⁸

The foregoing examples of the actor at work in Jacques are minor by comparison with the performances to be found in two of the side episodes: the tales of the Marquise de La Pommeraye and of Père Hudson.

It is worthy of mention that at least three authorities--Francis Pruner, Roger Kempf, and Jacques Smietanski--speak of masks in connection with the interplay of characters in Jacques le fataliste. Smietanski writes that "la société que Diderot voit et qu'il nous montre est dure et sans pitié; tout le monde se masque, tente de tromper autrui."⁴⁹ There is an obvious connection to be made here with actors in the ancient Greek drama, for whom the wearing of masks was customary. But Smietanski's observation has a still closer correlation to the subject at hand, for it suggests that the characters are actors playing roles calculated to serve their own purposes rather than straightforward, candid human beings. In the Mme de La Pommeraye episode, there are at least three signal performances by characters of this type: those of Mme and Mlle d'Aison and that of Mme de La Pommeraye herself. The marquise is first motivated to play actress when she begins to suspect that her lover, the

Marquis des Arcis, has lost interest in her. Her plan is to discover his true feelings by pretending to have fallen out of love with him, a role that she is able to play convincingly. Every word and action is calculated to win his belief:

Alors la marquise de La Pommeraye se couvrit les yeux de ses mains, pencha la tête et se tut un moment après lequel elle ajouta: "Marquis, je me suis attendue à tout votre étonnement, à toutes les choses amères que vous m'allez dire. Marquis! épargnez-moi . . . Non, ne m'épargnez pas, dites-les moi; je les écouterai avec résignation, parce que je les mérite. . . . Vous êtes le même, mais votre amie est changée; votre amie vous révère, vous estime autant et plus que jamais; mais . . . mais une femme accoutumée comme elle à examiner de près ce qui se passe dans les replis les plus secrets de son âme et à ne s'en imposer sur rien, ne peut se cacher que l'amour en est sorti." . . . Cela dit, Mme de La Pommeraye se renversa sur son fauteuil et se mit à pleurer.⁵⁰

Mme de La Pommeraye's ruse fools the marquis and elicits the truth from him. For the sake of vengeance she devises an elaborate plan which requires her to conceal her true feelings and to put on a mask that must be consistent over a long period of time in order for her plot to succeed. It is true that on at least one occasion she is on the brink of losing control, and she must act quickly to regain her composure.⁵¹ However, the fact that the marquise is finally capable of bringing her plan to fruition despite the tumult of her emotions is proof of her ability as an actress. No less impressive are the performances of the mother and daughter d'Aisnon, who, by their ability to play persuasively

the dévotés, are able to conceal the fact that they have only recently been rescued from the brothel by Mme de La Pommeraye. It is important to note that one of the reasons for their success is that they avoid the pitfall of overacting: "Le ton de la dévotion fut celui de l'une et de l'autre, mais avec aisance et sans pruderie."⁵² If the outcome of the ruse of Mme de La Pommeraye is contrary to her hopes, the reason for the ultimate failure certainly does not lie in the incompetence of the actresses.

The tale of Père Hudson, unlike that of Mme de La Pommeraye, turns out in favor of the schemer. Père Hudson is the very type of the hypocrite. The fact that this word comes naturally to mind where this character is concerned has interesting implications for an examination of the theme of the actor, for the Greek origin of the word hypocrite, hypokrites, meant an "actor on the stage, pretender, hypocrite."⁵³ Père Hudson is only playing the role of a stern and upright abbot; he is in reality a libertine using his rank in the Church as a cover. Although he is described as having wit, learning, gaiety, a very proper manner, and a taste for order and work, the other side of his character consists of

les passions les plus fougueuses, mais le goût le plus effréné des plaisirs et des femmes, mais le génie de l'intrigue porté au dernier point, mais les moeurs les plus dissolues, mais le despotisme le plus absolu dans sa maison.⁵⁴

Père Hudson is able to preserve his standing in the community

because he is adept at putting on a pious act when necessary. For example, he heads off the suspicions of the family of a young woman whom he has seduced without even giving them a chance to voice their objections, simply by assuming the outward appearance of piety:

Comme ces bonnes gens étaient en train de lui exposer leur chagrin, la cloche sonne; c'était à six heures du soir: Hudson leur impose silence, ôte son chapeau, se lève, fait un grand signe de croix, et dit d'un ton affectueux et pénétré: Angelus Domini nuntiavit Mariae . . . Et voilà le père de la confiseuse et ses frères honteux de leur soupçon, qui disaient, en descendant l'escalier, à l'époux: "Mon fils, vous êtes un sot . . . Mon frère, n'avez-vous point de honte? Un homme qui dit l'Angelus, un saint!"⁵⁵

Within his own monastic order, however, the discovery of his double life leads to the formation of a plot against the wayward abbot, to be carried out under the protection of the order's superior. As Roger Kempf points out, Père Hudson's reaction is to organize a counterplot in which not a single word or gesture is left to chance. He gives his accomplices a role to play, just as Mme de La Pommeraye had done with the d'Aisnon mother and daughter.⁵⁶ Père Hudson's instructions to his female accomplice reveal his conception of their counterplot as being to some degree theatrical: "Songez seulement à bien jouer votre rôle."⁵⁷ The abbot is able to turn the tables on his enemies not only as a result of his ingenuity, but because he and his accomplices are convincing actors.

The theme of the actor in the three major novels of Diderot is indeed a pervasive one. The tendency of Sister Suzanne to conduct herself in a certain way in order to please the audience of which she is constantly aware is always in evidence in La Religieuse. The convent as a whole, from mothers superior and confessors down to the supporting cast of anonymous nuns, is characterized by role-playing as a way of life. Rameau's nephew finds release in his often frenzied portrayal of roles that are played every day in society at large. The art of deception is further explored in the sterling performances of Mme de La Pommeraye, the mother and daughter d'Aison, and Père Hudson. Although the presence of the actor is an important aspect of dramatic technique, the interplay of actors would not be complete without the spoken word. The dramatic character of Diderot's novelistic dialogue will therefore next be considered.

NOTES

¹ Arthur M. Wilson, Diderot (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972), pp. 24, 26, 30.

² Denis Diderot, Paradoxe sur le comédien, Oeuvres, ed. André Billy (Paris: Editions Gallimard, 1951), p. 1036. Hereafter cited as Paradoxe.

³ Wilson, p. 31.

⁴ R[obert] Niklaus, "La Portée des théories dramatiques de Diderot et de ses réalisations théâtrales," Romanic Review, 54 (1963), 6.

⁵ Denis Diderot, "Réponse à la lettre de Mme Riccoboni," Oeuvres complètes de Diderot, ed. J. Assézat, VII (Paris: Garnier Frères, 1875), 400-01.

⁶ Robert Loyalty Cru, Diderot as a Disciple of English Thought (1913; rpt. New York: AMS Press, Inc., 1966), p. 328.

⁷ P.-G. Castex, P. Surer, and G. Becker, Manuel des études littéraires françaises, XVII^e siècle (Paris: Librairie Hachette, 1966), p. 121.

⁸ Denis Diderot, Les Bijoux indiscrets, Oeuvres, ed.

André Billy (Paris: Editions Gallimard, 1951), p. 137.

⁹ Cru, pp. 327-28.

¹⁰ Denis Diderot, Dorval et moi: Second Entretien, Oeuvres complètes de Diderot, ed. J. Assézat, VII (Paris: Garnier Frères, 1875), 109.

¹¹ Diderot, Paradoxe, p. 1035.

¹² Roger Kempf, Diderot et le roman: ou Le Démon de la présence (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1964), p. 192. Hereafter cited as Diderot et le roman.

¹³ Denis Diderot, La Religieuse, Oeuvres, ed. André Billy (Paris: Editions Gallimard, 1951), pp. 237-38. Hereafter cited as La Religieuse.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 237.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 238.

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 239.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 291.

¹⁸ Kempf, Diderot et le roman, p. 192.

¹⁹ Diderot, La Religieuse, p. 365.

²⁰ Vivienne Mylne, "Diderot: Theory and Practice," The Eighteenth-Century French Novel: Techniques of Illusion

(New York: Barnes & Noble, Inc., 1965), p. 206.

21 Georges May, Diderot et "La Religieuse": Etude historique et littéraire (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1954), p. 214.

22 Kempf, Diderot et le roman, p. 227.

23 Diderot, La Religieuse, p. 307.

24 Ibid., p. 245.

25 Ibid., pp. 281-82.

26 Ibid., p. 318.

27 Ibid., p. 365.

28 Ibid., p. 303.

29 Ibid., p. 335.

30 Ibid., pp. 383-84.

31 Denis Diderot, Le Neveu de Rameau, Oeuvres, ed. André Billy (Paris: Editions Gallimard, 1951), p. 413. Hereafter cited as Le Neveu de Rameau.

32 Ibid., p. 456.

33 Ibid.

34 Diderot, Paradoxe, p. 1022. That a good actor is

directed by reason rather than passion is, of course, a central principle in the theory of acting propounded in Diderot's Paradoxe sur le comédien.

³⁵ Herbert Dieckmann, "Le Thème de l'acteur dans la pensée de Diderot," Cahiers de l'Association Internationale des Etudes Françaises, 13 (1961), 167-68. Hereafter cited as "Le Thème de l'acteur."

³⁶ Diderot, Le Neveu de Rameau, p. 456.

³⁷ Ibid., pp. 429-30.

³⁸ Ibid., p. 419.

³⁹ Ibid., p. 457.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 437.

⁴¹ Dieckmann, "Le Thème de l'acteur," p. 168.

⁴² Diderot, Le Neveu de Rameau, p. 471.

⁴³ Ibid., p. 473.

⁴⁴ Denis Diderot, Jacques le fataliste et son maître, Oeuvres, ed. André Billy (Paris: Editions Gallimard, 1951), p. 616. Hereafter cited as Jacques le fataliste.

⁴⁵ Francis Pruner, L'Unité secrète de "Jacques le fataliste" (Paris: Lettres Modernes, 1970), p. 311.

- 46 Diderot, Jacques le fataliste, pp. 480-81.
- 47 Ibid., pp. 614-15.
- 48 Ibid., p. 620.
- 49 Jacques Smietanski, Le Réalisme dans Jacques le fataliste (Paris: Librairie A. G. Nizet, 1965), p. 170.
See also Kempf, Diderot et le roman, pp. 191-235, and Pruner, pp. 115-16.
- 50 Diderot, Jacques le fataliste, pp. 564-65.
- 51 Ibid., p. 590.
- 52 Ibid., p. 582.
- 53 "Hypocrite," Webster's Third New International Dictionary of the English Language (Springfield, Mass.: G. & C. Merriam Company, 1961).
- 54 Diderot, Jacques le fataliste, pp. 623-24.
- 55 Ibid., pp. 624-25.
- 56 Kempf, Diderot et le roman, pp. 200-01.
- 57 Diderot, Jacques le fataliste, p. 627.

CHAPTER III

DIDEROT'S USE OF DIALOGUE

No literary work could be classified as dramatic, at least in any conventional sense, without the use of dialogue. Although certain other techniques, such as those involving stage setting and the actors' gestures and expressions, are useful for creating a general mood or atmosphere, it is through dialogue that the playgoer gains most of his specific information as to the meaning of the play. Every word uttered by the characters must deliver the maximum effect, for the playwright is not ordinarily at liberty to rely upon the novelistic techniques of narration, description, or psychological analysis to help convey his message. It will be recalled that Diderot recognized these limitations imposed upon the dramatic form and regarded the drama with greater respect than the novel because of the greater technical difficulties that the playwright had to overcome. Dialogue abounds in the three major novels under consideration, and, as previously mentioned, Dieckmann has even stated that the essential form of Diderot's novels is dramatic dialogue.¹ An examination of the philosophe's use of dialogue, and of what makes it dramatic, is in order.

Diderot's most characteristic touch, according to J. Robert Loy, is the wide use of dialogue.² A look at the major literary works of Diderot in all genres reveals the truth of this statement. Even the best of his philosophical writing takes on the dialogue form.³ The philosophe's wide use of dialogue in his writing is consistent with his personality, for no one took more pleasure in conversation than Diderot. To be sure, there are numerous attestations to the effect that he preferred to do the speaking rather than the listening. A journalist of the time named Métra, who contends that a face-to-face meeting took place in 1778 between Diderot and Voltaire, portrays Voltaire as having been unable to say very much in the interview as a result of Diderot's usual ebullieny. According to Métra, Voltaire remarked afterward that nature had refused Diderot the essential talent of dialogue.⁴ Other contemporaries found his conversation charming despite its tendency to be one-sided. These were fascinated by the dramatic quality of his conversation--by its abundance of ejaculations, dramatic pauses, and its variety of tempo and tone--all calculated to produce the maximum effect.⁵ Georges May, who considers the dialogues and letters to be Diderot's masterpieces, laments the irretrievable loss of the philosophe's conversation, which may have been his true masterpiece in spite of the fact that he himself handled both the questions and the answers.⁶ Emile Faguet makes too much of this tendency when he observes

somewhat testily that even in the lively dialogue of the novels and the Salons, Diderot was only conversing with himself, and so was in reality writing animated monologues rather than true dialogues.⁷ Although Diderot was sometimes prone to be carried away by his natural vivacity, it seems clear that he was aware of this propensity and possessed enough good humor to be able to laugh at himself for it. He good-naturedly recognized the aptness of a description written about him by a young journalist named Garat and published in the Mercure de France in February, 1779.⁸ This caricature, in which Garat is meeting the philosophe for the first time, makes much both of Diderot's tendency to do most of the talking and of the dramatic quality of his conversation:

. . . il se lève, ses yeux se fixent sur moi, et il est très-clair qu'il ne me voit plus du tout. Il commence à parler, mais d'abord si bas et si vite, que, quoique je sois auprès de lui, quoique je le touche, j'ai peine à l'entendre et à le suivre. Je vois dans l'instant que tout mon rôle dans cette scène doit se borner à l'admirer en silence: et ce parti ne me coûte pas à prendre. Peu à peu sa voix s'élève et devient distincte et sonore; il était d'abord presque immobile; ses gestes deviennent fréquents et animés.⁹

Portraits such as this one are valuable, for they give the reader a glimpse into the nature of Diderot's behavior and, more importantly, into the personal basis for the extensive use of dialogue in his writing. It is entirely natural that a highly social person would express himself most easily in a form that requires much give and take. Furthermore, it is

not difficult to understand why Diderot's dramatic preoccupations would lead him to lend the dialogue in his novels a distinctly dramatic flavor. In his youth he had begun to acquire a feel for the conversation of the stage and had memorized certain roles from Molière and Corneille, which he used to recite aloud.¹⁰ This acquaintance with the best models of the seventeenth century, along with his own admittedly pedestrian attempts at writing drama in the 1750's, allowed him to hone his talents in dramatic dialogue for use in the major novels. Interestingly, in the works under consideration the philosophe is much more successful in making the dialogue come alive than he had been in his early drama. Loy points out that Diderot is able to give his ideas a feeling of actuality by having his characters speak audibly and visibly with one another,¹¹ and this sort of immediacy is a sine qua non of the theater. Just as dramatic dialogue is normally intended to be heard rather than read in silence, the dialogue in Diderot's best novels cannot be fully appreciated from a silent reading, as Roger Kempf points out: "Ce serait donc lire Diderot à contresens, que de le lire seulement, en négligeant son souci de la dimension sonore."¹²

One contributing factor to the dramatic nature of the dialogue in Diderot's novels is the sheer frequency of its appearance. The fact that much of Diderot resembles the speeches of a play¹³ is partially attributable to the proportion of space given over to recording the characters'

conversation. In many cases, page after page is devoted to nothing but dialogue, or to dialogue with only slight interruptions. This arrangement is comparable to that of most conventional plays, in which the dialogue is broken only by the playwright's stage directions. La Religieuse, which, as previously mentioned, is the earliest of the three major novels, is perhaps the first French novel to devote such a proportionally large share of space to dialogue, for entire scenes are almost exclusively composed of it.¹⁴ Scenes in which dialogue is plentiful come readily to mind. In many cases they are the most memorable ones in the book for their dramatic value. The various episodes in which Sister Suzanne must confront the cruel mother superior at Longchamp, the investigation of the archdeacon into Suzanne's mistreatment at that convent, and the chilling encounters between Suzanne and the deranged mother superior at Sainte-Eutrope d'Arpajon are all excellent examples. Of course, in a limited sense it is also true that Suzanne is engaging in a kind of dialogue by writing her story. As stated in the previous chapter, these memoirs are written for the Marquis de Croismare and for a larger undefined audience. Suzanne anticipates certain responses to what she recounts and thus seeks to bring the audience into the story as participating characters, even to the point of putting words into their mouths on occasion: "Des horreurs si multipliées, si variées, si continues! Une suite d'atrocités si recherchées

dans les âmes religieuses! Cela n'est pas vraisemblable,' diront-ils, dites-vous."¹⁵ By this standard there is a certain underlying dialogue that runs throughout La Religieuse. The two later novels continue and expand the tendency toward the extensive use of dialogue. Le Neveu de Rameau is almost entirely in dialogue form. The only exceptions are the brief introductory remarks at the beginning of the book and the occasional narrative passages that one finds tucked in at strategic points in the dialogue, usually for the purpose of describing Lui's elaborate pantomimes or the reactions of the spectators. As Smietanski has observed, Jacques le fataliste is, like Le Neveu de Rameau, "un vaste dialogue, ou plus exactement une juxtaposition de dialogues."¹⁶ This basic structure is interspersed with the author's interventions, which as often as not become little dialogues in themselves between the author and the reader. The presence of so much dialogue in the major novels is one element that suggests a connection with the drama.

A further general consideration that links Diderot's novelistic dialogue to that of the drama is its natural quality. In the theater the audience's credence must be won and maintained for a relatively lengthy period of time. The characters on the stage must seem real in order for this goal to be accomplished. With the possible exception of the more rigidly formal, highly stylized forms of drama, then, one of the characteristics of good dramatic dialogue is its

close approximation of the way real people actually speak. Paradoxically, this very point gave Diderot a good deal of trouble in the early plays. His intentions were to render his drama truer and more realistic than the seventeenth-century classical tragedy, with its many conventions and elevated style. Yet, put into excessive practice, the techniques that Diderot advocated, "des cris, des mots inarticulés, des voix rompues, quelques monosyllabes qui s'échappent par intervalles, je ne sais quel murmure dans la gorge, entre les dents,"¹⁷ had stilted and even ludicrous results. By contrast, the dialogue found in the major novels has an air of realism about it that helps to make the characters and their stories believable. The long, moralizing tirades and incoherent monosyllables of Diderot's early drama are gone,¹⁸ along with the maddening overabundance of ellipses. Furthermore, expressions such as reprit-il and dit-elle, which tend to destroy the reader's feeling of being directly in on the action, are not widely used by Diderot, particularly after La Religieuse. This simple step toward a greater illusion of reality is a significant innovation that appears also in Samuel Richardson,¹⁹ a writer whom Diderot greatly admired for the verisimilitude of his novels. The total impression of reality created by Diderot's novelistic dialogue, along with its dramatic flavor, has been admirably summed up by J. Robert Loy in a passage referring specifically to Jacques le fataliste:

As for the sounds of real people talking in real roads and by-ways, no writer has ever had a better ear for natural dialogue than Diderot. This explains why much of the "novel" resembles more the scenario of a play than the novel's block prose paragraphs with their eternal "he said" and "she said."²⁰

In a general way, then, the dialogue found in the major novels of Diderot is dramatic because there is much more of it than in other novels of the period and because it is realistic and natural enough to satisfy rather high standards of believability. But there are more specific functions of dramatic dialogue that must be shown to be performed, at least to some degree, by Diderot's novelistic dialogue before it can be characterized as dramatic. According to Stephen Minot, dramatic dialogue must reveal character, provide peripheral information, help in the development of thematic elements, serve as a means of controlling pace, and function as the primary method of establishing the tone of any one scene.²¹ It will be noticed that, as stated before, there can be no absolute dividing line between that which is dramatic technique and that which is merely commonly accepted novelistic technique. This observation is applicable to Minot's list of the functions that dramatic dialogue should serve, for any good fictional dialogue will perforce help to accomplish the same objectives. Nevertheless, the drama and the novel are separate, if related, genres, and there are differences between their respective types of dialogue, mainly stemming from the fact that the playwright has

fewer techniques at his disposal than does the novelist to reveal character, establish tone, and so forth. This means that it is critically important that dramatic dialogue be particularly effective in performing the functions outlined by Minot. The extent to which Diderot's novelistic dialogue leans in the direction of the dramatic will be considered as each function is examined separately.

The playwright has basically two means of developing and revealing character, both of which are accomplished directly through the characters themselves: what the characters say and what they do. The second method falls under the general heading of gesture, pantomime, and physiognomy, and will consequently be dealt with in detail in a later chapter. The first method demands further attention here. The dialogue that the playgoer hears provides him with essential information as to the personalities of the characters involved. Diderot places much of the burden of character revelation on the dialogue in his novels, and therefore relies less heavily on techniques more commonly associated with the novel, such as psychological analysis or description provided directly by the author. The reader must hear for himself what is being said and, to a very great extent, draw his own conclusions about the characters. The philosophe's feelings about the lengthy character portraits that were so popular in the seventeenth century and, by extension, about other techniques that fail to involve the reader directly in

the progress of the story, are summed up in Jacques's objections to his master's account of the beautiful widow of Desglonds' acquaintance:

Jacques.--Si c'est votre avis, reprenez l'histoire du père; mais plus de portraits, mon maître; je hais les portraits à la mort.

