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DIDEROT'S READERS: INTERACTING ACROSS GENRES

by

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A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in French in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York

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Abstract

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In this thesis I looked at how Diderot inscribes readers in his text and found that he uses similar techniques in genres ranging from the novel, to the short story, to the *Encyclopédie* to the *Salons*. Due to the difficulties of publishing in 18th-century France Diderot had to manipulate three distinct audiences: the censors who were a great threat to Diderot and his work, the bourgeois reading public who was looking for a pleasurable reading experience, and the astute readers who would understand Diderot's philosophical message. Chapter one studies Diderot's use of a pornographic subject to entice readers and divert censors. In chapter two, I suggest that Diderot's message is to be found as much in the form as in the content. These two chapters also consider how these texts are read today and in particular how men and women readers might interpret the texts differently. In writing the *Encyclopédie* Diderot carefully addressed his audience in the *Prospectus* and in the article "Encylopédie" and d'Alembert does the same in the *Discours préliminaire*. This was necessary because in constructing the *Encyclopédie* Diderot conceived of an innovative type of reading that is not

linear but rather decentered. The *Encyclopédie* is in fact organized in a way that is similar to the Internet of today. Finally, in the *Salons* Diderot addresses a much more restricted audience of fifteen aristocrats but he varies his way of to the paintings so that a wide range of readers would find his text meaningful. Diderot tries to elicit in his readers the same reaction that he himself had to the paintings and uses a multiplicity of writing techniques to do so.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all those that helped me finish this thesis. My sincere thanks to my advisor Nancy K. Miller who had the insight and the wisdom to help me develop the most interesting parts of this thesis. She saw the potential appeal of certain aspects of the thesis before I did. She was a model adviser in that she guided me while allowing me to discover my own insights. Thanks also to Francesca Canadé Sautman for her dedication to the French program at the Graduate Center and for her immense help improving the style of the dissertation. I am most especially grateful to Scott Bryson for his constant and unflagging encouragement without which this thesis might never had become anything more than a proposal. His suggested readings and informal discussions were invaluable. I would also like to thank my family especially my parents who offered support in innumerable ways and Xavier Tourneux who always believed in my success. Without the help of these generous people this thesis would never have reached fruition.

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Introduction

Among Diderot's many works *La Promenade du sceptique* (1746) is significant in understanding Diderot's interpretation of what it means to write and to read. It is an allegory criticizing dominant groups in 18th century society but that is not what makes it remarkable; it looks at what it means to be a writer in that society and what it takes to effectively engage readers. In this text, Diderot demonstrates his awareness that writers are putting themselves at great risk and that in order to succeed they must address a wide variety of readers who often make up conflicting audiences. According to his daughter, Madame de Vandeul, *La Promenade du sceptique* was written around Easter of 1746. At that point Diderot's only other work was *Les Pensées philosophiques (1746)*. He had yet to become the greater writer of the 18th century and describes himself as such, "Je n'ai point de rang parmi les écrivains connus" (75). He explains that it is only chance that has led him to becoming a writer and he doubts that he will continue because there are too many disadvantages to the profession. He writes, "Le hasard m'a mis la plume à la main; et trop de dégoûts accompagnent la condition d'auteur pour que dans la suite je me fasse une habitude d'écrire" (75). The humility of this statement strikes modern readers who know Diderot as one of the most prominent 18th-century writers of novels, plays, short stories, art criticism and as editor and chief contributor of the *Encyclopédie.*

In *La Promenade* Cléobule is the wise character who is inducting the younger character Ariste into his garden, a symbol of society. Ariste is clearly based on a young Diderot. Immediately readers notice the use of the dialogue to present two opposing positions: Cléobule who thinks it is dangerous and useless to become an author, and

Ariste, a naïve youth who is determined to fulfill his dream. Although Cléobule thinks it is foolish to become a writer, he understands the desire to touch people through writing. "Je ne vous blâme point de travailler à éclairer les hommes; c'est le service le plus important qu'on puisse se proposer de rendre (78). The problem is that it is usually impossible to have readers learn anything different from what they are already familiar with. Cléobule clarifies his point of view, "Présenter la vérité à de centaines de gens, c'est [...] introduire un rayon de lumière dans un nid de hiboux; il ne sert qu'à blesser les yeux et à exciter leurs cris"(78). This is the same image that Diderot later uses when talking about the spread of knowledge in his article in l'*Encyclopédie*,"Aigle." Cléobule very pessimistically assumes that the majority of people not only do not know anything; they do not want to know anything. Cléobule sums up his ideas on being a writer in this way: "Ne vous attendez pas que votre ouvrage serve beaucoup aux autres; mais craignez qu'il ne vous nuise infinement à vous-même. La religion et le gouvernement sont des sujets sacrés auxquels il n'est pas permis de toucher" (78).

One of the major obstacles that writers had to contend with in 18th-century France was the omnipresent censor who spied on writers considered dangerous and subversive. The spies followed them throughout their day and were paid to read the texts carefully to find any hint of subversion. To illustrate this danger, Cléobule explains that when he encounters a good book on sale he wonders whether there was a censor who was honest and courageous enough to sacrifice his pension to allow the book to be published or whether the book was written poorly enough to have escaped the censor's attention. Authors only have two choices: either they do not write at all or they write a book bad

enough to escape the censor's vigilance. In case readers were unaware of the dangers facing authors, Ariste reiterates the main points, "Ainsi à votre avis, Cléobule, est-ce que je n'écrive point, ou que je fasse un mauvais livre"(82). Cléobule does not hesitate to offer his advice, "Il vaut mieux être mauvais auteur en repos, que bon auteur persécuté"(82). Nevertheless, Ariste is not to be persuaded from his career path. "Je tâcherai, lui répliquai-je, de faire un bon livre et d'éviter la persécution"(82). This was not one of the possibilities presented to him by Cléobule; it is a combination that, it is suggested, is impossible. In this study I would like to show that Diderot spent the rest of his life not just writing but trying to bring together these seemingly contradictory goals of writing a good book and escaping persecution for it. He accurately assessed the dangers of being a writer in Ancien Régime France and decided that if he were to achieve his goals that he would need to write in such a way as to be intriguing and interesting enough to engage readers in his text, and without their necessarily realizing it, enlighten them all while avoiding censorship.

Diderot's *Promenade du sceptique* was never published during his lifetime. It is understandable that Diderot would see the author as someone who was constantly persecuted. Having only written one previous work and done a few translations he was already being spied on because he was considered to be a dangerous and subversive writer. One June 20 1737, one of these spies, Monsieur Perrault, wrote to the police inspector, Berryer about, "ce misérable Diderot" claiming that he was a dangerous man who spoke against religion with contempt (Wilson, 61). Diderot's police file also contained a letter from his parish priest who described Diderot as a man who had spent

his youth in debauchery. He had nothing positive to say about the writer, "He utters blasphemies against Jesus Christ and the Holy Virgin that I would not venture to put in writing" (Wilson, 61). Not knowing when the next police spy was going to overhear a conversation in a café or the next religious leader was going to further denounce them to the police was enough to give anyone the impression that they were living in a state of persecution. Readers can see the wisdom behind Cléobule's advice to not be a writer or at the very least to limit the writing to very bad writing so as not to attract the attention of the authorities. Some research indicates that Diderot gave up his *Promenade du sceptique* to the Inspecteur des publications, Joseph d'Hémery, promising that it would never be published. (Hermann II, introduction, 73). Diderot's daughter gives another version of what happened to the text claiming that it was discovered when the police searched Diderot's house for dangerous works. Diderot later denounced his work, having developed disdain for the allegory claiming that it was "the ordinary recourse of sterile minds" (Wilson, 63). Yet, at the end of his career when he wanted to recover the text to include it in his complete works because he believed it to be one of the best things he wrote. That gives us reason enough to look at the text again; it also has particular pertinence for this study.

Generally critics have assessed the allegory as the beginning of Diderot's writing style in which dialogue dominates and as an example of his criticism of the Church and of corrupt behavior surrounding the court of Louis XV. Critics have focused on the allegory itself while neglecting the conversation between Cléobule and Ariste that prefaces the Allegory. In my view, the two must be read together as they lend new insights into the

role of the writer as Diderot sees it and articulates his views on the best way to address his readers.

Cléobule leads his student, "Dans une espèce de labyrinthe formé d'une haute charmille coupée de sapins élévés et touffus"(75). In this labyrinth Ariste distinguishes three different paths: the path of thorns, the path of chestnuts trees, and the path of flowers. Each path corresponds to a dominant group in 18th-century French society. The path of thorns is frequented by the devoutly religious. Diderot's description of this path is a not very veiled criticism of priests and of particular Bible stories and the ensuing interpretation of these stories. The path of flowers is dominated by those who prefer everything that is sensual. His criticism of this group is as mordant as his criticism of the religious, "Ici se ressemblent des gens qui affectent de penser d'un air distrait, qui disent rarement ce qu'ils pensent, s'accablent de politesse sans se connaître ou quelquefois en se haïssant"(140). The allegory suggests that there are no genuine or honest people to be found in society. The path of chestnut trees is clearly the preferred one. "Une petite allée sombre, bordée de marronniers, sablée plus commode que le sentier des épines, moins agréable que l'allée des fleurs, plus sûr que l'une et l'autre, mais difficile à suivre jusuq'au bout, tant son sable devient mouvant sur la fin"(90). This tranquil and shady path is where people gather to share knowledge and to philosophize. Although the main purpose of this allegory is to criticize types of people, Diderot's allegory allows for the fact that people can often be a combination of these caricatures. Again, Diderot does not describe straight simple paths but a labyrinth in which the paths often intersect. This permits those who frequent the path of thorns to come debate with the philosophers on

the path of chestnut trees. Unfortunately, they are blinded by their prejudices and therefore, are unable to really enter into a philosophical debate. The members of the path of thorns also visit the path of flowers to take advantage of their sensual side. Of course, they do this either in secret or under the guise of trying to convert people. And even the philosophers are sometimes tempted to visit the path of flowers. Diderot concludes his text with a strong resolution to avoid this path in the future. "J'ai cent fois été dupe de ce monde, avant que de le connaître, et que de me méfier; et ce n'a été qu'après une infinité de bourberies, de noirceurs, d'ingratitudes et de trahisons, que je suis revenu de la sottise"(155).

Undoubtedly, Diderot was portraying different groups in 18th century culture. But the importance of the *Promenade du sceptique* for this study goes beyond the satire of these caricatures or even the comments regarding censorship and persecution of authors. I would like to argue that Diderot's awareness of these three opposing (yet sometimes overlapping) groups led him to adopt a type of writing that addresses these three different audiences all within the same text. Diderot always pays attention to the interplay among these three groups of readers, regardless of the text or the genre that he is writing. My argument is that Diderot addresses first readers who are like philosophers in that they are reasonable and enlightened and will use their readings to obtain further knowledge and enlightenment. Following Enlightenment beliefs this will result in greater virtue and happiness for all. Yet, while addressing this group of readers, Diderot cannot neglect the other two groups. If he does the penalties will be high. If he forgets the readers traveling down the path of thorns his text will be burned (as was his *Pensées philosophiques*),

confiscated (as was *Promenade du sceptique*), censored (as were many volumes of the *Encyclopédie*), or will be impossible to publish (as was *La Religieuse*). Likewise, if he neglects readers who are looking for pleasure, those on the path of flowers, he will restrict his work to a very small reading public. Diderot himself was often drawn from the path of chestnut trees to the path of flowers. The best way to attract a large enough reading public, to have an impact and to render a service to society, is to make the story a pleasure to read. When incorporating an element of pleasure into the text the chances are greater that when the ray of light enters the metaphorical owl's nest it will not result in hurting readers' eyes and cause them to scream. Instead, it will make readers want to read more. It is the virtuosity and the magic of Diderot's style that he constantly addresses these three very distinct groups of readers all in the same text. Diderot was acutely aware of the difference in addressing a wide range of people. He writes in his *Salon of 1767* in his introduction to LaGrenée's painting, "We are each organized differently. None of our sensibilities are exactly alike. We all make use, in our various ways, of an instrument to a hundred people who listen, understand, think and feel quite differently from one another"(II, 44). At times, Diderot's writing might be a little confusing because it is hard to determine where he himself stands philosophically, aesthetically, and critically. Occasionally, readers find themselves lost in the labyrinth of his writing. The result, however, is a pleasurable reading experience coupled with philosophical insights.

Pierre de Saint-Amand suggests in *De la labyrinthe de la relation* that Diderot adopts a labyrinthine way of thinking and writing. An example of this style is when Diderot writes,

> Qu'un maître qui résout un problème d'arthimétique ou de géométrie fasse une fausse supposition, qu'il la reconnaisse, qu'il revienne sur ses pas, qu'il avance et qu'il découvre enfin la vérité qu'il cherchait, je pense qu'il instruira mieux son élève qu'en y arrivant par une marche rapide, sûre, et non tâtonnée (III, 531).

The labyrinth, Saint-Amand asserts, is a positive symbol for Diderot because it opens up new ways of thinking and new paths of communication. Readers can become temporarily lost in the myriad of narrators found in *Les Bijoux indiscrets,* or in the endless cross references in the articles in the *Encyclopédie,* or the juxtaposition of scenes from Tahiti and commentary on what they have just read by characters A and B, or Diderot's multiple voices in his *Salon.* This is, however, an effect desired by Diderot. It increases the pedagogical value of the text because as in the example quoted readers are following each of the master's moves rather than just blindly reading the text without any reflection or involvement on their part. It also increases readers' pleasure in the text because they need to search for a coherent meaning in the text. Also, readers have greater control over Diderot's texts because, their interests and tastes are often the guiding force behind the reading. For example, readers of the *Encyclopédie* actively choose which articles they are going to pursue and which ones they are going to abandon. Similarly, in the *Salons* Diderot reacts to the many different paintings in a myriad of different ways, adopting different voices and different writing techniques to convey his ideas. Readers find some of his criticism to be too frivolous or too lofty or unrelated to the painting; yet, they inevitable also seize upon some of Diderot's criticism in which his comments resonate as true, accurate, and meaningful for them. My hope is to show that Diderot's texts form more independent, engaged and active readers. Diderot demonstrates his awareness that

when something is displayed too obviously there is little interest for readers to delight in the meanderings of the writer. The same is true for someone looking at a painting. Diderot describes the process in his *Salon of 1767*,

> Il y a dans toute composition un chemin, une ligne qui passe par les sommités des masses ou des groupes, traversant différents plans, s'enfonçant ici dans la profondeur du tableau, là s'avançant sur le devant. Si cette ligne, que j'appelerai ligne de liaison, se plie, se replie, se tortille, se tourmente, si ses circonvolutions sont petites, multipliées, rectilinéaires, anguleuses, la composition sera louche, obscure; l'oeil irrégulièrement promené, égaré dans un labyrinthe, saisira difficilement la liaison. Si au contraire elle ne serpente pas assez, si elle parcourt un long espace sans trouver aucun objet qui la rompe, la composition sera rare et décousue. Si elle s'arrête, la composition laissera un vide, un trou (III, 186).

Readers find pleasure in being able to put the pieces together. This is the same thing that readers do in reading the articles in the *Encyclopédie* that are cross references and in juxtaposing seemingly unrelated ideas, or in finding a middle point between two extremes presented in one of Diderot's many dialogues. Understanding Diderot's text cannot be too obvious but it cannot be too difficult either because then readers will not be interested in making all the possible connections. I argue that only the very perceptive or deeply feeling readers are successful in achieving a coherent whole, in stepping out of the labyrinth to see the total organization of the work.

Diderot's strategy is risky because if his readers do not make the effort to see the order behind his labyrinthine structure his work will appear to be a frivolous, meaningless text. And when readers are predisposed to perceive one aspect of the text it is difficult for them to see an overarching structure that gives additional meaning to the whole. In describing Vernet's first in a series of paintings in the *Salon of 1767* Diderot takes the

opportunity to clarify some of his ideas on order. He explains to his companion, "The beautiful order in the universe that you find so enchanting cannot be other than it is. Only one such order is known to you, the one you inhibit; you'll find it beautiful or ugly, according to whether the terms of your coexistence with it are agreeable or difficult"(II, 90). Diderot's writing technique is a precarious one but the method also has advantages. I argue that one group of readers is not usually aware of the existence of other readers for whom the text was also written. In this way readers from the path of flowers will read *Les Bijoux indiscrets* as a pleasant libertine story about the sexual escapades of the members of Mangogul's court. Readers from the path of chestnut trees will be attracted more to the chapters on Newton's discoveries or the controversy as to where the soul is located. Readers can find in Diderot what they are predisposed to finding and the reading is agreeable for them to the extent that their expectations are fulfilled. As Diderot is expounding upon his aesthetic views in this site dedicated to Vernet's painting, "a western wind sweeping across the landscape enveloped us in a thick, swirling cloud of dust. It momentarily blinded the abbé, who rubbed his eyes. As he did this, I added: Although this cloud seems to you like a chaos of haphazardly dispersed molecules, in fact my dear abbé, it's as perfect as the world"(90-1). Thus even if readers are at times lost in Diderot's labyrinth of writing, a metaphorical particle of dust that momentarily clouds their vision of the work as a hole, there is an overall, orderly plan. What might at times strike readers as chaotic is in fact Diderot's overall scheme to address different audiences in the same text. This study proposes to explore the order behind the seeming chaos. Diderot's goal in writing the *Salon of 1765* as expressed in his epigraph from Horace's

Ars Poetica applies equally well to his entire work: "Non fumum ex fulgore, sed ex fumo dare lucem Cogitat."meaning, "His intention is not to give smoke from the flame, but light from out of the smoke."

Diderot pays careful attention to his readers. To minimize the confusion of the labyrinth Diderot usually opens his text with a direct address to his readers. Seeing that Diderot addresses these disparate audiences, it might seem likely that he would address a heterogenous, all encompassing reader. On the contrary, he addresses a very specific reader. In Diderot's first work, *Les Pensées philosophique* (1746) he addresses a young man, "Prends, jeune homme et lis." In *Les Bijoux indiscrets* (1748) he prefaces his novel by dedicating it to a young girl whom he tells to read his text, "Prenez, lisez et lisez tout." The *Encyclopédie* (1750-1772) inscribes readers in the text with the *Prospectus, le Discours préliminaire* and with the *Advertissement des éditeurs* preceding volumes III and VIII. There are references directed at ideal readers who will understand the goals of the *Encyclopédie* and bring these goals to fruition by adopting the proper reading strategies as well as references aimed at the numerous detractors of the *Encyclopédie.* D'Alembert writes, "Ce début est donc uniquement destiné à ceux de nos lecteurs qui ne jugeront pas à propos d'aller plus loin" (GF, I, 76). In his *Salons* (1759-1781) there are numerous references to readers as, "mon ami." In *La Religieuse* the reader adopts the position of the Marquis de Croismare for whom the text is supposedly written. So that readers can easily slip into this role Diderot opens his novel by explaining who the Marquis is: "C'est un homme du monde, il s'est illustré au service; il est âgé; il a été marié; il a une fille et deux fils qu'il aime et dont il est chéri" (277). Once readers take on

this role the subsequent use of the pronoun, "vous" serves to directly address them. For example later we read, "J'oubliais de vous dire [..]" (280).The most obvious use of address appears in *Jacques le Fataliste et son maître* (1772) which revolves around a fictional dialogue between the author and the reader. The text begins, "Comment s'étaient-ils rencontrés? - Par hasard, comme tout le monde. -Comment s'appelaient-ils? - Que vous importe?" Indeed all these questions are reasonable ones when reading a traditional story and so again readers quickly take on the role that has been given them. The direct address is also used in Diderot's short stories, *Ceci n'est pas un conte* (1772) and *Madame de la Carlière* (1772). In *Ceci n'est pas un conte* Diderot is again overt and forth-coming in assigning a role to his reader. "Lorsqu'on fait un conte, c'est à quelqu'un qui l'écoute; et pour peu que le conte dure, il est rare que le conteur ne soit pas interrompu quelquefois par son auditeur. Voilà pourquoi j'ai introduit dans le récit qu'on va lire, et qui n'est pas un conte ou qui est un mauvais conte, si vous vous en doutez, un personnage qui fasse à peu près le rôle du lecteur; et je commence." Finally, in *Le Supplément au voyage de Bougainville* readers encounter two readers reading Bougainville's *Voyage autour du monde.* And once again, there is the exhortation to readers to read the text, "Tenez, tenez. Lisez."