Le Maître.--Et pourquoi haissez-vous les portraits?

Jacques.--C'est qu'ils ressemblent si peu, que, si par hasard on vient à rencontrer les originaux, on ne les reconnaît pas. Racontez-moi les faits, rendez-moi fidèlement les propos, et je saurai bientôt à quel homme j'ai affaire. Un mot, un geste m'en ont quelquefois plus appris que le bavardage de toute une ville.²²

Diderot is exceedingly consistent in following the principle enunciated by Jacques, and in the eighteenth century in general, for long descriptive passages are almost non-existent, especially in the two later novels. It is true that La Religieuse may be seen as somewhat transitional. In it, Diderot makes use of a certain amount of description, although he is concerned with change or movement as opposed to the kind of static moral portrait given by the master. Where some pictorial or moral description does appear in Le Neveu de Rameau and Jacques le fataliste, it usually serves only as a brief introductory note, as in Diderot's description of Rameau's nephew in the first two or three pages of Le Neveu de Rameau, or else as a summary of conclusions that the reader should have been able to draw for himself long before, as in the description of Jacques found almost two-thirds of the way through the book.²³ The dialogue in La

Religieuse reveals much about the main characters. For example, Suzanne's words consistently show her extreme innocence and also her desire to please. Her conversation is simple, honest, and to the point. The fact that Suzanne is a genuine Christian who does not rebel against the Church, but against being forced into a life for which she has no vocation, has been discussed by Vivienne Mylne.²⁴ The sincerity of her religious commitment can be seen in the prayer she offers during the investigation scene with the arch-deacon at Longchamp,²⁵ as well as in her account to the marquis of her thoughts immediately before:

Ce fut alors que je sentis la supériorité de la religion chrétienne sur toutes les religions du monde; quelle profonde sagesse il y avait dans ce que l'aveugle philosophie appelle la folie de la croix. Dans l'état où j'étais, de quoi m'aurait servi l'image d'un législateur heureux et comblé de gloire? Je voyais l'innocent, le flanc percé, le front couronné d'épines, les mains et les pieds percés de clous, et expirant dans les souffrances; et je me disais: "Voilà mon Dieu, et j'ose me plaindre! . . ."26

Suzanne's mother reveals through her conversation a lack of affection for Suzanne, resulting from a perception of her daughter as the embodiment of her past mistakes. The cruelty of the mother superior Sainte-Christine of Longchamp is obvious in all that she says, just as the dialogue of the mother superior at Arpajon is a chronicle of her descent into madness.

In Le Neveu de Rameau, the characters' dialogue becomes even more important for the revelation of personality than

in La Religieuse. Indeed, one scholar states that the personality of each character becomes one with his position,²⁷ and their positions are revealed inevitably by what they say to one another. Moi leaves the impression not of being a moral prig, as Plotkin puts it, but of a "sensitive, skeptical observer of life in society"²⁸ who is concerned with moral issues. The nephew, whose conversation by his own description is composed of "un diable de ramage saugrenu, moitié des gens du monde et des lettres, moitié de la halle,"²⁹ is a bundle of contradictions. His words reveal that he is perceptive, cynical, lazy, desirous of genius and yet contemptuous of those who have it, frustrated, and resourceful--truly a complex character. In Jacques le fataliste, the garrulous Jacques proves himself to be a thinker endowed with a full measure of common sense. He is the true master, as previously mentioned, and his master, a benign but limited sort of person, usually accepts the leadership of Jacques with equanimity. The master's mental limitations show through in his tendency to use the same expression over and over again, almost word for word, just as a young child might do. Occasionally Jacques becomes annoyed by this practice and resorts to mockery, as in the "quel diable d'homme es-tu?" episode. The master evidently does not realize what Jacques is doing, for he repeats the expression once more:

Le Maître.--Jacques?
 Jacques.--Eh bien, Jacques! Jacques! quel
 diable d'homme êtes-vous?
 Le Maître.--Quel diable d'homme es-tu? Jacques,
 mon ami, je t'en prie.³⁰

The personalities of the other characters in Jacques le fataliste are similarly revealed through dialogue. A good example is the conversation of the peasants who take Jacques in to care for his wounded knee. The exchange which Jacques overhears through the thin partition one night reveals their worries and gives some insight as to how they live.³¹ The significant point about all the foregoing examples is that the characters in Diderot's novels are allowed to reveal themselves through their dialogue, in much the same way as the characters in a play are made to do. The author generally does not step in to do the reader's work for him in this area. Thus, the first function of dramatic dialogue mentioned by Minot is admirably fulfilled by Diderot in the novels.

Minot's second point, that dramatic dialogue serves the purpose of providing information peripheral to the central interests of the play, is not as applicable to Diderot's novels as the first. Interestingly, this point would have been equally inapplicable to ancient drama, since the playwright of ancient times normally used plots based on stories already familiar to his audience. For modern playgoers, however, essential background information must be supplied in some way so that the actions taking place on stage may be

understood in context. The modern playwright, lacking even the resource of the ancient chorus, really has no way of handling this problem other than through dialogue. Peripheral information must be worked into the dialogue unobtrusively, a task that is by no means easy to perform. Furthermore, the presence of such details in the characters' speeches can hardly be said to strengthen the dialogue; they are included only because they must be if the audience is to grasp the full meaning of the play. Diderot was undoubtedly wise not to use dialogue for the purpose of providing peripheral information. His method is to focus on important matters, using generous amounts of dialogue in the significant scenes. Information of secondary importance is summarized quickly, usually in a sentence or two, so that the reader's interest will not be lost. An example of this practice is found immediately after the "quel diable d'homme es-tu?" conversation in Jacques le fataliste, quoted above in connection with the revelation of character. Diderot makes short work of getting his two main characters away from the inn and out on the road again, where he intends to bring them to their next adventure:

Jacques se frotta les yeux, bâilla à plusieurs reprises, étendit les bras, se leva, s'habilla sans se presser, repoussa les lits, sortit de la chambre, descendit, alla à l'écurie, sella et brida les chevaux, éveilla l'hôte qui dormait encore, paya la dépense, garda les clefs des deux chambres; et voilà nos gens partis.³²

In just a few lines, he is able to move his characters from

one scene to the next, and at the same time to maintain a pace more nearly resembling that of the theater. Diderot therefore does not make a habit of using dialogue to provide peripheral information, but he actually strengthens the overall dramatic effect by reserving dialogue for more significant points.

The third function of dramatic dialogue to be examined is the development of thematic elements. Diderot does make extensive use of dialogue for this purpose. One of the major themes that appears in La Religieuse is the dehumanization resulting from imprisonment, whether in a religious convent or elsewhere. Evidences of this dehumanization are to be found in the conversation of most of the characters in the convent, who are presumably there against their will. The worst side of human nature is often revealed in what they say. They are jealous, cruel, and repressed in a variety of ways. Perhaps the best example of the total lack of human compassion that is to be found in the artificially closed community of the convent is the mother superior Sainte-Christine at Longchamp. Her words are constant reminders of the savage denial of individual worth that exists when freedom is taken away and fanaticism is allowed to take control. Her words to the nuns in reference to Suzanne, who lies shut out from the choir door, "Marchez sur elle, ce n'est qu'un cadavre,"³³ could hardly be a more graphic illustration of this point. Although her figurative--and

sometimes literal--imprisonment in the convent does not make Sister Suzanne cruel or inhuman, it does have the effect of making her give up hope when all avenues of escape have seemingly been exhausted, and this is another form of dehumanization. Her conversation with M. Manouri after the loss of her lawsuit reveals a sense of despair; even a transfer to another convent could not free her from her basic problem, that of being forced into a life for which she has no inclination or calling.³⁴ Other forms of imprisonment are also present in La Religieuse. Mme Simonin is a prisoner to the indiscretions of her youth, and this fact inevitably comes through in her conversation with Suzanne, the symbol of her transgression. The Arpajon mother superior is similarly imprisoned by guilt. Her troubled state of mind is evident in her repeated rationalizations of her behavior, in her sudden shifts of mood, and, finally, in the senseless babbling of one gone insane. Thus the dialogue of the characters in La Religieuse is used effectively to develop the theme of imprisonment, and this is only one of several themes developed in essentially the same way.

The use of dialogue is even more critical to the development of theme in Le Neveu de Rameau, primarily because this work is almost entirely in dialogue form. The nephew's ideals are constantly pitted against those of the philosophe, with stimulating results. The theme of morality which is present throughout Le Neveu de Rameau will serve as an

example. In passages such as the following, the opposing moral systems of Lui and Moi are presented by means of dialogue worthy of the stage in vigor:

LUI.-- . . . Tenez, vive la philosophie, vive la sagesse de Salomon; boire de bon vin, se gorger de mets délicats, se rouler sur de jolies femmes, se reposer dans des lits bien mollets; excepté cela, le reste n'est que vanité.

MOI.--Quoi! défendre sa patrie?

LUI.--Vanité! Il n'y a plus de patrie; je ne vois d'un pôle à l'autre que des tyrans et des esclaves.

MOI.--Servir ses amis?

LUI.--Vanité! Est-ce qu'on a des amis? Quand on en aurait, faudrait-il en faire des ingrats? Regardez-y bien, et vous verrez que c'est presque toujours là ce qu'on recueille des services rendus. La reconnaissance est un fardeau, et tout fardeau est fait pour être secoué.

MOI.--Avoir un état dans la société et en remplir les devoirs?

LUI.--Vanité! Qu'importe qu'on ait un état ou non, pourvu qu'on soit riche, puisqu'on ne prend un état que pour le devenir. . . .³⁵

The remainder of the passage is too lengthy for quotation here, but the above portion is sufficient to show the way in which Diderot uses dialogue to advance this theme according to a dialectical method. It is important to point out that although the nephew may seem to have the advantage in the foregoing selection, neither he nor the philosophe gains any definitive victory by the end of the book. Lui's position gradually becomes somewhat less tenable, and, as Plotkin observes, the two characters arrive at a kind of solution in which Moi's relation to society and to his morality has undergone a change resulting from his determination to defend his principles.³⁶ Thus the theme of morality develops

in the truest sense of the word. Like other themes that appear in Le Neveu de Rameau, the theme of morality takes on a dynamic quality enhanced by the interplay of two fertile minds.

The treatment of theme is carried on in a serious way in both La Religieuse and Le Neveu de Rameau. In Jacques le fataliste, the development of theme, while still accomplished by a heavy reliance on dialogue, takes on a playful quality. The most obvious theme in Jacques is the question of fatalism--or, to be more precise, determinism³⁷--versus freedom. Is man the slave of that which is written on the great scroll, as Jacques argues, or is he a free agent, as the master insists? This is the subject of intermittent debate between the two main characters throughout the novel. The "écrit là-haut sur le grand rouleau" formula is repeated so many times by Jacques that it becomes a comic catch-word. Still, it does not fail to serve the purpose of turning the reader's attention to the problems and advantages of the viewpoint of determinism. Through dialogue the question is explored in an entertaining way. Although Jacques does not succeed in eliminating all the thorny problems inherent in his position, he does gain a certain advantage over his rather dull-witted master by the end of the novel. In one of their final discussions on the matter, the master protests that he is a free agent, able to do what he wishes whenever he pleases. Jacques replies that three-quarters

of one's life is spent "à vouloir, sans faire" and "à faire sans vouloir."³⁸ To prove his point, Jacques loosens the straps on his master's saddle in such a way that the master, who is unaware of the scheme, nearly falls when he puts his foot in the stirrup. In the heated discussion that follows, Jacques points out that his master is not as free as he thinks, as proven by the trick: "N'avez-vous pas été ma marionnette, et n'auriez-vous pas continué d'être mon polichinelle pendant un mois, si je me l'étais proposé?"³⁹ The master can come up with no suitable answer, and Jacques emerges as the winner. The important point about the development of this theme or any other that appears in the novels is that Diderot chooses to accomplish it by capitalizing upon the resources of dialogue. Although there are other means of handling theme development which are available to him as a novelist, he decides repeatedly in favor of letting the reader hear and weigh the evidence for himself, a choice which links Diderot's novelistic dialogue more closely to that of the theater.

Minot's final two functions of dramatic dialogue, controlling pace and establishing tone, may be taken together for purposes of this discussion because they are closely related considerations. The tone that is set in a scene is largely dependent upon the pace that is maintained, and the reverse is also true. One general characteristic of dramatic dialogue is that it must be far more compressed than

novelistic dialogue.⁴⁰ Because a play rarely goes much beyond three hours in length, all the meaning that is to be conveyed in dialogue must be packed into a relatively short space. Additionally, given the limitations of the human attention span and the necessity of maintaining the audience's attention for the better part of an evening, the pace must be more rapid than is necessary in a novel.⁴¹ These requirements place great demands on dramatic dialogue which are not ordinarily expected of dialogue in a novel. Not only can the novelist set a more leisurely pace because his work is not meant to be read at a single sitting, but he may depend on techniques of altering pace or of creating mood that would be impossible to duplicate in the theater. For example, André Gide makes effective use of lyrical passages dealing with nature and the delights of the senses in his novels, but the unsuitability of this technique for use in drama is evident. In the theater, then, dialogue is probably the most critical element for the determination of pace and the creation of tone. Diderot is successful in writing dialogue for his novels which maintains a near-theatrical pace and displays a dramatist's feel for the setting of tone.

Few scenes could possess more dramatic appeal than the one in La Religieuse in which Suzanne refuses to take her vows. It is a scene almost entirely composed of dialogue, including ominous silences, in which one can feel the emotion-charged atmosphere:

. . . il se faisait un profond silence, lorsque celui qui présidait à ma profession me dit:
 "Marie-Suzanne Simonin, promettez-vous de dire la vérité?"

--Je le promets.

--Est-ce de votre plein gré et de votre libre volonté que vous êtes ici?"

Je répondis: "non"; mais celles qui m'accompagnaient répondirent pour moi: "oui."

"Marie-Suzanne Simonin, promettez-vous à Dieu chasteté, pauvreté et obéissance?"

J'hésitai un moment; le prêtre attendit; et je répondis:

"Non, monsieur."

Il recommença:

"Marie-Suzanne Simonin, promettez-vous à Dieu chasteté, pauvreté et obéissance?"

Je lui répondis d'une voix plus ferme:

"Non, monsieur, non."⁴²

The incredible tension built up in the foregoing scene is testimony to Diderot's gift for creating a dramatic mood. The pace is at a dramatic level, which is one reason why the mood is successfully maintained. A less sensitive writer might have spoiled the scene by drawing it out, thus lessening its impact and certainly weakening its connection with dramatic style. The scene in which the archdeacon questions Suzanne at Longchamp is another in which great skill is exercised in building up the dramatic tone.⁴³ Diderot plays upon the reader's sense of sympathy for Suzanne, for the archdeacon has the power to put an end to the kind of persecution she has undergone. This knowledge, along with the archdeacon's coldly impersonal manner and Suzanne's abject misery, builds up a sense of dramatic tension which is enhanced by the gradually increased proportion of dialogue during the course of the scene and by the tendency of the

dialogue to become faster in pace toward the end. A climax is reached when Suzanne shows the archdeacon her wounds, uttering only two words: "Vous voyez!"⁴⁴

Diderot's skill in creating mood and managing pace takes different directions in Le Neveu de Rameau, as one would expect. There are many small touches in the dialogue between Lui and Moi that are quite effective from a dramatic standpoint. A particularly good example is the exchange in which the philosophe's daughter is the topic of conversation. In this very short passage, one can feel the resentment and protective instinct of the father pitted against the brashness and cynicism of the bohemian, and these impressions are created entirely by the skillful management of dialogue. Of special interest is the last sentence of this selection, whose sarcastic tone can scarcely be overlooked:

LUI.-- . . . Quel âge a votre enfant?
 MOI.--Cela ne fait rien à l'affaire.
 LUI.--Quel âge a votre enfant?
 MOI.--Et que diable, laissons là mon enfant
 et son âge, et revenons aux maîtres qu'elle aura.
 LUI.--Pardieu! je ne sache rien de si têtù
 qu'un philosophe. En vous suppliant très humblement,
 ne pourrait-on savoir de monseigneur le philosophe
 quel âge à peu près peut avoir mademoiselle sa fille?⁴⁵

Another of the many examples of dialogue which would be suitable for the stage with few if any modifications comes toward the end of Le Neveu de Rameau. Moi is defending the stance of the philosophe who, according to his assessment, is free from the kind of role-playing to which Lui has been

reduced.⁴⁶ The give and take of this portion of dialogue as Lui tries to refute the position of Moi is stimulating, and the rapid-fire pace would be more than enough to satisfy dramatic requirements.

Jacques le fataliste contains passages in which the pace is equally brisk. An example in which the fast pace helps to reinforce a mood of mystery appears in the story of the Chevalier de Saint-Ouin. The dialogue involves the chevalier and the usurer Le Brun. The snatches of conversation that Jacques's master overhears whet his own interest, along with that of the reader:

Il est bon?
 --Excellent.
 --Majeur?
 --Très majeure.
 --C'est le fils?
 --Le fils.
 --Savez-vous que nos dernières affaires? . . .
 --Parlez plus bas.
 --Le père?
 --Riche.
 --Vieux?
 --Et caduc.⁴⁷

A final example from Jacques le fataliste demonstrates Diderot's ability to construct a humorous scene with as much dramatic skill as was evidenced in the more serious scenes from La Religieuse. The exchange takes place between Jacques and his master, with the garrulous inn hostess stepping in at the end as referee. It all starts after a discussion about the worth of the common man with the master's rather pointed observation to his valet, "souvenez-vous

que vous n'êtes et que vous ne serez jamais qu'un Jacques,"⁴⁸ and with his coldly peremptory order, still reinforced by the use of the vous forms: "Jacques, prenez votre bouteille et votre coquemar, et descendez là-bas."⁴⁹ When Jacques refuses, the master, switching back to the habitual tu forms, repeats his demand somewhat more forcefully. Little by little the demands and refusals become less cordial, until finally Jacques and his master are shouting at each other at the top of their lungs:

Tu descendras.
 --Je ne descendrai pas.
 --Tu descendras.
 --Je ne descendrai pas.⁵⁰

The mood of this scene is strictly slapstick and relies on an accumulation of exaggerated effects. Through the use of dialogue, the pace gradually accelerates, and the resultant tone is reminiscent of certain passages of Molière. Clearly, the dialogue in Diderot's three major novels fulfills the dramatic functions having to do with tone and pace.

The dramatic aspect of Diderot's novelistic dialogue has been examined from several angles. First, the quantity of dialogue in the novels suggests a relationship with the theater. The natural quality of the conversational exchanges among characters helps to create an impression of reality that is indispensable for dramatic dialogue. Just as the playwright must do, Diderot relies heavily on dialogue in his novels to fulfill four of the five functions of

dramatic dialogue set forth by Minot: revelation of character, development of thematic elements, controlling of pace, and establishing tone. Only in the case of providing peripheral information does Diderot prefer to resort to narrative techniques more common to the novel, and the results of this decision actually enhance the effect by reserving the greatest use of dramatic technique for more significant moments. Of course, dialogue is not the only technique open to the dramatist to achieve the effects he desires. The visual aspect of a dramatic presentation is also of capital importance. One facet of the visual impact left by a play is what the playgoer sees in the background of the major action. The dramatic background in Diderot's novels will be considered in the next section.

NOTES

¹ Herbert Dieckmann, Cinq Leçons sur Diderot (Geneva: Librairie E. Droz, 1959), p. 29. Hereafter cited as Cinq Leçons.

² J. Robert Loy, Diderot's Determined Fatalist: A Critical Appreciation of Jacques le Fataliste (New York: King's Crown Press, 1950), p. 95. Hereafter cited as Diderot's Determined Fatalist.

³ Dieckmann, Cinq Leçons, p. 29.

⁴ Arthur M. Wilson, Diderot (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972), p. 688.

⁵ Ibid., p. 696.

⁶ Georges May, Quatre Visages de Denis Diderot (Paris: Boivin et Cie, 1951), p. 191.

⁷ Emile Faguet, "Diderot," Dix-huitième Siècle: Etudes littéraires (Paris: Boivin et Cie, 1890), p. 322.

⁸ Wilson, pp. 694-95.

⁹ J. Assézat, ed., Oeuvres complètes de Diderot, I (Paris: Garnier Frères, 1875), xxi, n. 2.

10 Denis Diderot, Paradoxe sur le comédien, Oeuvres, ed. André Billy (Paris: Editions Gallimard, 1951), p. 1036.

11 Loy, Diderot's Determined Fatalist, p. 95.

12 Roger Kempf, Diderot et le roman: ou Le Démon de la présence (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1964), p. 114. Hereafter cited as Diderot et le roman.

13 Loy, Diderot's Determined Fatalist, p. 42.

14 Georges May, Diderot et "La Religieuse": Etude historique et littéraire (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1954), p. 223. Hereafter cited as Diderot et "La Religieuse."

15 Denis Diderot, La Religieuse, Oeuvres, ed. André Billy (Paris: Editions Gallimard, 1951), pp. 307-08. Hereafter cited as La Religieuse.