This technique of either creating a role for readers to assume or of directly addressing readers through an extradiegetic narrator is found in the majority of Diderot's work; therefore, it is key to understanding Diderot's oeuvre. Critics have been drawn to this aspect of his writing precisely because Diderot pays so much attention to his narratee. This approach was encouraged by Herbert Dieckmann's series of five lectures to the

Collège de France, *Cinq leçons sur Diderot* (1955). Dieckmann argued that when writing Diderot addresses a very specific reader for whom the text was intended. "Diderot s'adresse à une personne individuelle concrete, tout à tour, il cause, il disserte, il rapporte des expériences et des observations du groupe d'amis dont il fait partie et il compose un traité"(26). Sometimes, according to Dieckmann, the text is written for Sophie Voland as is the case for much of his correspondence, or for Melchior Grimm, editor of the *Correspondance littéraire* where Diderot's *Salons* and his short stories first appeared. Dieckmann's theory, however, is limited. For whom did he compose the *Encyclopédie*? It is hard to imagine that such a monstrous work, requiring a quarter of a decade of work, was written for just one person. Furthermore, I argue that if Diderot is addressing one particular reader he brilliantly does so in such a way as to not exclude any unintended readers. Indeed, I will try to show that Diderot was not writing for just one reader but rather for three different groups of readers. Nevertheless, Dieckmann's study opens the field for subsequent critics the majority of which have concentrated on one specific work, the most popular being *la Religieuse* and *Jacques le Fataliste et son maître.* These works, it is often argued, revolve solely around the role of address. Thomas M. Kavanagh studies the role of the narratee in *The Vacant Mirror: A study of Mimesis through Diderot's Jacques le Fataliste.* Early work focusing on the reader was done by Georges May who studies the inconsistencies found throughout the narration in *La Religieuse.* More recently, Rosalina de la Carrera's study, *Success in Circuit Lies: Diderot's Communication Practices* follows a similar line of argument. Very influential for this story was Sarah Kofman's *Seductions: de Sartre à Héraclite.* She analyzes

Diderot's ability to draw in and seduce readers. She argues in her chapter devoted to *La Religieuse*, "Tout l'art de Diderot, son talent et ses artifices, sous couvert de la naïveté - et de la franchise de la narratice, vise à émouvoir assez le lecteur pour le charmer et le séduire"(21). Julie W. Arnold's study, *Art Criticism as Narrative* also looks at how Diderot's readers are engaged in his *Salons.* Part of Diderot's placement of the reader entails presenting readers with a dialogue in which two extreme positions are supported. Fundamental studies in Diderot's use of dialogue include: D.J. Adams's *Diderot, Dialogue, and Debate,* Carol Sherman's *Diderot and the Art of Dialogue* and Christie V. McDonald's *The Dialogue of Writing.* McDonald demonstrates how Diderot's dialogue works to make reading of Diderot's texts not just a passive activity but more of a performative one.

There are also critics, who while not focusing on the role of the readers, provided me with insights as to how to uncover the mechanics behind Diderot's narrative. These fundamental studies include Daniel Brewer's *The Discourse of the Enlightenment,* Thomas M. Kavanagh's *Threshold's of Representation* and Jean Starobinski's *Diderot dans l'espace des peintres.*

Reader response criticism provides this study with an overall framework in which to study Diderot's readers. Leading reader response criticism includes Susan Suleiman's *The Reader in the Text: Essays on Audience and Interpretation,* Wayne Booth's *The Rhetoric of Fiction* and Wolfgang Iser's *The Act of Reading.* My thesis looks at theoretical and abstract readers but was greatly advanced by research done on actual readers. Jacques Proust in *Lectures de Diderot* organizes a series of excerpts from famous

readers including Karl Marx to show how the reactions to Diderot's work vary. Raymond Trousson's study *Images de Diderot en France* focuses more on reviews of Diderot found in the press from the late 18th century through the early 20th century. My thesis would be a beginning in explaining why opinions regarding Diderot's work have been so divergent.

In order to understand the literary climate of 18th-century France, Robert Darnton's work is essential. His studies include a look at the politics behind publishing the *Encyclopédie* in *The Business of the Enlightenment,* a study of hack writers, who aspired to become writers like Diderot, Voltaire and Rousseau but never met with much success in *The Literary Underground of the Old Regime.* He analyzes the forces behind clandestine literature: both what made it dangerous and what made it popular in *The Corpus of Clandestine Literature in France.* This study was continued in *The Forbidden Best-Sellers of Pre-Revolutionary France* where he looks at how these works were published, distributed, and sold. A pastiche of perspective on 18th-century is found in *The Great Cat Massacre and Other episodes in Cultural History.* In this work Darnton studies the forces at work in *Le Discours préliminaire* and the class system and hierarchy evident in a small printing press in Paris.

While building on these works I propose to look at the underlying reasons for which Diderot pays so much attention to readers in such a direct and obvious way and then study the way that Diderot interacts with his readers across genres. I will show that while Diderot switches from one genre to another his interaction with readers remains consistent. It seems logical that the type of reader drawn to *Les Pensées philosophiques*, a philosophical treatise, is probably not the same reader who will seize *Les Bijoux*

indiscrets, an exotic libertine novel. Likewise, a reader who appreciates Diderot's erudite articles in the *Encyclopédie* is not necessarily the same reader for whom *La Religieuse*, a memoir novel narrated by a nun trying to escape the convent, was written. I argue that Diderot's address in his very varied works is in fact very similar. His incorporating "A Zima"in *Les Bijoux indiscrets* inscribes the reader of his text in much the same way as his "Prospectus"to the *Encyclopédie*.

When Diderot exhorts his readers to read his work he is not just addressing his contemporaries but also future readers. His preoccupation with posterity is apparent in all his works. Diderot tried to disown *Les Bijoux indiscrets* saying that it was the work that he would most like to burn if he could rid himself of one of his works. Despite this disclaimer he returned to *Les Bijoux indiscrets*, many years after it was originally published, in as late as 1781, to make additions and revisions. Surely, he was making these alterations for his future readers. Also in the *Encyclopédie*, Diderot talks about the need to leave a monument of knowledge for future generations. Diderot and his colleagues were writing not only for their contemporaries but also for "l'intérêt général du genre humain"(II, 44). More specifically, Diderot refers to his future nephews, "En effet, le but d'une encyclopédie est de ressembler les connaissances éparses sur la surface de la terre; d'en exposer le système général aux hommes avec qui nos vivons, et de le transmettre aux hommes qui viendront après nous; afin que les travaux des siècles passés n'aient pas été des travaux pour les siècles qui succéderont; que nos neveux, devenant plus instruits, deveinnent en même temps plus vertueux et plus heureux"(II, 41). As Diderot got older he became noticeably more concerned with posterity. This

preoccupation in also found in *Le Supplément*. A remarks that "On dépèce si bien le laurier qui ceint la tête d'un grand homme et on le dépèce si bien qu'il ne reste plus qu'une feuille" B reassures him that even if the author is misunderstood during his time he will be appreciated in the future. " Mais le temps rassemble les feuilles éparses et refait la courrone" (167). Certainly having undergone all the scandals and the controversy surrounding *L'Encyclopédie*, Diderot hoped that posterity would reevaluate his works and see their true worth. Unfortunately, during the writer's lifetime that was small consolation for all his unappreciated efforts and accomplishments. This dialogue finishes on a most pessimistic note. A objects, "Mais l'homme est mort; il a souffert de l'injure qu'il a reçue de ses contemporains, et il est insensible à la réparation qu'il obtient de la postérité" (167). As in *Le Supplément* throughout Diderot's work there seems to be a tension between his wanting to be recognized and his understanding that the greatest of artists are often too avant garde to be appreciated during their lifetime. In the *Salon* Diderot repeatedly discusses the fate of artists who are misunderstood and underappreciated by their contemporaries but who are in fact, much more talented than many popular artists. He clearly shows great contempt for someone, like the artist, Bachelier, who gives up on art to obtain some of life's earthier luxuries - excellent wines, fancy clothing and pretty women. He imagines a conversation he would have with Monsieur Bachelier who gave up his painting to be a teacher.

> Mais Monsieur Bachelier; le sentiment de l'immortalité? - Qu'est que cela? Je ne vous entends pas. - Le respect de la posterité. - Le respect de ce qui n'est pas, je ne vous entends pas davantage. - Monsieur Bachelier, vous avez raison, c'est moi qui est un sot, on ne donne pas ces idées à

> ceux qui ne les ont pas. C'est une manie qui n'est pas trop rare, que celle de repousser la gloire qui se présente, pour celle qui nous fuit. Le philosophe veut faire des vers, et il en fait de mauvais; le poète veut trancher du philosophe, et il fait hausser les épaules à celui-ci. Le géomètre ambitionne la réputation de littérateur, et il reste médiocre; l'homme de lettres s'occupe de la quadrature du cercle, et il sent lui-même son ridicule.Falconnet veut savoir le latin comme moi, je veux me connaître en peinture comme lui, et de tous côtés on ne voit que l'adage *asinus ad lyram*, ou des Bacheliers à l'histoire (III, 127).

Here and elsewhere Diderot ridicules himself for having spent so much time trying to square the circle when clearly mathematics was not his field of expertise. Despite his disdain for what he calls "asinus ad lyram," or the ass aspiring to the lyre, he has unmitigated admiration for those select few (of which he undoubtedly considered himself) who are willing to sacrifice gains in this world to achieve immortality. True genius however cannot be bribed or discouraged. In his *Salon 1765* Diderot remarks, "Even if a sack of gold were to be emptied at the feet of a genius nothing would come of it, because it's not gold he wants as compensation it's his vanity he wants to satisfy, not his avarice. [...] Genius works in a constant state of rage and hunger."

Certainly, Diderot's genius was not to be deterred. He continued to write despite numerous obstacles and very little public acclaim. He house was searched by the police; he lived on limited means most of his life and had to sell his beloved books to Catherine of Russia; he was imprisoned in Vincennes for several months in 1749; he was viciously attacked by his enemies like Pallisot whose play *Les Philosophes* was better received than his own plays; his work *Pensées philosophiques* was condemned to be burned by Parliament; major parts of the *Encyclopédie* were eliminated by his publisher who feared the censors; and still several volumes were censored and could not be distributed in Paris.

Perhaps his greatest pain of all was knowing that the vast majority of his works were perhaps destined to obscurity because he was unable or unwilling to publish them. Indeed the omnipresent threat of attack from the authorities altered Diderot's writing style, he could never path to neglect readers from the of thorns, and this caused him to leave many works unpublished.

Another fear was that even if his works were read they would not be appreciated and Diderot's critique of Desporte's painting in *Salon of 1765* is very severe and anything but flattering. He doubts though that of the 20,000 spectators at the *Salon* even 50 are capable of distinguishing between Chardin's great genius and Desportes's very flawed and uninspiring works. Trying to console Chardin Diderot remarks, "Et puis travaillez, donnez-vous bien de la peine, effacez, peignez, repeignez; et pour qui? Pour cette petite église invisible d'élus qui entraînent les suffrages de la multitude, me répondez-vous, et qui assurent tôt ou tard à un artiste son véritable rang. En attendant, il est confondu avec la multitude, et il meurt en attendant que nos apôtres clandestins aient opéré la conversion des sots" (I, 129). The only solution then is to ignore the critical acclaim, or lack there of, and to continue creating.

In the *Salon of 1765* Diderot recounts the story of his friend Baron d'Holbach who discovered an unknown artists, Jean Baptiste Oudri and bought his painting, *Chienne.* Later when more people realized that the painting was quite good the baron offered to sell Oudri his painting back so that he could resell it at a higher price. Oudri's answer was that he wanted someone, like the Baron, who truly appreciated the work to have it. We can easily see this as a meaningful story for Diderot who seemed to be writing for a future

public that would appreciate the true worth of his writing. Diderot was, however, never assured of immortality or lasting fame. Doubtlessly though he wrote in the hope that someone as sensitive and intelligent as the Baron d'Holbach would read his works and truly value them.

Indeed, until very recently, Diderot was admired by very few. The majority of the critics cited in Trousson's *Les Images de Diderot*, are scathingly negative. La Harpe sums up his impressions, "On a honte de rappeler ce que Diderot n'a pas honte d'écrire"(51) Madame de Staël as a writer might be expected to appreciate Diderot's work. She is remarkably stingy, however, with her praise. She writes,

> Diderot [...] fut doué d'une âme ardente et désordonnée. Mais c'est un feu sans aliment, et le talent dont il a donné quelques indices, n'a vécu aucune application entière. S'il eût embrassé une carrière unique, si son esprit bouillant eût marché dans un sens déterminé, au lieu d'errer dans tout le chaos d'opinions contraires, que cette époque voyait naître ou se détruire, Diderot aurait laissé une réputation durable (in Trousson, 96).

It is significant that she critiques Diderot's writing as too chaotic and disorganized. When we consider the control that censors had on what was published during the 18th century it is no wonder that Diderot had to find a way to camouflage his ideas. It may have lead to confusion for 18th- and 19th-century readers but today we can appreciate the modern aspect of his writing.

Chapter One - *Les Bijoux indiscrets:* A First Attempt at Seduction

Why did Diderot decide to write a novel in 1747? Why did he change genres and devote himself to the novel after writing such philosophical works as *Les Pensées philosophiques* (1746), and *La Promenade du sceptique* (1747) which remained in manuscript form, and having done some erudite translations, such as Shaftesbury's *Essai sur le mérite et la vertu* (1745)? Diderot's choice of the novel to express his ideas is particularly perplexing in the middle of the 18th century when according to May the novel was experiencing the greatest number of obstacles. (May, 8). Naigeon informs us that Diderot did it on a bet with his mistress at the time, Madame Puisieux. Aram Vartanian claims that Diderot's desire to earn some needed money through a bet certainly wasn't the only motivation because he later returned to *Les Bijoux indiscrets* to which he incorporated three new chapters (3). Thus we can surmise that there was something about this particular novel, and the novel form in general, that intrigued Diderot enough to make him want to come back and revise it several years later. What was it then about the novel's form that made it best suited to Diderot's philosophical and intellectual goals?

This is an especially perplexing question when we consider the status of the novel in the first half of the 18th century in France. Georges May writes in *Le Dilemme du roman au XVIIIième siècle*, "L'atmosphère littéraire de l'époque n'est donc guère propice au roman: en fait elle lui est clairement hostile"(6). May also argues that sociologically and ideologically conditions were favorable in the sense that there was a growing bourgeois reading public (illiteracy was decreasing) who believed less and less in the supreme power of the king and was thus more open to new ideas. According to May,

however, these reasons are not sufficient to explain the dramatic growth in novels in the 18th century and we still have to ask what else characterized this era and led to the emergence of a new genre. There must have been something inherent about the form of the novel that the *philosophes* found to be particularly suitable for transmitting their ideas to a wide audience.

Locke claimed that the purpose of language is to communicate the knowledge of things. The language one uses whether it be philosophical or literary has a different effect on readers. Why then did writers like Rousseau, Voltaire, and Diderot fix upon the literary language of the novel to communicate their ideas? It is difficult to explain the rise in the novel as that time;[1] the novel was accused of a variety of crimes and evils. Bruzen de la Martinère, for one, considered time spent reading novels to be a great waste of time and worse.

> Les heures véritablement perdues que celle qu'on leur donnerait de plus au préjudice des études plus solides. La perte de temps n'est pas toujours le plus grand danger qu'il y ait à craindre dans les mauvais romans. On s'y gâte le goût, on y prend de fausses idées de la vertu, on y rencontre des images obscènes, on s'apprivoise insensiblement avec elles; et on se laisse amollir par le langage séduisant des passions, surtout quand l'auteur a su les prêter les couleurs les plus gracieuses (May, 4).

Novels were principally accused of corrupting the public's taste and morals. They were thought to breed vice and suffocate any sense of virtue that existed in the reader. This was extremely dangerous because innocent young girls were considered to be the most

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See Showalter, English. *The Evolution of the French novel.* 1641-1782.Princeton, N.J. Princeton University Press, 1972.

likely members of society to read novels. Another great critic of the novel was Lenglet-Dufresnoy who wrote in 1734,

> Rien ne gâte plus l'esprit que de lire des mauvais ouvrages; tous les petits romans et toutes les petites histoirettes ne sont pas seulement contraires à la pureté des sentiments et des moeurs; ces sortes de livres gâtent encore plus l'esprit que le coeur (May, 9).

Diderot incorporates this very same idea into *Les Bijoux indiscrets,* using almost the exact same words, when Mangogul scolds Mirzoza for her poor reasoning saying, "Voilà, madame [...] comme les romans vous ont gâtée." He claims that her reading novels has prevented her from distinguishing between what is real and what is fiction. He continues, "Vous avez vu là des héros respectueux et des princesses vertueuses jusqu'à la sottise; et vous n'avez pas pensé que ces êtres n'ont jamais existé que dans la tête des auteurs"(297). It is ironic that two of the most popular novelists of the 18th century, Diderot and Rousseau both promote the idea that novels are a corrupting force, especially for young women. In *Les Confessions* Rousseau characterizes novels as "ces livres qu'on ne lit que d'une seule main," and writes in the preface of *La Nouvelle Héloise* that, "jamais fille chaste n'a lu de roman." Most critics of the novel agree that they were bad works that would corrupt the most devoted readers who were assumed to be predominantly women.

While condemning the bad effects that novel reading could have on women, Rousseau clearly understood the power of the novel. May writes, "S'il n'avait pas été sensible à la puissance cachée de ce mouvement de transmutation des valeurs littéraires, J.J. Rousseau aurait choisi une autre forme que celle du roman pour donner corps à tout

ce contenu idéologique et sentimental complexe dont il chargea les lettres de Julie, de Saint-Preux et de Milord Edouard"(May,3). Even Voltaire considered the novel to be an inferior form of literature and wrote, "Si quelques romans nouveaux paraissent encore et s'ils font pour un temps l'amusement de la jeunesse frivole, les vrais gens de lettres les méprisent." As late as 1762, in a work as avant garde as *L'Encyclopédie,* in the article entitled, "Roman" Jaucourt grudgingly admits that there have been a few good works such as those written by Madame de Lafayette and Hamilton, but overall he believes that, "La plupart des autres romans qui leur ont succédé dans ce siècle, sont des productions dénuées d'imagination, ou des ouvrages propres à gâter le goût, ou ce qui est pis encore, des peintres obscènes dont les honnêtes gens sont révoltés" (May 10). And finally perhaps most shocking of all is that Diderot himself recognizes the novel's poor standing among literary genres when he wrote in his *Eloge de Richardson,* "Par un roman, on a entendu jusqu'à ce jour un tissu d'événements chimériques et frivoles, dont la lecture était dangereuse pour le goût et pour les moeurs." (*OE,*28).

In writing this Diderot is, or course, condemning his own writing as "un tissu d'événements chimériques et frivoles" and some critics might qualify *Les Bijoux indiscrets* as just that. But perhaps we can understand this to mean that the novel, which had been harshly criticized by almost all the intellectuals of the time period, could not, according to Diderot, accurately be used to describe a work as great as Richardson's *Clarissa* or his *Pamela.* His quote is that much more revealing because it captures that contradictory view of novels. It also highlights the potential the he saw in the novel as a literary form: "jusqu'à ce jour" indicating that Richardson's novel was perhaps a turning

point in the century. It was understood that fiction could elicit a different type of response, a more emotional reaction from readers; one that was potentially more powerful and long lasting. Diderot saw that reading novels could serve two opposite ends; a light pleasurable activity or a philosophically subversive genre that could be quite dangerous for society's established order. The real potential of the novel is exploited when these two goals are achieved simultaneously.

It is just this connection that Robert Darnton investigates in his work, *The Forbidden Best Sellers of Pre-Revolutionary France.* After an in-depth examination of 18th century reading habits, he concludes that "philosophical books," by which he means both philosophical and pornographic works were much more popular than had previously been thought. Daniel Mornet's study had just examined the contents of aristocrats' personal libraries. Darnton argues that these works were not limited to a small aristocratic readership; they had a large bourgeois reading public as well. These two types of books usually deal with very different subject matter, in theory, but they were nevertheless put in the same category of works that undermined authority. According to Darnton, these works played a key role in radicalizing public opinion and in taking chipping away at some of the legitimacy of Louis XVI's reign. (Darton 231-246)

We must, then, consider what the inherent qualities of a novel are that lead to this dual function of giving pleasure while reading and spreading philosophical and social critique at the same time. One immediately noticeable aspect was the ability of novels to engross their readers to a point where they forget about all else. Sebastien Mercier, author of *L'An 2440,* describes this phenomenon,

> Anyone who had seen me reading would have compared me to a man dying of thirst who was gulping down some fresh, pure water... Lighting my lamp with extraordinary caution, I threw myself hungrily into the reading. An easy eloquence, effortless and animated, carried me from one page to the next without my noticing it. A clock struck off the hours in the silence of the shadows, and I heard nothing. My lamp began to run out of oil and produced only a pale light, but still I read on. I could not even take out time to raise the wick for fear of interrupting my pleasure. How those new ideas rushed into my brain! How my intelligence adopted them! (Darnton, 142-143).

Mercier's quote shows that if a novel was well written and captivating it could supercede all other interests. But that does not answer the question of how the novel creates this intense level of absorption. Mercier highlights the need for the prose to be eloquently written, engaging, and a continuous source of pleasure all of which is arguably more characteristic of a novel than of a philosophical treatise. It is also clear from this quote that in an engaging work an emotional as well as an intellectual bond is created between readers and the text.

Rousseau also explores the fascination that books held for him throughout his childhood. He writes in *Les Confessions*,

> Je ne sais comment j'appris à lire; je ne me souviens que de mes premières lectures et de leur effet sur moi: c'est le temps d'où je date sans interruption la conscience de moi-même. Ma mère avait laissé des romans. Nous nous mîmes à les lire après le souper mon père et moi. Il n'était question d'abord que de m'exercer à la lecture par des livres amusants; mais bientôt l'intérêt devint si vif, que nous lisions tour à tour sans relâche et passions les nuit à cette occupation. Nous ne pouvions jamais quitter qu'à la fin du volume. Quelquefois mon père, entendant le matin les hirondelles, disait tout honteux: allons nous coucher; je suis plus enfant que toi (GF, 46).