16 Jacques Smietanski, Le Réalisme dans Jacques le fataliste (Paris: Librairie A. G. Nizet, 1965), p. 142.

17 Denis Diderot, Dorval et moi: Second Entretien, Oeuvres complètes de Diderot, ed. J. Assézat, VII (Paris: Garnier Frères, 1875), 105-06.

18 May, Diderot et "La Religieuse," p. 223.

19 Kempf, Diderot et le roman, p. 30.

20 J. Robert Loy, ed., "Introduction," Jacques le fataliste, by Denis Diderot (New York: Dell Publishing Co., Inc., 1962), p. 17. Hereafter cited as "Introduction."

21 Stephen Minot, Three Genres: The Writing of Fiction, Poetry, and Drama (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1965), pp. 269-70.

22 Denis Diderot, Jacques le fataliste et son maître, Oeuvres, ed. André Billy (Paris: Editions Gallimard, 1951), p. 688. Hereafter cited as Jacques le fataliste.

23 Ibid., pp. 620-21.

24 Vivienne Mylne, "Diderot: Theory and Practice," The Eighteenth-Century French Novel: Techniques of Illusion (New York: Barnes & Noble, Inc., 1965), pp. 207-08.

25 Diderot, La Religieuse, p. 304.

26 Ibid., p. 301.

27 Frederick Plotkin, "Diderot's Nephew and the Mimics of Enlightenment," The Centennial Review, 13 (1969), 414.

28 Ibid.

29 Denis Diderot, Le Neveu de Rameau, Oeuvres, ed. André Billy (Paris: Editions Gallimard, 1951), p. 463. Hereafter cited as Le Neveu de Rameau.

- 30 Diderot, Jacques le fataliste, p. 482.
- 31 Ibid., pp. 489-91.
- 32 Ibid., p. 482.
- 33 Diderot, La Religieuse, p. 294.
- 34 Ibid., pp. 315-17.
- 35 Diderot, Le Neveu de Rameau, pp. 422-23.
- 36 Plotkin, p. 414.
- 37 Loy, "Introduction," p. 13.
- 38 Diderot, Jacques le fataliste, p. 693.
- 39 Ibid., p. 706.
- 40 S. W. Dawson, Drama and the Dramatic, The Critical Idiom, No. 11, ed. John D. Jump (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1970), p. 82.
- 41 Ibid.
- 42 Diderot, La Religieuse, p. 246.
- 43 Ibid., pp. 302-07.
- 44 Ibid., p. 307.
- 45 Diderot, Le Neveu de Rameau, p. 415.

46 Diderot, Le Neveu de Rameau, pp. 471-73.

47 Diderot, Jacques le fataliste, pp. 660-61.

48 Ibid., p. 612.

49 Ibid.

50 Ibid., p. 614.

CHAPTER IV

THE DRAMATIC BACKGROUND

The importance of background elements to the total effect of a dramatic production is probably not fully appreciated by the playgoer unless he is unusually observant. Likewise, the significance of the little touches that make an otherwise ordinary novel into a work of art is often not noticed, even by discriminating readers, until the second or third reading. The reason for this lack of perception of detail may be found easily enough. Most of the audience's concentration, or reader's concentration in the case of a novel, is focused on the main action at any given moment, so that the backdrop against which it occurs may receive little conscious attention. The setting--which will be used in this study to mean all elements of the dramatic or narrative background, including sights and sounds, human and inanimate components of the literary environment--is not meant to assume a position of primary importance. Nevertheless, the way in which the setting reinforces or fails to reinforce the major thrust of a literary work may have a profound influence upon its overall effectiveness. Diderot was fully aware of the importance of subtle background touches for gaining the reader's credence and, consequently,

for helping to create in him the mood desired by the author. It is common knowledge that the philosophe held the English novelist Samuel Richardson in great esteem largely for his skill in accumulating such details to build up an illusion of reality.¹ In a passage from Les Deux Amis de Bourbonne dealing with the conte historique, Diderot sets forth a formula for winning the reader's belief in which one can see his concern for proper management of the narrative background:

[Le conteur historique] parsèmera son récit de petites circonstances si liées à la chose, de traits si simples, si naturels, et toutefois si difficiles à imaginer, que vous serez forcé de vous dire en vous-même: Ma foi, cela est vrai: on n'invente pas ces choses-là.²

The necessity of winning and maintaining the audience's belief has already been discussed in relationship to the drama. The techniques used by Diderot in his novels to create an illusion of reality and to reinforce the mood conveyed by the main action seem to be modeled after those used for the same purposes in the theater. A brief look at the philosophe's ideas on the dramatic background as it should appear on the stage may therefore shed some light on his later handling of setting in the major novels.

In general, it may be said that Diderot advocated a move toward greater realism on the stage. Because he considered stage settings to be an integral part of the action, he wanted to put an end to the practice of seating spectators

on the stage.³ This was a major step in the right direction, for it can easily be imagined how distracting this custom must have been for audience and actors alike. Additionally, the philosophe reinstated scenery, which had suffered long years of neglect as a result of the classical tradition of timelessness, as an important part of the presentation.⁴ He wished to replace the conventional with the realistic and particular. A glance at the copious stage directions in Le Fils naturel reveals a detailed description of Clairville's parlor, which undoubtedly would have commanded very little attention in the seventeenth century. This attempt at providing a realistic setting for the action is in accordance with Diderot's express desire to "transporter au théâtre le salon de Clairville, comme il est."⁵ A tasteful simplicity was to be the rule in both setting and costuming so that, by avoiding the trap of calling too much attention to the dramatic background, the dramatist could use these effects to enhance the overall mood of the production.⁶ Finally, and perhaps most importantly, Diderot recommended the use of tableaux, which may be defined briefly as stage arrangements that please the eye and help to create the desired mood.⁷ As the word tableau suggests, the philosophe was thinking of the painter's arrangement of shapes on a canvas when he formulated this concept, and the connection is obvious in his own definition of tableau as "une disposition [des] personnages sur la scène, si naturelle et si vraie, que, rendue

fidèlement par un peintre, elle me plairait sur la toile."⁸ Such an idea may bring to the mind of the modern reader the somewhat frozen domestic compositions of Greuze, a painter who incidentally was greatly admired by Diderot, and the temptation is to dismiss the theatrical tableaux as outmoded and quaint. Yet, viewed in the context of the eighteenth century, the concept was really quite novel. It represented a reaction against the cold conventions of the seventeenth-century classical theater, in which the actors were forever obliged to "se tenir en rond, séparés, à une certaine distance les uns des autres, et dans un order symétrique."⁹ Thus, by advocating the use of tableaux on the stage, Diderot was seeking to further the cause of realism in dramatic setting.

The spirit behind the reforms that the philosophe proposed for the theatrical background carries over into the novels, although the specific applications inevitably undergo changes. For example, clearing the stage of spectators was a significant reform in the theater, but this measure would have little direct application where the novel is concerned. Yet the desire for a more realistic and therefore a more evocative dramatic background can be perceived as the motivation behind this reform, and evidences of the same motivation are pervasive in the novels. In the case of the tableaux, the transfer of dramatic theory to novelistic application is more direct. Tableaux exist in the novels

and are often a major technique for the creation of atmosphere in a scene. In this connection it is important to point out that Diderot almost never describes a setting simply for its picturesque qualities; he does it for the purpose of contributing to a dramatic effect.¹⁰ In this way the background for the main action becomes a means to an end rather than an end in itself. Moreover, in his settings Diderot focuses on human beings and their movements rather than on inanimate objects.¹¹ The philosophe's brand of realism does not focus on descriptions of clothes, furniture, and buildings. Things of this sort appear only when they have some special significance, and even then they are rarely described in much detail. Little details of human behavior, including words, gestures, nuances of emotion, and traits of conduct, are provided instead to create an atmosphere of everyday life.¹² This humanized literary background is one reason why change and movement are depicted in preference to a more fixed backdrop, for they are testimony to the presence of man.¹³ These characteristics of Diderot's creation of setting in the novels explain why the philosophe preferred the use of tableaux to simple description.¹⁴ A consideration of setting in each of the works presently under study should clarify the ways in which dramatic technique is applied in the novels.

The pathos of La Religieuse may be attributed to Richardson's influence, but the dramatic intensity of this first

major novel is Diderot's own touch.¹⁵ Background sights, sounds, and movements are masterfully woven together to create the desired atmosphere. As a result, the reader is caught up in the various scenes much as he would be if he were present at a theatrical presentation, for he catches the prevailing mood through the use of his senses. The overall feeling of doom is reinforced by themes of darkness, madness, illness, and death,¹⁶ which Diderot skillfully works into Suzanne's narrative. Georges May has pointed out that the majority of the most dramatic episodes in La Religieuse take place during the night or in the relative darkness of the corridors, chapels, and nuns' cells in the convent.¹⁷ This predilection for obscurity is symbolic of the spiritual darkness that pervades the religious community. It also serves as an appropriate backdrop for the other themes mentioned above. The death scene of Mme de Moni is a good example of Diderot's use of darkness, flickering light, and the sounds of human sorrow to create a mood of gloom:

A l'approche de sa mort, elle se fit habiller, elle était étendue sur son lit: on lui administra les derniers sacrements; elle tenait un christ entre ses bras. C'était la nuit; la lueur des flambeaux éclairait cette scène lugubre. Nous l'entourions, nous fondions en larmes, sa cellule retentissait de cris¹⁸

By bringing the reader's senses into play, Diderot conveys an impression of immediacy and of participation in the scene, thus making it possible to grasp the full import of

the mother superior's death. One can visualize the weeping nuns gathered around her bedside in the semi-darkness, forming just the kind of tableau that Diderot recommended for the drama.

The mock death rites held for Suzanne during her persecution at Longchamp take place in a still more foreboding atmosphere. Because she is not on the point of death in any physical sense, the elaborate preparations of the other nuns take on a terrible significance. The mother superior Sainte-Christine and her subordinates are seeking to frighten Suzanne into obedience and submission. Diderot constructs this scene with the utmost care. It is easy to imagine the coffin, in which Suzanne is made to lie, in the middle of the choir, with the basin of holy water and the candlesticks alongside it. After the nuns file past, the candles are extinguished, leaving Suzanne in a darkness heavy with implied threats.¹⁹ Still another death scene, again involving Sister Suzanne, appears some pages later. Although she does not actually die, she is extremely ill in this scene and is believed to be near death. Again, as in the case of Mme de Moni, the setting depends heavily on a tableau of nuns surrounding the deathbed, with the mother superior in their midst and a weeping Sister Ursule, Suzanne's faithful friend, at her side.²⁰ Sister Ursule herself dies not long afterward. It is significant that the reader does not find himself counting how many death scenes, or how many instances

of insanity, or how many other calamities take place during the course of the novel. The reader is involved in these scenes to the extent that he does not stop to ponder the implausibility of the occurrence of so many misfortunes in such a short period of time.²¹

The theme of insanity is explored most fully in the case of the mother superior at Arpajon. Her nocturnal prowlings in the corridor, her sighs and immoderate laughter, and her senseless babbling create an eerie atmosphere that penetrates the entire convent. The reader is allowed to follow her descent into madness in unsettling detail. The changes that take place in her behavior as her mental state deteriorates are noted with an almost clinical concern for accuracy. Because of her prominent position as mother superior, these signs of a growing instability inevitably influence the kind of atmosphere that is to be found in the convent. Interestingly enough, the mother superior's plight is seemingly foreshadowed in the condition of a young nun who appears early in the novel.²² When he wrote the scene about her, Diderot may have had in mind the fate of his sister Angélique, who is reputed to have died in an Ursuline convent at the age of twenty-eight as a result of overwork.²³ The nun in question is obviously insane, perhaps even dangerous. She escapes from her cell one day not long after Suzanne's arrival at her first convent. Her behavior, presented vividly in a chilling scene, is revelatory of that

which supposedly lurks just beneath the surface in the religious community. The reader shares Suzanne's experience of seeing and hearing the young nun in action, and in this way an atmosphere of mental as well as physical illness is first established in La Religieuse. Instances such as these tend to confirm Suzanne's worst fears about the effects of convent life and to reinforce her determination to refuse her vows. The scene in which she does so is certainly one of the most dramatic in the entire novel. Its effectiveness is greatly enhanced by the setting against which the episode is played out, a part of which is the image of insanity which is undoubtedly still fresh on the impressionable Suzanne's mind. Not only is there a sort of tableau formed by the waiting audience, but the sounds and silences are strategically placed to evoke a sense of foreboding:

Je ne sais ce qui se passait dans l'âme des assistants, mais ils voyaient une jeune victime mourante qu'on portait à l'autel, et il s'échappait de toutes parts des soupirs et des sanglots, au milieu desquels je suis bien sûre que ceux de mon père et de ma mère ne se firent point entendre. Tout le monde était debout; il y avait de jeunes personnes montées sur des chaises, et attachées aux barreaux de la grille; et il se faisait un profond silence²⁴

The many unnamed nuns in the convent make up an important part of the novel's setting. One can see from their roles in the preceding examples that they do not function as main characters, but as part of the dramatic background. During Suzanne's difficult days at Longchamp, they are

allowed and even encouraged to wander into her cell at all hours of the day and night.²⁵ It is they who gradually despoil her room of all its furnishings, so that Suzanne is left "sans tapisserie, sans chaise, sans prie-Dieu, sans rideaux, sans matelas, sans couvertures, sans draps, sans aucun vaisseau, sans porte qui fermât, presque sans vitre entière à mes fenêtres."²⁶ Interestingly, as Georges May observes, Suzanne's cell is described only when the changes that take place in it allow a dynamic description. The reader learns something about the room's appearance only when that which is in it is stolen.²⁷ The actions of the mass of nuns provide a sort of emotional barometer in the convent. Suzanne comes to realize that a change of some kind is in the air when the commotion around her reaches a certain level. Before the news of the loss of her lawsuit reaches her, Suzanne is able to guess the unfavorable outcome from the atmosphere of muted excitement that is suddenly present in the convent: "C'était un mouvement, un tumulte, une joie, de petits entretiens secrets, des allées, des venues chez la supérieure, et des religieuses les unes chez les autres."²⁸ Similarly, the comings and goings and whispered conferences of the Longchamp nuns provide the first clue as to Suzanne's impending transfer to Arpajon,²⁹ and it is appropriate that the first inkling she has as to the kind of life that she will lead at the new convent is furnished by the nuns who are peering inquisitively out the

windows at her arrival: ". . . cette seule circonstance m'en apprit, sur l'ordre qui régnait dans la maison, plus que tout ce que la religieuse et sa compagne ne m'en avaient dit."³⁰

Perhaps the most striking tableau to be found in all of La Religieuse appears some pages from the end of the novel, during the afternoon gathering in the mother superior's room. The cast of anonymous nuns plays an important part in the creation of this scene. That Diderot himself was quite pleased with its effect is revealed toward the first of the passage: "Vous qui vous connaissez en peinture, je vous assure, monsieur le marquis, que c'était un assez agréable tableau à voir."³¹ The scene is of ten or twelve of the youngest and prettiest nuns in the convent, all engaged in different tasks under the active supervision of the mother superior. The following excerpt from this rather lengthy passage demonstrates how vividly and yet how gracefully the setting is described, and how well Diderot uses this dramatic background to create an atmosphere of serenity. The contrasts in appearance and in disposition among the individuals present are especially interesting:

J'étais assise sur le bord de son lit, et je ne faisais rien; une autre dans un fauteuil, avec un petit métier à broder sur ses genoux; d'autres, vers les fenêtres, faisaient de la dentelle; il y en avait à terre assises sur les coussins qu'on avait ôtés des chaises, qui cousaient, qui brodaient, qui parfilaient ou qui filaient au petit rouet. Les unes étaient blondes, d'autres brunes; aucune ne se ressemblait, quoiqu'elles fussent

toutes belles. Leurs caractères étaient aussi variés que leurs physionomies; celles-ci étaient sereines, celles-là gaies, d'autres sérieuses, mélancoliques ou tristes.³²

The setting in La Religieuse is indeed a powerful reinforcement for the mood of the action taking place in the foreground. Despite the improbability of Suzanne's experiences, the reader's belief is won as a result of the atmosphere of reality that permeates the novel,³³ and an indispensable element of this atmosphere is the careful management of the novel's setting. Diderot uses essentially the same methods for the creation of background in this work that he had recommended for the theater, yet with far more convincing results than he ever achieved in his own drama.

The accent in Le Neveu de Rameau is unmistakably on dialogue and gesture. Accordingly, there are relatively few passages that describe the dialogue's setting by comparison with La Religieuse, but it is difficult to agree with John S. Wood's statement that there is no "décor" in Le Neveu de Rameau.³⁴ Although the background is described very concisely, its extreme vividness gives the reader the distinct feeling of being physically present in the Café de la Régence, seeing and hearing the remarkable debate between the philosophe and the brilliant ne'er-do-well. In accordance with his usual practice, Diderot handles the setting in a more impressionistic than realistic way.³⁵ The description concentrates on movement and the human element, as was the

case in La Religieuse. The background of Le Neveu de Rameau is one which the philosophe knew intimately. It is composed basically of two components: the visible and audible surroundings of the Café de la Régence and the more general atmosphere of mid-eighteenth-century Paris that is gradually constructed by means of the characters' conversation. Diderot was a regular patron of the Café de la Régence, and therefore was quite familiar with it and its ever-present chess players.³⁶ On the very first page of the novel, some of these players are mentioned by name--"Légal le profond, Philidor le subtil, le solide Mayot"--along with a few words about their games.³⁷ This touch of realism helps to give the reader a feel for the backdrop against which the dialogue will be taking place. In a very real sense, the brief introduction to the Café de la Régence sets the stage for the main action of the dialogue in substantially the same way that this function is performed at the beginning of a play. The difference is that the setting of most plays is conveyed visually in the theater, perhaps with the help of a sentence or two on the printed program, while the novelist must be content to create his setting in the mind of the reader solely by the use of words. One can imagine along with Georges May what Balzac would have done with the Café de la Régence had it been his task to describe it. Every detail relating to the way it looked to the writer would no doubt have been faithfully and minutely recorded.³⁸ Diderot,

by contrast, is much closer to the dramatic procedure. Not only does he limit his description to preserve the near-dramatic pace of the work, but he creates a vividly dynamic atmosphere by concentrating his attention on the human aspect of the setting. The café itself is not described. However, by focusing his attention on a brief but graphic rendering of the café's patrons and their actions, Diderot is able to stimulate the reader's imagination and make the setting seem real.³⁹

Once the initial stage setting is accomplished, little attention is directed toward the chess players. Since they, like the mass of nuns in La Religieuse, are part of the background rather than true characters in the novel, the spotlight is naturally not centered on them. Their reactions to Lui's antics are recorded just often enough to make the reader realize that the dialogue is not taking place in a vacuum, but against a busy café backdrop. For example, when the nephew demonstrates the force of his lungs, he coughs "d'une violence à ébranler les vitres du café et à suspendre l'attention des joueurs d'échecs."⁴⁰ It is not difficult to imagine the chess players looking around at the brash young man who has so abruptly broken their concentration. Later on, the nephew gives an especially frenzied performance which commands even closer attention not only from the chess players, but from passersby attracted by the noise:

Tous les pousse-bois avaient quitté leurs échiquiers et s'étaient rassemblés autour de lui. Les fenêtres du café étaient occupées, en dehors, par les passants qui s'étaient arrêtés au bruit. On faisait des éclats de rire à entr'ouvrir le plafond.⁴¹

This indication of the response to Lui's actions creates a kind of tableau, or at least the closest approximation to it that appears in Le Neveu de Rameau. The fact that the chess players actually stop their game to gather around and react to the nephew, and that even those passing by the café stop to gaze at him through the windows, serves to reinforce the immoderation of Lui's performance. As his frenzy gives way to a calmer discussion of the topic at hand, the audience in the background gradually moves back to resume their original occupations.⁴² While the focus is not on their movement, their retreat does have the effect of announcing a return to normalcy. Diderot also takes this opportunity to mention the position of the two main characters in the room in relation to their neighbors: they are left alone in their corner.⁴³ This seemingly insignificant detail gives the reader a clearer idea of where in the room the main dialogue is taking place.

In all of the foregoing examples, it will be noted that the creation of setting is centered around human beings and their actions rather than around inanimate objects. Still another component of the human environment in which this remarkable dialogue takes place is, as mentioned previously,

Paris as it was in the middle of the eighteenth century. A striking impression of this larger background is created by the use of frequent references in the dialogue to specific people and places. This aspect of the setting is handled so subtly that the reader may not even be aware of its value as part of the backdrop for the novel as a whole. Nevertheless, as Georges May has pointed out, the names of actual financiers, journalists, actresses, musicians, and other well-known personalities of the time are there for the purpose of creating a "décor" of the mid-century Paris literary world.⁴⁴ No one was better qualified to establish a realistic setting built around the Paris world of letters than Diderot, who spent the greater part of his life at its center. In fact, the extreme frankness of the discussion about certain of Diderot's prominent enemies was undoubtedly one factor in the philosophe's decision to keep Le Neveu de Rameau a secret during his lifetime.⁴⁵ At any rate, the subtle construction of a greater literary atmosphere blends together with the portrayal of the more immediate background of the busy Café de la Régence to create a setting that is at once realistic and effective in its support of the main action.

In Jacques le fataliste, Diderot devotes proportionately more space to setting than in Le Neveu de Rameau. The same method of dynamic realism that was observed in the earlier two novels is still in effect in Jacques,⁴⁶ and again the

physical surroundings have little or no significance by themselves; they receive attention only as they play some particular role in the dramatic action or help to shed light on one of the novel's characters.⁴⁷ Indeed, the philosophe is so eager to play down the importance of his main characters' destination that at one point he roundly scolds the inquisitive reader for repeatedly asking where they are going, proposes several likely places, and invites the reader to choose the one that best fits the situation.⁴⁸ Finally, in Jacques le fataliste one sees once again that the human aspect of the setting takes precedence over such considerations as the placement and description of inanimate objects. On those rare occasions when the inanimate background is recorded in some detail, it may be said with certainty that the description serves some special purpose, usually having to do more or less directly with the characters in the novel.

An example of Diderot's skill in creating the desired atmosphere through the careful construction of setting appears very early in Jacques le fataliste. The scene takes place at the first inn where Jacques and his master are overnight guests, a place described simply as the most wretched of inns in a perilous area of the country which has been rendered even more dangerous by poor administration and misery.⁴⁹ Not only do the food and accommodations leave much to be desired, but the place is inhabited by characters

of the most unsavory sort. Diderot conveys some idea of the kind of room occupied by Jacques and his master by mentioning the fact that rough beds similar to cots ("lits de sangle") are set up for their use in a room formed by partitions affording little privacy. It is important to emphasize that even these bare details about the inn's physical layout are not given for their picturesque quality, but to create the sort of sinister atmosphere that will bring out Jacques's temerity in confronting the troublesome bandits in the next room and bluffing them into submission. In this way the décor serves the purpose of contributing to a dramatic effect,⁵⁰ that of providing a suitable background to reinforce the main action of the scene. To turn to a consideration of the human element of the setting, the reader gets an excellent impression of the inn's general atmosphere from a short but vivid description of its occupants. The background created by these two sentences has an unmistakably dramatic flavor, for the reader's senses of sight and hearing are brought into full play:

L'hôte, l'hôtesse, les enfants, les valets, tout avait l'air sinistre. Ils entendaient à côté d'eux les ris immodérés et la joie tumultueuse d'une douzaine de brigands qui les avaient précédés et qui s'étaient emparés de toutes les provisions.⁵¹

This passage does much to reinforce the impression already set up by the concise description of the inn, for with it the scene's setting comes alive. The reader is provided

with a graphic mental picture, enriched by the dimension of sound, of a backdrop against which Jacques's escapade with the bandits may be presented with maximum effectiveness.

Despite the overall paucity of descriptions of places in Jacques le fataliste, there are a few scenes in which a fairly precise notion of the inanimate setting is given. As was the case with the inn episode that has just been examined, these more detailed descriptions serve some particular function; they are not included merely for their aesthetic value. For instance, the apartment of the second-hand dealer and usurer Le Brun, who appears in the story of Jacques's master and his treacherous friend the Chevalier de Saint-Ouin, is described at some length.⁵² The furnishings receive special attention, for nothing matches and things are strewn about in no discernible order. Nevertheless, as Smietanski points out, this description does not have a pronounced individual character and could just as easily be the residence of any "faiseur d'affaires" at all.⁵³ As such, the description of his home serves as a fitting introduction to the character Le Brun, who is himself the very type of the usurer. Jacques is able to guess the occupation of Le Brun from the account of his dwelling: "Cela sent le faiseur d'affaires d'une lieue à la ronde."⁵⁴ The perceptive reader can do the same. In this passage, then, the description of an apartment and its furnishings serves the function of revealing something about the character who

lives there, but it is important to point out that Diderot avoids the kind of detail that characterizes a Balzac description. To take another example, the arrangement of doors in the home of the hypocritical abbot Hudson is described with care: "L'abbé de l'ordre avait une maison attenante au monastère. Cette maison avait deux portes, l'une qui s'ouvrait dans la rue, l'autre dans la cloître"55 This description discloses much about Hudson's divided loyalties; the doors become symbols of his duplicity.⁵⁶ Finally, the layout of Bigre's residence is described in some detail, again not for aesthetic reasons, but because the reader must have this knowledge about the room's arrangement to understand why Justine cannot simply flee on the morning when she and Bigre oversleep.⁵⁷ Thus Diderot limits his description of the inanimate backdrop to the absolutely essential. Where such description does appear, it is confined to just the amount necessary to achieve a definite purpose other than aesthetic appeal.

Jacques le fataliste is full of the kind of tableaux that Diderot advocated for the theater. These "stills," as Loy has called them,⁵⁸ are extremely evocative. Each one constitutes an entire mute scene, a sort of drama in a nutshell.⁵⁹ Some of the tableaux are rather lengthy, as is the one involving Jacques, his master, and the hostess of the Grand-Cerf, quoted in its entirety below. The extreme vividness of the scene is particularly to be noted, along with

Diderot's express desire to bring into play the reader's sense of sight as well as his sense of hearing:

Lecteur, j'avais oublié de vous peindre le site des trois personnages dont il s'agit ici: Jacques, son maître et l'hôtesse; faute de cette attention, vous les avez entendus parler, mais vous ne les avez point vus; il vaut mieux tard que jamais. Le maître, à gauche, en bonnet de nuit, en robe de chambre, était étalé nonchalamment dans un grand fauteuil de tapisserie, son mouchoir jeté sur le bras du fauteuil, et sa tabatière à la main. L'hôtesse sur le fond, en face de la porte, proche la table, son verre devant elle. Jacques, sans chapeau, à sa droite, les deux coudes appuyés sur la table, et la tête penchée entre deux bouteilles: deux autres étaient à terre à côté de lui.⁶⁰

Not only does this passage make it easy for the reader to picture the arrangement of the characters, but Diderot selects just the right details to fit each individual's personality. Other tableaux appear in Jacques le fataliste wherever the situation lends itself to the use of that technique. One cannot help recalling the advice that the philosophe puts into the mouth of Dorval in their first conversation on Le Fils naturel, that in a well-written and well-presented play "la scène offrirait au spectateur autant de tableaux réels qu'il y aurait dans l'action de moments favorables au peintre."⁶¹ In his wide use of tableaux in Jacques le fataliste, Diderot is therefore following one aspect of his own advice concerning dramatic technique more faithfully than in any previous novel. Vivid tableaux appear when Jacques meets the executioner, with the two dogs getting into the picture as if it were a painting by Greuze

himself; when the guests detained at the Grand-Cerf because of bad weather take reluctant leave of the hostess; and when Jacques, surrounded by the surgeon, his table of instruments, and Denise and her mother, is about to undergo another operation on his knee,⁶² to name only a few of the most striking examples. The extensive use of this technique is consistent with Diderot's general tendency to create settings composed chiefly of human beings rather than inanimate objects, even when there is more description than usual.

The importance of sound as an element of setting in Jacques le fataliste becomes clear at several points in the novel. It is during the stay of Jacques and his master at the Grand-Cerf that Diderot relies most heavily on sound to convey the atmosphere of the inn. The hostess, who loves to talk and is quite an accomplished storyteller, is continually interrupted by the demands of her guests and her husband, much to her frustration.⁶³ These little exchanges which break into her conversation with Jacques and his master are printed in italics with no explanation preceding or following, and after each one the hostess picks up her story at the point where she had left it before the interruption. This method of presentation preserves the dramatic pace and gives the impression of a bustling, dynamically human background. Additionally, something of the monotonous aspect of the hostess' job is conveyed in the fact that she shouted

requests almost always begin with "Madame?" or "Ma femme?," followed by the hostess' reply, "Qu'est-ce?," and that the hostess is rarely at a loss for answers. It is as if she had heard the questions before so many times that she can give automatic responses and return immediately to her narrative, sometimes all in the same breath. In this passage, Diderot is inviting the reader to be part of an audience in the purest sense of the word. As Roger Kempf has pointed out, "Diderot force notre attention en nous incitant à écouter avec ses personnages."⁶⁴ It is precisely because the reader is treated as a listening participant that his mental impression of the inn setting is so vivid, despite the fact that little visual description of it is provided. Thus, in Jacques le fataliste Diderot makes use of sounds as well as sights to make the setting come alive for the reader.

The general inclination of Diderot toward greater realism in dramatic setting carries over into his management of the background for the main action in the three major novels. The absence of detailed descriptions of inanimate components in the backdrop is a consequence of the philosophe's desire to place the emphasis upon human elements of the literary environment. Although the settings are normally characterized by change and movement, tableaux of the kind that Diderot advocated for the theater are to be found in abundance. These "stills" are rich in eye appeal and therefore help the reader to visualize certain important

scenes. Details about the novels' various backdrops are limited to just what is necessary to provide the imagination with a vivid impression. No attempt is made to describe that which is insignificant, and in this way the setting preserves both its impact and a proper subordination to the main action, which is the major concern. By obliging the reader to hear and see for himself what is going on in the background, Diderot involves him directly in the action, just as a play's audience must become involved. Yet the playgoer's participation is by no means confined to the setting; it is necessary for the main action as well. The audience must see the performers in action on the stage in order to get the maximum benefit from the presentation. The next section therefore deals with the use of bodily expression in the novels.

NOTES

¹ Denis Diderot, "Eloge de Richardson," Oeuvres, ed. André Billy (Paris: Editions Gallimard, 1951), p. 1064.

² Denis Diderot, "Les Deux Amis de Bourbonne," Oeuvres, ed. André Billy (Paris: Editions Gallimard, 1951), p. 727.

³ Arthur M. Wilson, Diderot (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972), p. 268.

⁴ Lester G. Crocker, The Embattled Philosopher: A Biography of Denis Diderot (East Lansing: Michigan State College Press, 1954), p. 182. Hereafter cited as The Embattled Philosopher.

⁵ Denis Diderot, Dorval et moi: Second Entretien, Oeuvres complètes de Diderot, ed. J. Assézat, VII (Paris: Garnier Frères, 1875), 114.

⁶ Denis Diderot, De la poésie dramatique, Oeuvres complètes de Diderot, ed. J. Assézat, VII (Paris: Garnier Frères, 1875), 375.

⁷ Vivienne Mylne, "Diderot: Theory and Practice," The Eighteenth-Century French Novel: Techniques of Illusion (New York: Barnes & Noble, Inc., 1965), p. 198.

⁸ Denis Diderot, Dorval et moi: Premier Entretien, Oeuvres complètes de Diderot, ed. J. Assézat, VII (Paris: Garnier Frères, 1875), 94. Hereafter cited as Premier Entretien.

⁹ Ibid., p. 95.

¹⁰ Jacques Smietanski, Le Réalisme dans Jacques le fataliste (Paris: Librairie A. G. Nizet, 1965), p. 33.

¹¹ Georges May, Quatre Visages de Denis Diderot (Paris: Boivin et Cie, 1951), pp. 193-95. Hereafter cited as Quatre Visages.

¹² Mylne, p. 195.

¹³ May, Quatre Visages, p. 193.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 195. See also Crocker, The Embattled Philosopher, p. 267.

¹⁵ John Garber Palache, Four Novelists of the Old Régime: Crébillon, Laclos, Diderot, Restif de la Bretonne (New York: The Viking Press, 1926), p. 128.

¹⁶ Georges May, Diderot et "La Religieuse": Etude historique et littéraire (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1954), p. 219. Hereafter cited as Diderot et "La Religieuse".

17 May, Diderot et "La Religieuse," p. 228.

18 Denis Diderot, La Religieuse, Oeuvres, ed. André Billy (Paris: Editions Gallimard, 1951), p. 265. Hereafter cited as La Religieuse.

19 Ibid., p. 291.

20 Ibid., p. 320.

21 May, Diderot et "La Religieuse," p. 220.

22 Diderot, La Religieuse, p. 241.

23 Wilson, p. 14.

24 Diderot, La Religieuse, p. 246.

25 Ibid., p. 272.

26 Ibid., p. 309.

27 May, Quatre Visages, pp. 186-87.

28 Diderot, La Religieuse, p. 313.

29 Ibid., pp. 327-28.

30 Ibid., p. 328.

31 Ibid., p. 359.

32 Ibid., pp. 359-60.

33 Mylne, p. 204.

34 John S. Wood, "Le Neveu de Rameau à la scène," Revue d'Histoire du Théâtre, 19 (1967), 391.

35 May, Quatre Visages, p. 186.

36 Wilson, p. 417.

37 Denis Diderot, Le Neveu de Rameau, Oeuvres, ed. André Billy (Paris: Editions Gallimard, 1951), p. 395. Hereafter cited as Le Neveu de Rameau.

38 May, Quatre Visages, p. 183.

39 Ibid., pp. 182-83.

40 Diderot, Le Neveu de Rameau, p. 429.

41 Ibid., p. 455.

42 Ibid., p. 458.

43 Ibid.

44 May, Quatre Visages, p. 183.

45 Wilson, p. 416.

46 May, Quatre Visages, p. 187.

47 Smietanski, p. 37.

48 Denis Diderot, Jacques le fataliste et son maître, Oeuvres, ed. André Billy (Paris: Editions Gallimard, 1951), pp. 492-94. Hereafter cited as Jacques le fataliste.

49 Ibid., p. 480. The entire passage dealing with setting in the inn is found on this page.

50 Smietanski, p. 33.

51 Diderot, Jacques le fataliste, p. 480.

52 Ibid., p. 660.

53 Smietanski, pp. 35-36.

54 Diderot, Jacques le fataliste, p. 660.

55 Ibid., p. 624.

56 Roger Kempf, Diderot et le roman: ou Le Démon de la présence (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1964), p. 83. Hereafter cited as Diderot et le roman.

57 Smietanski, p. 36.

58 J. Robert Loy, Diderot's Determined Fatalist: A Critical Appreciation of Jacques le Fataliste (New York: King's Crown Press, 1950), p. 99.

59 Smietanski, p. 125.

60 Diderot, Jacques le fataliste, p. 581.

61 Diderot, Premier Entretien, p. 95.

62 Diderot, Jacques le fataliste, pp. 533, 617, 702.

63 Ibid., pp. 561-67.

64 Kempf, Diderot et le roman, p. 113.

CHAPTER V

BODILY EXPRESSION: GESTURE, PANTOMIME, AND PHYSIOGNOMY

The action that takes place on the stage is an indispensable part of any dramatic production. No matter how powerful the dialogue or how effective the setting, the play presented without any movement or expression on the part of the actors would be a mere recitation. Visual effects are so fundamental to the dramatic genre that, as Minot observes, it seems natural to speak of seeing a good play.¹ If the dramatic background has much to do with the overall visual impact, the way in which the actors use their bodies to convey meaning during the main action is still more significant, for it is the main action that commands the lion's share of the audience's attention at any given moment. For this reason it is necessary to examine Diderot's ideas on the use of the body as an integral part of any dramatic presentation, and to consider the application of these theories in the three major novels. Three important terms will appear repeatedly throughout this section. Gesture will be used as a generic term for any bodily motion that conveys meaning. Pantomime, a word often used by Diderot, will signify the acting out of a scene or an idea without the use

of words; it is a term that relates specifically to the actor's art. Finally, the word physiognomy will mean the face and facial features in their capacity as revealers of emotion or character.

Diderot's interest in the role of gesture in the drama was conceived very early indeed. During his bohemian years in Paris, he was, as previously mentioned, a regular patron of the theater, and took the trouble to memorize many of the best French plays of the time. On certain days, he would go to performances for the sole purpose of studying the actors' movements on the stage and how well they were suited to the meaning of the dialogue. To carry out his intent, the young Diderot would find a seat as far away from the stage as he could, put his fingers in his ears, to the astonishment of those seated around him, so that he could hear nothing, and concentrate on the action as long as it seemed to fit the dialogue that he remembered. When he felt that the actors' movements were leading him astray, he would unstop his ears to make sure of his place. In his estimation, very few actors were able to stand up under scrutiny of this kind, and most of them would have been humiliated by his findings.² Diderot's fascination with gesture and its role in communication, both inside and outside the theater, was not to stop with this rather bizarre experiment. He touched on the subject in many of his later writings, and in a few works it is a main topic of discussion. In the Lettre

sur les sourds et muets, for example, written in 1750, the philosophe uses an imaginary deaf-mute as a new way to approach the evolution of speech by the study of gesture.³ Of course, all the works on dramatic theory deal with gesture and pantomime as major concerns.

This lifelong interest in bodily communication was quite natural in a person of Diderot's temperament. His gregarious disposition and the extreme animation that characterized his conversation have already been mentioned in a previous section. The fact that his speech was punctuated by copious gestures must be added to complete the picture. The philosophe's contemporaries often described his conversation as being a pantomime.⁴ The young journalist Garat, whose caricature of Diderot's conversational behavior has already been seen in part, speaks of his "gestes . . . fréquents et animés" and of his striking Garat's thigh for emphasis as if it were his own.⁵ This particular mannerism must have been a commonplace with Diderot, for during his visit to St. Petersburg the empress Catherine II was obliged to place a table between herself and the ebullient philosophe during their interviews to protect her thighs from his overly enthusiastic gesticulations.⁶

In like fashion, Diderot's lifelong interest in physiognomy must have had its deepest roots in his own personality. By his own testimony, his face was a faithful mirror of his every feeling: "J'avais en une journée cent

physionomies diverses, selon la chose dont j'étais affecté."⁷ Still another source, or at least a major reinforcement, for his interest in gesture and physiognomy was a treatise published by a seventeenth-century French painter in 1702.⁸ Charles Le Brun's Méthode pour apprendre à deviner les passions had as its purpose the application of recent findings in psychophysiology to painting.⁹ Toward this end, the work contained descriptions and illustrations of the expressions that were supposed to accompany the various emotional states.¹⁰ Under Le Brun's tutelage, then, Diderot became a student of physiognomy. Evidence of his interest in the subject is scattered throughout his writings. To take one example, in a 1772 letter to Grimm the philosophe proposes an experiment to be carried out by the Marquis de Croismare with five or six portraits. The marquis was to cover up the inscriptions under the pictures and to compose character sketches of the persons involved from the information provided by their faces. With this step completed, the marquis' sketches could be compared with the men's true histories to determine how reliable the physiognomies had actually been.¹¹

Diderot's fascination with the body's power to communicate feelings and ideas inevitably found expression in his dramatic theory. It was his desire to banish the stylized and symbolic gestures of the classical theater and to replace them with more natural movements.¹² "Voilà le geste tel qu'il doit être au théâtre, énergique et vrai," he wrote

to Mme Riccoboni; "il ne faut pas jouer seulement du visage, mais de toute la personne."¹³ This recommendation was one consequence of his desire for greater realism in the theater. It was his belief that since emotions are expressed in real life as much through gestures and facial expressions as by words, the theater should make effective use of the body to communicate meaning rather than relying as heavily on the spoken word as did the traditional French theater.¹⁴ In order that the message may come through to the audience clearly and with a minimum of confusion, gestures must be striking in their simplicity,¹⁵ or as Diderot so aptly put it in the passage quoted above, energetic and true. The philosophe admired the famous hand-washing scene from Macbeth for the dramatic value of its silent gestures.¹⁶ Indeed, he declared that in certain entire scenes it is more natural for the characters to move about than to speak.¹⁷ A further conviction of Diderot's was that the resources of pantomime as it existed in ancient times should be rediscovered and put to better use in the drama:

Nous parlons trop dans nos drames; et, conséquemment, nos acteurs n'y jouent pas assez. Nous avons perdu un art, dont les anciens connaissaient bien les ressources. Le pantomime jouait autrefois toutes les conditions, les rois, les héros, les tyrans, les riches, les pauvres, les habitants des villes, ceux de la campagne, choisissant dans chaque état ce qui lui est propre; dans chaque action, ce qu'elle a de frappant.¹⁸

According to his formula, pantomime should be used in many different types of situations, namely

. . . toutes les fois qu'elle fait tableau; qu'elle donne de l'énergie ou de la clarté au discours; qu'elle lie le dialogue; qu'elle caractérise; qu'elle consiste dans un jeu délicat qui ne se devine pas; qu'elle tient lieu de réponse, et presque toujours au commencement des scènes.¹⁹

The very fact that Diderot considered pantomime to be appropriate for so many different occasions underscores his belief in the value of effective bodily expression in the theater.