This joy of reading was essential to Rousseau's formation and raises many of the common ideas surrounding novel-reading in 18th- century France. First, the novels

belonged to his mother, as indeed, novels were usually associated with women readers. Second, the reading is supposed to serve a useful purpose and it is a question of learning to read. Elsewhere, it might be a question of learning about a historical event or learning a moral. The most crucial part of the experience, for this study, is that reading became all engrossing. Father and son, like Mercier, forget all other needs and responsibilities while they are reading. Rousseau claims that he became another person because it was during this period of intense reading that his consciousness as Jean Jacques Rousseau was established. And here, according to the critics, lies the danger of novels - it was believed that through reading people would be changed and most likely not for the good. Rousseau himself supports the idea that novels are dangerous. He remembers further, "En peu de temps j'acquis, par cette dangereuse méthode, non seulement une extrême facilité à lire et à m'entendre, mais une intelligence unique à mon âge sur les passions. Je n'avais aucune idée des choses que tous les sentiments m'étaient connus. [...]et me donnèrent de la vie humaine des notions bizarres et romanesques, dont l'expérience et la réflexion n'ont jamais bien pu me guérir"(GF,47). Rousseau qualifies reading as dangerous because readers vicariously feel emotions that they themselves have never experienced. It gives them insights and "intelligences" that they would never have naturally acquired and as a result the division between reality and fiction becomes clouded. This is precisely why reading was considered more dangerous for innocent young women who had little worldly knowledge with which they could judge what they were reading. At the same time, the emotional impact that novels have on readers is what drew *philosophes* to the novel as a propitious type of writing. When readers become emotionally connected with

the characters and the plot they temporarily suspend their critical reasoning. In this way, even if readers think in a very different way from the characters they adopt, to a certain extent, the ideas and emotions of the those characters. Their emotions persuade them to, momentarily at least, adopt positions that they would have perhaps rejected outright in a conversation or while reading a philosophical text.

Diderot not only understood this, he articulated it in his *Éloge* (1762).

> Une maxime est une règle abstraite et générale de conduite dont on nous laisse l'application à faire. Elle n'imprime pas elle-même aucune image sensible dans notre esprit: mais celui qui agit, on le voit, on se met à sa place où à ses côtés, on se passionne pour ou contre lui; on s'unit à son rôle, s'il est vertueux; on s'en écarte avec indignation, s'il est injuste et vicieux.(*OE*, 28-29).

Yet almost fifteen years previous to his enthusiasm for Richardson, Diderot already uses Mirzoza as his mouthpiece for this esthetic theory regarding effective writing. She passionately advances her own version of what was to become the *Éloge*. What she says is in regards to the *drame* and later is developed by Diderot into his formulation of the *drame bourgeois*. Nevertheless, it is striking how much it resembles the *Éloge* in emphasizing the uselessness of rules, the need to feel as if you were really witnessing the action, and the need for it to be an emotional experience. She argues,

> Je n'entends point les règles, continua la favorite, et moins encore les mots savants dans lesquels on les a conçues; mais je sais qu'il n'y a que le vrai qui plaise et qui touche. Je sais encore que la perfection d'un spectacle consiste dans l'imitation si exacte d'une action, que le spectateur, trompé sans interruption, s'imagine assister à l'action même (201).

The only guiding principle in writing then is to make readers feel as though they are not reading a piece of fiction yet are still able to relate to the characters in an

emotional way. In this way, the author can transmit a moral or philosophical message to readers much more effectively than in a philosophical treaty or maxim.

In studying *Les Bijoux indiscrets* I would like to explore two hypotheses. One is that in writing his novel Diderot was simultaneously directing his novel at different audiences, and two, that he kept these different readers interested in his text because it generated a sense of narrative desire . Diderot was writing for those who found reading novels to be an escapist pleasure and an entry into different worlds where they could find pleasure. A second group of readers were more perspicacious and would be able to uncover a philosophical viewpoint in Diderot's writing. While managing these two groups of readers Diderot also had to be aware of the omnipresent censors because if they censored the work it would prevent Diderot's novel from ever being read.

Barbara de Negroni writes in *Lectures interdites: le travail des censeurs au XVIIIe siècle 1723-1774,* that the reason the state censored works was the founding belief that "Toute lecture est alors dangereuse, parce qu'elle est source d'esprit critique, d'hérésie et de subversion" (278). Indeed, if *Les Bijoux indiscrets* could be interpreted as a work that required critical thinking to enter into debates such as that between Cartesian philosophy and Newtonism or the controversy between the Ancients and the Moderns, it could equally be considered as subversive to political authority.

Today we see Diderot as undeniably one of the most prominent and influential thinkers of the 18th century. His position in 1748 was, however, much less established

and much more tenuous. At that time he had only translated *Le Dictionnaire universel de médecine et de chirurgie* by Robert James as well as penning a much freer translation of Shaftesbury's *Essai sur le mérite et la vertu.* Making his position that much more prone to attack was his *Pensées philosophiques* published in June 1746 which was sentenced to be burned by Parliament in July. He had at that time also received the position of director of *L 'Encyclopédie* along with d'Alembert. This was an extremely important job for a *philosophe* and it is inconceivable that Diderot would have carelessly jeopardized it.

Therefore, in writing *Les Bijoux indiscrets* Diderot had to address these very different audiences. According to Darnton's study it would seem that the majority of readers of "philosophical" texts were primarily looking for a titillating, enjoyable story. Other readers could read beyond the surface and extract a philosophical message regarding many of the controversies of the time. And finally the censors had to be convinced that *Les Bijoux indiscrets* was only a light frivolous story in the same vein as other exotic libertine novels and that it did not contain any of the philosophically dangerous ideas that were found in his *Pensées.* Criticizing the novel, Bruzen de la Martinière wrote in his *Introduction générale à l'étude des sciences et des belles-lettres* (1731) "Je les regarde comme un amusement innocent"(Coulet, 31). Diderot would have wanted his novel to have been read by the censors with a similar attitude. I would like to examine the preface where the reader is inscribed into the text, the use of exoticism, and the use of a sexual storyline as advancing these seemingly opposing goals.

Throughout history, readers have remarked upon the magical aspect of Diderot's writing style. Upon his death, *Le Journal de Paris,* wrote, "la magie de son style [fait qu'il est] l'un des hommes les plus extraordinaires que le siècle ait produits"(Trousson, *Images,*30). Sarah Kofman more recently remarked on Diderot's "pouvoir magique" (33), that she found particularly forceful when reading *La Religieuse.* I would like to argue that his magic lies, at least partially, in his ability to make his philosophy appear and disappear within his stories, all while readers remain awed and unaware of how it is done. Thus it is magical in its ability to mystify readers and camouflage Diderot's ability to draw them into his philosophical plan. Gérard de Nerval wrote in the 19th century,

> Les plus grands écrivains, Montesquieu, Diderot, et Voltaire, berçaient et endormaient par des contes charmants cette société que leurs principes allaient détruire de fond en comble... Le fondateur de *L'Encyclopédie* charmait les ruelles avec *L'Oiseau blanc,* et *Les Bijoux indiscrets.* Tout cela, c'était de l'invention, c'était de l'esprit, rien de plus, sinon du plus fin et du plus charmant (1074).

Nerval was not only remarking on Diderot's power to charm and mystify readers but highlighting the fact that this way of writing masked a philosophical goal to criticize and ultimately destroy, or at the very least, rethink and destabilize society's foundations. When he says that this writing was an act of pure wit he might be referring to the calculated decision to write novels and short stories as opposed to philosophical works. Otherwise he would be minimizing the emotional connection that Diderot had with his works.

To see if this hypothesis holds let's first analyze the preface. The idea behind dedicating a book to someone was that the reading was destined solely for one particular

reader for whom the work was conceived. This seems to be diametrically opposed to the idea of managing groups of readers with different agendas. This is where we see Diderot's virtuosity in that within one short paragraph he can maintain two different levels of discourse.

When readers read "À Zima" they will probably interpret this as immediately pertaining to the fiction that the story takes places in the Congo. This is similar to the 18th-century use of the preface in the novel. It was common in the 18th century for authors to use the fiction of an editor in writing the preface to their work. This pretext was used to bring up any objections that readers might have to the work and combat them before they took hold in the readers' minds and to a certain degree this is how Diderot's "A Zima" works. Or, it might be used to further draw the readers into believing that what they were about to read was not a work of fiction but rather a true collection of letters, as was the case with *La Nouvelle Héloïse* or *Les Liaisons dangereuses*. Again, this partially applies to "A Zima" because readers immediately enter the exotic world of the Congo. Finally, the preface often insists upon the utility of reading this particular work. Diderot makes every effort to convey the opposite.

Rousseau in his preface to *La Nouvelle Héloïse* chose to openly identify himself writing, "Quoique je porte ici le titre d'éditeur, j'ai travaillé moi-même à ce livre, et je ne m'en cache pas" (GF,3). With *Les Bijoux indiscrets*, it is much less clear exactly where Diderot the author stands. It would seem that he is the author of the work (this is what readers would conclude from the title page) but he does not clearly identify himself in relation to his addressee, Zima. Nevertheless the "author" whether that is Diderot or

Diderot's fictitious author is not clear. Readers seem to have already entered into one level of the many mise-en-abymes found in this work. Nevertheless, the author, whoever that might be, is very present to Zima, and by extension to all readers, due to the use of "je", "vous" and to a sort of dialogue that imagines what Zima's objections to the reading will be. It also makes it a more personal experience as if the novel were written specifically for each individual reader. Unlike other prefaces of the time period this does not promise to be an edifying experience but merely a pleasurable one.

Part of the pleasure is to be gleamed from the exotic setting. This is immediately indicated by Zima's name. The 18th-century French view of the Orient encompasses women whose name often began with a Z: Zaïde, Zuleïman, Zégris, etc. This is further reinforced by the exotic names and titles of the other characters mentioned, l'aga Narkis, Mangogul, Aglaé and the fact that it takes place in the Congo. At the same time, it is not so exotic as to put readers at a distance. The writer refers to Zima's governess and her mother who are nearby. It is easy for readers to imagine a young girl watched over by these women and who hides her other novels under her pillow for these are commonly established European notions. The exotic elements are just enough to pique European readers' interest without alienating them in any way from the text.

I agree with Linda William's analysis of *Les Bijoux indiscrets* that it is a man writing for a primarily male readership (266). These male readers, or women readers who adopt the dominant reading position of a male heterosexual, might fantasize about a young girl reading and reading with only one hand as suggested by Rousseau. Zima is already an avid reader; she has read *Le Sopha, Le Tanzia* and *Les Confessions*. Aware of

the dangers inherent in novel-reading, Zima, we can infer, hesitates and blushes. "Vous hésitez encore? Vous rougissez d'accepter" (27). These details emphasize that *Les Bijoux indiscrets* is similar to other popular libertine texts of the 18th century and the suggestion that there might be good reason for Zima's reticence further piques readers' interest. Through the intermediary of Zima, Diderot can directly address readers, exhorting them to take advantage of all that the novel has to offer, "Profitez du moment"(27). In case by the end of the paragraph they are not convinced he reiterates his plea, "Prenez, lisez, et lisez tout." Diderot once again emphasizes the enjoyable aspect of reading. Aglaé's advice has already improved upon all the pleasing details that make this novel an innocent and amusing one. Thus Diderot's announced goal is to give pleasure. The use of the imperative as well as the pronouns "je"and "vous" reduce the space between readers and writer, and once readers have entered the enclosed world of Zima's bedroom it is easy for them to enter the world of Mangogul's Banza, the capital of the Congo.

Lorraine Piroux in *Le Livre en trompe l'oeil* argues that the preface is "un jeu qui incite le lecteur à interpréter le texte au lieu de se disposer à recevoir passivement les information que le texte lui transmet"(23-24). Diderot tries to allay the objections of those readers who are intent upon analyzing the more subtle meanings of the preface. He immediately disarms critics who, familiar with Diderot's other works, might be ready for a more philosophical text. He does this while at the same time there is the suggestion that there is another element to be discovered beyond the amusing, exotic tale. By claiming that this work is nothing more than an innocent source of amusement, and in mentioning the other 18th century novels, he announces that his work is no more provocative than

other popular texts. He also says that there is nothing shocking except the tales recounted by the bijoux voyageur but even then there is nothing to fear because it is all written in foreign languages. Finally, Diderot tells perspicacious readers "lisez et lisez tout." His insistence that it is nothing but an innocent amusement can be seen as a trope that calls to the readers' attention that this is only the most superficial reading of the story and that effectively there is much more to be discovered. The reference to the bijou voyageur alerts these penetrating readers that at times they will need to translate what they read in order to make it meaningful.

Diderot adroitly manipulates the three different groups of readers, guiding them so that each group will encounter what they are predisposed to find. Some readers have been primed to find an enjoyable work of fiction similar to other works while other readers are alerted to the fact that they will have to search to find additional meanings subtly hidden in Diderot's text. *Les Bijoux indiscrets* might appear to be a pastiche of women's sexual escapades but upon closer inspection it is carefully constructed text with layered meanings serving multiple, and even contradictory, goals.

The exotic components of the work function in a similar way. Readers feel that they are embarking upon a more interesting and diverting reading because they will be enthralled by the mores of a foreign culture. In his attempt to pass off his novel as a poor imitation of other 18th-century novels, Diderot had to adhere to the established rules of the genre. One law was that the action had to take place away from Europe. Most often the stories took place in the Orient made popular by the translation of *A Thousand and One Arabian Nights* in 1723. *L'Ecumoir* for example was a Japanese story supposedly printed

in Peking, *Angola* was an Indian story and *Bibi* de Chevalier was, were are told, translated from the Chinese. Diderot wastes no time in establishing the exotic world. The novel begins, "Hiaouf Zélès Tanzaï régnait depuis longtemps dans la grand Chéchianée; et ce prince voluptueux continuait d'en faire les délices" (29). It is impossible for readers to miss the numerous exotic names and the suggestion that erotic activities dominate this text. The author makes it clear that the Congo we are being introduced to is a romanesque one: "Splendide, Angola, Misapouf, et quelques autres potentats des Indes et de l'Asie étaient morts subitement"(29). These names call to mind fictional characters from other popular 18th-century novels such as *La Sopha* and *L'Écumoire.* Diderot incorporates all of the crucial elements. *Les Bijoux indiscrets* takes place in the African Congo in the city of Banza in the year of the world 1.500.00.003.200.001 during the reign of Mangogul.

This exotic world is very different from the one that readers later come in contact with in Diderot's *Le Supplément au voyage de Bougainville* (1772), where the Tahiti described is a geographically identifiable place supported by many sources of documented information (from Bougainville and Cooke's travels and Aotourou's journey to France). This Congo is a mystical world that is important in readers' minds as being part of an unknown, otherwise impenetrable world. It serves the same function as Persia in Montesquieu's *Les Lettres persanes* (1721) or America in *Prévôt's Manon Lescaut.* As such the author can manipulate the unknown and fill in the void in knowledge with strange and sometimes magical incidents that could obviously never have taken place in the West. Readers can effortlessly submerge themselves in this foreign world because

they have no facts that clash with the information being presented. It is easier then for readers to suspend their disbelief and to accept a world that includes fairies and magic rings that can make people invisible and can force women's "jewels" to speak. In describing Cucufa, the genie who gives Mangogul his powerful ring, the author tells readers to allow their imaginations to go free. "Figurez-vous, un vieux camaldule porté dans les airs par deux gros chats-haunts qu'il tiendrait par les pattes"(39).

Diderot capitalizes not only on the little that his readers know about the Congo, he also includes elements that are so familiar to readers that they have no trouble seeing Mangogul's court in the Congo as a replica of Louis XIV's court at Versailles. The fact though that Diderot never says anything specifically linking Erguebzed, Mangogul's father, or Mangogul himself, to Louis XIV, allows him to criticize their politics freely. Banza, the capital of the Congo is, for example, described as having "les meilleures pièces de théâtre et les salles de spectacles les plus laides qu'il y eût dans tout l'Afrique, en revanche, on y avait le plus beau collège du monde"(29-30). Edward Saïd argues that when the Orient is used in Western literature it makes more of a commentary on Western culture than on the exotic culture. He argues that whether "Orientalism makes sense at all, depends more on the West than on the Orient, and this sense is directly indebted to various techniques of representation that make the Orient visible, clear, "there" in discourse about it. And these representations rely upon institutions, traditions, conventions, agreed-upon codes of understanding for their effects, not upon a distant and amorphous Orient"(22). The amorphous quality of the Orient applies equally well to the Congo of *Les Bijoux indiscrets*. At times, the Congo is a strange and mystical place

where unknown phenomenon occur regularly, but for the most part it is a transposition of 18th-century French courtly life. Yet it is hard to prove, as some critics have tried to do, that there is a one for one correlation between Louis XIV's court and Mangogul's. This gives Diderot more liberty to criticize while at the same time it keeps readers thinking about the characters and events that seem to mimic what they already know about their own lives and history. There are attacks against rulers and particularly virulent criticism of the Academies. It is only in chapter 50 (out of 54), however, that the clearest, most indisputable portrait of Louis XIV's "l'âge d'or" and his life at Versailles is made (281-282). The courtier Sélim, who, some argue, is based directly on Richelieu, describes the court as being a court of puppets where everyone ranging from the army to the religious devotees were on a string and obeyed every whim of the puppet master. Thus we see the exotic setting as serving two purposes. First, it brings readers into a foreign world thereby heightening their interest in the unknown and it ironically satisfies their thirst for criticism of a world with which they are closely familiar.

The third way that Diderot maintains readers' interest is with the sexual nature of his story. We are told that Mirzoza, "fixait Mangogul depuis plusieurs années." However, their state of mutual adoration could not continue forever and eventually their physical relations break down leading to a state of "dégoût." Therefore, Mangogul, who as his name indicates is lacking, (Mangogul = *manque*) longs for more stimulation. He can not be satisfied by merely imagining the escapades of the women in his court. He wants to *know* and to *learn* so he goes to see his genie Cucufa. Cucufa grants Mangogul's wish to procure some pleasure at the expense of the women in his court by giving him a magical

ring. "Toutes les femmes sur lesquelles vous en tournez le chaton, raconteront leurs intrigues à voix haute, claire et intelligible"(40)[2]. Thus Diderot clearly had recourse to all the devices commonly used in 18th-century exotic novels: a foreign, exotic setting, a story based on magic and descriptions of exotic women's sexuality.

Diderot's employing an overtly sexual story line works in a way similar to his use of the exotic. From the beginning it entices readers; it leads them to think that they are about to read a

pornographic, detailed account of all the women in Mangogul's court.[3] Again, Diderot works within an established literary tradition. Thus it can appear to censors that he is not writing a philosophically dangerous text; he is merely copying what has already been done a number of times. Adam argues in his preface to the work, "Pour qu'un homme comme Diderot ait écrit *les Bijoux indiscrets* sans avoir le sentiment de se déshonorer, il faut que son époque ait été pleine d'indulgence pour une certaine forme de littérature libertine (GF, 11). Diderot openly points out to readers that *Les Bijoux indiscrets* is in many ways an imitation of other novels. The "African" narrator admits that the work was

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This is illustration of what Foucault argues in *Histoire de la sexualité (vol. I)*occurs in the 18th and 19th centuries. People are instructed not to talk about sexuality but an outside force whether it be psychiatry or here Cucufa's ring forces people to talk about their sexuality. Cucufa is presented as a helpful genie who is able to provide means of entertainment for his sultan but he is also giving Mangogul the means to coerce and manipulate the sexual discourse of the women in his court.

3

See Lynn Hunt's *The Invention of Pornography: Obscenity and the Origins of Modernity, 1500-1800* for her analysis of when pornography began and how it developed. There is some debate as to whether pornography existed as early as the Middle Ages. Jean de Jean argues convincingly that it was clearly established by the 17th century with *École des femmes*.

constructed according to a recipe given to him: "Il ne nous reste de cette préface que les trois dernières lignes que je vais apporter ici.

> Prenez de .....
> De .....
> De *Marianne* et du *Paysan*, par ..... quatre pages.
> Des *Egarements du coeur* une feuille.
> Des *Confessions* vingt-cinq lignes et demie(257).

Indeed, many of the incidents in the plot have a familiar twist. Sélim's accounts of his growing up resemble in part *les Confessions* and the story of his cross-dressing to pass himself off as a nun seems to be taken directly from Madame de Tencin's novel *Mémoires du comte de Comminge* (1735).

Despite this open avowal that his novel resembles many others, Diderot is still able to lure readers further into his story by having them think that what they are about to read is grounded more in truth than in fiction. Mangogul is not satisfied with mere conjecturing about the sexual acts and feelings of the women in his court. His curiosity, like that of the readers, can only be satiated with access to the truth. Mangogul rejects outright Mirzoza's offer to imagine what the women are like. "J'imaginerai avec vous, si vous voulez, les aventures des femmes de ma cour, fort plaisantes, dit Mangogul; mais le fussent-elles cent fois davantage, qu'importe, s'il est impossible de les apprendre?" (36).