The use of the body and its resources of gesture, pantomime, and physiognomy play an equally important role in the three major novels of Diderot. In fact, these techniques are used to greater advantage in the fiction than in the philosophe's drama, perhaps because he had achieved greater maturity as a writer by the time of the novels. It is obvious that the novelist must handle the bodily movements of his characters in a way that differs somewhat from that of the playwright. Diderot points out that the playwright visualizes the action as he writes and records what he wants the various characters to do, but that the actor is not slavishly bound to these indications.²⁰ To this extent, the development of gesture is a joint venture in the drama, while the novelist's word in such matters is final. Furthermore, the novelist must take over the function of the actor by conveying actions verbally.²¹ This factor necessitates a more detailed written account of the characters' movements than the playwright would have to provide in his

work,²² for most dramatic pieces are meant to be seen in performance, not merely read. Despite these differences, the three major novels of Diderot are surprisingly close to drama from the standpoint of bodily movement. Although the actions are portrayed verbally rather than visually, the reader is made to feel as if he is seeing them for himself. Similarly, the philosophe is careful not to overburden the reader with details, so that the near-dramatic pace is maintained and the vividness of the visual impression is enhanced. It is interesting to realize that Diderot cites the novels of Samuel Richardson as models in the depiction of movements that appeal strongly to the mind's eye. From the modern perspective, one might conclude that Diderot was more successful than Richardson in this regard, for the English author's action passages lack the compression and immediacy of comparable passages in Diderot. Nevertheless, it is possible to see in his appreciation of Richardson's efforts how important the philosophe considered the vivid portrayal of movements to be in the novel:

C'est la peinture des mouvements qui charme, surtout dans les romans domestiques. Voyez avec quelle complaisance l'auteur de Paméla, de Grandison et de Clarisse s'y arrête! Voyez quelle force, quel sens, et quel pathétique elle donne à son discours! Je vois le personnage; soit qu'il parle, soit qu'il se taise, je le vois; et son action m'affecte plus que ses paroles.²³

Because Diderot felt that the quasi-visual impression left by the graphic depiction of movements could be even

more effective than dialogue, he emphasizes his characters' actions to such a degree that Smietanski has likened the resulting impression to seeing a movie, the point being that one feels as if he is seeing the characters act, move, and change before his very eyes.²⁴ Very simple movements and human activities are recorded, as are conventional symbols such as the wink of an eye, but the most frequent purpose of gesture is to reveal character by portraying emotion and feeling.²⁵ Despite the occasional excess of the passages dealing with gesture, the overall result of the repeated notations of movements in Diderot's novels is an unmistakable impression of life²⁶ closely approaching that which may be achieved in the theater. A look at some specific examples taken from the three works under consideration will illustrate the ways in which Diderot uses gesture, pantomime, and physiognomy in the novel.

In La Religieuse, bodily movements are almost always employed to reveal the characters' personalities and feelings and, by so doing, to heighten the dramatic impact of a scene. In many cases, as a result of the philosophe's desire to eliminate confusion in the interpretation of a particular emotion, the use of gesture or facial expression is still heavily dependent on the familiar stereotypes set forth by Le Brun, from whose influence Diderot never managed to liberate himself completely.²⁷ Two good examples of this tendency to rely on traditional models are pointed out by

Jacques Proust.²⁸ The first recalls Le Brun's depiction of Effroi, or Terror, as a face convulsed with fear. The arms stiffen in front of the person, the legs give way, and the entire body is in an agitated state. When Suzanne is frightened, she shows many of the same traits: she trembles, her knees become weak, her mouth opens without a word, her arms are held out in a suppliant position, and she is unable to stand without assistance. Numerous scenes in La Religieuse involving Sister Suzanne in a state of fear could be cited as examples, but the ceremony which constitutes her first formal step into the religious life will illustrate the point:

Quoique les religieuses s'empressassent autour de moi pour me soutenir, vingt fois je sentis mes genoux se dérober, et je me vis prête à tomber sur les marches de l'autel. Je n'entendais rien, je ne voyais rien, j'étais stupide; on me menait, et j'allais; on m'interrogeait, et l'on répondait pour moi.²⁹

The second example mentioned by Proust of Diderot's reliance on Le Brun's models has to do with Désespoir, or Despair. This figure is portrayed as gnashing his teeth and frothing at the mouth. His forehead is wrinkled, his eyebrows are lowered, there is a wild look in his eye, his nostrils are distended, and his hair bristles. Moreover, he pulls out his hair, chews on his arms, lacerates himself, and throws himself about. Suzanne displays many of these rather extravagant characteristics at several points during her persecution at Longchamp. In the following excerpt from one

such scene, in which she is thrown into a subterranean cell in the convent, the connection between her behavior and that described by Le Brun as typical of the person in despair is obvious:

. . . je portai mes mains à ma gorge; je déchirai mon vêtement avec mes dents; je poussai des cris affreux; je hurlai comme une bête féroce; je me frappai la tête contre les murs; je me mis toute en sang; je cherchai à me détruire jusqu'à ce que les forces me manquassent, ce qui ne tarda pas.³⁰

Despite occasional excesses in passages such as these, the repeated notation of key movements does serve to create an impression of life, as Smietanski observes with reference to Jacques le fataliste.³¹ Additionally, the reader is adequately prepared for the onslaught of such emotional displays, which would degenerate into bathos if the situation which provoked them were any less serious. This suitability of the effect to the cause is in keeping with the principles of Diderot's dramatic theory dealing with adequate motivation for the events that take place on the stage,³² as well as being an unwritten law of good taste for all serious literary efforts.

Although it may be argued that Diderot was sometimes overly dependent upon the stereotyped expressions of Le Brun, the importance of bodily expression in La Religieuse can scarcely be challenged. A considerable portion of what the reader learns about the characters is derived from gestures and facial expressions, and the mood of a scene is

often set by just such actions. Suzanne's extreme innocence and naïveté make it easy to observe how a given situation affects her; she lacks the ability to conceal her feelings. The reader is consequently led to make his own observations and to draw his own conclusions, as he would have to do if he were part of an audience at a theatrical performance. In a particularly dramatic scene toward the first of the novel, Diderot accomplishes several goals by allowing Suzanne's movements to speak for themselves. The contents of the upsetting letter from Mme Simonin which Suzanne receives at her first convent are never specifically revealed, but the reader can guess its general drift perfectly well from Suzanne's reactions. In addition, the depth of Suzanne's aversion to the cloistered life is felt very clearly, which is an important bit of information about the main character. Finally, the mood that is created by the use of gesture and facial expression enhances the dramatic impact of the scene. Especially worthy of note are the changes that one can see taking place in Suzanne as she reads the message that shows her parents adamant in their demand that she become a nun:

. . . je pris la lettre, je la lus d'abord avec assez de fermeté; mais à mesure que j'avancais, la frayeur, l'indignation, la colère, le dépit, différentes passions se succédant en moi, j'avais différentes voix, je prenais différents visages et je faisais différents mouvements. Quelquefois je tenais à peine ce papier, ou je le tenais comme si j'eusse voulu le déchirer, ou je le serrais violemment comme si j'avais été tentée de le froisser et de le jeter loin de moi.³³

An image that runs throughout La Religieuse is that of Suzanne on her knees or in some similar position of helplessness. These postures carry with them different meanings, depending upon the situation, but they usually serve to reinforce the impression of Suzanne as an innocent sufferer with little control over her own fate. She throws herself at the feet of her mother to ask forgiveness, and at the feet of her persecutors at Longchamp to beg for mercy; on both occasions, she is rejected.³⁴ In at least one case, the prostrate position shows her reverence before God, although a bit of pride enters the picture as she carefully notes her own attitude in contrast to that of her partner: "Ma compagne priaît, droite; moi, je me prosternai; mon front était appuyé contre la dernière marche de l'autel, et mes bras étaient étendus sur les marches supérieures."³⁵ The most pathetic example of Suzanne in an inferior pose portrays her as "couchée à terre, la tête et le dos appuyés contre un des murs, les bras croisés sur la poitrine,"³⁶ blocking the passageway from the choir, from which she has been excluded. The quasi-visual impression left by this passage greatly adds to the overall mood of the scene and emphasizes Suzanne's helplessness before her oppressors.

A remarkable account of the Arpajon mother superior's journey into insanity could be pieced together solely on the basis of her changing physical characteristics, so vivid is that aspect of her experience. From the outset it is clear

that her personality lacks a certain stability. Suzanne's initial impressions of her are recorded in considerable detail: she is plump but quick in her movements, her head is always in motion, there is always something not quite right in her clothing, her eyes are "pleins de feu et distraits," she moves her arms rather awkwardly when she walks, and she stutters a bit because her thoughts are never organized when she opens her mouth. When she is seated, she squirms in her chair, scratches herself, and crosses her legs. She is easily distracted and prone to change her mind without warning, and her fact attests to the imbalance of her mind.³⁷ In this striking picture of the mother superior, the reader can detect the seeds of a mental disorder that will become progressively more severe. The first concrete signs that her condition is worsening come when she begins to wander in the corridors at night, stopping to sigh and groan at Suzanne's door.³⁸ She begins to follow Suzanne everywhere, and her general physical deterioration is evident by her difficulty in walking and by the faded look in her eyes. One even sees her kneeling at Suzanne's feet³⁹ in a position of helplessness that had often characterized Suzanne herself at Longchamp. In the second stage of her illness, the mother superior begins to live in a sort of devout seclusion. A veil covers her face, and she speaks to no one except to ask for the prayers of the community.⁴⁰ When she encounters any of the nuns, she hides her face or assumes a prostrate

position with her face to the floor. On one such occasion, she even invites Suzanne to trample her underfoot,⁴¹ a request that recalls Suzanne's experience outside the choir door at the Longchamp convent. Finally, it is clear that the mother superior has gone completely mad, for she alternately laughs and cries and rushes about, trembling, as if pursued by her own hallucinations, only to stop and press her face against the ground in exhaustion.⁴² In a chilling scene foreshadowed very early in the book by the insane nun who has escaped from her cell and whose actions leave such a strong impression on the newly arrived Suzanne, the mother superior escapes from her guards and, having torn her clothes to shreds, runs naked through the corridors, demanding at the top of her lungs that she be returned to her position of authority.⁴³ The total effect of all these visual impressions is to give the reader a remarkably clear conception of the mother superior's troubled personality based on a detailed portrayal of her movements. Furthermore, her steadily worsening condition has inevitable repercussions in the convent as a whole, and so a mood is created that intensifies the dramatic impact of all the convent scenes.

In some cases in La Religieuse, gestures and expressions serve to betray the characters' true condition or state of mind by revealing what they mean to conceal. The best example of this situation comes at the end of the book, when

Suzanne is desperately trying to hide her status as a runaway nun. She runs the risk of being discovered because she seems powerless to break the deeply ingrained habits of the religious life, such as crossing herself or kneeling at the sound of a bell, or crossing her arms over her chest and bowing at the arrival of a stranger.⁴⁴ Yet the body is also used for deceptive purposes, as Roger Kempf points out.⁴⁵ The cruel mother superior of Longchamp crosses herself in a hypocritical show of piety as she accuses Suzanne of being possessed.⁴⁶ The first mother superior with whom Suzanne comes in contact feigns a state of sadness so convincing as she hands Suzanne the letter from her mother that her performance actually recalls Le Brun's Tristesse figure:⁴⁷

Son visage était celui de la tristesse et de l'abattement; les bras lui tombaient; il semblait que sa main n'eût pas la force de soulever cette lettre; elle me regardait; des larmes semblaient rouler dans ses yeux; elle se taisait⁴⁸

Thus, the bodily movements in La Religieuse are not always to be taken at face value, but their importance for showing character development and for the overall dramatic impact of the book can scarcely be overemphasized.

Gesture and pantomime are absolutely crucial to the effect of Le Neveu de Rameau. Of the three novels under consideration in the present study, this one depends the most heavily upon the resources of dialogue and gesture. It is the latter element that gives life to the encounter between the philosophe and the bohemian and serves to fix

the character of Rameau's nephew in the reader's mind as an extraordinary literary creation. Lui's gestures are so essential to the reader's impression of him that they become an inseparable part of his personality, as Herbert Josephs observes:

It is impossible to evoke the image of Rameau's Nephew without calling forth simultaneously his many gestures: the burlesque gestures and the feverish gestures, the impulsive gestures, the gestures that reveal suffering, the gestures that conceal an ironic smile.⁴⁹

This aspect of Lui's makeup evidently has its roots in the personality of the historical nephew of the great musician, for it has been said that the entire Rameau family was endowed with "le geste prompt."⁵⁰ The use of gesture and pantomime brings Le Neveu de Rameau very close indeed to drama, for the reader is practically forced to visualize the extravagant movements of a young man whose talents as a mime have been developed in the absence of the creative genius that he would have preferred. The nephew is inclined not only to gesticulate freely, but to act out what he has to say from time to time. This habit gives his conversation an exaggerated quality that is at once fascinating and ridiculous. In any case, the reader's imagination is stimulated. To take an example, the nephew at one point is enumerating the things he tells himself that he might have had if he had become a great musician, and his recitation is punctuated with a series of little pantomimes:

Tu aurais une bonne maison (et il mesurait l'étendue avec ses bras), un bon lit (et il s'y étendait nonchalamment), de bons vins (qu'il goûtait en faisant claquer sa langue contre son palais), un bon équipage (et il levait le pied pour y monter), de jolies femmes (à qui il prenait déjà la gorge et qu'il regardait voluptueusement), cent faquins me viendraient encenser tous les jours (et il croyait les voir autour de lui; . . . il les entendait, il se rengorgeait, les approuvait, leur souriait, les dédaignait, les méprisait, les chassait, les rappelait . . .).⁵¹

Lui proves himself to be equally versatile at acting out his interlocutor's conversation whenever the topic lends itself to that kind of expression. Thus, when the philosophe advises the nephew to go back to the home of his former benefactors and to beg their forgiveness for the mistake that caused him to be dismissed, Moi sees his counsel imitated in gesture even as he speaks. As if according to a script, the young mime throws himself at the imaginary matron's feet with his face to the ground and, between sobs, promises her that he never will have any common sense.⁵²

A certain dramatic tension is built up in Le Neveu de Rameau by a gradual increase in the length and intensity of the nephew's performances. The work builds to a climax largely through the use of gesture. Toward the first of the book Lui's conversation is interspersed with sweeping gestures, and he occasionally indulges in a short pantomime to dramatize a point. Little by little these short performances lengthen and demand more attention until, at last, their significance transcends the nephew's immediate

purposes to become a symbol of the universal human comedy. As one might expect from his background, Lui imitates the musician as a point of departure. He does such an energetically realistic impression of a violin soloist that Moi actually confesses to feeling as uncomfortable in his presence as he does before the virtuosos of a concert, who go through similar convulsions in order to produce a beautiful sound. The nephew, like any good actor, uses his entire body to convey his message: "il bat la mesure du pied, il se démène de la tête, des pieds, des mains, des bras, du corps."⁵³ Immediately following his imitation of a violinist, Lui does an admirable pantomime on the clavichord. As his fingers fly over the imaginary keyboard, the various moods of the music are reflected in his face, just as in La Religieuse Suzanne's face reveals a succession of emotions as she reads the letter from her mother:

Les passions se succédaient sur son visage. On y distinguait la tendresse, la colère, le plaisir, la douleur; on sentait les piano, les forte, et je suis sûr qu'un plus habile que moi aurait reconnu le morceau au mouvement, au caractère, à ses mines et à quelques traits de chant qui lui échappaient par intervalle.⁵⁴

These passages, despite their vigor, seem tame by comparison with the ones that appear later in the novel. As the nephew's frenzy reaches a peak, and as the novel reaches its climax, one finds him acting out not only the part of a single musician, but portraying an entire lyric theater in song and in pantomime.⁵⁵ He imitates every imaginable type

of singer and the characters that they play, so that he is "successivement furieux, radouci, impérieux, ricaneur."⁵⁶ He also takes on the parts of the various instruments and of the dancers and seems bent on playing them all at once. As Josephs points out, the nephew's pantomime takes on the qualities of a ritual, and his gestures resemble those of some primitive ceremony.⁵⁷ Since drama has its roots in such religious rites, perhaps there is a connection between Lui's frantic pantomime and drama in its earliest forms. But the nephew's dramatic activity does not stop with the portrayal of a lyric theater; it expands a few pages later to become a universal human comedy, taking in the roles that constitute a way of life for the highest as well as the lowest ranks of society. Josephs sees in this final symbolic pantomime a complete commedia dell'arte performance created by movements alone, in which all the stock characters may be recognized by the positions they assume.⁵⁸ The first stage of the nephew's presentation is the dance of the beggars and sycophants. In it, Diderot carefully builds up the visual effects so that the reader is compelled to see the performer's movements in his mind's eye:

Puis il se met à sourire, à contrefaire l'homme admirateur, l'homme suppliant, l'homme complaisant; il a le pied droit en avant, le gauche en arrière, le dos courbé, la tête relevée, le regard comme attaché sur d'autres yeux, la bouche entr'ouverte, les bras portés vers quelque objet; il attend un ordre, il le reçoit, il part comme un trait, il revient, il est exécuté, il en rend compte; il est attentif à tout; il ramasse

ce qui tombe; il place un oreiller ou un tabouret sous des pieds; il tient une soucoupe, il approche une chaise, il ouvre une porte; il ferme une fenêtre, il tire des rideaux; il observe le maître et la maîtresse; il est immobile, les bras pendants, les jambes parallèles; il écoute; il cherche à lire sur des visages, et il ajoute: "Voilà ma pantomime, à peu près la même que celle des flatteurs, des courtisans, des valets et des gueux."⁵⁹

When Moi recognizes in this performance the basic steps of the entire human race, the king included, Lui is motivated to expand upon his pantomime so that the beggarly characteristics of society's upper strata are specifically acted out. The hypocritical petit abbé is portrayed as holding his hat under his left arm and his breviary in his left hand as he lifts the train of his robe with his right hand; as he moves forward, his head leans slightly over one shoulder, and his eyes are lowered.⁶⁰ To play the coquettish young woman, "il allait à petits pas, il portait sa tête au vent, il jouait de l'éventail, il se démenait de la croupe" ⁶¹

Much of the vigor of the nephew's gestures and pantomimes results from the fact that his models are genuine human beings. Le Brun's emotional stereotypes are remarkably absent in Le Neveu de Rameau. Lui is not only an apt mime, but an astute observer of the human condition. He is aware that man's social destiny in general, and his own destiny in particular, revolve around theatricality and play-acting.⁶²

As the nephew seeks to act out the human comedy and his place in it, the character of the novel as a whole moves closer and closer to drama. According to Herbert Dieckmann,

"dans le Neveu de Rameau, nous ne sommes pas seulement à deux pas du théâtre; nous sommes au théâtre."⁶³

Jacques le fataliste offers a rich array of gesture that enlivens the story and brings it close to drama in visual appeal. Everything from elementary movements to the most exaggerated gesticulations is to be found. Occasionally, simple gestures are used as a sort of sign language to communicate simple ideas: the hostess of the Grand-Cerf places her finger against her lips to silence Jacques and his master; the master makes a sign to indicate to the hostess that Jacques's head is a bit muddled and receives a sympathetic shrug of the shoulders in return; a wink of the eye conveys the marquis' thanks to Mme de La Pommeraye for seating him across from the pretty young dévote.⁶⁴ In the majority of cases, however, the body is used to convey more complex messages, usually in relation to the characters' personalities or to their emotions and feelings in a given situation.⁶⁵ From time to time the outward expression of an inner state is again greatly indebted to Le Brun's formulas, as was the case in La Religieuse. For example, Dame Marquerite's state of passion has much in common with Le Brun's Ravissement, or Ecstasy, figure⁶⁶ (and, incidentally, with the similar emotional state of the Arpajon mother superior in La Religieuse). Her bosom rises, her voice and her entire body become weak, she trembles, her eyes close, and her mouth is in a half-opened position.⁶⁷

The figure of Désespoir, or Despair, is represented in la d'Aisnon, who sobs, tears at her hair, and twists her arms in remorse for her deception of the marquis, and in Jacques himself, from whom the supposed death of his captain evokes a similar response.⁶⁸ Despite the occasional appearance of such stereotypes, bodily movements are generally used very skillfully to provide the reader with a visible barometer of character and emotion.

A greater portion of the reader's information on the personalities of the various characters is gained from an observation of their behavior than from any detailed physical description.⁶⁹ Jacques's master is a good example of this principle. As Smietanski points out, the reader will not find even the slightest bit of physical description about him, yet the novel abounds with indications as to his conduct, his idiosyncrasies, and his gestures.⁷⁰ Perhaps the most significant aspect of his character is the rather limited quality of his mind, especially by comparison with the intelligent and resourceful Jacques. This personality trait is reflected in "les trois grandes ressources de sa vie, qui se passait à prendre du tabac, à regarder l'heure qu'il était, à questionner Jacques, et cela dans toutes les combinaisons."⁷¹ Deprived of any one of these "ressources," the master scarcely knows how to behave. The point is driven home by frequent repetition; the master is portrayed as forever taking some tobacco, looking at his watch, and

depending on Jacques for his entertainment. To take another example, some of the reader's first impressions of the garrulous inn hostess are received from the way she behaves toward her dog, Nicole, whom she treats like a pampered child. The dog is cradled, caressed, and even kissed.⁷² All of these actions have something to say about the hostess' personality. Roger Kempf goes one step further to suggest that the body is like a text to be decoded.⁷³ Just as Sister Suzanne fears that her deeply ingrained habits of convent life will give away her status as a runaway nun, Jacques is able to guess that Richard is a former religious from a collection of physical clues. The description of the ex-monk's behavior is remarkable for its precision and its visual quality:

Il était d'une timidité qui se peignait sur son visage; il portait sa tête un peu penchée sur l'épaule gauche; il était silencieux, et n'avait presque aucun usage du monde. S'il faisait la révérence, il inclinait la partie supérieure de son corps sans remuer ses jambes; assis, il avait le tic de prendre les basques de son habit et de les croiser sur ses cuisses; de tenir ses mains dans les fentes, et d'écouter ceux qui parlaient, les yeux presque fermés.⁷⁴

If gesture is important as a means of elaborating character development in Jacques le fataliste, it is also essential for the communication of the characters' thoughts and feelings at any given moment. As Jacques himself observes, it is by the outward physical evidence of inner experience that one person understands what another is

feeling: "Je plains ceux ou celles qui se tordent les bras, qui s'arrachent les cheveux, qui poussent des cris, parce que je sais par expérience qu'on ne fait pas cela sans souffrir."⁷⁵ The reader understands that the husband of the farm woman who takes in the wounded Jacques is worried, not because Diderot says so explicitly, but because he sees the man pacing the floor and nodding his head in the direction of Jacques's bed.⁷⁶ The agitation of the Marquis des Arcis is similarly evident when, smitten by the young Mlle d'Aisnon, and knowing that he must confess his feelings to Mme de La Pommeraye, he paces up and down, goes to the window, looks at the sky, stops in front of Mme de La Pommeraye, goes to the door to call his servants for no good reason, and sends them away, only to go back and stand in front of his former mistress.⁷⁷ The new Mme des Arcis is the picture of remorse when she must face the marquis, who has learned the truth about her background. Approaching him on her knees, she is trembling and disheveled. Her head is lifted, and she gazes into her husband's eyes, her face flooded with tears.⁷⁸ Scenes such as this one create a heavily dramatic mood, as well as reveal much about the emotions of the characters involved. Other scenes take on a comic tone while making skillful use of gesture to convey emotion. The encounter in Bigre's hovel between the youthful Jacques and Justine, played out in pantomime, portrays Jacques's roguish intentions and Justine's desperate pleading in a humorous

way.⁷⁹ The movements of the enraged village vicar, who appears "criant, jurant, écumant, se débattant de la tête, des pieds, des mains, de tout le corps, et prêt à se jeter du haut du fenil en bas, au hasard de se tuer,"⁸⁰ not only communicate an emotion, but are exaggerated for comic effect.