In *Histoire de la sexualité* Michel Foucault calls attention to the fact that we are all like Mangogul, searching for knowledge, and that the most desirable of all types of knowledge is that which is grounded in pleasure. He illustrates this with reference to *Les Bijoux indiscrets*,

> For many years, we have all been living in the realm of Prince Mangogul:

> under the spell of an insatiable desire to hear it speak and be spoken about, quick to invent all sorts of magical rings that might force it to abandon its discretion. As if it were essential for us to be able to draw from that little piece of ourselves not only pleasure but knowledge, and whole subtle interchange from one to the other: a knowledge of pleasure, a pleasure that comes of knowing pleasure, a knowledge-pleasure (77).

People are like Mangogul because it is not enough for them to experience pleasure; they want to know the truth about other people's pleasure. Diderot understood this insatiable curiosity that people have when it comes to sexuality and he played upon that when he was constructing his novel. He adds to the pleasure of reading about exotic, unknown, kingdoms the pleasure of having otherwise impossible access to unmediated information about female sexuality.

The covers to books were very important in 18th-century literature. It was the most direct method to indicate to readers that the clandestine books they might consider reading were not just philosophical, that they were also pornographic[4]. Directing readers' attention to the book with a suggestive cover is, of course, still very much in use today. Modern editions of *Les Bijoux indiscrets* lead readers to believe that they will be able to catch a glimpse of the unknown world of female sexuality.

Although buying *Les Bijoux indiscrets* no longer results in any of the severe penalties that were common practice in the 18th century the cover of the Garnier-Flamarion edition announces its contents and attracts readers with a painting by Laurent de la Hyre, *Les Corsaires ou L'Arrivée de Panthée captive devant Cyrus.* This cover is

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Even the frontpiece that Diderot asked his friend Cochin to do for the *Encyclopédie* is revealing in that there are many women wearing only transparent veils. This message that there is something provocative and sexy is unusual for a reference work.

appropriate because it shows Cyrus studying the exposed breasts of Panthée, as if studying them closely would indeed reveal the mysteries of the female sex. This parallels Mangogul's use of his ring to try to understand women's sexuality. Cyrus' fixed stare indicates that he is attentive yet still perplexed. He approaches Panthée but stops just short of touching her as if that might taint any truth that was about to be revealed. Panthée looks towards the ground in a defeated way. Her sense of defeat is similar to Mirzoza's. She is being enslaved by Cyrus, and that parallels Mirzoza enslavement to Mangogul's desire to know. Mirzoza feels defeated when she begins to realize that Mangogul will never be able to understand Woman by merely studying examples of woman and that hers is a lost cause. James Creech has remarked Mangogul's desire to conclude his search for full understanding but that he cannot reach any conclusion until the whole is "metaphorically repossessed"(Creech, 33), and that while he searches for plenitude of meaning, the only thing he successfully gathers is the meaningless babble of the women's sexes.

Another woman painted in the background of the painting is looking up to the heavens, questioning her fate, which is similar to the women in Mangogul's court who wonder where the noise from the babbling sexes is coming from and what is causing it. Finally, the headdresses worn by the men and the jewelry encircling Panthée's breasts complement the erotic with the exotic. Both elements promised by the cover are delivered by the text.

Interestingly, in the Herbert Dieckmann edition *Les Bijoux indiscrets* is preceded by a sketch done by Pierre-Antoine Boudouin aptly titled *L'Indiscret.* This sketch

immediately introduces the theme of voyeurism because a man is stealing a look around a door at a woman getting dressed. One maid tries to close the door while the other maid hastily covers the woman's naked body. The sketch gives a quality of motion, fury, and surprise to the scene. Diderot criticized Boucher in his *Salon* for being a painter who only painted "des fesses et des tétons." However, here that is not the case. We do not know what the indiscreet gentleman was able to espy before the maids constricted his view by closing the door and covering their mistress, but it is clear that the person viewing the painting sees very little. The woman's arms are positioned in such a way that even her breasts are covered and protected from indiscreet gazes. This is appropriate for *Les Bijoux indiscrets* because even when Mangogul succeeds in forcing a woman to reveal something about her sex life, Mangogul and readers are often unable to put these glimpses together to form any real and coherent knowledge about the enigma that woman represents for them. Yet, even if this gentleman did not succeed in viewing the woman entirely naked in the moments before the scene was painted, the sketch successfully gives the idea that there is something to be seen, because if there were not, the woman would not be covered up so quickly.

In opening *Les Bijoux indiscrets* readers mimic Mangogul and hope that, by opening enough doors, they will be lucky enough to see what, up until then, had always escaped them, the truth of female sexuality. Yet none of this information is pornographic.[5] In the two instances where readers are about to have access to something

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See Linda Williams, *Hard Core*, (Univ. of Berkeley Presss, 1989, 9-23) for her discussion on the difficulty in characterizing what is and is not pornographic.

scabrous, Mangogul backs away, effectively denying readers any further information. This happens when what the women's jewel reveals is overheard by the woman's lover as well as by Mangogul. Her revelation impassions the lover and Mangogul prefers to leave them alone together. It is surprising, and frustrating for readers, that Mangogul who is so intent upon discovering the truth is quickly scared off when he is actually confronted with sexuality. The second time that readers' desire is thwarted is when one woman begins to describe in detail her liaison with Mangogul's father. And the jewel that is supposed to reveal the most salacious and scabrous is the "bijou voyageur" whose sexual affairs are indeed recounted using a different register of language than that found with any of the other jewels. Yet because it is written not in French but in English, Spanish, and Italian readers are again frustrated. Another way to read this multilingual confession is to see it as another example of Diderot who likes to reserve complete comprehension of his text to an elite who would be able to decode these four languages. It was dangerous for Diderot to write such a salacious text and he had to find a technique to make it palatable to the censors. Writing the confession in four different languages allows him to be more obscene than in the rest of the text.[6]

Whether readers are able to decipher this text or not this jewel confirms what all

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This is a similar technique to what Rabelais uses in *Pantagruel* when Pantagruel first meets Panurge who speaks a variety of languages including German, Dutch, Spanish, Hebrew, Latin and even fantasy languages created by Rabelais. Rabelais, like Diderot, also uses another language to avoid offending readers. Pantagreul meets a Limousin who speaks a jargon that is a mixture of French and Latin to explain what Parisians do. "Nous despumons la verbocination latiale, et, comme versimiles amorabonds, captons la bénévolance de l'omnijuge, omniforme et omnigène sexe féminin.Certaines diecules, nous invisions les lupanares, et en ecstase vénérique, inculcons nos veretres ès penitissimes recesses des pudendes de ces meretricules amicablisissmes" (Paris, Gallimard, 1955, 191). Rabelais' text is only obscene for those who are able to make sense of it which is the same technique used by Diderot.

the other jewels have revealed; there is something to be known but we have to first have access to it and then we have to be capable of interpreting it properly. In this case it is a question of translating from one language to another. This is also an issue when Mangogul wants to interrogate his horse. Mangogul's secretary, Ziquezague, cannot copy down what the "bijou du jument" reveals. He protests, "Je ne sais point l' orthographe de ces sortes de mots..." (166). Ziguezague, as his name suggests, can write in a haphazard way but he will never transcribe properly if he does not know the language. From the beginning Mangogul believes that the jewels are sure to tell an unadulterated truth because they do not subscribe to the hypocrisies of society. "Quel intérêt auraient ceux-ci à déguiser la vérité? Il n'y aurait qu'une chimère d'honneur qui pût les y porter; mais un bijou n'a point de ces chimères ce n'est pas là le lieu des préjugés"(53). The truth they reveal will be useless, of course, if it is not intelligible. This is not always the case. From the second turn of Mangogul's ring readers are alerted to the fact that they speak in their own jargon, "Tous dirent leur mot, mais si brusquement, qu'on n'en put faire juste l'application. Leur jargon, tantôt sourd, tantôt glapissant, accompagné des éclats de rire de Mangogul et de ses courtisans, fit un bruit d'une espèce nouvelle" (51). Nonetheless, it is only at the very end of his investigations (in chapter 51 of 54) that it occurs to Mangogul that perhaps the jewels might not even be telling the truth. He concludes, "Les bijoux sont de petits fous qui ne savent ce qu'ils disent. La bague de Cucufa peut les faire parler, mais non leur arracher la vérité"(287). The issue is not that they do not know what they are saying, but more that we do not necessarily know how to interpret what they are saying. They are prized for their value as oracles of the unmitigated truth

because, Mangogul believes, the jewels are more objective than the women themselves would be but in recounting sexual affairs it seems impossible to escape the subjective nature of what they are recounting. When confronted with a contradiction between the story as told to him by his respectable and honored courtier Sélim or the jewel of another woman, Mangogul opts to believe his friend. "Je viens de consulter un bijou qui l'accuse d'une méchanceté qu'il ne vous a pas confessée, qu'assurément il n'a point eue, et qui même pas de son caractère"(287).

In addition to the content not revealing as many delectable stories as readers were expecting, the style in which their revelations are communicated frustrates readers' desire to be titillated. Lynne Hunt in "The Invention of Pornography: Obscenity and the Origins of Modernity," argues that the rise of the novel led to an increase in pornography and that the mid 18th century was a crucial moment in this development. It was then that *Histoire de Dom Bougre, Le Portier des Chartreuses, Le Sopha, Les Bijoux indiscrets, Thérèse philosophe,* and *Fanny Hill* were all published. The preponderance of pornographic novels led to the development of artistic and philosophical tendencies that condition the act of reading and visualizing these pornographic texts. Lucienne Frappier-Mazur argues in "Truth and the Obscene Word in 18th century Pornography" that "these texts are seductive and arousing because of the introduction of women in the situation of community between author and reader that actualizes forms of complicity between the reader and the writer, or rather, between the reader's imaginary representation of women"(209). Indeed this is the situation that is set up from the beginning; through Mangogul readers will have access to their greatest phantasms about women. This

relationship between the author and readers or between the protagonist and readers is, however, only the starting point for pornographic texts. Margaret C. Jacob in "The Materialist World of Pornography," describes how the philosophical beliefs of these writers were auspicious for developing pornography. She argues that these texts manage to arouse because,

> Like the scientists, the pornographic philosophic narrative rivets our attention on nature. They encapsulate bodies, capture and replicate their motions, place them in a universe of limitless possibilities and, in the process, abstract them from any determining universe. Arousal is induced by watching the interaction of isolated, activated bodies, supposedly uncontrolled by any laws save those of nature or physiology. Whether they are master or observed while having sex, whether alone or in a crowd, the atomized bodies in the new pornography are totally privatized (181).

These conditions are entirely lacking in *Les Bijoux indiscrets*. It soon becomes apparent that readers are not discovering a world of limitless possibilities but rather that the jewels concur with the already well known rumors in Mangogul's court and that what they reveal are nothing but the mundane stories of society with which readers are all too familiar. These women's jewels do not in any way take readers out of the controlled environment of the court. On the contrary, they further reinforce these restrictive rules. These women are not confined only by the laws of nature; they are still being controlled by their king and by the society in which they live. This is why women pay exorbitant prices to have their jewels muzzled. The last condition described by Jacobs is the one that is the most absent. Readers never see these bodies having sex. They never even hear about them directly. They are working through the intermediary of Mangogul and even he only *hears* about what the jewels have done. There is no effort on Diderot's part to

make readers visualize what the jewels have experienced. Pornographic texts become erotic when the written text causes the reader to develop visual tableaux. Yes, Mangogul is a voyeur, as are the readers by extension, but the entire concept of being a voyeur is based on seeing rather than hearing. What I would qualify as more "successful"pornographic texts such as *Thérèse philosophe* encourage readers to visualize what they are reading. Frappier-Mazur argues, "A narrative will condition and engage the reader, and even more so if it uses the past tense and the first person, a joint strategy that promotes self-voyeurism in the reader"(207). The jewels use the present and the past tense and even if they use the first person, it is the first person of an organ, not a person, thereby creating an intermediary between the woman and her jewel, confounding readers' efforts to visualize. Therefore, it is not only the content of what the jewels reveal that disappoints readers who, having seen the cover, believe they will be privy to women's private sexual moments; it is also the form in which these accounts are related that fails to live up to readers' expectations.

This leads me to my second hypothesis that *les Bijoux indiscrets* is not a work constructed around reader's sexual desire, as is the case with most libertine texts, but rather on their narrative desire. Roland Barthes in *Le Plaisir du texte* (1973) wonders what exactly his role as a writer is and how his writing can give pleasure to readers. He writes, "Ce lecteur, il faut que je le cherche, (que je le 'drague')" (11). In *Les Bijoux indiscrets* readers, indeed, sense that Diderot is playing with them in a teasing and flirtatious manner. Later in *Salon 1765 (Loutherbourg)* Diderot explains the seductive qualities of a woman who plays hard to get: "Nous ne voulons pas tout savoir à la fois.

Les femmes ne l'ignorent pas; elles accordent et refusent; elles exposent et dérobent" (II, 167). Diderot explains that in this way the woman is able to maintain the interest and the power that she holds over lovers. It is not surprising, then, that Diderot adopts a similar way of writing. Vartanian asserts in his introduction to the text that "Dans *Les Bijoux indiscrets* surgit également la sensibilité érotisante qui, une fois consciente de sa force, devint une modalité irrépressible de la pensée comme de l'art de Diderot"(Intro, 3). I would argue, however, that his erotic components are not to be found merely in his choice of subject but, more importantly, in his style of writing.

One example of this is in the subject matter that Diderot chooses for each chapter. Readers have been led to expect a plot based solely on the exotic and erotic world of the Congo. Everything, including the cover of the book, the preface, and the first few chapters has led readers to believe that they will be reading a very erotic and titillating story, and then all of a sudden, there are long digressions into very philosophical and scientific discussions. The subjects are as varied as the location of the soul in the body, predicting the return of comets, discovering the flattening of the earth, the decomposition of light through a prism, theories on acoustics, the conjecture that most humans are just "automatons," and even the possibility that matter might be able to think. This is an illustration of his "encouraging and discouraging, expos[ing] and obscur[ing]" and applies to readers who are seeking a titillating reading experience as well as those looking for Diderot's philosophical position.

Yet it is not just in his choice of subject matter that Diderot is flirtatious. He also plays with the reader by changing the type of narration used throughout the book. At

times readers have the impression that he is playing hide-and-go seek with them. Vartanian has also remarked on Diderot's style which jumps from one subject to another and from one type of narration to another. He refers to it as "l'élan spontané ludique et digressif si propre à Diderot" (2). Diderot's magic is that he knows how to draw in readers so that they do not remain at a philosophically objective distance with their critical thinking alert, but rather become intrigued and involved in the story.

In *Les Bijoux indiscrets,* it is not clear exactly where Diderot, the author stands. From the beginning it is not clear what the relationship is between the author and his addressee, Zima. Without explaining how they know each other, he does assume a great deal of familiarity with her and her daily habits. He is very present to her, and to all readers, due to the use of "je", "vous" and to a sort of dialogue that imagines what Zima's objections to the reading will be. Then the story begins with a third person omniscient narrator. This is, however, abruptly interrupted when in the beginning of Chapter two the extra-diagetic narrator appears. "Je passerai légèrement sur les premières années de Mangogul." Is this the same "je," that same person who exhorted Zima to read the story? Readers cannot be sure. A page later the extradiegetic narrator reappears to conclude the chapter: "Je ne m'amuserai point..."(34) Chapters three and four recount the story of Mangogul's powerful ring, again in the third person. Yet, in chapter five the author reappears, "J'ai oublié de dire..."(41) Readers might conclude that the author adopts the third person for the convenience of telling the story and occasionally reappears to comment on his own choice of style or the sequence of events.

This seems to be a reasonable hypothesis except for a brief comment in chapter

six, "Ici mon auteur dit que...." until chapter nine which interrupts the third person narration again with, "Ici l'ignorance des traducteurs nous a frustrés d'une démonstration que l'auteur africain nous avait conservé sans doute. A la suite d'une lacune de deux pages environ, on lit: ..."(59), and with that the story once again resumes in the third person. This interjection albeit, somewhat hidden in the text, raises many issues. First is the question of translation. Clearly, the actual readers are reading the work in French but there has been no mention before this that the original was first written in a different language by an African writer. Much later in the story there is an identified translator, Ricaric, an esteemed member of the Banza Academy of letters who scrupulously translates ancient texts that are then translated in beautiful edition with notes and variants. There is no indication however that he is the said translator of this edition. It seems improbable at best because the text is not an erudite translation. Readers later come to hope that he is not the translator because he believes that he can translate from a language that he does not know such as Greek; he explains this by arguing that his readers do not know Greek either, and therefore would be unable to verify his translation.[7] The goal of his translations are the same as those expressed by the author: to give pleasure to readers. Mangogul comments on his translations, "les presses vont incessamment; et si les maris du Congo faisaient aussi bien leur devoir que les auteurs, je pourrais dans moins de dix ans mettre seize cent hommes sur pied, et me promettre la conquête du Monoémugi. Nous lirons le roman à loisir"(198).

7

This comment reminds readers that Diderot also tried to do translations from a language that he did not entirely master.

Up until this point readers have been situating themselves as if they were Zima and were reading a work that was clear to them and needed no translation. Here suddenly a quarter of the way into the story, it is mentioned that the work was translated, and worse yet, that there are parts missing from the original. Was this Diderot's technique to increase the seeming veracity of the story thereby making it more real and powerful for readers? Perhaps, yet it seems odd to be introducing this crucial detail that will change readers' perspective on the story at this point and in such a matter of fact way.

Is this a concrete example of Barthes's observation that an author needs to flirt with readers? Or is it a characteristic of Diderot's writing style that constantly obscures his own philosophical views in a carefully constructed house of mirrors, where each reflection of the author (the one who writes in the third person, the one who appears as "je", the original African writer, as well as the translator of the original) makes it that much more impossible to pinpoint Diderot's own editorial, philosophical comments?

Readers are not frustrated by a seemingly unimportant gap in the details of what exactly went on at the Banza Academy of Science. They are, however, frustrated by a lack of information and clues telling us who is the person presenting the story and where to locate the authorial voice. A few pages later, after another turn of Mangogul's ring, we read, "Les autres femmes en dirent autant, et l'on se mit au jeu, sans connaître précisément l'interlocuteur de la conversation que je viens de rapporter"(65). Is this just another round of hide-and-seek with the author, or is it a hint that we can talk about something even if we don't recognize the source, or the interlocutor. This is exactly what readers encounter while reading *Les Bijoux indiscrets.*

The text seems to be in a constant state of flux and destabilization. Ironically, when the extra-diegetic narrator materializes it is not to add necessary information, but rather to underline missing details. Later, for example he writes, "Le manuscrit s'est trouvé corrompu dans cet endroit."(72) or again, "Je ne sais si Mirzoza resta ou s'en alla."(96). Perhaps this is included as an attempt to increase the sense of veracity, just as missing letters were sometimes referred to in epistolary novels, giving the idea that if this was a work of fiction the author would have made a more smooth transition to the next episode.

This problem of trying to locate the narrator and the authorial voice is that much more frustrating, and that much more necessary because it makes trying to understand pronouns illusory. Who is the "je" that aligns him/herself with readers behind the pronoun "nous?" It does not seem to be the same "je" that we have already encountered on two other occasions. Readers might be slightly disconcerted by the missing information but they are destabilized when they realize that the narrator is constantly transformed and changed. Halfway into the story we read, "Et moi, dit l'auteur africain, j'allais me reposer en attendant qu'il [Mangogul] revînt" (117). This is the first instance where the African author adopts the first person narration and only serves to further confuse readers. The narration continues to be interrupted because a little later we read, "En cet endroit, l'auteur africain remarque..."(121), and then, "Il faut avouer, dit l'auteur africain qui l'avait vue..."(144).

Diderot's alternating narrators seems to be at cross purposes with Diderot's goal of creating and maintaining illusion; yet, maybe it can be explained by some insight into the mise en abyme. Lucien Dällenbach explains in *Le Récit spéculaire: Essai sur la mise*

en abyme, that *mise en abyme* is a heuristic device that helps to orient readers and make the work coherent. He defines *mise en abyme* as "any sign having as its referent a pertinent continuous aspect of the narrative (fiction, text or narrative code) enunciation which it represents on the diegetic level" (*Mirrors and After, 10).* One good example of *mise en abyme* is presented in reference to the novel that Ricaric brings Mirzoza: "un roman qu'on donne à la marquise Tamazi, mais où l'on reconnaît par malheur la main de Mulhazen; la réponse de Lambadago, notre directeur, au discours du poète Tuxigraphe que nous reçûmes hier; et le *Tamerlan* de ce dernier"(198). The novel is clearly given to Tamazi just as this story is addressed to Zima but after that it gets cloudy as to who wrote what part just as in *Les Bijoux indiscrets* is unclear who is writing and who is narrating various parts of the book. Although there are no other examples that adhere to Dällenbach's definition equally well, readers do indeed feel that they are lost within some "récit spéculaire". What they are reading is a story written by someone who originally addresses Zima to tell the story of Mangogul and his ring. The narrative is often interrupted with further digression of individual jewels telling the story of their most characteristic sexual experience(s), interspersed with further digressions of Mirzoza telling about her dream, or of Sélim recounting his trips and love affairs around the world. *Mise en abyme* is used, according to Dällenbach, to crystallize the author's viewpoint or highlight key leit motifs in the story and yet here readers get lost in a morass of indistinguishable narrators.

One example of this is in Chapter 16, "Vision de Mangogul," in which Mangogul recounts the dream that he had. It begins like a dialogue between the sultan and his *pontif.*

"La nuit dernière à l'heure à laquelle Brama se plaît à se communiquer aux hommes qu'il chérit, nous avons eu une vision; il nous a semble entendre l'entretien de deux graves personnages" (84). The dream consists of the conversation between two men: one who believes that he has two noses and the other who believes that he has two asses. The man with two asses (deux trous au cul) tells a story about a night when he overheard a conversation between a man and a woman. After the very embedded story about this woman who wanted a new hole carved into her butt, the two men comment on the incident between the man and the woman. Certainly, a strange story with little closure because, before he (or the readers) could fully grasp what was going on, the man woke up and tells us that since then he has believed that he himself has two asses. The priest and Mangogul discuss the meaning behind the story but it is no longer written in dialogue form. Diderot supposedly wrote this novel in a few short weeks and it might at first appear to be an oversight. I would, however, agree with Pierre Mesnard who believes that *Les Bijoux indiscrets* already showed in 1748, "la matrice de l'oeuvre ultérieure" (in Vartanian, 7). This is easy to see on a structural as well as a thematic level. Diderot, the author, has his protagonist, Mangogul, tell a story about his conversation with a priest about his dream in which two men discuss a dream and then the dream ends and there is further speculation as to what it all means. In a few short pages Diderot tightly controls a story so that readers are never sure exactly where Diderot, the author, is to be found. When read carefully, however, this vision reveals two of Diderot's main preoccupations. The first, that is later developed further by Diderot in *Le Rêve de d' Alembert,* is the importance given to dreams. Second, we are told that if a person believes something

deeply enough (even if it is as ridiculous as the idea of having two noses) then they can convince others of this belief. This is how sects come about. The pontif illustrates the danger of leaving behind rational thinking when he exclaims, "Ô profondeur des décrets d'en haut! Combien cela serait fou, si cela n'était pas révélé! Soumettons nos entendements, et adorons" (85). And clearly, this is how persecution can come about. One interlocuteur wonders, "Et s'il leur venait en fantaisie de se faire chefs de parti, et que la secte des deux trous au cul se mit a persécuter la secte aux deux nez?...) (89). It is not difficult to extrapolate this seemingly silly story to religious persecution that was occuring in France at the time against which many *philosophes*, particularly Voltaire, spoke out.

Equally complicated from a narrative point of view is Chapter 18, "Des voyageurs." It begins with a third person narrator followed by a dialogue between Mirzoza and Mangogul about an article in a newspaper. The story is embedded in a number of layers. It begins with a conversation about whether or not Mirzoza wanted to stay and listen to this racy topic or not. The extra-diegetic narrator has his input which far from clarifying things only serves to further obscure, "Je ne sais si Mirzoza resta ou s'en alla; mais Mangogul reprenant le discours du Cyclophile lut ce qui suit:"(96). It is not coincidental that the members of this island are called cyclophiles thereby calling readers' attention to the circularity of this story. What follows is a story between the Cyclophile and a member of Mangogul's court who has visited their far off island where marriage is very different from what exists in Mangogul's land. Here, marriage is described: "rien n'est plus conforme au bonheur et à la raison" (96). On their island marriages are

arranged on the basis of physiological matches between people's sexual organs, categorized by temperature and shape. The two speakers discuss all the ramifications of this system. There is no concept of sin nor of incest except to have men and women with different shaped sexes have sex. Courtesans are those whose temperature is quite high and they are honored and respected for their position. Mirzoza, we can surmise, returns to the room and Mangogul scolds her,

> Votre pudeur toujours déplacée, [...] vous a privée de la plus délicieuse lecture. Je voudrais bien que vous me dissiez à quoi sert cette hypocrisie qui vous est commune à toutes, sages ou libertines. Sont-ce les mots? En vérité, cela n'en vaut pas la peine. S'il est ridicule de rougir de l'action n'est-il pas infiniment davantage de rougir de l'expression? (102).

The stories that we learn about from the Cyclophile are exaggerated and amusing because every aspect of courting and marriage are dictated by physiology. They fit into the overall story because they are about sex. It allows Diderot to expound upon issues that he considers most important such at the institution of marriage and the need to reorganize religion to bring it closer to the laws of nature. A priest deplores the state of religion in Banza, "Ô étranger! Que tout est opinion et préjugé! On appelle crime chez toi, ce que nous regardons ici comme un acte agréable à la Divinité"(99). It is easy for readers to interpret this as a comment on their own culture. Mangogul reinforces the idea that the Cyclophiles have a better organized society, admiring the fact that they call everything by its proper name. "La langue en est plus simple, et la notion des chose honnêtes ou malhonnêtes beaucoup mieux déterminée..."(102). Mirzoza asks whether women on this island are dressed. Mangogul answers, "Assurément; mais ce n'est point par décence, c'est par coquetterie: elles se couvrent pour irriter le désir et la curiosité"(102). This is the

same idea that Barthes develops that if authors hide their positions, readers will seek them out and the reading experience will be more pleasurable. In fact, Diderot's text is decent, there are no explicitly pornographic passages but he arouses readers' desire by camouflaging his position as author.

The chapter ends with Mangogul's suggestion that they continue to read about the Cyclophiles because that would make Mirzoza more perfect. She responds, "Il me semble que je le suis assez"(103). Familiarizing ourselves with customs of the Cyclophiles and their circular world is just like learning about women's jewel's from Mangogul's circular ring, which is to say, that we do not learn anything new, it does not change anything.

The ideal reading experience results in pleasure and knowledge. The pleasure gained in reading along with the possibility of learning something is very seductive. Sarah Kofman remarks that Diderot's astuteness is perverse because he awakes in readers a desire that is constantly promised and yet impossible to achieve (50). She gives the example of *La Religieuse,* in which Diderot's fiction is seductive for the Marquis, and the reader, who want to know and understand Suzanne, yet, that is impossible because she never truly existed. Similarly, in *Les Bijoux indiscrets* Diderot holds out the possibility of understanding female sexuality yet Mangogul and readers alike come to realize that this is impossible. The ring which at first seems to hold all the possibilities of knowledge is eventually seen for its circular qualities. Mangogul can attempt to go round and round interrogating all the women's sexes but they will never present him with a clear, finite, provable answer.

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Although *Les Bijoux indiscrets* was a literary success and spawned a number of counterfeit copies and even a translation in English, Diderot was evidently not able to convince the censors that what he had written was a frivolous and benign text that posed no threat to authority, because he was imprisoned in Vincennes for several months. Arthur Wilson, in his meticulously detailed biography, *Diderot*, tells us that on July 24, 1749, two police officers arrived at Diderot's apartment on the rue de l'Estrapade, in Paris, with orders to search his apartment for *Lettres sur les aveugles, Les Pensées philosophiques, Les Bijoux indiscrets, L'Oiseau blanc, conte bleu,* and to bring Diderot to the Vincennes fortress for detaining. Despite claims by the publishers of the *L'Encyclopédie* that Diderot's imprisonment would mean financial ruin for them and their enterprise, as well as letters from Voltaire and Madame de Châtelet, and pleas from Madame Diderot, Diderot was held until November third. On that date, according to a letter from the Lieutenant General of Police to the Count of D'Argenson, Diderot "promises to do nothing in the future that might be contrary to the slightest respect to religion and good morals"(Wilson, 118). In light of the fact that *Les Pensées philosophiques* was subsequently condemned and burned both by the Church and the State, it would probably be fair to assume that it was more responsible for inflaming the authorities than his works of fiction but since *la lettre de cachet* that brought about Diderot's imprisonment is no longer extant, we have no proof as to whether that is actually true or not.

Barbara de Negroni writes in *Lectures interdites: le travail des censeurs au XVIIIe siècle 1723-1774* that the reason the state censored works was the founding belief that "Toute lecture est alors dangereuse, parce qu'elle est source d'esprit critique, d'hérésie et de subversion"(278). Indeed, *Les Bijoux indiscrets* could be interpreted as a work that required critical thinking to enter into debates such as that between Cartesian philosophy and Newtonism or the controversy between the Ancients and the Moderns. And as we mentioned before, the parallels made between Mangogul and Louis XV were rather overt and could easily be considered to be subversive to his authority. Therefore, we might conclude that Diderot was not successful in convincing censors that *Les Bijoux indiscrets* was nothing but a light, pleasurable novel with no hidden agenda.

Now we must consider whether Diderot successfully imparted his philosophical point of view to perceptive readers. This is a much thornier question because it is difficult to pinpoint what exactly Diderot's philosophy was in *Les Bijoux indiscrets*. In the 18th century many readings focused on the novel as a *roman à clef* constantly suggesting different "keys"that would unlock the secrets about the French court found in the story. Twentieth century criticism has been more varied. Roger LeWinter in his preface to *Les Bijoux indiscrets* (1972) argues that it is a commentary about social hypocrisies. Robert Darnton interprets it as a political commentary about the king and the dangers of having a too powerful sovereign especially when, like Louis XV, his principal interests are in the boudoir. Thomas Kavanagh argues in "Language and Deception" that the work is a larger analysis on the ability to represent reality in the novel and through the flawed medium of language. Or maybe it is a Freudian look at the power of dreams or

even a larger allegory about the Enterprise of the Enlightenment? Or is the work a detached scientific look at sexuality in all its different forms as Vartanian argues in "Erotisme et philosophie chez Diderot"? The nature of the book in which the subject changes radically from one chapter to the next might have served Diderot's interest in keeping the reader's attention but it makes it much more difficult to say what the book is really about. The constantly vacillating text makes it nearly impossible to distill *Les Bijoux indiscrets* into one overarching, philosophical message. Nevertheless, when readers study criticism to determine what the work means for 20th-century readers, it is arguable that *Les Bijoux indiscrets* is a commentary on women and their sexuality. But even when most critics agree that Diderot is commenting on women and their sexuality, it is interesting to note that their interpretations of what Diderot is saying diverge widely. There is no consensus. Let's compare Jane Gallop's article "Women and Language in Literature and Society"or Daniel Brewer's "Diderot and the Image of the (Other) Woman" to what Vartanian argues in his preface to *Les Bijoux indiscrets* to see what the two most divergent interpretations of the story are.

Those who criticize *Les Bijoux indiscrets* as an example of Diderot's anti-feminist ideas claim that the representation of women in the work is predominantly negative and denies her the right to her own subjectivity, the expression of her own, personal desire. Instead, we see Mangogul imposing his own phantasms on women. In reference to *Sur les femmes*, Daniel Brewer writes in his article, "Diderot and the Other (Woman)," "If there is any hysteria in Diderot's text, it is perhaps his own, expressed in his compulsively repetitive attempts to define woman"(36). Certainly, Mangogul can be seen as the

expression of this hysteria. Brewer continues, "Woman is presented in Diderot's writings inevitably as image, as a mute object invested by a discourse that is not her own"(37). Although, he is talking about excerpts from the *Salons*, again it applies well to *Les Bijoux indiscrets*. The women are never allowed to debate, contest, modify, or explain what their "jewels" have revealed about them. The numerous turns of the ring never show women in a favorable light. The "knowledge" that Mangogul acquires about women is that they are lesbians, which is here portrayed as a perversion, women who prefer caresses with their dogs than with their lovers, women who are never faithful, and women who marry just for social status and plan to hold their sexual power over their husbands'. Mangogul's quest is not only to understand, but also to win his bet with Mirzoza, that no *femme tendre* defined by Mirzoza as,

really exists. All the images given of women are negative and there is never any indication that what the jewels reveal is anything but the pure, unmitigated truth. Those critics who highlight the misogynistic ideology found in *Les Bijoux indiscrets* are not lacking in examples.

Therefore, it is more than a little surprising to read Vartanian's defense of *Les Bijoux indiscrets*. Vartanian explains, "Dans ce prétendu cynisme on a cru apercevoir, en outre, un dessein anti-feministe; mais ce reproche est injuste. L'anneau magique, il est vrai, déconcerte, vexe et humilie momantanément les femmes dont il décèle le caractère libidineux; mais Diderot ne songe nullement à leur faire grief" (13). According to Vartanian, Diderot was not in anyway attacking women; On the contrary, he was showing the hypocrisy upon which society is based, and which causes a lot more problems for

women than it does for men. Instead of criticizing women, Diderot was arguing like feminists two centuries later, for the emancipation of feminine sexuality.

It is true that in his examination of women society's hypocrisies and double standards are revealed. There are the common 18th-century criticisms of fashion as being capricious and not based on anything concrete and yet it is followed as closely as if it were law: "Ce sont les fous qui donnent la loi aux sages, les courtisanes qui la donnent aux sages, les courtisanes qui la donnent aux honnêtes femmes, et qu'on n'a rien de mieux faire que de la suivre." There is also the idea makeup was a trick created by the genie to make women look uglier. Nevertheless, it is hard to be convinced by Vartanian's argument because women are usually shown as manipulating society's flaws to their advantage. There is the example of the young woman who marries a noble because of her beauty but plans to neglect her husband once the marriage is accepted in society.

I would argue that it is precisely the myriad of different narrators in *Les Bijoux indiscrets* that causes such radically divergent readings The reason why these critics are so diametrically opposed might be found in Wayne Booth's work on reading. He argues in *The Rhetoric of Fiction* that when reading , "Regardless of my real beliefs and practices, I must subordinate my mind and heart to the book if I am to enjoy it to the full. The author makes his reader as he makes his second self, and the most successful reading is one which the created selves, author and reader, can find complete agreement"(133). This statement is questionable whether readers are really able to disassociate themselves when reading from their most deep-seated ways of interpreting (such as gender or religion), but also because it is difficult to understand in that what makes a

"successful"reading is unclear. What is clear, however, is that if readers are unable to determine who this implied author is, and what his beliefs are, and to feel him guiding the reading, it is impossible to adopt his beliefs as our own. The fact that Diderot is constantly displacing the authorial voice from a third person omniscient narrator, to the African writer, to a translator, to a first-person narrator who has found the already translated manuscript etc., seriously impedes the readers who are looking to align their beliefs with the those of the implied author.

The second reason why it is possible to attain such opposite readings has to do with the voice of the characters. I agree with Lennard J. Davis, in his *Resisting Novels,* that the writer's ideology is manipulated through the characters. He argues that, "the simplification of personality required to produce a character in a novel is itself once again an ideological statement about the role of the individual in relation to society since the early modern period" (133). Arguably, Mangogul and Mirzoza play equally important roles in the story and since they present two diametrically opposed views on women it is difficult for readers to agree with either one of them. At the same time, readers who want to reduce the complex issue of women's sexuality to only one position can quickly find support in either one of these characters.

A third reading is advanced by Thomas Kavanagh in "Language as Deception: Diderot's *Les Bijoux indiscrets*." He claims that those who see *Les Bijoux indiscrets* as a commentary on women's sexuality or on society's hypocrisies are missing the point. Diderot's real goal in writing *Les Bijoux indiscrets* was to show the duplicity inherent in language. Key for Kavanagh, is that the "jewels" are described as "la partie la plus

franche qui soit en elles, et la mieux instruite de tous que vous désirez savoir"(43). It is only in getting the story directly from the body, with no intermediary, that Mangogul can approach the truth. The main theme of the work then is the problems inherent in any communication, which is then compounded by problems in translation. Translation is at issue for the entire story that has supposedly been translated from a relatively unknown African language, "le congeois," to French; it is also central to understanding the revelations of the horse's jewel or the "bijou voyageur", and, in a larger sense, communication in society only exists if there is an agreed upon meaning for all words. Finally, there is translation when readers attempt to understand a work of fiction. The magic of Cucufa's ring is that it speaks an idiom in which translation in unnecessary; it communicates in a unique language that is "magically stripped of its inherent powers to deceive"(103). Even the women who potentially have the most to lose in this game accept the idea that whatever the jewel, the body, reveals will be the truth. One woman reasons that she would rather have her secrets revealed by her own body than by a jealous lover. She argues, "un bijou parle sans passion et n'ajoute rien à la vérité." A second woman disagrees but never denies that the jewels are speaking the truth. Her argument is that when a jealous lover slanders a woman it was always possible to say that he was lying whereas with the jewel everyone accepts it as the unvarnished truth. This belief is nevertheless undermined by a narrative editorial which always refers to the jewels' language as chattle, prattle or babble.

The problem of language remains then because no language, not even one spoken, through the natural medium of the body, is completely transparent. The Sultan, happy

with the progress that he has made, admits, "Tous les secrets ne sont pas dévoilés, et je compte arracher des choses plus importantes aux bijoux qui me restent à consulter." Therefore, even when a truth is forced out of the jewels (by unnatural means, it should be noted), it is never *the* truth. Kavanagh concludes, "Every recourse to voice, every act of self-representation within language, establishes a dialogic movement of communication shot through with these twin menaces of deception" (231).

What Mirzoza very perceptively understands from the beginning is that what counts is not the truth, but the desire for the truth. So in the very beginning, she could have proven her faithfulness to Mangogul, winning the bet that they made (and securing her position as the Favorite,) but in doing that she would have put an end to Mangogul's desire to know. They would have ended up back in the same state of dissatisfaction and "dégoût" that led to Mangogul's quest. Kavanagh writes, "Mirzoza is acting according to her conviction that any language mythically purified of deception's promise, any language pretending to end interpretation in the name of truth, is antithetical to both desire and life (112).

Many critics have studied the importance of the dialogic in works by Diderot, one of the best examples being *Le Neveu de Rameau*, where readers are confronted with a similar problem of being able to ascertain where Diderot stands. Does he scoff at the dishonest and bohemian life style of Lui, or does he admire his freedom and his ability to not conform to society? Does he esteem Moi in all his respectability or does he see him as a boring sell out? Similarly in *Les Bijoux indiscrets*, Diderot manages to hide what his exact feelings are on the question of female sexuality. Maybe this is because it is such a

complex issue that there could never be one definitive answer, but I believe that it is also because Diderot understood that if he gave his readers *the* answer or *the* truth, that they would cease to desire the text in the same way that Mangogul would have ceased to desire Mirzoza once he knew everything about her. Although *Les Bijoux indiscrets* is not written in a dialogue form like *Le Neveu de Rameau* the dialogue that is kept up between Mirzoza who believes that women are indeed "des femmes tendres" and Mangogul who thinks that all women have some dirty secret that they are hiding permeates and guides the text.

Another way that we might explain why Diderot's narrative technique was not entirely successful was that is was not pornographic enough. He understood that melodrama affects the reader with a sense of sadness. By extension pornography and licentious novels should arouse readers, something which never really happens in *Les Bijoux indiscrets.* It might be argued that pornography is like humor in that what qualifies as humorous or pornographic changes with the time period . Yet it is clear that even for 18th century readers *Thérèse* or *Margot la Ravaudeuse* and significantly more pornographic and continue to arouse and shock readers more than *Les Bijoux indiscrets.* Diderot does not however abandon this method. He comes back to a sexually charged, erotic and exotic story with *Le Supplément au voyage de Bougainville.* In my other chapters I will show that Diderot never gives his readers all the answers. He constructs his text in such a way as to make them search for an answer that is meaningful individual readers.

Chapter 2 - *Le Supplément au voyage de Bougainville:* Supplementing the Supplement

Louis-Antoine de Bougainville traveled around the world from 1766-1769. During his expedition he kept a journal which he later rewrote and published on May 15, 1771 as *Voyage autour du monde par la frégate du roi la Boudeuse, et la flûte l'Étoile.* Bougainville wrote specifically for other navigators and in no way intended his text for a wide reading audience. However French readers of the mid-18th century were avid for tales about Tahiti and Bougainville's work became popular with the general public. Readers were attracted to exotic texts going back to the *Lettres persanes* written by Montesquieu in 1721. This was one of the first accounts about Tahiti and because it captured the public's attention so incompletely it was very influential. Bougainville was able to create an image of Tahiti that captivated and attracted readers to this exotic world much more so than that of any other writer, including other 18th century explorers like Samuel Willis (who traveled to Tahiti in June and July of 1767) and James Cook (who took two trips to Tahiti in 1773 and 1777), and even later novelists, such as the 20th century Victor Ségalen's *Les Immémoriaux.*

Bougainville's account of his voyages was dedicated to the King, and like many texts of the time period, claimed utility as its main objective. Bougainville is clear about why and for whom he is writing. In his preface he states, "Avant que de le commencer qu'il me soit permis de prévenir qu'on ne doit pas en regarder la relation comme un ouvrage d'amusement: c'est surtout pour les marins qu'elle est faite. [There are no] scènes intéressantes pour les gens du monde" (19). Bougainville claims to only write to help other sea explorers yet his text resembles less a shipping manual than a travelogue

written by an ethnographer. He makes no attempt to judge the people he observes nor to impose his own philosophical message.[1] He only records what he has seen. There is some suspense in the text but it is mostly based on whether his ships are going to survive the difficult weather conditions. Although colorful and suspenseful at times, Bougainville tries to present his text as that of an objective and detached ethnographer. He uses the first person in his narratives but adopts the voice of the scientific observer. He only occasionally resorts to conjecture; "Je ne saurais si le mariage est un engagement civil ou consacré à la religion," (145) and clearly prefers to limit his text to detailed accounts of what he saw. These accounts of what he and his men witnessed and experienced are rarely embellished with poetic devices or literary writing. Significantly, between the time that Bougainville composed his journal entries on Tahiti in 1768 and the time he published his account in 1771 he had time to do further research, to thoroughly interview Aotourou, and to compare his account with others. In his third chapter on Tahiti Bougainville claims that when he first observed Tahiti he was mistaken in some of his assumptions. He corrects the idea that the Tahitians live in a pacifist state, stating that in fact they live in a never ending state of war. He also discovered that what he took to be a people with no religion, other than their devotion to nature, was in reality strongly superstitious. He even noted some instances of human sacrifice. Public opinion had, however, become so seduced and enthralled by the utopian vision of Tahiti that they

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One exception is when he expresses his dismay at European's ignorant reaction to Aotorou's visit to Paris. Bougainville is horrified at the small-mindedness shown by some people who thought there were no other languages other than French, English and Spanish.

ignored any of these negative aspects mentioned in Bougainville's text.