As was the case in La Religieuse, gestures in Jacques le fataliste are sometimes used to cover up rather than to reveal the characters' underlying motivations and feelings. The Marquise de La Pommeraye is an excellent example of this ability to deceive. The success of her plot for revenge against the Marquis des Arcis depends not only upon what she says, but upon the successful use of bodily communication to reinforce the impression she is trying to create. Thus, she covers her eyes with her hands, bows her head, and even weeps during the scene in which she tells the marquis that she no longer loves him.⁸¹ But all of these movements are calculated to trick the marquis into confessing his lack of constancy. They do not reflect the true feelings of the marquise. The Chevalier de Saint-Ouin is similarly versed in the fine art of deception through gesture, although he shows considerably less restraint than Mme de La Pommeraye. When he weeps as he embraces Jacques's master and buries his face in his hands in shame at the very thought of betraying a friend,⁸² one may be certain that the emotion implicit in his actions is simulated. Even more ludicrously insincere in view of his real intentions is the

scene in which he opens his shirt and offers to thrust a knife into his body if that is the punishment which Jacques's master has in mind for him.⁸³

It would be possible to mention many more instances of the dramatic use of gesture, pantomime, and physiognomy in the major novels of Diderot, but the examples considered in this section are sufficient to show how much importance the philosophe placed upon physical movement and expression to accomplish his purposes. With very few exceptions, he prefers to prod the reader into active participation as much like that of the theatergoer as possible. Diderot shuns static description in favor of animated portrayals of characters who reveal much about themselves and their situations by the way in which they move about. The reader is forced to weigh the quasi-visual evidence for himself and to come to his own conclusions. The success of this particular dramatic technique in the novels under consideration may be partially measured by the vivid mental picture that the reader is able to formulate of the major characters, despite a notable absence of straightforward physical description. Jacques's preferred method of presenting a character's thoughts and feelings appears to work as well in the novel as in the theater: "Un mot, un geste m'en ont quelquefois plus appris que le bavardage de toute une ville."⁸⁴ Diderot manipulates these words and gestures to which Jacques refers, along with the elements that form the backdrop for the

action, to construct three very different novels that share a definite dramatic flavor. A look at some of the stylistic and structural traits also used to help create this impression will be undertaken in the next section.

NOTES

¹ Stephen Minot, Three Genres: The Writing of Fiction, Poetry, and Drama (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1965), p. 242.

² The entire anecdote appears in Denis Diderot, Lettre sur les sourds et muets à l'usage de ceux qui entendent et qui parlent, Oeuvres complètes de Diderot, ed. J. Assézat, I (Paris: Garnier Frères, 1875), 359. Hereafter cited as Lettre sur les sourds et muets.

³ Lester G. Crocker, ed., "Introduction," Lettre sur les sourds et muets, by Denis Diderot, in Anthologie de la littérature française du XVIII^e siècle (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1972), p. 331.

⁴ Arthur M. Wilson, Diderot (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972), p. 696.

⁵ J. Assézat, ed., Oeuvres complètes de Diderot, I (Paris: Garnier Frères, 1875), xxi, n. 2.

⁶ Georges May, Quatre Visages de Denis Diderot (Paris: Boivin et Cie, 1951), p. 177. See also Wilson, pp. 632-33.

⁷ Denis Diderot, Salon de 1767, Oeuvres complètes de Diderot, ed. J. Assézat, XI (Paris: Garnier Frères, 1876),

21.

⁸ Wilson, p. 522.

⁹ Jacques Proust, "Diderot et la physiognomie," Cahiers de l'Association Internationale des Etudes Françaises, 13 (1961), 320. The full title of Le Brun's treatise is Méthode pour apprendre à deviner les passions, proposée dans une conférence sur l'expression générale et particulière par M. Le Brun, premier peintre du roi, chancelier et directeur de l'Académie royale de peinture et de sculpture, enrichie d'un grand nombre de figures très bien dessinées.

¹⁰ Wilson, p. 522.

¹¹ Proust, p. 321.

¹² Herbert Dieckmann, "Le Thème de l'acteur dans la pensée de Diderot," Cahiers de l'Association Internationale des Etudes Françaises, 13 (1961), 164. Hereafter cited as "Le Thème de l'acteur."

¹³ Denis Diderot, "Réponse à la lettre de Mme Riccoboni," Oeuvres complètes de Diderot, ed. J. Assézat, VII (Paris: Garnier Frères, 1875), 399.

¹⁴ Daniel Mornet, Diderot: L'Homme et l'oeuvre (Paris: Boivin et Cie, 1941), p. 170.

¹⁵ Michael T. Cartwright, "La Formation de l'expression

chez Diderot," Diderot Studies, 13, ed. Otis Fellows and Diana Guiragossian (Geneva: Librairie Droz S. A., 1969), 86.

16 Diderot, Lettre sur les sourds et muets, pp. 354-55.

17 Denis Diderot, De la poésie dramatique, Oeuvres complètes de Diderot, ed. J. Assézat, VII (Paris: Garnier Frères, 1875), 378. Hereafter cited as De la poésie dramatique.

18 Denis Diderot, Dorval et moi: Second Entretien, Oeuvres complètes de Diderot, ed. J. Assézat, VII (Paris: Garnier Frères, 1875), 104.

19 Diderot, De la poésie dramatique, p. 379.

20 Ibid., p. 386.

21 S. W. Dawson, Drama and the Dramatic, The Critical Idiom, No. 11, ed. John D. Jump (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1970), p. 80.

22 Diderot, De la poésie dramatique, p. 385.

23 Ibid., p. 380.

24 Jacques Smietanski, Le Réalisme dans Jacques le fataliste (Paris: Librairie A. G. Nizet, 1965), p. 118.

25 Ibid., pp. 118-20.

- 26 Smietanski, pp. 123-24.
- 27 Cartwright, p. 87.
- 28 Proust, p. 327.
- 29 Denis Diderot, La Religieuse, Oeuvres, ed. André Billy (Paris: Editions Gallimard, 1951), p. 239. Hereafter cited as La Religieuse.
- 30 Ibid., p. 276.
- 31 Smietanski, pp. 123-24.
- 32 Denis Diderot, Dorval et moi: Premier Entretien, Oeuvres complètes de Diderot, ed. J. Assézat, VII (Paris: Garnier Frères, 1875), 88.
- 33 Diderot, La Religieuse, p. 242.
- 34 Ibid., pp. 252, 275.
- 35 Ibid., p. 281.
- 36 Ibid., p. 294.
- 37 Ibid., p. 329.
- 38 Ibid., pp. 354, 374.
- 39 Ibid., p. 374.
- 40 Ibid., pp. 376-77.

- 41 Diderot, La Religieuse, pp. 377-78.
- 42 Ibid., pp. 385-86.
- 43 Ibid., pp. 387-88.
- 44 Ibid., p. 392.
- 45 Roger Kempf, Diderot et le roman: ou Le Démon de la présence (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1964), p. 196.
- 46 Diderot, La Religieuse, p. 288.
- 47 Proust, pp. 326-27.
- 48 Diderot, La Religieuse, pp. 241-42.
- 49 Herbert Josephs, Diderot's Dialogue of Language and Gesture: Le Neveu de Rameau (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1969), p. 122.
- 50 André Billy, Diderot (Paris: Les Editions de France, 1932), p. 420.
- 51 Denis Diderot, Le Neveu de Rameau, Oeuvres, ed. André Billy (Paris: Editions Gallimard, 1951), pp. 404-05. Hereafter cited as Le Neveu de Rameau.
- 52 Ibid., p. 408.
- 53 Ibid., p. 412.

- 54 Diderot, Le Neveu de Rameau, p. 413.
- 55 Ibid., pp. 454-56.
- 56 Ibid., p. 454.
- 57 Josephs, pp. 171-72.
- 58 Ibid., p. 188.
- 59 Diderot, Le Neveu de Rameau, p. 470.
- 60 Ibid., p. 471.
- 61 Ibid., p. 473.
- 62 Josephs, p. 189.
- 63 Dieckmann, "Le Thème de l'acteur," p. 166.
- 64 Denis Diderot, Jacques le fataliste et son maître, Oeuvres, ed. André Billy (Paris: Editions Gallimard, 1951), pp. 555, 561, 591. Hereafter cited as Jacques le fataliste.
- 65 Smietanski, p. 120.
- 66 Proust, p. 326.
- 67 Diderot, Jacques le fataliste, p. 650.
- 68 Proust, p. 327. See also Diderot, Jacques le fataliste, pp. 601, 512.

⁶⁹ While there is a general lack of descriptive passages on major characters, secondary characters are sometimes described in a little more detail, perhaps for economy's sake. See Smietanski, pp. 37-40.

⁷⁰ Smietanski, p. 37.

⁷¹ Diderot, Jacques le fataliste, p. 494.

⁷² Ibid., p. 554.

⁷³ Roger Kempf, "Deux Essais sur Diderot: No. 1, La Présence et le corps chez Diderot," Revue des Sciences Humaines, 100 (1960), 425.

⁷⁴ Diderot, Jacques le fataliste, pp. 617-18.

⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 488.

⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 485.

⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 588.

⁷⁸ Ibid., p. 601.

⁷⁹ Ibid., pp. 641-42.

⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 652.

⁸¹ Ibid., pp. 564-65.

⁸² Ibid., p. 677.

83 Diderot, Jacques le fataliste, p. 680.

84 Ibid., p. 688.

CHAPTER VI

STYLE AND STRUCTURE

Generally speaking, it is on the basis of style that literary works are categorized into genres. While it is true that the boundaries separating the various genres are by no means fixed and indisputable, the word drama nevertheless implies a certain manner of expression, or style, that distinguishes it from other types of literature. On the simplest level, dramatic style is characterized by the use of dialogue as the chief verbal means of communication. The customary way of recording dramatic dialogue on the printed page is simply to write the characters' speeches after their names, which appear indented a few spaces from the left margin. This conventional method allows the playwright to indicate clearly and concisely which character is to speak and when his part comes in. The need for this type of notation becomes apparent when one considers that most plays are meant to be presented on a stage by a company of actors who will actually speak the words of the dialogue in as realistic and lifelike a way as possible. Because visual effects are equally important to the impact of the work, the playwright usually inserts brief instructions dealing with the actors' movements on the stage or the way in which the

setting is to be handled at appropriate points in the dialogue. When one encounters a literary work incorporating the foregoing characteristics, it is only natural to think of it as a play.

Still, dramatic style is made up of more than these superficial features. For example, in order to maintain the conflict and the rapid pace that the genre requires,¹ the playwright must express himself in the most concrete and vigorous of terms. Each word must be made to carry the maximum impact. Thus, the sentence in a well-written dramatic dialogue is typically shorter, more concise, and simpler in structure than its often tortuous counterpart in everyday conversation. It also bears little resemblance to the type of sentence used by the omniscient author who engages in abstract psychological analyses. The verbs are very often in the present tense, and adjectives are of less importance than in a more elaborate style. It has been mentioned in an earlier chapter that Diderot recommended "des cris, des mots inarticulés, des voix rompues, quelques monosyllabes qui s'échappent par intervalles, je ne sais quel murmure dans la gorge, entre les dents,"² as appropriate language for use in the drama. While the overuse of such devices had a deleterious effect upon his own early plays, it is clear from suggestions such as these that he recognized the need for shorter, more emotion-laden sentences in dramatic writing. Diderot insisted that the kind of "petits

incidents" that contribute so much to a novel's verisimilitude would not be at all effective in a play,³ an observation that takes into account the need for the elimination of superfluous details so that every word is important to the ultimate effect. Furthermore, as the philosophe is careful to point out, the playwright should include in his work only those actions that seem credible or true, and he must be able to distinguish the actions from this category that should be presented on the stage from the ones that are better left behind the scenes.⁴ This plea for verisimilitude and good taste shows a sensitivity to the need to absorb the audience in the action taking place on the stage by making it seem plausible. Finally, the matter of tone must be taken into consideration. The language of the stage must be exaggerated enough to make an impression on the audience, without going to extremes that would make it seem too far removed from everyday conversation. Diderot was very much aware of the need for more vigorous expression on the stage than would be appropriate in normal social intercourse. The following observation on the subject of the kind of banter suitable for the theater will serve to illustrate his views:

[La plaisanterie de société] serait trop faible sur la scène, et n'y ferait aucun effet. [La plaisanterie de théâtre] serait trop dure dans le monde, et elle offenserait. Le cynisme, si odieux, si incommode dans la société, est excellent sur la scène.⁵

Not only is there a certain overall tone appropriate for the stage, but there is a tone suitable for each individual character in a play, as in society.⁶ Although the idea of fitting a character's language to his station and personality was not to come into its own until the nineteenth century, it is significant that it appears in rudimentary form in Diderot's dramatic theory.

The problem of incorporating these stylistic elements into a coherent whole falls under the heading of structure, which Dawson defines as the "identifiable means by which a dramatist relates the parts of the play to each other and to the whole, and keeps before our attention what is most central to the action."⁷ Diderot had very definite ideas about the ways in which plays should be constructed. For example, he states his preference for a play that observes the unity of action over one that is "chargée d'incidents."⁸ In addition, he argues for the necessity of linking the various events in such a way that the sensible spectator will be able to discern a good reason for each one.⁹ Still another of his recommendations is that scenes involving dialogue be interspersed with silent scenes composed solely of pantomimes or tableaux.¹⁰ In view of this concern for structure, it is interesting, although not surprising when one takes into consideration the philosophe's volatile personality, that he had great difficulty in constructing his own plays.¹¹ The rigors of formal, systematic composition

seemed to run counter to his inclination toward freedom and spontaneity. Diderot's preference for the relatively unrestricted dialogue form¹² that appears in works other than his plays reflects this aspect of his temperament, as does a criticism that he once directed against the author of a treatise entitled De l'Esprit. Helvétius, he claimed, had really spoiled his work by being overly methodical:

Il est très-méthodique; et c'est un de ses défauts principaux: premièrement, parce que la méthode, quand elle est d'appareil, refroidit, appesantit et ralentit; secondement, parce qu'elle ôte à tout l'air de liberté et de génie¹³

Because of this dislike for structural limitations that he considered too strict, then, the philosophe did not fare as well within the rather narrow confines of the dramatic structure per se as he did in applying many of the same principles to the somewhat freer framework of the novel.

If he was only marginally successful at utilizing the stylistic and structural techniques under consideration here in his own dramatic works, Diderot seems, paradoxically, to have had little difficulty in applying them to the novel form. As the reader will presently see, all of the three major novels reveal a wide use of style and structure that would normally be considered dramatic in nature and origin. Twentieth-century students of narrative form have likened many of the philosophe's tales to movie scripts, and the Mme de La Pommeraye episode in Jacques le fataliste has in fact been made into a film.¹⁴ Perhaps the most basic reason for

this resemblance to dramatic form is, as previously mentioned, the omnipresence of dialogue and the correspondingly reduced importance of pure narrative style in the novels.¹⁵ The very arrangement of the dialogue on the page suggests that which is typical of a play, for the characters' speeches are generally printed either directly after their names, as in Le Neveu de Rameau, or immediately following an indented dash indicating a change of speaker, as in La Religieuse, or in a mixture of both styles, as in Jacques le fataliste. This direct method of writing dialogue, with its omission of novelistic expressions such as reprit-il and dit-elle,¹⁶ tends to leave a more dramatic impression at first glance, and it raises the possibility that Diderot visualized the characters in just the kind of face-to-face dialogue that would take place on the stage. From time to time the reader even comes upon parenthetical indications dealing with the characters' actions that look for all the world like genuine stage directions.

In addition to these superficial areas of resemblance to the drama, there are more profound stylistic similarities between Diderot's novelistic expression and that type of language commonly found in theatrical works. The philosophe's novelistic dialogue is fast-paced and full of the kind of animation that is a requirement for holding audience interest at a play. By shunning the conventional and rather artificial abstract psychological analysis of the omniscient

author, Diderot is able to maintain what Georges May calls "une allure plus dynamique, plus dramatique, plus mystérieuse et plus conforme à la réalité."¹⁷ The composition of the sentences provides some indication as to how such an effect is achieved: adjectives are deemphasized in favor of verbs and adverbs, and the present tense, reflecting action and movement, is used whenever possible.¹⁸ As Roger Kempf points out, Diderot does not hesitate to use the questions, exclamations, interruptions, repetitions, ellipses, cries, unarticulated words, broken voices, and monosyllables that he advocated for the theater in his novels,¹⁹ although the novels reveal more restraint in this area than do the plays. A sense of control is also in evidence in the philosophe's choice of details. As a general rule, the story is not burdened with nonessentials, and items of secondary importance are mentioned in passing to allow the reader to concentrate his attention on concerns of major interest. The tone of Diderot's novelistic dialogue also reflects his dramatic theory in that an extreme vigor of expression prevails, and a noticeable attempt is made to vary the tone of the main characters' language according to their individual life situations.²⁰

From a structural standpoint, the three major novels also reveal certain similarities to accepted dramatic practice. While the principle of providing adequate logical motivation for the actions that take place is not taken as

seriously in Jacques le fataliste as it is in the two earlier novels, in all three works the creation of scenes and the gradual accumulation of effects leading to a climax are often reminiscent of the theater. A further instance of the application of the philosophe's dramatic theory to the novels is the occasional alternation of spoken scenes with silent ones, a device used with great success to heighten the effect of selected passages or to provide needed variety. A separate examination of each of the works under study will permit a more thorough, if not exhaustive, investigation of the specific stylistic and structural aspects that reveal dramatic influence. While some of the ensuing analysis will inevitably refer to certain points that have already been mentioned, particularly with respect to dramatic dialogue, it is important to reexamine and expand upon these areas in the present context of style and structure.

The predominance of dialogue in La Religieuse, accented by the vivid presentation of appropriate gestures and the careful creation of a suitable backdrop, has already been discussed at some length. The extreme concision and vigor of the dialogue should now be emphasized. In the best dramatic tradition, hardly a word is wasted, and the result is the maintenance of a pace and tension rivaling those of the theater. A scene involving Suzanne and her friend, Sister Ursule, will serve as an example of the kind of compression that characterizes the dialogue throughout the book:

Soeur Sainte-Suzanne, dormez-vous?
 --Non, je ne dors pas. Qui est-ce?
 --C'est moi.
 --Qui, vous?
 --Votre amie, qui se meurt de peur, et qui
 s'expose à se perdre, pour vous donner un conseil,
 peut-être inutile. Ecoutez: Il y a, demain, ou
 après, visite du grand vicaire: vous serez ac-
 cusée; préparez-vous à vous défendre. Adieu;
 ayez du courage, et que le Seigneur soit avec
 vous.²¹

In a passage whose brevity reflects both the urgency of Ursule's message and the risk involved in her approaching Suzanne in secret to deliver it, the social amenities are quickly observed, Ursule acknowledges her fear, her warning is communicated to Suzanne, and she leaves with a word of encouragement; yet the entire encounter could not take much more than a few seconds. It is significant that this kind of compression is the rule rather than the exception in La Religieuse.