Bougainville had to include these corrections because he wanted his text to be as truthful as possible. Nevertheless, readers sense that he repeatedly asserts his attachment to the truth precisely because he was seduced by all that he had seen in Tahiti. Yet, in his "Discours Préliminaire" he distinguishes himself from writers who imagined more than they had ever actually witnessed.

> Je ne cite ni ne contredit personne; je prétends encore moins établir ou combattre aucune hypothèse. Quand même les différences très sensibles, que j'ai remarquées dans les diverses contrées où j'ai abordé, ne m'auraient pas empêché de me livrer à cet esprit de système, si commun aujoud'hui et cependant si peu compatible avec la vraie philosophie, comment aurais-je pu espérer que ma chimère, quelque vraisemblance que je susse lui donner, pût jamais faire fortune? Je suis voyageur et marin; c'est-à-dire, un menteur et un imbécile aux yeux de cette classe d'écrivains paresseux et superbes qui, dans les ombres de leur cabinet, philosophent à perte vue sur le monde et ses habitants, et soumettent impérieusement la nature à leurs imaginations (Hermann, XII, 374)[2]

Bougainville insists that he has no philosophy or scientific theory that he is trying to advance. In noting "les différences très sensibles," he depicts Tahiti as vastly superior to all the other places visited. Therefore, despite his detached style, his devotion to reporting the truth, and his "vraie philosophie," Bougainville creates a mythic version of Tahiti that enters into the European imagination. The legend of Tahiti as a utopia is constructed around the idea of a superlatively beautiful island where justice reigns and where everyone is at peace, "Cet acte de justice nous en donna une idée,""partout nous

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Some critics have interpreted this remark as a direct attack on Rousseau who wrote in his *Discours sur l'Origine de l' inégalité*: "Il n'y a guère que quatre sortes d'hommes qui fassent des voyages de long cours, les marins, les marchands, les soldats et les missionnaires. On ne doit pas attendre que les trois premières fournissent de bons observateurs." (See Introduction Hermann, XII,374)

voyions regner l'hospitalité, le repos, une joie douce et toutes les apparences du bonheur" (129). Although he can only attest to the *appearance* of happiness, Bougainville's descriptions culminate in a vision of Tahiti as paradise on earth, "Je me croyais transporté dans le jardin d'Eden" (123).

Building upon this vogue, many of Bougainville's shipmates wrote their own accounts of Tahiti. Fesche, a volunteer on board, Vivez, a surgeon aboard L'Étoile, and the prince Nassau-Siegan all published laudatory texts expressing their pleasure and wonder at all the superlative qualities commonly found in Tahiti. They gave detailed accounts of the agreeable climate, the hospitable people, the unrestrained sexuality, the communal property and the overall state of peace that reigned on the island. Commerson, a naturalist accompanying Bougainville's expedition wrote two articles for *Le Mercure.* On February 21, 1769 he describes Tahiti: " Le seul coin de terre où habitent des hommes sans vices, sans préjugés, sans besoins, et sans dissensions" (Hermann, XII, 371). Another member of the crew, Bricaire de Dixmérie, published *Le Sauvage de Tahiti aux Français, avec un envoi au Philosophe, ami des sauvages* (1770) which was more an apology for inequality and a defense of private property than a description of conditions in Tahiti. Even people who had never visited Tahiti and who had never met the Tahitian native visiting Paris, Aotourou, created imaginative texts set in Tahiti. Louis Sébastien Mercier included in his chapter "Gazettes" of *L'An deux mille quatre cent quarante* a speech given by a Frenchman to the Tahitians when he decides to permanently live among them. Thus we see that many 18th-century writers took the extremely popular idea of Tahiti and used it to advance their own goals. Diderot was no exception.

Diderot eschews the type of writing used by Rousseau in *Le Discours* where the imagination and philosophical reasoning dictate the text but at the same time he does not restrict himself to a faithful transposition of Bougainville's text. Henri Coulet, like most critics who have studied *Le Supplément*, emphasizes the philosophical aspect of Diderot's text. I would argue however that Diderot's philosophy cannot be separated from the form in which it was written. His role as writer of *Le Supplément au voyage de Bougainville* (1772) is very similar to that of the sublime actor, as he describes it in *Le Paradoxe.* Lacoue-Labarthe in "Diderot, Le paradoxe ou le mimésis" elucidates Diderot's thesis in the *Paradoxe* that nature gives actors their qualities as a person; it is art that is able to perfect those qualities. Diderot took what was given to him in the factual, anthropological text written by Louis-Antoine de Bougainville, *Voyage autour du monde* (1771) and used it to form his own creative work weaving together questions and answers, fact and fiction, philosophy and art.

Diderot reviewed the work for Grimm's *Correspondance littéraire* at the end of 1771. For reasons unknown, it was never published in Grimm's journal. Herbert Dieckmann makes the conjecture that Diderot asked Grimm to return the review so that he could augment and improve upon it (Introduction, xxiv). Clearly, Diderot's interest in the text remained alive and he continually added to it, making final additions as late as 1780. Diderot appropriately entitled this work *Le Supplément au voyage de Bougainville.* It appeared in four installments in September and October of 1773 and in March and April of 1774. Although the text was completed by Diderot in a short amount of time, he continually revised the text until as late as 1778 or 1779 (Adam, 24).

What captured the attention of most readers, and obviously of Diderot, was the idea of the *bon sauvage* who lived in an uncorrupted world. Readers were drawn to Tahiti as an example of utopia. The fact that Bougainville had brought back a native, Aotourou, only further increased curiosity surrounding Tahiti. The 18th-century French reading public was particularly interested in free, unrestricted sexuality that reigned on the island. Bougainville observes, "La plupart de ces nymphes étaient nues; Les hommes, plus simples, ou plus libres, s'enoncèrent bientôt clairement, ils nous pressaient de choisir une femme, de la suivre à terre, et leurs gestes non équivoques démontraient la manière dont il fallait faire connaissance avec elles" (116). This free sexuality, moreover, is never tainted by jealousy, "la jalousie est un sentiment si étrange que le mari est ordinairement le premier à presser sa femme de se livrer" (113). Bricaire de la Dixmerie also developed the theme of free sexuality. He writes, "Il est vrai que les moeurs tahitiennes sont peu rigides; mais elles sont simples et vraies[...] Ces sauvages si bornés, ont pris la voie la plus courte pour arriver au bonheur. L'Amour est leur besoin le plus fréquent, et ne leur coûte pas plus à satisfaire que d'autres. Nulle entrave ne gêne son essor. On dirait que cette île est uniquement consacrée à son culte" (in Jimack, 13). Bougainville tells us that his men were bewitched [encorcelés] by these nude, sexually free Tahitian women and Diderot obviously wanted to have a similar effect on his readers. So much so, that at times, he incorporates the descriptions given by Bougainville verbatim.

Another area that served as a direct source of inspiration for Diderot was the treatment of religion. But he took the idea of primitive religion and manipulated it for his own philosophical purposes, remaining significantly less faithful to Bougainville's text.

According to Bougainville, who admits that due to language problems communication was never guaranteed, the Tahitians were for the most part very superstitious and their religion centered around a caste system in which the lowest members were often burned to offer human sacrifice to the gods. Diderot's Orou exhorts the Aumônier to borrow Tahitian mores asking, "Les moeurs de Tahiti, sont-elles meilleures ou plus mauvaises que les vôtres?" With this question readers are prompted to consider that their religion is not the only one and that it is not necessarily the best one. This is similar to many 18th-century exotic texts in which readers are led tc compare their own cultures with the exotic world depicted, so that they could better understand their own societies and mores. The Aumônier eventually submits because Orou presents better, more reasoned, views on sexual relations and on God. Concluding their conversation, Orou summarizes his impressions of European ideas and practices; "Ces préceptes singuliers, je les trouve opposés à la nature, contraires à la raison; faits pour multiplier les crimes, et fâcher à tout moment le vieil ouvrier, qui a tout fait sans tête, sans mains, et sans outils" (157). This ironic recapitulation is phrased in such a way that philosophical readers cannot help but smile and then perhaps grudgingly admit that Orou has a point. It is hard to imagine that the Aumônier and readers would have been so open towards the Tahitian religion if it had been a question of burning men as a way to offer reverence to their polytheistic gods. Restating his convictions, Orou asserts, "Crois-moi, vous avez rendu la condition de l'homme pire que celle de l'animal" (157).

Despite the somewhat frightening portrayal of Tahitian religious customs, after having read Bougainville's account, Diderot exclaimed, "Voilà le seul voyage dont la

lecture m'ait inspiré du goût pour une autre contrée que la mienne" (Jimack,11). But instead of climbing aboard a ship and setting sail for the exotic waters of the Pacific, Diderot composed a voyage. Although Bougainville's text was very successful Diderot could not rely on Bougainville's success to carry his own work; readers were undoubtedly impressed by *Voyage autour du monde* but that did not necessarily mean that a direct duplication would work again. Furthermore, it would go against Diderot's views stated in *Le Paradoxe* as to the need for art to be supplementary.

Diderot, therefore, adopted similar themes that had seemed to captivate readers but he distinguishes his work from Bougainville's through his style and ultimately through the message that his style carries with it. Readers can better understand *Le Supplément* by starting with the title and by studying the form. It is crucial to ask what is being supplemented in *Le Supplément.*[3] This is a difficult task, however, because this text eludes classification: Is it a short story? a philosophical dialogue? a utopian text? a series of theatrical pieces? It is a combination of many different genres of writing that includes all these different types of writing without being any one of them.

The entire title is *Supplément au voyage de Bougainville* ou *Dialogue entre A et B: Sur l'inconvénient d'attacher des idées morales à certaines actions physiques qui n'en comportent pas.* And in the margin of the copy found in the *fonds Vandeuls* was a quote taken from Horace's *Satires* (I, 2, 73). The text is then introduced with the roman numeral I. and the title, "Jugement du voyage de Bougainville." The title of the work, or the fact

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This is what Lacoue-Labarthe does in his article, "Diderot, le paradoxe ou le mimésis." He argues that the paradoxe in *Le Paradoxe* is to be found more in the form than in Diderot's thesis on acting.

that Diderot was unable to limit himself to just one title, belies his varied intentions in this work. In some ways this text is a supplement to Bougainville's *or* it might also be read as a dialogue. The word *or,* as opposed to *and*, suggests that the two are not of equal value and also suggests that the text can be read in two different ways. Some readers might see it just as a response to Bougainville's work but readers who search further will see that through the dialogue form Diderot is imparting a greater philosophical message that goes beyond his evaluation of Bougainville's book. Diderot might have combined the two titles to read: a dialogue between A and B about Bougainville's voyage and the fact that Diderot did not do that is significant. Also, in another version of the text discovered by Herbert Dieckmann the title is *Entretien entre deux mathématiciens ou Supplément au Voyage de Bougainville.* Again, the presence of both and the fact that Diderot changed the order of what should come first shows the text oscillates between the two goals and the two styles.

The subtitle and A's first comment offer another way of reading the text. For readers (like those who subscribed to the *Correspondance littéraire*) who were familiar with Diderot's other short texts, there would have been an obvious link with Diderot's two previous short stories. It is perhaps for this reason that many critics have classified *Le Supplément* as a short story. Diderot in a letter to Grimm, refers to "le troisième conte"and when Grimm published *Le Supplément* he did so under the heading, *Suites des contes de M. Diderot.* The textual links, though, are even more convincing of the connection between *Madame de la Carlière, Ceci n'est pas un conte,* and *Le Supplément.* All three texts explore the theme of sexual relationships and how public opinion

influences the character's development. The conclusion of *Madame de la Carlière* is, in my opinion, inconclusive as to whether Madame de la Carlière, supported by her friends, did the right thing in punishing her husband for his infidelity. The subtitle to the *Supplément* seems to offer Diderot's point of view; it is inconvenient, even foolish, to listen to public opinion regarding physical acts. In any event, A opens the text, "Cette superbe voûte étoilée sous laquelle nous revimes hier et qui semblait nous garantir un beau jour, ne nous a pas tenu parole," clearly links the text to the weather comment in the previous short story, "La nuit qui s'avance avec ce nombreux cortège d'étoiles"(33). But at the same time this opening line also warns readers that expectations are not always fulfilled. This is much more than a negligible comment on the weather; it is a warning to readers who expect to find any one thing in the text. Readers should not count on reading a text that is just a response to Bougainville's, nor should they expect a pure dialogue, and they cannot count on the text to restrict itself solely to the theme of social laws and sexual relations. Nevertheless, readers who are familiar with the ending of *Madame de la Carlière* are waiting for Diderot to take a stand. The narrator concludes the text: "Et puis j'ai mes idées, peut-être justes, à coup sur bizarres, sur certaines actions, que je regarde moins comme des vices de l'homme que comme des conséquences de nos législations absurdes, sources de moeurs aussi absurdes qu'elles, et d'une dépravation que j'appellerais volontiers artificielle. Cela n'est pas trop clair, mais cela s'éclaircira peut-être une autre fois" (537). Bougainville's text seems to offer the perfect opportunity to expand on the incompatibility between society's laws and what is considered to be a vice and this theme is developed beginning with the subtitle and further explored in the Polly

Baker story. Thus we see a connection between the three stories both aesthetically and thematically. This theme of the role of sexuality in society is further emphasized by the quote from Horace. Diderot presents Tahiti as the antithesis of social and sexual relations in 18th-century France.

These similarities in the three works are not enough to argue conclusively that *Le Supplément* is only a short story. The title emphasizes the dialogic component and that cannot be overlooked. There is, of course, a dialogue among the three stories and another dialogue with the two exterior works by Bougainville and by Horace.[4] Yet, readers who are unfamiliar with the two short stories or who have no knowledge of Horace or of Bougainville still see the work as a dialogue. The form is a technique already used by Diderot in his better-known works. He adopted the Socratic dialogue as a way of exploring two opposing positions. This is the case in *Le Paradoxe* where Premier argues against Sticoti's ideas on acting and presents his own views while, Second, Sticoti's friend, occasionally raises objections and asks different questions. It is also used in Diderot's more commonly studied works like *Le Neveu de Rameau* and in *Le Rêve de d'Alembert.* In *Le Neveu* Moi supposedly represents the bourgeois philosopher who espouses views that are diametrically opposed to Lui, the bohemian loser. The extremes of both characters are presented and argued. While many critics have tried to pinpoint Diderot's personal views in either Moi or Lui's position, it is important to remember that in the Socratic dialogue the "answer" is never obtained; the goal of the exercise is to use

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For a detailed explanation of Diderot's use of Horace's *Satire* and the connection that it has to *Le Supplément* see Georges May, "Horace et Orou," in *L'Encyclopédie et Diderot* ed. Annie Becq, Paris: PUF, 1998.

logical reasoning and to examine which side holds up better. Diderot then uses the dialogue not as a device to advance any one position but rather to examine the possibilities. It is left to the reader to decide who presents the better case.

At first it seems that Diderot eschews Bougainville's objective writing style and makes it subjective in the sense that we have two very specific readers of Bougainville's work, A and B. Yet, upon further reflection, it becomes apparent that the back and forth between the two characters provides readers with a much more balanced examination of the issues than any first-person narrator ever could. This would also explain why Diderot uses such anonymous names for his characters. Diderot wrote about historically known 18th-century contemporaries such as Bougainville, Aotourou, or the famous musician Rameau's nephew, or the real theorist on acting, Sticoti. Nevertheless, Diderot repeatedly uses names like First, and Second, He and Me, A and B, that frustrate readers' attempts to qualify any one character's position as that of the author. When readers finish the work there is no doubt as to where the real life people (i.e. Bougainville or Sticoti) stand philosophically but they have much less of an idea regarding Diderot himself. It is possible to infer that A and B are two European male readers but beyond that little is known about them to help readers decide who is more credible. Jimack who argues that "out of intellectual honesty found himself compelled to present confrontation rather than conclusions"(16). I would argue that it is not just a question of honesty that explains Diderot's penchant for dialogue but a desire to make readers decide for themselves. Dialogue insures that the text is not read passively but rather that readers grapple with the issues presented and draw their own conclusions. Undoubtedly the text becomes more

meaningful for individuals when they establish their own position vis-à-vis the text. They cannot rely on Diderot to give them the answer. It becomes obvious to them that Diderot's philosophy is always located somewhere in between the two viewpoints presented. In this way they have to reevaluate what they themselves think about the issues presented.

Diderot's text is animated and fun to read but readers should not be fooled into thinking that Diderot jumps from one subject to another just because he is trying to imitate the natural style of a spoken conversation in which the speakers quickly go from one topic of conversation to another and then back without there being any confusion. There is an overarching logic that connects the seemingly disparate comments. Although the first few exchanges jump from topic to topic, it becomes evident that just as with the title, subtitle, and epigraph that opens the text, the various topics of conversation are, in fact, interrelated. It becomes clear that it is impossible to disassociate any one part of the text from another. A and B remark upon the weather, then they talk about reading, and then they discuss Bougainville and his decision to leave his sedentary life of studying math to become a world explorer. These seemingly isolated remarks should not be read as unconnected or disjointed. Let's begin with the comments regarding Bougainville. A is surprised at Bougainville's decision to leave his life as a math scholar to become a world explorer. B is, however, not at all surprised that one would study and then later actively put his knowledge to concrete use. (Bougainville's text describes the exact location of his ships calculated with his mathematical and astronomical knowledge). Similarly, readers should not passively collect knowledge just through reading and then stop; they need to follow Bougainville's example and find a way to make it active and useful. As Dena

Goodman argues in "The Structure of the Political Argument in Diderot's *Le Supplément au voyage de Bougainville,*" B's reference to "la maison flottante" shows that what is most valuable about Bougainville's voyage is, "Not the movement of the ship, but that of the traveler's mind in observing and reflecting upon what he has encountered" (124). In this way, the comments on the weather can be understood metaphorically.

> A: Le brouillard est si épais qu'il nous dérobe la vue des arbres voisins.
> B: Il est vrai; mais si ce brouillard, qui ne reste dans la partie inférieure de l'atmosphère que parce qu'elle est suffisamment chargée d'humidité, retombe sur terre?
> A: Mais si au contraire il traverse l'éponge, s'élève et peut, comme disent les chimistes, n'être pas saturé?

When the air is too saturated with humidity, its impossible to see anything. Similarly, readers who are overwhelmed with facts cannot comprehend anything. When the saturation rises and reaches "les régions supérieures," the fog clears. When readers move what they are passively reading to the superior regions of their brains, then they begin to think and to understand. B fits the pieces together: "Si le vaisseau n'est qu'une maison flottante, et si vous considérez le navigateur qui traverse des éspaces immenses, resserré et immoblile dans une enceinte assez étroite, vous le verrez faisant le tour du globe sur une planche, comme vous et moi le tour de l'univers sur notre parquet" (4). As readers, A and B can be as active as Bougainville who crossed immense seas to acquire knowledge. The *comme vous et comme moi* points out that A and B can be like Bougainville just as we readers can be like A and B. B extols the invaluable qualities of Bougainville, many of which are those of perceptive, engaged readers. Bougainville left, "avec les lumières nécessaires et les qualités propres à ses vues; de la philosophie, du courage, de la véracité,

un coup d'oeil prompt qui saisit les choses et abrège le temps des observations, de la circonspection, de la patience, le désir de voir, de s'éclairer et d'instruire [...]" (5). Finally, A asks about Bougainville's writing style and B answers, "Son apprêt, le ton de la chose, de la simplicité et de la clarté, surtout qu'on possède la langue des marins" (5). The text, whether it is Bougainville's or Diderot's is best understood when the style is clear and when writer and reader are speaking the same language. Yet the use of metaphor itself can be problematized: does it make B's statement clearer or more obtuse?

The metaphor of the navigator for readers is further developed but the overarching point is that communication is always tenuous. Talking about the relationship between people on different continents, B wonders not just about how they were geographically attached but how they communicate, "Quelle communication les liait autrefois avec le reste de leur espèce?"(7). Later, B describes the meeting of the natives with the Europeans, "Ce sont de bonnes gens qui viennent à vous et qui vous embrassent en criant *chaoua*" (9). Communicating was also a problem for Aotorou who had trouble pronouncing certain words because his alphabet lacked some letters. "Il s'ennuyait parmi nous. L'alphabet otaïtien n'ayant ni b, ni c, ni Diderot, ni f, ni g ni q, ni x, ni y, ni z, il ne put jamais apprendre à parler notre langue qui offrait à ses organes inflexibles trop d'articulations étrangères et des sons nouveaux" (10). In the same way that Aotorou would be forced to alter his vocabulary to express to other Tahitians once he returned home what he saw in Europe, B wonders whether what they are reading is a faithful translation or whether it has been changed and European overtones have been added.