The judicious use of short exclamations heavy with emotion, of the type that Diderot recommended for the theater, adds much to the dramatic atmosphere of the novel while observing the principle of concision. M. Simonin's anger at Suzanne not only for upsetting her mother, but for symbolizing Mme Simonin's lapse from virtue by her very existence, finds expression in one menacing word: "Sortez!"²² The terror of a young nun at meeting Suzanne, whom she believes to be possessed by Satan, is conveyed in her appeal for rescue: "Mon Dieu! mon Dieu! Jésus! Marie! . . ." ²³ Finally, all of Suzanne's revulsion at

finding out the truth about the Arpajon mother superior is revealed in the exclamation that ends the detailed portion of her tale: "Quelle femme, monsieur le marquis, quelle abominable femme! . . ."24 Another important aspect of Diderot's attempt to express himself as directly as possible, in the best dramatic style, is his wide use of the present tense of verbs. Georges May attributes his shift to the present tense from the imperfect and composed past tenses of the memorialist to Diderot's intense identification with his story.²⁵ It is true that he was very much emotionally involved in his character Suzanne's plight. According to the philosophe's own account, a friend found him in tears one day as he was working on La Religieuse. When asked what was bothering him, Diderot is supposed to have replied: " . . . je me déssole d'un conte que je me fais."²⁶ Roger Kempf nevertheless proposes that this confusion of tenses was not done inadvertently, but with the purpose of forcing the recalcitrant language to move and come alive.²⁷ The use of the present tense in the second of the following two sentences describing Suzanne's departure from the Longchamp convent has an enlivening effect, especially by contrast with the first sentence:

Je ne demandai point à voir la supérieure; la soeur Ursule n'était plus; je ne quittais personne. Je descends; on m'ouvre les portes, après avoir visité ce que j'emportais; je monte dans un carrosse, et me voilà partie.²⁸

This brief passage also serves as a good example of the way

in which Diderot tends to summarize relatively unimportant events so that the reader's attention may be directed toward that which is of real significance. The actual transfer of Suzanne from one convent to the other is handled quickly, and interest is immediately channeled into her new experiences at Arpajon. In this way, the reader's mind has little opportunity to wander, and his involvement with the story is not allowed to waver for a single moment. Furthermore, by keeping the reader's energies constantly focused on hearing and seeing events of significance, by maintaining the action's speed and rhythm, and by enlisting constant sympathy for Suzanne's plight, Diderot succeeds in making his tale seem plausible in spite of the improbability of his main character's range of misfortunes.²⁹

The dramatic effect of La Religieuse is greatly enhanced by the dialogue's suitability of tone, both with respect to the individual character and to the mood of the particular scene. Roger Kempf has identified the repetition of the word petit as one of the recurrent stylistic eccentricities of the Arpajon mother superior's speech. She speaks of "petites indispositions, petits besoins, petit argent, petite amie, petits genoux, petite âme,"³⁰ and in so doing reveals something about her inner disorder. The extreme sobriety of the nuns' dialogue, particularly that of Suzanne and her friend Ursule, is similarly appropriate to their temperament and station in life. At times the

moderation of Suzanne's speech also serves to emphasize her position as an innocent victim, thereby adding to the pathos of an individual scene. The interrogation episode at Longchamp contains a good example of this effect. To the archdeacon's questions as to why she does not carry out her various religious obligations, Suzanne repeats a very simple reply: "C'est qu'on m'en empêche."³¹ There is even some evidence that she senses the dramatic possibilities of her role as suffering servant, for her expression frequently takes on a Biblical tone. On one occasion, Suzanne's enemies sense and are angered by her self-perception as something of a Christ figure as revealed in her prayer, which has unflattering implications for her persecutors:

Mon Dieu, je vous demande pardon des fautes
que j'ai faites, comme vous le demandâtes sur la
croix pour moi.

--Quel orgueil! s'écrièrent-elles; elles
[sic] se compare à Jésus-Christ, et elle nous com-
pare aux Juifs qui l'ont crucifié.³²

A further indication of Suzanne's awareness of the scriptural overtones of her persecution appears in the way she describes the archdeacon's instructions and her obedience. The repetition and sentence structure of his commands ("Faites un acte de foi," "Faites un acte d'amour") and of her invariable response (" . . . et je le fis") imitate the cadences of the Bible to a remarkable degree.³³ Just as Suzanne's words suit her disposition and status as an innocent victim who is nevertheless quite aware of the role she

is playing, the somewhat imperious tone of the archdeacon's orders seems to fit the authority of his position. His instructions are couched in the shortest and firmest of terms: "Qu'on la délie," "Qu'on lui lève son voile," "Allez."³⁴ The cumulative effect of these imperatives, along with his similarly concise questions, is to establish him as a formidable character. In addition, the authoritative tone of his communication combines with the simplicity of Suzanne's responses to enhance the dramatic tension of the interrogation scene.

In structure as well as in style, La Religieuse reveals the influence of the theater in general and of Diderot's dramatic theory in particular. One of the most obvious points in support of this connection is the extreme compactness of the story. La Religieuse is not a long novel, and it is free from the interpolated stories that had characterized the work of Lesage, Prevost, and Marivaux, among others.³⁵ The tale seems to divide itself naturally into three parts, which one might compare to the three acts in a play: Suzanne's experiences up to the installation of Mère Sainte-Christine as mother superior at Longchamp, the time of her persecution at Longchamp under the new mother superior, and her experiences at Saint-Eutrope d'Arpajon through the end of the book. The artistic merit of the contrast of mood between the main episodes has been observed by Vivienne Mylne, along with Diderot's gift for sustaining

the mood throughout each main division.³⁶ Still, the most striking structural link between La Religieuse and the dramatic genre becomes apparent at the level of individual scenes. Diderot excels at the effective combination of all the visual and auditory elements at his disposal to build up scenes that enlist the reader's total participation. The ceremony at which Suzanne refuses her vows is a good example.³⁷ The encounter presents a built-in conflict between Suzanne on the one hand and her family, along with the religious establishment, on the other. The preparation for the scene begins on the night before the ceremony is to take place, when Diderot allows the reader to see Suzanne unable to sleep in her extreme agitation. She prays for deliverance, lifting her hands toward heaven, and foresees the scandal that her refusal will cause. Through the use of gesture, the reader is allowed to see the extent of her despair, as the following passage demonstrates:

. . . il me prit une défaillance générale, je tombai évanouie sur mon traversin; un frisson dans lequel mes genoux se battaient et mes dents se frappaient avec bruit, succéda à cette défaillance; à ce frisson une chaleur terrible; mon esprit se troubla. Je ne me souviens ni de m'être déshabillée, ni d'être sortie de ma cellule; cependant on me trouva nue en chemise, étendue par terre à la porte de la supérieure, sans mouvement et presque sans vie.³⁸

The next morning she is exhausted and has no recollection of the night before. All of these effects foreshadow the scandal of the scene that will take place.

Just before the actual ceremony, bells are rung "pour apprendre à tout le monde qu'on allait faire une malheureuse."³⁹ Suzanne is carefully dressed for the occasion; mass is held; the vicar's sermon, in which Suzanne's virtues are praised, strikes her as ridiculous by comparison with her real inner state. During these preliminary activities, the tension of the scene begins to build. When the crucial moment arrives, Suzanne is unable to walk without help, and the reader is made to hear the sighs and sobs of the onlookers. Diderot depicts the audience as standing up, with some of the youngsters standing on chairs so that they can see the proceedings. A profound silence falls over the crowd, and the stage is set for the main action of the scene. At first those accompanying Suzanne are able to cover up for her unexpected answers, but her intention soon becomes clear. The assistants begin to murmur, Suzanne indicates that she wishes to speak, and there is silence again. By this point the scene has reached a very effective climax. Just as Suzanne begins her speech to the shocked audience, one of the nuns drops the veil of the grille, and Suzanne is led back in disgrace to her cell, where she is confined under lock and key. The touch of the dramatist is everywhere present in the careful construction of this important scene.

Finally, Diderot makes some attempt in La Religieuse to follow his own advice about the alternation of spoken with

silent scenes composed of tableaux in the theater. The most striking tableau in the novel has already been pointed out in an earlier section. It is a vivid and aesthetically pleasing picture of the youngest and prettiest nuns in the Arpajon convent gathered in the mother superior's room for an agreeable soirée.⁴⁰ From a structural point of view, the significant aspect of this scene is its placement between two spoken scenes involving Sister Sainte-Thérèse. The episode preceding the tableau consists of a conversation between Suzanne and the mother superior about the former favorite, and the one immediately following deals with Sister Sainte-Thérèse's attempt to gain admission to the gathering and Suzanne's efforts in her behalf. The intervening tableau provides just the needed relief at that point in the story, and serves later on as a powerful contrast to the scenes involving the insane mother superior.

Le Neveu de Rameau is very close indeed to the drama in style and structure and, as previously mentioned, it has actually been presented on the stage with some adaptations.⁴¹ René Taupin has called the work "une suite de scènes de comédie."⁴² From the standpoint of form the dramatic resemblance is striking. The novel is composed of page after page of dialogue printed directly after the characters' names, broken only by vivid indications as to gesture or setting and an occasional introductory or explanatory comment made by Moi. Some actions that are to accompany

certain parts of the dialogue are printed in parentheses, as if the author feared disturbing the continuity of the verbal exchange. Instructions such as "Puis il se remettait à chanter l'ouverture des Indes galantes et l'air Profonds abîmes, et il ajoutait," "(Et mettant sa main droite sur sa poitrine, il ajoutait)," or "s'approchant de mon oreille, me répondit,"⁴³ have the appearance of stage directions printed in a play, and they perform roughly the same function. They, along with the longer passages dealing with gesture, are indispensable for helping the reader to visualize the action. As discussed in a previous section, the visual background is also filled in by brief but vivid indications as to setting.

The stylistic attributes of the dialogue in Le Neveu de Rameau deserve closer scrutiny, since dialogue makes up the major portion of the novel. One important point is that the dramatic ideals of vigor and concreteness are scrupulously observed. Elaborate sentence structure, esoteric symbolism, and vague illustrations are not allowed to intrude on the basically simple, straightforward style. Much importance is placed on the resources of the verb, the use of actual proper names, and the incorporation of strikingly imaginative images to enliven the dialogue. Examples of all three techniques, besides the rhetorical device of repetition to drive home a point, may be found in the following passage, in which the nephew is daydreaming aloud about the greatness which has eluded him:

Et c'est ainsi que l'on te dirait le matin que tu es un grand homme, tu lirais dans l'histoire des Trois siècles que tu es un grand homme; tu serais convaincu le soir que tu es un grand homme; et le grand homme, Rameau le neveu, s'endormirait au doux murmure de l'éloge qui retentirait dans son oreille; même en dormant, il aurait l'air satisfait: sa poitrine se dilaterait, s'élèverait, s'abaîsserait avec aisance; il ronflerait comme un grand homme.⁴⁴

The verbs in this passage are exceedingly important to its effect, particularly toward the end, where they are instrumental in building up the image of the self-satisfied man who has attained worldly success. One can almost see his regular breathing and hear him snore from the nephew's description. The mention of an actual work of the period, Les Trois siècles de notre littérature, in which Diderot's bitter enemy Palissot had had a part,⁴⁵ would have greatly enhanced the concrete quality of the work for the informed reader of Diderot's time. The fact that a specific work is mentioned has the same effect on a modern reader, although the impact of this particular title is admittedly lessened by the fact that it is not as familiar today. Finally, the repetition of "que tu es un grand homme" serves to emphasize, in the vigorous way that is appropriate for the theater, Lui's obsession with what he might have become.

The dramatic pace of the dialogue is maintained by just such techniques as these, along with the variety that is to be found in the length and intensity of the speeches. Passages of short, rapid-fire dialogue break up the lengthier

exchanges so that the reader's interest may be kept at a high level. The moderate use of exclamations, questions, monosyllables, and similar utterances advocated by Diderot in his dramatic theory is a related technique that aids in providing variety. The following excerpt from a passage of short, vigorous speeches illustrates these techniques. In it Lui demonstrates the singleminded persistence of the prosecuting attorney, and the reader can sense Moi's reluctance to talk about his early bohemian days from the brevity of his replies:

LUI.--Cela est juste, morbleu! et très juste. Là monsieur le philosophe, la main sur la conscience, parlez net; il y eut un temps où vous n'étiez pas cossu comme aujourd'hui.

MOI.--Je ne le suis pas encore trop.

LUI.--Mais vous n'iriez plus au Luxembourg en été . . . Vous vous en souvenez? . . .

MOI.--Laissons cela; oui, je m'en souviens.

LUI.--En redingote de peluche grise . . .

MOI.--Oui, oui.

LUI.--Etreintée par un des côtés, avec la manchette déchirée et les bas de laine, noirs et recousus par derrière avec du fil blanc.

MOI.--Et oui, oui, tout comme il vous plaira.

LUI.--Que faisiez-vous alors dans l'allée des Soupirs?

MOI.--Une assez triste figure.

LUI.--Au sortir de là, vous trottiez sur le pavé.

MOI.--D'accord.

LUI.--Vous donniez des leçons de mathématiques.

MOI.--Sans en savoir un mot; n'est-ce pas là que vous en vouliez venir?

LUI.--Justement.⁴⁶

A final stylistic consideration is the suitability of tone to the individual character and situation. The level of Moi's expression is well suited to a man of letters and

is relatively constant, except for occasional outbursts such as the following, in which he switches from the customary vous forms to the more familiar tutoiement: "O fou, archi-fou, m'écriai-je, comment se fait-il que dans ta mauvaise tête il se trouve des idées si justes, pêle-mêle, avec tant d'extravagances?"⁴⁷ The style of Lui's language is much more varied, as befits his station as society's mimic. His characterization of his own speech as "un diable de ramage saugrenu, moitié des gens du monde et des lettres, moitié de la halle,"⁴⁸ has already been noted in another context. Part of his mimetic genius results from his highly developed sense of what sounds authentic and what has a false ring about it, as his anecdote about the renegade of Avignon and the Jew proves.⁴⁹ Antoine Adam points out that Diderot succeeds in giving the nephew the tone of the philosophe at times, while on other occasions his character expresses himself "en termes d'une truculence rabelaisienne."⁵⁰ At one point early in the book, the nephew utters the following sentence, complete with the proper subjunctive, and worthy of the most particular philosophe: "Je crois bien qu'ils le pensent au dedans d'eux-mêmes; mais je ne crois pas qu'ils osassent l'avouer."⁵¹ One has only to compare this example with the rudely familiar description of his wife that comes toward the end of the book to appreciate the truth of Adam's observation:

Outre son talent, c'est qu'elle avait une bouche

à recevoir à peine le petit doigt; des dents, une rangée de perles; des yeux, des pieds, une peau, des joues, des tétons, des jambes de cerf, des cuisses et des fesses à modeler. Elle aurait eu, tôt ou tard, le fermier général, tout au moins. C'était une démarche, une croupe! ah! Dieu, quelle croupe!⁵²

In structure, Le Neveu de Rameau is the closest of the three major novels to the theater. Michel Hérubel has commented upon the lack of digression, asides, and other such distractions, and it is his contention that the novel's vigor comes from its total concentration on Lui.⁵³ John S. Wood, on the other hand, sees the main dramatic interest in Le Neveu de Rameau as the joust of two minds, or the conflict of two attitudes.⁵⁴ Whichever point of view is correct, Diderot's purpose is pursued with unusual consistency. In this work the philosophe, whether consciously or unconsciously, even observes the traditional unities of time, place, and action, which at one point in his dramatic theory he had characterized as "difficiles à observer; mais . . . sensées."⁵⁵ While at first glance the conversation seems to shift from one topic to the next without any apparent transition, a less capricious structure emerges upon closer examination. According to René Taupin, it is the movement of life itself that links one anecdote to the next, and in using this structural technique, Diderot is only attempting to transport a recognized quality in French theater into the novel.⁵⁶ In accordance with his theatrical doctrine, the philosophe is careful to intersperse spoken scenes with

scenes made up solely of pantomime. The nature of Lui's antics in these silent scenes has already been discussed at some length in previous chapters, and therefore will not be examined here. The important point about such episodes from a structural point of view is that they provide variety and, in so doing, help to keep the reader's attention by involving him as a viewer as well as a hearer. Finally, Diderot is quite successful in Le Neveu de Rameau at gradually accumulating all the effects at his disposal to a climax just before the end of the story. The exchange between Lui and Moi begins calmly enough, but tension builds as Lui's speech and actions become more and more extravagant. His mounting frenzy culminates in a dazzling torrent of words and especially of gestures, a remarkable portrayal of the universal human comedy.⁵⁷ It is during this scene that the nephew's role as society's mime reaches its high point. The falling action consists mainly of an assessment of the implications of his chosen role, and it becomes clear that the only difference between Lui and the rest of society's players is that he has decided to recognize and accept his role for what it actually is.⁵⁸ The resolution of the work is somewhat equivocal, like the nephew's own character: "Rira bien qui rira le dernier."⁵⁹

The mood of Jacques le fataliste is much different from that of either of the other two novels, and this fact is inevitably reflected in its style and structure. While La

Religieuse and Le Neveu de Rameau are basically serious in nature, and therefore reveal the influence of the serious theater forms, Jacques le fataliste very often borders on the slapstick. Its close kinship to the comic theater has been noted by Jacques Smietanski: "Le théâtre, à notre avis, en particulier la comédie et la farce, est en effet, au centre de Jacques le Fataliste."⁶⁰ Of course, there are still general areas of similarity with the theater that this novel shares with the other two works. J. Robert Loy points out that, typographically, at least half of Jacques le fataliste resembles a play, which naturally leads the reader to begin thinking of Jacques and his master as human beings who are present before him.⁶¹ A further very basic similarity in form is the occasional presence of stage directions, much like those found in Le Neveu de Rameau; "JACQUES, montrant le ciel du doigt" to indicate the great scroll up there in the sky, and "(Ici Jacques se met à rire et à siffler.)", Jacques's reaction at one point during his master's story about the Chevalier de Saint-Ouin, are two good examples.⁶² The overall style is vigorous and fast-paced. There are few descriptions, for they have a tendency to slow down the rhythm of a story, and Diderot prefers to keep the reader so stimulated that he hardly has a chance to breathe.⁶³ At one point in Jacques le fataliste, he stops to explain to the reader why the letter from Agathe will not be included in the narrative: ". . . ç'aurait été comme ces sublimes

harangues de Tite-Live, dans son Histoire de Rome, ou du cardinal Bentivoglio dans ses Guerres de Flandre. On les lit avec plaisir, mais elles détruisent l'illusion."⁶⁴

Thus, to maintain the illusion of reality and to keep the action moving at a rapid pace, Diderot rejects the use of letters, static description, and the like in favor of methods of expression that involve the reader more directly. In accordance with these goals, the typical sentence in Jacques le fataliste is "nette, courte, concise, assez peu imagée, riche en verbes d'action."⁶⁵ There is also a conscious effort made to make the language fit the personality of the individual character.⁶⁶ On the subject of the procreative tendencies of the common people, for instance, the master's statement is couched in more refined terms than Jacques's somewhat earthy observation:

JACQUES.--Il est certain que ce mari n'était pas trop conséquent; mais il était jeune et sa femme jolie. On ne fait jamais tant d'enfants que dans les temps de misère.

LE MAITRE.--Rien ne peuple comme les gueux.⁶⁷

Still, the most striking stylistic features in Jacques le fataliste are those that have their origin in farce or, more directly, in the comedies of Molière.⁶⁸ Diderot's admiration for Molière is easy to establish. In Le Neveu de Rameau, Lui mentions the seventeenth-century dramatist's plays as being among those works that he reads over and over again, and Moi reacts favorably to this bit of information.⁶⁹ In one of the frequent asides to the reader that appear in

Jacques le fataliste, the philosophe calls Le Médecin malgré lui "la plus folle et la plus gaie des fictions."⁷⁰ Subtler evidences of Diderot's esteem for the great seventeenth-century comic playwright also exist in expressions such as "Mais il vaut mieux épouser que de souffrir," which seems to echo a line from Les Fourberies de Scapin: "Il vaut mieux être marié qu'être mort."⁷¹ Several devices that clearly reveal the influence of Molière are worthy of mention. The technique of repetition for comic effect is widely used in Jacques le fataliste. An early example comes from the opening pages of the novel, when the peasant, annoyed at his wife's decision to take in the wounded Jacques, repeatedly mutters, "Eh! que diable faisait-elle à sa porte?"⁷² Diderot is exceedingly candid about his inspiration for this line, although he is mistaken as to the exact source:⁷³

"Lorsque j'entendis l'hôte s'écrier de sa femme 'Que diable faisait-elle à sa porte!' je me rappelai l'Harpagon de Molière, lorsqu'il dit de son fils: Qu'allait-il faire dans cette galère?"⁷⁴ Further instances of the same technique appear frequently. That the master has something of a one-track mind is humorously illustrated in the Rabelaisian request, "A boire . . . ,"⁷⁵ which he makes at regular intervals during his conversation with Jacques at the Grand-Cerf. Desglonds' natural son stubbornly repeats "Je le veux, je le veux"⁷⁶ and keeps an entire household in an uproar. Of course, the most obvious example of repetition

for comic effect is Jacques's own catch-phrase "Il était donc écrit là-haut!" and its variants, which appear like a refrain throughout the book.

Diderot also borrows other techniques from the comic theater to achieve his purposes in Jacques le fataliste. One of these devices is simple exaggeration. For example, the initially inconsequential dispute between Jacques and his master about whether or not Jacques will go downstairs escalates into a full-blown screaming contest, with the two characters shouting at the top of their lungs: "Tu descendras. --Je ne descendrai pas."⁷⁷ The enraged village vicar who jumps up and down, stuttering empty threats the whole time,⁷⁸ also belongs in this category. Closely related to exaggeration is the device of speeding up the action, which Diderot accomplishes chiefly by the use of a dizzying torrent of verbs. The humorous effect of this method may be seen in the following scene, which takes place in the Grand-Cerf:

L'hôtesse, encouragée par ce propos de maître, se lève, entreprend Jacques, porte ses deux poings sur ses deux côtés, oublie qu'elle tient Nicole, la lâche, et voilà Nicole sur le carreau, froissée et se débattant dans son maillot, aboyant à tue-tête, l'hôtesse mêlant ses cris aux aboiements de Nicole, Jacques mêlant ses éclats de rire aux aboiements de Nicole et aux cris de l'hôtesse, et le maître de Jacques ouvrant sa tabatière, reniflant sa prise de tabac et ne pouvant s'empêcher de rire. Voilà toute l'hôtellerie en tumulte.⁷⁹

Still another technique to which the philosophe has recourse is the use of incongruity. When Jacques is bewailing the

supposed death of his captain, his master recites a rather high-flown consolation meant for a woman who has lost her lover. The humorous effect of the selection, which fits the situation neither in meaning nor in tone, is enough to make Jacques forget his sorrow.⁸⁰ Finally, Diderot capitalizes upon the resources of the unexpected to achieve effects like those of theatrical comedy. As Smietanski⁸¹ points out, the influence of Molière, with his particular bias against doctors, is evident in the episode of Jacques and the three surgeons, who sit down to have a few bottles of wine and some leisurely conversation before attending to the suffering Jacques:

On boit, on parle des maladies du canton; on entame l'énumération de ses pratiques. Je me plains; on me dit: "Dans un moment nous serons à vous." Après cette bouteille, on en demande une seconde, à compte sur mon traitement; puis une troisième, une quatrième, toujours à compte sur mon traitement; et à chaque bouteille, le mari revenait à sa première exclamation: "Eh! que diable faisait-elle à sa porte?"⁸²

Jacques le fataliste is not a rigidly constructed work in the conventional sense. Again, as in the case of Le Neveu de Rameau, the movement of life itself links one incident to the next, a recognized technique in French comedy which the philosophe was seeking to introduce into the novel.⁸³ Still, Diderot takes a kind of perverse pleasure in interrupting a story just when the reader most wants to learn the outcome, only to return to his account at some later point. This technique, used with judgment, can be a

positive structural influence, for it tantalizes the interest of the reader and keeps his curiosity aroused. Furthermore, in accordance with the philosophe's theory, there is some alternation of spoken with silent scenes, as Robert Niklaus observes: "A côté de scènes de théâtre inoubliables, lestement enlevées grâce à un dialogue alerte, il y a de petits tableaux charmants de réalisme, composés à la manière du peintre" ⁸⁴ An excellent example is a picture which has already been examined in an earlier context, in which the postures of Jacques, his master, and the hostess are vividly portrayed. ⁸⁵ This tableau serves to break up two long scenes of conversation, thereby providing the necessary variety. Finally, Diderot is successful at the effective construction of individual scenes. The accumulation of various comic techniques in selected humorous scenes has already been examined to some degree, but there are more serious episodes in Jacques le fataliste that also deserve consideration. The reconciliation scene of the Marquis des Arcis and his new bride will serve as an example. ⁸⁶ Tension is built by the marquis' two-week disappearance after learning of his wife's past from Mme de La Pommeraye. The new Mme des Arcis spends this interval in a state of despair. When the marquis returns, he summons his wife to his room by means of a letter, and the stage is set for a confrontation of major importance. The bride, ignoring her husband's instructions to get up, crawls toward him on her

knees and indicates her willingness to submit to whatever punishment he has in mind for her. The scene is brought to a climax with the marquis' forgiveness of his wife. His repeated requests for her to arise emphasize the pathos of the encounter, for each time he addresses her in terms of greater respect: "Levez-vous, je vous en prie, ma femme, levez-vous et embrassez-moi; madame la marquise, levez-vous, vous n'êtes pas à votre place; madame des Arcis, levez-vous"87 The scene ends with their reconciliation and departure for the marquis' property in the provinces.

In conclusion, each of the novels under consideration bears an unmistakable resemblance to the drama in style and structure. While certain stylistic devices are shared by all three works, other techniques are peculiar to only one or two because of their vast differences in tone and intent. However, in general, the stylistic techniques cited previously, including the heavy use of terse dialogue and the devices used in its creation, the omission of nonessentials, and the insistence on fitting the tone of the language to the individual situation and character, all remind one of drama. Similarly, as exemplified in the works just examined, structural procedures involving overall composition of the novels, the creation and artful distribution of scenes in them, the development of special effects, and the preparation of moments of climax recall the art of the theater.

It is with these ideas in mind that we may now turn to a few final observations.

NOTES

¹ Stephen Minot, Three Genres: The Writing of Fiction, Poetry, and Drama (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1965), p. 300, s. v. "Dramatic."

² Denis Diderot, Dorval et moi: Second Entretien, Oeuvres complètes de Diderot, ed. J. Assézat, VII (Paris: Garnier Frères, 1875), 105-06. Hereafter cited as Second Entretien.

³ Denis Diderot, Dorval et moi: Premier Entretien, Oeuvres complètes de Diderot, ed. J. Assézat, VII (Paris: Garnier Frères, 1875), 88. Hereafter cited as Premier Entretien.

⁴ Denis Diderot, Dorval et moi: Troisième Entretien, Oeuvres complètes de Diderot, ed. J. Assézat, VII (Paris: Garnier Frères, 1875), 147.

⁵ Denis Diderot, De la poésie dramatique, Oeuvres complètes de Diderot, ed. J. Assézat, VII (Paris: Garnier Frères, 1875), 363.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 362.

⁷ S. W. Dawson, Drama and the Dramatic, The Critical Idiom, No. 11, ed. John D. Jump (London: Methuen & Co.

Ltd., 1970), p. 89.

⁸ Diderot, Premier Entretien, p. 88.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Diderot, Second Entretien, p. 116.

¹¹ Arthur M. Wilson, Diderot (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972), p. 367.

¹² Vivienne Mylne, "Diderot: Theory and Practice," The Eighteenth-Century French Novel: Techniques of Illusion (New York: Barnes & Noble, Inc., 1965), p. 205.

¹³ Denis Diderot, "Réflexions sur le livre De l'Esprit par M. Helvétius," Oeuvres complètes de Diderot, ed. J. Assézat, II (Paris: Garnier Frères, 1875), 272.

¹⁴ Wilson, p. 670.

¹⁵ J. Robert Loy, Diderot's Determined Fatalist: A Critical Appreciation of Jacques le Fataliste (New York: King's Crown Press, 1950), pp. 42-43. Hereafter cited as Diderot's Determined Fatalist.

¹⁶ Roger Kempf, Diderot et le roman: ou Le Démon de la présence (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1964), p. 30. Hereafter cited as Diderot et le roman.

¹⁷ Georges May, Diderot et "La Religieuse": Etude

historique et littéraire (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1954), p. 225. Hereafter cited as Diderot et "La Religieuse."

18 Kempf, Diderot et le roman, p. 53.

19 Ibid., p. 106.

20 For a conflicting viewpoint, see Kempf, Diderot et le roman, pp. 105-06.

21 Denis Diderot, La Religieuse, Oeuvres, ed. André Billy (Paris: Editions Gallimard, 1951), p. 297. Hereafter cited as La Religieuse.

22 Ibid., p. 255.

23 Ibid., p. 295.

24 Ibid., p. 384.

25 May, Diderot et "La Religieuse," pp. 207-08.

26 André Billy, ed., Oeuvres, by Denis Diderot (Paris: Editions Gallimard, 1951), p. 1385, n. 1. For Diderot's authorship of this anecdote, see Wilson, p. 384.

27 Kempf, Diderot et le roman, pp. 53-54.

28 Diderot, La Religieuse, p. 328.

29 May, Diderot et "La Religieuse," pp. 219-20. See

also Mylne, p. 204.

³⁰ Kempf, Diderot et le roman, pp. 109-10.

³¹ Diderot, La Religieuse, p. 305.

³² Ibid., p. 277.

³³ Ibid., p. 304.

³⁴ Ibid., pp. 302, 303, 307.

³⁵ Mylne, pp. 205-06. Still, Mylne offers some criticism of what she sees as Diderot's failure to emphasize adequately the plot's crucial moments (p. 205).

³⁶ Ibid., pp. 204-05.

³⁷ Diderot, La Religieuse, pp. 245-47.

³⁸ Ibid., p. 245.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid., pp. 359-60.

⁴¹ See John S. Wood, "Le Neveu de Rameau à la scène," Revue d'Histoire du Théâtre, 19 (1967), 387-92.

⁴² René Taupin, "Richardson, Diderot et l'art de conter," The French Review, 12 (Jan. 1939), 193.

⁴³ Denis Diderot, Le Neveu de Rameau, Oeuvres, ed.

André Billy (Paris: Editions Gallimard, 1951), pp. 404, 408, 452. Hereafter cited as Le Neveu de Rameau.

44 Ibid., p. 405.

45 André Billy, ed., Oeuvres, by Denis Diderot (Paris: Editions Gallimard, 1951), p. 1409, n. 12.

46 Diderot, Le Neveu de Rameau, p. 414.

47 Ibid., p. 416.

48 Ibid., p. 463.

49 Ibid., pp. 447-49.

50 Antoine Adam, ed., "Préface," Le Neveu de Rameau, by Denis Diderot (Paris: Garnier-Flammarion, 1967), p. 24.

51 Diderot, Le Neveu de Rameau, p. 400.

52 Ibid., p. 473.

53 Michel Hérubel, ed., "Préface," La Religieuse précédé de Le Neveu de Rameau, by Denis Diderot (Paris: Union Générale d'Editions, 1962), p. 10.

54 Wood, p. 391.

55 Diderot, Premier Entretien, p. 87.

56 Taupin, p. 193.

57 Diderot, Le Neveu de Rameau, pp. 454-57.

58 Herbert Josephs, Diderot's Dialogue of Language and Gesture: Le Neveu de Rameau (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1969), p. 186.

59 Diderot, Le Neveu de Rameau, p. 474.

60 Jacques Smietanski, Le Réalisme dans Jacques le fataliste (Paris: Librairie A. G. Nizet, 1965), p. 148, n. 75.

61 Loy, Diderot's Determined Fatalist, p. 96.

62 Denis Diderot, Jacques le fataliste et son maître, Oeuvres, ed. André Billy (Paris: Editions Gallimard, 1951), pp. 598, 678. Hereafter cited as Jacques le fataliste.

63 Smietanski, p. 149.

64 Diderot, Jacques le fataliste, p. 676.

65 Smietanski, p. 152.

66 Loy, Diderot's Determined Fatalist, p. 103.

67 Diderot, Jacques le fataliste, p. 490.

68 Smietanski, p. 60.

69 Diderot, Le Neveu de Rameau, p. 437.

70 Diderot, Jacques le fataliste, p. 526.

71 Ibid., p. 597; J. Robert Loy, ed., Jacques le fataliste, by Denis Diderot (New York: Dell Publishing Co., Inc., 1962), p. 289, n. 92.

72 Diderot, Jacques le fataliste, pp. 486, 502.

73 The Molière line to which Diderot has reference here is actually uttered by G ronste in Les Fourberies de Scapin. See J. Robert Loy, ed., Jacques le fataliste, by Denis Diderot (New York: Dell Publishing Co., Inc., 1962), p. 277, n. 16.

74 Diderot, Jacques le fataliste, pp. 486-87.

75 Ibid., pp. 546-47.

76 Ibid., p. 687.

77 Ibid., pp. 612-14.

78 Ibid., p. 654.

79 Ibid., p. 559.

80 Ibid., pp. 513-15.

81 Smietanski, p. 61.

82 Diderot, Jacques le fataliste, p. 486.

83 Taupin, p. 193.

84 Robert Niklaus, "Observations sur le style expressif de Diderot," Diderot Studies, 13, ed. Otis Fellows and Diana Guiragossian (Geneva: Librairie Droz S. A., 1969), 7.

85 Diderot, Jacques le fataliste, p. 581.

86 Ibid., pp. 601-03.

87 Ibid., p. 602.

CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION

The influence of dramatic technique is everywhere present in Diderot's three major fictional works. There are an immediacy and a visual quality about the novels that bring them very close to the theater. It is not difficult to imagine many passages as being performed on the stage, for the philosophe will not let the reader fail to see and hear the action that is taking place. By contrast, one would have difficulty imagining the novels of Gide, Proust, or Mme de Lafayette as being in the least dramatic. Their preoccupations are chiefly interior, and the characters of their novels are studied from the inside out. The reader is allowed generous access to thoughts and feelings that may not always find direct outward expression. Long lyrical passages very close to poetry as in the case of Gide, or page after page of minute analysis as in the case of Proust, or lengthy historical digressions as in the case of Mme de Lafayette add to the desired effect. None of these techniques can be found to any appreciable degree in Diderot. In his fiction, conclusions about character, theme, and so forth are reached largely by an inductive process. The reader

sees and hears the evidence and puts the pieces together to form generalizations, just as the playgoer must do.

A significant contribution to the total dramatic impression of the novels involved in this study is the pervasive presence of the actor, without whom the drama is incomplete. Diderot's knowledge of and respect for the actor and his art is obvious in his portrayal of a variety of characters, both major and minor, each of whom has a role to play for his own special reasons. Suzanne Simonin's acute self-awareness and concern for her image before others lead her to observe her audience carefully and to make adjustments in her behavior according to their reactions to her. The supporting cast in La Religieuse is scarcely less impressive. Play-acting is the exception rather than the rule in the convent, as the poisonous hypocrisies of the mothers superior and the petty pretensions of the anonymous mass of nuns demonstrate. In Le Neveu de Rameau, Lui is the consummate actor. He not only puts on a performance for those in the Café de la Régence, but proves himself to be one of a cast of thousands in a vast human comedy from which no element of society is exempt. The performances of Mme de La Pommeraye, Pere Hudson, and the mother and daughter d'Aisnon in Jacques le fataliste are excellent examples of roles played for deceptive purposes.

All three novels are further characterized by the extensive use of three indispensable components of a dramatic

production: dialogue, setting, and bodily expression. The proportion of dialogue in La Religieuse and Jacques le fataliste is extremely high, particularly by comparison with other novels of the period. Le Neveu de Rameau is almost entirely composed of dialogue. Furthermore, there is a natural, spontaneous quality about the various conversational exchanges that lends them an air of believability. Dialogue is used in place of other narrative devices to serve the essential functions of character revelation, the development of thematic elements, and the management of pace and tone. The reader must be prepared to make character judgments largely on the basis of what the characters say, for the author makes very few explicit statements on this subject. In addition, it will be recalled that such themes as imprisonment and dehumanization in La Religieuse, the quest for a valid moral code in Le Neveu de Rameau, and determinism versus freedom in human behavior in Jacques le fataliste are explored by means of dialogue. Diderot also makes use of this device to maintain a pace similar to that required for the stage and to aid in setting the appropriate tone for any given scene. Although theatrical dialogue bears the added burden of communicating to the audience information peripheral to the central concern of the play, the philosophe wisely chooses to accomplish this purpose in other ways, a decision which actually has the result of

strengthening the dramatic impact of the dialogue that appears in the three novels.

Through dialogue, Diderot leads the reader to hear the message that is being conveyed. By means of the dramatic background, the senses of sight and hearing are stimulated. Setting is used in Diderot's novels, as it is in the theater, to reinforce the prevailing mood and to help create an aura of believability. The philosophe's desire for greater realism in the dramatic backdrop led him not only to advocate certain reforms for the theatrical setting, but to apply many of the same ideas in modified form to his novels. Accordingly, the sights and sounds that are found in the background of the three principal fictional works are based on the dynamic presence of human beings rather than on lengthy descriptions of inanimate objects, offered solely for their picturesque value. The ominous comings and goings of the nuns in La Religieuse, the reactions of the chess players in the Café de la Régence and the more general atmosphere of the eighteenth-century Paris literary world in Le Neveu de Rameau, and the background commotion in the inns in Jacques le fataliste are all good examples of this principle, as the reader will recall. Tableaux of the type that Diderot advocated for the stage also appear as part of the backdrop. By means of this device, particularly evocative visual images are fixed in the mind's eye.

An essential part of the visual impression in the novels under consideration, as in the theater, is the characters' bodily expression. Diderot was fascinated with the whole question of gesture as a means of communication, and judged its importance to be approximately equal to that of dialogue: "Le geste est quelquefois aussi sublime que le mot"1 The generally natural quality of bodily expression in the novels is a result of the philosophe's reaction against the highly stylized gestures of the seventeenth-century drama in favor of more realistic physical portrayals of character and emotion. Occasional excesses in gesture and physiognomy, which are usually traceable to the influence of Le Brun's well-known emotional stereotypes, are further evidence of an attempt to escape the rigid bodily expressions of the classical French stage. Diderot also recommended a return to the type of pantomime that existed in the ancient theater. In accordance with the philosophe's dramatic theory, Sister Suzanne's feelings are reflected in her physical reactions to her experiences, and the reader is allowed to see the effects of the Arpajon mother superior's deteriorating mental condition in her bodily behavior. Rameau's nephew, whose very station in life is to mimic the various roles he sees played in society, constantly resorts to pantomime as a means of self-expression more powerful than words. In Jacques le fataliste, the body is used to reveal or to conceal character and emotion in a variety of

situations, from the master's habitual recourse to his watch and tobacco box to Père Hudson's hypocritical displays of piety.

Finally, the dramatic quality of Diderot's major novels is greatly enhanced by the presence of certain stylistic and structural characteristics borrowed from the theater. The preponderance and arrangement of dialogue and the presence of quasi-stage directions, along with the correspondingly reduced importance of techniques associated with pure narrative style, leave an immediate impression of kinship to the drama. Moreover, the style is terse, fast-paced, and animated, relying on relatively simple sentence structure and the rich resources of the verb for its vigor. Short, emotion-laden utterances of the type found in Diderot's dramatic theory are also present, and their use is tempered with a restraint that is lacking in the philosophe's own plays. Nonessential elements are given cursory treatment so that attention may be focused on the central interest of the story. The tone of dialogue is altered somewhat to fit the individual character's personality and station in life, in accordance with one point in Diderot's theatrical doctrine, although the reader will recall that this device was not to reach its high point until the nineteenth century. Jacques le fataliste, while sharing the above stylistic traits with the other novels, is unique in that it also contains certain devices belonging to the comic theater, such as repetition,

exaggeration, sudden changes in tempo, and incongruity. The influence of Molière is of particular note in this latest of Diderot's novels. Structurally, the novels bear the greatest resemblance to the drama at the level of individual scenes, in which all techniques at the author's disposal are carefully put together to build to a climax commensurate with the desired mood. The principle of alternating spoken with silent scenes for variety and dramatic effect, recommended for the theater by the philosophe, is observed in all three novels to a remarkable degree. In short, close examination reveals that the dramatic aspects of style and structure, the presence of the actor, and the effective use of dialogue, gesture, and setting give abundant testimony to the fact that Diderot relied heavily on dramatic techniques in writing his most important novels. These devices combine to create a distinctly theatrical air in the works under consideration.

It is a paradox that Diderot, although largely unsuccessful at writing plays of his own, was able to apply many of the principles of dramatic technique to his major fictional works with excellent results. The paradox becomes all the clearer when one remembers that Diderot had little respect for the novel as a genre by comparison with the more established drama. Yet the novels, which as a class were thought of by the philosophe as "des productions assez frivoles,"² seem to have been better suited to his own literary

goals than was the theater.³ They afforded him the opportunity to work within a slightly less restrictive framework, while continuing to employ his undeniable gifts for dialogue and the creation of vivid visual and auditory effects. The novel as a genre, which in Diderot's time was still in the embryonic stages, was open to this kind of experimentation. Furthermore, as an offshoot of the essay and the drama,⁴ it is only natural that the novel should have been heir to many of the same techniques that had reached an advanced stage of development in the theater. For these reasons, it does not seem strange to consider Diderot's novels as his best theater.⁵ As Roger Kempf points out, it is practically impossible in any case to divide the philosophe's literary efforts into exclusive categories: "Il y a du théâtre dans le roman, du roman dans le théâtre, de la physiologie dans le roman, des tableaux dans Jacques le Fataliste aussi bien que dans les Salons, des contes dans la correspondance."⁶ Kempf's observation is partially corroborated in the fact that many of the most striking scenes from the novels rely on devices of theatrical origin to achieve their effects, as this study has attempted to show. The successful application of dramatic technique to the novel is one testimony to the broad talents and fertile imagination of Diderot.

NOTES

¹ Denis Diderot, "Eloge de Richardson," Oeuvres, ed. André Billy (Paris: Editions Gallimard, 1951), p. 1064.

² Quoted in André Billy, Diderot (Paris: Les Editions de France, 1932), p. 590.

³ Georges May, Diderot et "La Religieuse": Etude historique et littéraire (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1954), p. 13.

⁴ S. W. Dawson, Drama and the Dramatic, The Critical Idiom, No. 11, ed. John D. Jump (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1970), p. 79.

⁵ R[obert] Niklaus, "La Portée des théories dramatiques de Diderot et de ses réalisations théâtrales," Romanic Review, 54 (1963), 19.

⁶ Roger Kempf, Diderot et le roman: ou Le Démon de la présence (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1964), p. 10.

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