The danger in any act of communication is even more pronounced in a dialogue.

There is always the potential problem that the two speakers might not be speaking the same language and as a result, there might be misunderstandings. If the author controls the text through the narrator this is much less likely to happen. In *Ceci n'est pas un conte*, another short story in the triptych, Diderot calls attention to the fact that all stories are based on the back-and-forth communication between the teller and the listener. "Lorsqu'on fait un conte, c'est à quelqu'un qui l'écoute; et pour peu que le conte dure, il est rare que le conteur ne soit interrompu quelquefois par son auditeur" (333). Diderot incorporates this relationship directly into the story. He repeatedly acknowledges the dependent relationship between reader and writer. "Voilà pourquoi j'ai introduit dans le récit qu'on va lire, et qui n'est pas un conte, ou qui est un mauvais conte, si vous vous en doutez, un personnage qui fasse à peu près le rôle du lecteur, et je commence." One way of understanding the title *Ceci n'est pas un conte,* is to take it to mean that it is not a short story and should not be read as one, but rather as a dialogue between readers and the writer where the readers read (or listen) attentively until they no longer want to continue reading. In the same way, *Le Supplément* begins with the act of reading. Again, the author can never be sure that the readers will continue to read or that they will read the text in the way in which it was intended. Here for example, A and B are only going to read for as long as the fog prevents them from doing anything else, and they do not read the text from beginning to end but prefer to read bits and pieces that strike them as being the most interesting. Diderot's fear that readers will misunderstand or even ignore his texts is evident from the many prefaces he wrote from *Les pensées philosophiques,* to *Les Bijoux indiscrets,* to *Le Supplément* where Diderot urges his readers to read, "Tenez,

tenez. Lisez." Perhaps Diderot is worried that if they get bored, readers will stop reading. "Passez ce préambule qui ne signifie rien" Another way of reading it, which corresponds better to Diderot's preoccupations, would be to read the sentence as a trope by which Diderot calls attention to this work by claiming that it is unimportant.

Diderot acknowledges that his readers might be confused by this text that is difficult to classify into any one genre or to read in a traditional way. Therefore the question, "Et où se trouve ce Supplément?"(13) might also mean what *is* the Supplément? The question can be understood as not simply asking the location of the text that they currently possess but rather: is the supplement limited to the text that is on the table next to them, or is the text they are now reading, or Bougainville's work modified by Diderot or the text that we readers are reading, or perhaps even something greater encompassing various readers' reactions to Diderot's work? When Lacoue-Labarthe asked the question, "What is paradoxical in the paradox?" he discovered new ways to read the text. He found that the form was more paradoxical than the subject and that Diderot's philosophical position can be found, first and foremost, in the form of his writing. Here Diderot makes sure that readers ask themselves that question. We know that the *Supplément* started literally as notes in the margins of Diderot's copy of Bougainville's book but what has it become? A and B's discussion that frames the "excerpts" we read are not directly taken from Bougainville's work. Therefore the question arises: is their discussion supplementing the text or has Diderot already supplemented it himself? Bougainville's original text has been transformed in many different ways and has become a series of interlocking dialogues. Proof that it has gone way beyond Diderot's original critique of

the work is B's response to A's question, "Est-ce que vous ne me le confiriez pas?" (146). B replies, "Non; mais nous pourrons le parcourir ensemble, si vous voulez" (147). It is no longer just the physical text written by Bougainville, nor is it what Diderot has written, it has become the interaction between readers and the text as well as the discussion surrounding the text between readers. All the talk by A and B about reading suggests that any reading, and particularly the reading of a text like Bougainville's that is full of foreign ideas needs to be supplemented by the readers' own knowledge and feelings. I argue that the work cannot acquire its full meaning unless it is supplemented. A philosophically and artistically successful work must incite readers to want to know more and perhaps to even produce their own work in response to Diderot's.

B reacts to Bougainville's text in the same way that Diderot expressed his feelings about Bougainville's voyage in his review of the work. "Le voyage de Bougainville est le seul qui m'ait donné du goût pour une autre contrée que la mienne" (146). B continues to say that until reading this work he had always assumed that people always felt most comfortable while they were in their homeland and imagined that it was the same for everyone. A responds, "Quoi, vous ne croyez pas l'habitant de Paris aussi convaincu qu'il croisse des épis dans la campagne de Rome que dans les champs de Beauce?" A's reaction is that most people do not reflect upon the different cultures that exist around the world and automatically think that their type of lifestyle is what exists elsewhere. Furthermore, when they encounter stories about other cultures they prefer to disbelieve them rather than to question themselves about their own habits, beliefs, and lifestyles. Referring to the Tahitian's likely reaction to Aotourou's accounts of what he saw in

Europe, B says that they would rather consider him a liar, than consider their culture from another viewpoint. B is not only criticizing Western society, he is also emphasizing the difficulty for any culture to stand back and objectively compare its own with others. *Le Supplément* has often been characterized as a utopia because life there is blissfully simple and there are few problems or conflicts. Diderot, it can be argued, presents Tahiti as a utopian vision of a better way to construct our world; he urges readers to be philosophical and to engage in an open and truthful dialogue with the other culture.

Tahitian culture might seem too perfect to be believed which is why A refers to Bougainville's work as a fable. A insists however that it is in no way a fable. The power of Bougainville's account comes directly from the fact that it is based on his own personal testimony of what he saw and his desire, as not just explorer, but also as ethnographer to never deviate from what he saw to be the truth. There were many utopian texts written throughout the 18th century but Diderot's text has a greater impact on readers because it is not just a work of fiction; it is presented as a viable reality. Most utopias are purely works of fiction that are produced by the writer's imagination. Utopia, as first coined by Thomas Moore in 1513, means a "good place" (eu-topia) as well as a no-place (ou-topia). Most readers would qualify Diderot's Tahiti as an ideal place to live due to the dynamics of community living in which all needs are met, and a free attitude towards sexuality characterizes life on the island. Yet in some ways Tahiti cannot be defined as a utopia because it is known to really exist both geographically and historically. As a result, Diderot *Supplément* is read differently.

Utopian stories function in a way similar to that of exotic texts; the works present

a foreign world in order to reflect the flaws in the readers' world. Ernst Bloch thus describes the effect of estrangement that readers experience while reading utopian texts: "The real function of esthetic estrangement is - and must be - the provision of a shocking mirror above an all too familiar reality" (Bloch, 33). Utopian texts, however, are different from exotic texts because they go beyond just highlighting the differences between two societies; they present an alternative. As Robert Mauzi argues in his work *L'Idée du bonheur dans la pensée française au XVIII ième siècle,* Enlightenment philosophers were often looking for new alternatives for a better, more auspicious, structuring of society and as a result utopian texts flourished throughout the 18th century. These texts varied from Voltaire's depiction of Eldorado in *Candide,* to Rousseau's ideal at Clarens in *La Nouvelle Héloïse* to Mercier's futuristic *L'An 2440.* Raymond Trousson explains why 18th-century readers found utopian texts to be so appealing. He argues, "L'utopie se présentait comme un commode instrument d'investigation des "possibles" economiques et politiques, permettant des recherches et des speculations parfois audacieuses sous le couvert de la fiction" (Trousson, 147). It was also a useful technique for polemical writers who wanted readers to question their own lives and consider alternative ways of constructing society.

Diderot's text appears uncontroversial because he begins with an innocent pretext: two European readers discussing Bougainville's work but the ensuing reading raises many polemical questions such as: Where is God? How should marriage be legislated? Is European society based on hypocrisy? etc. Diderot's text is more powerful and potentially more dangerous because in addition to raising the questions, he often suggests the

answers. With the fiction of A and B, two innocent readers, he can question whether Tahitian society is better structured than European society. I would go further to say that having these questions elicited by Bougainville's *truthful* account allows A and B to conclude that, in some areas, Tahiti is undoubtedly superior to Europe.

The conversation between Orou and the Aumônier explores Tahiti as an alternative to the European way of life. Orou's understanding of Europe is that it is a society based on all the inherent contradictions and the many layers of hypocrisy in Western society that can only lead to civil strife and unhappiness. Although the dialogue is humorously presented readers quickly detect a biting critique of a religion that convinces people to go against their nature. In the society depicted by the Aumônier, and then interpreted through the logic of Orou, Westerners find themselves in a perpetual conflict between their nature and the established social mores and religious laws. The humor with which the conversation advances makes the critique more palatable to sensitive readers than an outright condemnation of religion as completely illogical and unnatural. Nevertheless, at the culmination of his series of conversations, when the Aumônier cries, "Mais ma religion, mon état," readers cannot help but laugh and at the same time they become acutely aware of the contradictions in their own lives. Even if the 18th century readers were not members of the clergy, 18th century libertinage often imposed conflicts between common social practices and the dictates of religion or morality.

Clearly for Diderot utopia is not just an escapist dream. Underneath all the layers of narrative there is a reality that serves as a source of reflection about our own culture.

And this reflection can be performed equally well by Bougainville, by A and B, and by the readers themselves. Dena Goodman argues that the value is, "not in the 'facts' about alien cultures that it provides, but in the conclusions to be drawn from them" (124). In the dialgoue the practical value that can be gleaned from the comparison makes the story extremely engaging and adds another dimension to the dialogue. I contend that Diderot's Tahitian utopia is better adapted to advance his philosophical goals, because it is not a "quasi- human community" but rather a geographically known society presented as fully functioning and self-sufficient. Of course it is obvious to readers that there is no way to actually ascertain the truth about Tahitian culture. Bougainville was biased in his observations of the culture and prejudiced by his own Western viewpoints. This is further magnified by Diderot who takes bits and pieces of Bougainville's text that serve his own philosophical goals. Nevertheless, there are many aspects of the Tahitian culture that serve as useful points of comparison with Western precepts.

One of the areas where the two cultures diverge the most dramatically concerns the Tahitians' institution of reproduction rights and laws. While the sexual system of Tahiti, "La Nouvelle Cythère" has been closely analyzed, women's place in this system is often overlooked.

When the Aumônier arrives in Tahiti his every need is attended to. What appeals to many readers as the fulfillment of all their phantasms - women literally throwing themselves at the feet of all available men - outrages readers who do a close feminist reading of the text. Indeed, the Aumônier is exceedingly well treated by Orou's family. His wife and daughter wash his face, his hands, his feet and prepare him a good meal. At bedtime

Orou appears with his wife and three daughters and presents them naked to the Aumônier inviting him to take his choice. "Tu as soupé, tu es jeune, tu te portes bien; si tu dors seul, tu dormiras mal; l'homme a besoin la nuit d'une compagne à son côté. Voilà ma femme, voilà mes filles: choisis celle qui te convient;"(21). The entire structure of Tahitian society at first seems very seductive.

Certainly, it would appeal to most male readers to receive this type of welcome.[5] When studied from a feminist perspective, however, this scene is far from appealing. It seems that women are objects owned by men as a source of pleasure. Orou exclaims, "Elles m'appartiennent et je te les offre" (154), meaning that since he owns his wife and his daughters, and is freely offering them to the Aumônier, he should have no scruples about accepting his generosity. The fact that these women have their own will and say in what they do is very secondary. "Elles sont à elles, et elles se donnent à toi" (154), is added as an afterthought and readers wonder whether the women would offer themselves as freely as their father does. Their first identity is as a possession of their father. In fact, these women have very little choice in the matter. Thia supplicates the Aumônier to choose her, explaining, "Asto l'aînée a déjà trois enfants; Palli, la seconde en a deux, et Thia n'en a point!"(155). In this economy women are only valorized when they reproduce, which is seen as producing wealth for the island. Up until now Thia has not produced any children, has not increased the riches of Tahiti, and is therefore worth very little. The fact that she refers to herself in the third person gives an exotic flavor to the

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The question of how a woman would be received is never posed because the one female member of Bougainville's crew passes herself off as a man.

text but it also indicates the extent to which she is alienated from her own needs and desires. Not producing a child does not only mean not producing riches; in this society, it is a crime. Thia's mother says to her, "Corrige-toi, mon enfant, à ton âge, j'avais été trois fois mère" (155). Thia is transformed from being part of the system to being an individual desperate for the Aumônier's help. She explains that she will be forever indebted to the Aumônier if he sleeps with her. "Si tu m'accordes cette faveur, je ne t'oublierai plus; je te bénirai toute ma vie; j'écrirai ton nom sur mon bras et sur celui de ton fils; nous le prononcerons sans cesse avec joie" (155). The measure of her gratitude also indicates how desperate she is. She also supposes, predictably enough in European as well as Tahitian culture, that the desired child will be male.

"Le naif Aumônier" gives in to her caresses and sleeps with her. Is he qualified as naive because of his religious training that has ill prepared him for such a situation, or because he, in his desire, fails to see the workings of an economy where women are secondary citizens until they become mothers? What is interesting is that at this point in the dialogue the narrative changes to indirect discourse makes it difficult for readers to judge who is calling him naive. Is that Diderot's characterization, or the Tahitians, or Thia's? It is impossible to know from what perspective this unknown narrator is evaluating the Tahitian customs.

The discussion between Orou and the Aumônier reveals that in Tahiti people are encouraged to follow nature as a guide to all their actions. That Diderot, the Enlightenment philosopher, who at all times advocates learning and the advancement of society through knowledge, symbolized by the *Encyclopédie*, now champions listening

exclusively to our natural impulsions, is more than a little confusing. In Tahiti, this means that people can do what they feel is best for them. He believes the world to be in a constant state of change and that it is unreasonable to enter into the indissoluble bonds of marriage Orou argues this point and sees the laws of marriage as, "Contraires à la nature, parce qu'ils supposent qu'un être sentant, pensant et libre, peut être semblable à lui. Sur quoi ce droit serait-il fondé?" (157). Surprisingly, Diderot's revolutionary ideas on mariage do not mean that he consequently sees both men and women as being equally free. The limits to Diderot's freethinking are revealed. Orou, who just the night before proclaimed his wife and his daughters as his property, now wonders according to what right one person might have to own another. More than just contradictory, the description of Tahitian sexual mores reveals Diderot's desire to structure society so that men have total freedom and women are objectified. This belief that each person belongs only to him/herself translates into a Tahitian marriage which might only last from one moon to the next. The sexual freedom to change partners every month might appeal to some readers who agree with Orou that in instituting marriage vows, society has made man's fate worse than an animal's. This freedom seems to have no possible pitfalls. If a pregnancy occurs, the child is welcomed by all and we know through the Vieillard's speech that there were no sexually transmitted diseases before the Europeans arrived. That small detail betrays the fact that Tahiti's construction is based on Diderot's phantasms of sexual freedom. According to Bougainville's account, it was the Tahitians who infected the Europeans with venereal diseases previously unknown in Europe. Some critics have pointed out that while Diderot was writing *Le Supplément au voyage de*

Bougainville, he was having trouble with his wife whom he married in 1743. He was also having trouble with his mistress.[6] For them, the biographical information provides a clue as to why in *Le Supplément* marriage is depicted as a harmful state with absolutely no benefits. It is clear from the text that happiness is not to be found in a union that results in lifelong devotion and faithfulness. The Aumônier admits that nothing is more popular in Europe than a woman who is unfaithful to her husband. According to the text, neither man nor woman is protected by society's laws that create an infernal cycle with no way out. "On se blâme, on s'accuse, on se suspecte, on se tyrannise, on est envieux, on est jaloux, on se trompe, on s'afflige, on se cache, on dissimule, on s'épie, on se surprend, on se querelle, on ment" (28). The rapid succession of verbs gives the impression that the negative consequences of marriage take on a force of their own that cannot be stopped. And Orou infers from the Aumônier's description that things only get worse once the couple has children.

Readers might wonder what the solution is. The solution that appears to be advocated by Orou is free sex for all. Upon closer inspection, it seems, however, that what he offers is to organize society so that men have better control over women's sexuality. It is assumed that in Europe women are given a choice as to whether or not they want to pursue sexual relations . If a woman is forced against her will then it is

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David Anderson argues in his article "The Polly Baker Digression in *Le Supplement au voyage de Bougainville.* (*Diderot Studies* 1995, 18-27) that the best way to understand the epigraph is to read it is as indicative of what Diderot was experiencing with his wife and mistress at the time. He gives a translation of the epigraph from Horace's *sermones, Satire,* I, 2, lines 73 to and adds line 77 which is not given by Diderot. He argues that Diderot deliberately left out the last line, "Therefore, to save yourself grief, stop chasing after matrons!" (20) but that well-versed readers would understand his meaning.

considered to be the felonious crime of rape. In Tahiti, such notions do not exist because, it is suggested that the woman will always be ready and willing, and therefore, the idea of using force is never an issue. Orou explains that, "C'est l'affaire de l'homme que de la [la femme] distraire de sa crainte, de l'enivrer et de la séduire" (57). Women's desire never enters into the mathematical equation where sexuality is reduced to a set of geometric precepts (a bit like in the island described in *Les Bijoux indiscrets*) where women's will and desire are not an issue.

Men's control of women comes from the prohibitions that they impose. It is true that there are some minor restrictions on prepubescent boys, but the majority of restrictions are aimed solely at women. One would imagine that in a sexually free society there would be no such thing as a libertine, yet, in Tahiti, like in Europe libertines are considered a source of moral corruption. In literature all libertines are men (with the exception perhaps of Madame de Merteuil in *Les Liaisons dangereuses,* and she of course suffers greatly for having adopted this role*)*. Here, where men can have all the women that they want, it might be assumed that there are no libertines and no condemnation for libertine behavior. Yet, this is not the case in Tahiti, where women referred to as "les vieilles dissolues," are those who are unable to conceive a child and continue to have sexual relations. Libertines are men and women who show "le signe de la stérilité, vice de naissance, ou suite de l'âge avancé" (173), but who remain sexually active. Thus we see that this utopia where sexual pleasures are supposed to be abundant for all, is, in fact, reserved for those who are fertile. Women who have sex merely for pleasure are ostracized and sometimes banned to a desolate part of the island.

According to the subtitle, "Sur l'inconvénient d'attacher des idées morales à certaines actions physiques qui n'en comportent pas," the underlying philosophical message is supposed to the be the need to separate morality from physical actions like sex. Upon examination, this is not even always the case in Tahiti. Orou tells us that the greatest punishment for libertines is blame and guilt emanating from the society. Georges Van Den Abbeele argues in , "Utopian Sexuality and Its Discontents," that one coercion is turned into another. "The 'il ne faut pas' has simply be reversed into an 'il faut.' An ethics of pleasure has merely give way to a utilitarian one" (Van Den Abbeele, 46). Indeed, Tahiti is presented as being superior to Europe because it is more "natural" but in fact readers discover that there is a rigorously structured society that tries to maximize its riches. The role of women in Tahitian society has been severely diminished and it seems to have been reduced to a purely economic one, that of reproductive labor.

There is no discussion concerning money or commerce in *Le Supplément*. Yet, when Orou explains sexual relations, it seems as though children are a commodity and that women are the producers. Far from being empowered by this situation, women are completely reliant on children to gain self-respect, to bring riches to the home, and to provide their own dowry. Van Den Abbeele argues that women's position in society is as "the locus of production of personal and social wealth." He continues, "She can be seen to play the role of laborer in an economic system" (47). And since sexuality's primary goal is to procreate, there is never any mention of pleasure. How to distribute the wealth, meaning the children, is the main concern, and eliminating any taboos associated with sexuality decreases the erotics. Readers who are at first drawn to such a

frank discussion of sexuality are later frustrated because there are no erotic details such as those in Montiesquieu's harem scenes in *Les Lettres persanes.* Instead the subject is broached in terms used for talking about a commodity. Furthermore, the plans for mating are not made because there is any physical attraction or attempt at seduction, but rather by considering how fertile a woman is and in comparing the value of different gene pools. Therefore, a fertile-looking woman is preferred over a beautiful one. Orou insists that value outweighs attraction in choosing a sexual partner, "tu ne saurais croire combien l'idée de richesse particulière ou publique, unie dans nos têtes à l'idée de population, épure nos moeurs sur ce point" (172).

Readers wonder whether it is really a purification of the European system or simply a reversal of evils. Orou also tells the Aumônier that the Europeans were used for their genes because it was immediately observed that they were smarter than the Tahitians. Talk of genetics really does reduce children to a commodity. When talking about children, Orou's speech is flavored with statements such as, "il s'est établi entre nous une circulation d'hommes" (170), "si tu veux apprécier la valeur," (174) and "nous savons aussi calculer" (175), which shows to what point reproduction is a highly calculated enterprise. Clearly, the most valued child is a male. "Un enfant qui naît, occasionne la joie domestique et publique: c'est un accroissement de fortune pour la cabane et de force pour la nation: ce sont des bras et des mains de plus dans Tahiti; nous voyons en lui en agriculteur, un pêcheur, un chasseur, un soldat, un époux, un père." The idea that the child will grow to be a soldier, a husband, and a father leaves no doubt as to what gender the child should be.

Orou argues that in Tahiti there are no senseless restrictions on sexuality, and words like incest and adultery do not have any meaning. This idea is later found to false but it is true that marriage is entirely free and only lasts from moon to moon. This was in line with Diderot's ideas regarding the constantly changing quality inherent in nature. He believed that if the world was constantly in a state of flux that it was absurd to try to enforce institutions such as marriage that required people to remain the same in their needs and desires. If a woman sleeps with two men during her four-week marriage and there is any dispute as to who the father is, the child is automatically given to the man of her choice. Since children are of great value in Tahiti and make up a woman's dowry, this would be a significant loss of wealth. Therefore extramarital affairs are not called adultery but they do result in penalties for the woman if she does not abide by the restrictions that are placed on her. There is, however, no mention of any penalty for a man who sleeps with more than one woman during their "marriage."

In addition to there being a general prejudice against women there is a more acute bias against menstruating and post-menopausal women. Menstruating women are said to be suffering from "la maladie périodique" (41), and are forced to set themselves apart from other women by wearing a gray veil. In this "utopia" post-menopausal women immediately become not only worthless to society; they pose a grave danger to the well-being of society in that they might commit the crime of having sexual relations that could not possibly lead to children.

This is evidence of Diderot's concern that Europe was undergoing a serious decline in population. The importance of this critique might escape 20th-century readers

who are more aware of the dangers of overpopulation than of depopulation. Robert Darnton has documented the conditions that led to depopulation in the 18th century and his study makes this concern of Diderot's much more meaningful. In the 18th century 45% of French children died before they were 10 years old. Immortality was a risk throughout life and many people died before they reached their procreative years. Marriages lasted on the average of 15 years and ended because of death. Women infrequently had children out of wedlock, married often after age 25 and never had children after they were 40. Furthermore, long periods of breast feeding reduced the likelihood of conception. And finally, many infants were accidently smothered by their parents in bed when their parents rolled over; everyone slept in the same bed to keep warm (*The Great Cat Massacre*, 27). And this concern can be found in Diderot's other works as well. He praises a Greuze painting writing that in addition to being moral, "Cela prêche de la population" (133). In the *Encyclopédie* an important article by Damilaville, "Population," cites Montesquieu's *Esprit des lois* to argue that in the 18th century there was only ten percent of the population that used to be on earth. He argues that, "la nature n'a que deux grands buts, la conservation de l'individu et la propagation de l'espèce"(GF, 270). He argues further that it is necessary for the government to firmly regulate the population to ensure its growth. His suggestions are closely related to Diderot's construction of Tahiti.

There is no discussion of homosexuality in Tahiti. Perhaps this announces Diderot's belief, found in other works, *La Religieuse,* for example or in his letters to Sophie Volland, that homosexuality is unnatural. Here in this society based on nature, heterosexuality is assumed. "La nature presse indistinctement un sexe vers l'autre,"(57)

and later "L'homme conserve toute son impulsion naturelle vers la femme; l'impulsion naturelle de la femme vers l'homme,"(57) are clear examples that in this society heterosexuality is the presupposed norm. Although, the topic never comes up, readers can imagine what a crime it would be to engage in homosexual relations that would never produce a child: banishment.

The only thing less respectable than being a barren woman or a homosexual is to be a monk. This fits in with Diderot and other philosopher's general anti-clericalism but that itself is based on the belief that celibacy goes against nature. Orou's assessment of the situation shows how ingrained the belief is that every member of society is responsible for producing children. "Ma première pensée était que la nature, quelque accident, ou un art cruel vous avait privés de la faculté de produire votre semblable; et que, par pitié, on aimait mieux vous laisser vivre que de vous tuer" (22). This suggests that in Tahiti, anyone who wanted to remain celibate, would following this logic, be killed.

To summarize all these individual examples: it is a crime to either refrain from sexual activity or to have sex for pleasure instead of for the purely functional purpose of producing children. This means that in Tahiti there is no passion and no mention of pleasure. "Pudeur, retenue, et bienséance," have no meaning, because explains Orou, these feelings do not promote respect between the sexes. Worse, these feelings can lead to undesirable results" of "échappant l'imagination et en irritant les désirs (56), and therefore have been abolished. It becomes increasingly clear that individual happiness is sacrificed for the general good. This leads readers to question more and more whether

this is an ideally constructed society. Europe is flawed but at least there is still passion, love, and erotic pleasures. Yet B fully approves of the Tahitian system, "la passion de l'amour, réduit à un simple appétit physique n'y produisait aucun de nos désordres" (173). Readers might ask themselves if they would be willing to give up all the passion and excitement of love and have it turned into just another physical need to be closely regulated. Surely, most readers do not want to minimize sexuality to a purely natural need which would entail getting rid of love, passion, and erotics.

If there is love in Tahiti, it is as Adriana Sfargo suggests, "L'amour chez les indigènes n'est pas réciprocité, mais subordination de la femme à l'homme" (1339). The bias found against women in Tahiti continues in the dialogue between A and B. Women in Europe, perhaps less subjugated, are considered to be evil. B admonishes A that he should "comptez sur des femmes méchantes" (185). B reacts to Orou and the Aumônier's dialogue by advocating the reform of all senseless laws that exist in European society. Again, the desirability of this reform might seem questionable to readers. In Tahiti men are free to do as they please with women, whereas in Europe, their liberty over women is restricted. B asks, "Et nous serons encore libres, cet après-dîner, de sortir ou de rester?" A answers, "Cela dépendra, je crois, un peu plus des femmes que de nous"(186). In reforming society we must be cognizant of women, "Toujours les femmes! On ne saurait faire un pas sans les rencontrer à travers son chemin" (186). The text once again demonstrates a distrustfulness towards women who are portrayed as dissimulating creatures. B asks A what he thinks the women will think of the discussion between Orou and the Aumônier and A replies, "Peut-être le contraire de ce qu'elles en

diraient"(186).

This quote that concludes the text does not merely reveal Diderot's suspicion of women but his understanding that in order to successfully reform society we must do it through open and sincere dialogue. However, A and B are clearly men and throughout the text readers rarely hear from women directly. In his article, "Diderot and the Image of the Other (Woman)," Daniel Brewer argues "The other [meaning woman] becomes - or always already is - a sign, an empty space invested by a consciousness fascinated with the problems of identity" (53). B suggests that the only way to reform society is through discussion and dialogue, "Nous parlerons contre les lois insensées jusqu'à ce qu'on les réforme, et en attendant nous nous y soumettrons" (64). Yet women never have a place in the dialogue. Despite the apparent differences, the relations between the sexes in Tahiti are not that different from those in Europe. In both societies sexual energy is strictly regulated and is always a question of power. The Vieillard says to Bougainville, "Te voilà possesseur de la tendre victime du devoir hospitalier"(150). Words like possessor, victim, and right, make it clear that there is no equality between men and women.

Perhaps Diderot excludes women from his dialogue because he believed women to be more feeling but less thoughtful than men. He explains his ideas on this subject most clearly in his review of Thomas's work *Sur les femmes.* The same idea is also found in *Le Supplément* where women are thus characterized referred to as "Ces frêles machines-là renferment quelquefois des âmes bien fortes" (167). This comment might at first appear to be derogatory towards women but Diderot valued an emotional response as much as a well thought out rational reaction. Diderot incorporates this duality into his

works. He articulates his philosophical position without neglecting the emotional aspect controversial issue often contain. In this way he appeals to readers in two different ways.

Le Supplément has been studied primarily as a philosophical work that it certainly is.[7] B concludes *Le Supplément* saying that our only reasonable course of action is to speak out against unreasonable and illogical laws until they are reformed and until they are, we should obey them. There is some doubt though that speaking out against these laws is going to lead to any major reform, because as B has already argued, a few "rascals" usually dominate law-making. "J'en appelle à toutes les institutions politiques, civiles, et religieuse: examinez-les profondément; et je me trompe fort, ou vous y verrez l'espèce humaine pliée de siècle en siècle au jour d'une poignée de fripons se promettait de lui imposer" (184). He also reminds A that it is dangerous for a lone individual to go against any of society's laws. "Il y a moins d'inconvénients à être fou avec des fous, qu'à être sage tout seul" (183). A more effective route to reform would therefore be to convince everyone that it was in their own best interests to be virtuous. In some ways this resumes the entire humanist enterprise of the Enlightenment philosophers. What distinguishes Diderot is how he proposes doing this. He realizes that he would succeed in convincing only an élite group of thinkers through his philosophical writing. This is due both to the limits placed on him by exterior forces such as the censors, the Church and the King and also by the restricted number of intellectuals who would understand the full meaning of his at times vauge statements.

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See Georges Benrekassa's chapter in his book *Le Concentrique des lumières et l'excentrique: Marges de Lumières*. Paris: Payot, 1980.

In addition to being a philosophical work it is also a dramatic one. Diderot believes that a much better medium for reaching his audience, in a way that makes them not only think but feel about the issues as well, is through the use of theater and more specifically through the use of dramatic tableaux. I argue that the profound loss inflicted upon the Tahitians is best conveyed through the use of dramatic tableaux. Diderot is not going to follow B's suggestion and only talk about and debate the destructive policies of colonialism; he makes readers feel themselves the loss these explorers impose upon the natives. When other writers wrote about Tahiti they always described it using the superlative. Bougainville wrote in his journal. "Je ne saurais quitter cette île fortunée sans renouveler ici les éloges que j'en ai déjà faits. La nature l'a placée dans le plus beau climat de l'univers, embellie des plus riants aspects, enrichie de tous ses dons,[...] Législateurs et philosophes, venez voir ici tout établi ce que votre imagination n'a pu même pas rêver"(Hermann XII, 370). Fesche, one of Bougainville's comrades aboard, uses the same laudatory style: "Le pays est aussi beau qu'il peut l'être" and the explorers find there "la plus belle espèce des choses"(Hermann XII, 370). Diderot was unique in that he saw the threat that these explorers posed for the Tahitians. In his review he explains that it is impossible for an explorer like Bougainville who has gone to such lengths to discover these islands to remain objective about them; it is in their own interests to highlight the positive aspects of these foreign cultures and to show how that will benefit the Europeans. Diderot takes the opposite viewpoint. As a self-appointed spokesman for the Tahitians, he begs Bougainville to leave. "Ah! Monsieur de Bougainville éloignez votre vaisseau des rives de ces innocents et fortunés Tahitiens; ils

sont heureux et vous ne pouvez nuire à leur bonheur" (Hermann XII, 385). In *Le Supplément* Diderot has the Vieillard vehemently present the same position. Many readers, especially those who are familiar with Bougainville, Fesche, Dixmérie, and Commerson, might not realize that any contact with Europeans diminishes and ultimately destroys the idyllic life in these unexplored, pristine parts of the New World. Diderot makes readers feel that even well-intentioned expeditions like Bougainville's have unforseen negative consequences on life there. The culture exchange is positive for the Europeans, but the contact is fatal for the Tahitians who already have everything that they could possibly need.

The tableau was the perfect medium for sensitizing readers to this loss. Diderot had already used the *drame bourgeois* in his plays to appeal emotionally to readers and to evoke a sense of pathos in the viewer. In *Le Supplément* Diderot adopts this theatrical device. The tableau was thought to captivate spectators because it was much more realistic than the classical tragedies of the 17th century. In portraying everyday scenes of bourgeois life, Diderot hoped to reduce the space between the actors on the stage and the spectators in the audience. In this way, all emotions expressed by the actors would be felt that much more deeply by the viewers. Diderot was strongly against the 17th-century use of *coup de théâtre* because he believed it to be too artificial. The tableau was to give viewers the sensation that they were voyeurs looking in on bourgeois life and that they were lucky to witness these very emotional moments. The emotional appeal of these scenes was also exploited by genre painters such as Greuze, with much greater success than Diderot himself had as a playwright. The pleasure experienced by the viewer

culminated in the shedding of delicious tears. The tears were a symbol that created a sense of community among the viewers. Tears act as the physical sign that the spectators are equally affected by this touching and paroxystic scene. In theory, the audience becomes united because everyone experiences the same beautiful moment and all are supposed to be inspired to be as virtuous as the characters depicted.

This feeling of imminent loss is immediately established in "Le Discours du Vieillard." In Diderot's theater the use of exaggerated gestures and silence were used because Diderot thought that they more realistically conveyed the intense emotion that the characters were feeling. Speaking of the Vieillard's reaction to the Europeans' arrival the narrator says, "Son silence, et son souci ne décelaient que trop sa pensée; il gémissait en lui-même sur les beaux jours éclipsés"(141). The indications of the Vieillard's movement and feelings that are seen on his face are very similar to the didescalia that Diderot relies on in his plays to convey information that the characters' words could not sufficiently express. The heightened emotional state is rendered through the prodigious use of exclamation points but the most visible gesture that translates the intense loss felt by the Vieillard are tears. "Pleurez, malheureux Tahitiens! Pleurez" (147). Jay Caplan argues in *Framed Narratives* that when the spectators share the same emotions expressed by the actors they are sacrificing part of themselves. Their own tears connect them to the actors but more importantly to the other members of the audience. In this way a community is formed in which everyone shares the same feelings. Their tears fill the loss expressed on stage and incite them to be more virtuous. Thus while the Vieillard is directly addressing his fellow Tahitians, he is also imploring the audience (which includes

both the members of Bougainville's ship as well as the readers) to feel the full impact of their loss and to mend their ways. "O Tahitiens! Ô mes amis! Vous auriez un moyen d'échapper à un funeste avenir!" (147). The "mes amis" includes anyone who can share in the Tahitians' loss. Caplan explains that, "A suffering, fragmented family requires another fragment, the beholder, in order to be whole" (103). It is the beholder of the tableau or in this case the readers who can restore some of the loss. It is impossible to go back and undo the harm inflicted on the Tahitians by Bougainville's exploration but readers can join the Tahitians on an aesthetic level and feel their loss.

The Vieillard's speech gathers force by establishing a series of oppositions between life in Tahiti before Bougainville's arrival and after their noxious influence. Before, they lived in a state of happiness and innocence, but exposure to the European ideas makes their innocent sexual pleasures seem criminal. The Vieillard stresses that the actions have not changed but the Tahitians' feelings towards these acts have been corrupted by the Europeans. "Elles sont devenues folles dans tes bras; tu es devenu féroce dans les leurs." According to the Vieillard, the most serious crime perpetrated on the Tahitians by the Europeans is their claiming Tahiti as their own. He thus refers to Bougainville's crew as "les empoissoneurs de nations."

The source of this crime is the idea of property. The Tahitians had a system of communal ownership of everything but the Europeans introduced them to the concepts of ownership which brought about radical changes in their relations with each other. Clearly, we see here the same ideas that Rousseau expounds in his *Discours sur l'origine de l'inégalité* (1754). The downfall that results from the notion of mine and yours is just

as catastrophic in Tahiti as it is for Rousseau in the state of nature. The Tahitians used to be free but now they have become enslaved both by outsiders and by themselves. The Vieillard argues that it is ridiculous for the Europeans to think that they can claim Tahiti for their own just because they happened to land on this island and put a wooden sign in the dirt.[8] The Tahitians are also now oppressed by their own superfluous needs. Before, they had enough to satisfy all their needs, but the Europeans taught them to always want more. Creating fictitious desires and needs has robbed the Tahitians of one of their most valued qualities: rest. They now work harder to meet their unnecessary desires and as a result are more tired and have less time for leisure and pleasure. This is not to say that before the Europeans' arrival they were lazy. The Vieillard remarks that at his old age he is still stronger than the young men in Bougainville's company. Before, however, the only disease or decline in well being was attributed to natural weakening due to old age. The Europeans have introduced Tahitians to diseases and have infected their blood. "Nos champs seront trempés du sang impur qui a passé de tes veines" (149), and will forever be perpetuated. Their contact has been harmful in every way and it is not easily forgotten or erased. Tahitian pleasure has been transformed into a pervading sense of theft and death and there is nothing that can be done to reverse the harmful effects of European culture on Tahitian society. One might imagine that the Europeans could offer knowledge and culture but for the Vieillard that amounts to nothing but their "lumières inutiles."

8

V. Y. Mudimbe discusses the Spanish and French colonizers act of taking possession of the land of *terra nullius* and the symbolism involved. The placing of the cross in the natives' land was followed by the recitation of the *Requirement*, after which they were supposed to pledge alliance to the pope and the king if they did not the colonizers could occupy their land using force when necessary. (*The Idea of Africa.* Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994, 35.)

There is no doubt as to the depth of the Tahitian loss and the only hope is that in viewing their downfall we might share their loss and learn something. I would argue that for Diderot another hope is that readers will be inspired by their suffering and create a work of art. The Vieillard concludes, "Eloigne-toi, à moins que tes yeux cruels ne se plaisent à des spectacles de mort" (151). That is the key to reparations. The readers who are capable of visualizing this touching scene might cry at the irreparable destruction inflicted upon the innocent Tahitians and although they might be powerless to stop any further exploitation of colonial lands, they can supplement the Tahitians's loss with a work of art.

A asks B how it was that Bougainville was able to understand the Vieillard's speech and B answers enigmatically with, "You'll find out." The answer is delayed until the end of the speech which suggests that the power of the Vieillard's language could overcome any language barriers. Regardless of a limited understanding of the Tahitian language, no one would be insensitive to the Tahitian's tragic loss. In the end, B reveals, however, that the speech was translated from the Tahitian language to Spanish and from Spanish to French. The fact that the meaning of the speech survived all these translations testifies to its power. The Vieillard's speech has now become part of many languages and is sure to be repeated in many countries. Thus readers can attempt to respond to the Tahitian's loss through tears. Diderot's work elicits a response from readers. For some readers this requires threading together a coherent understanding of the Tahitian story based on Diderot's juxtaposed scenes. In other instances, Diderot's work inspires readers to create their own work. In fact, this is, according to Jacques Derrida, what Lévi-Strauss

has done with *Tristes tropiques* which he characterizes as "une sorte de supplément au *Supplément au voyage de Bougainville*" (*De la grammatologie,* 157). It would seem at first that composing the narrative of an exotic, untouched civilization has reverted back to being told by the observer trying to maintain their objectivity. It is no longer the 18th century sailor or explorer but has become the 20th century anthropologist. Yet while focusing on the similarities between Levi-Strauss and Rousseau, Derrida argues that Lévi-Strauss has transformed the Brazilian tribe, the Nambikwaras, in much the same way that Diderot has done. This is to say that they both transcribed incidents that supported their view of these societies as uncorrupted by harmful Western influences and as a result depict them as being superior to us.

In *Le Supplément* the Vieillard deplores the corrupting influence of Bougainville's stay in Tahiti. Derrida analyzes Levi-Strauss's "Leçon d'écriture,"to illustrate how an outsider coming to the foreign lang to observe and document is in itself a crime because there is a link between writing and violence. In my view this pertains to Diderot's work as well. In manipulating Bougainville's text, and by extension, the Tahitians' story, he has in some ways committed an act of violence on their civilization. He used them to further his own philosophical and artistic goals. Derrida admonishes Lévi-Strauss for not being sensitive to the loss of which Diderot was very much aware. Derrida asserts, "La simple présence de l'étranger, la seule ouverture de son oeil ne peut ne pas provoquer." He continues, "Donc, la simple présence du voyeur est un viol"(166). The violence is inflicted twice over on the Tahitians because, despite Bougainville's objective style, there is no way to ascertain that his text transcribe the truth about the Tahitian society. What

we are reading, then, it could be argued, is the fiction of a fiction. This recalls Lacoue-Labarthe's characterization of *Le Paradoxe* as a "mise en abyme sans fin." *Le Supplément* seems to be not only never ending but also it is no instance anchored to a truth about the Tahitians. Perhaps, in fact the "truth" can never be ascertained by an outsider. Derrida writes:

> Les peuples non-européens ne sont pas seulement étudiés comme l'index d'une bonne nature enfouie, d'un sol natif recouvert, "d'un degré zéro"par rapport auquel on pourrait dessiner la structure, le devenir et surtout la dégradation de notre société et de notre culture. Comme toujours, cette archéologie est aussi une téléologie et une eschatologie; rêve d'une présence pleine et immédiate fermant l'histoire, transparence et indivision d'une parousie, suppression de la contradiction et de la différence"(168).

Therefore writing about a non-European culture can indeed be seen, as Derrida suggests, as an act of violence committed against this culture.

The loss felt by the Tahitians is also felt by readers on a narrative level. Derrida brings our attention to the fact in his chapter, "Ce dangereux supplément." In French the term supplément has a double meaning. It can mean to add something on, which is what I have argued Diderot has done. He has added on to, written in the margins of, embellished Bougainville's work for his own purposes. But it can also mean to take the place of, to substitute for, and in so doing erase or supplant the original. This today is also an accurate way to interpret Diderot's title. His work becomes a substitute for Bougainville's. Yet Diderot's work is still read today, while Bougainville's work has lost most of its popularity. Diderot though writes in such a way as to call for a new work that would conceivably take the place of his own. But if we agree with Derrida that Lévi-Strauss's *Tristes Tropiques* is a supplement to Diderot's work, then that is exactly what

has occurred, and we might see Derrida's analysis as yet another supplement because he tries to fill the gaps and holes left by Levi-Strauss's work.

Finally, there is an inherent quality found in most utopian stories that involves an impending sense of loss. Either the explorers will have to leave this ideal or their very presence leads to an inevitable decline. Bougainville and his fellow explorers are at a loss because having discovered this utopia they know that they can never completely integrate themselves into Tahitian society. At some point they must leave. Further, the Tahitians lived in such an ideal state that they could not possibly have been enriched by their exposure to the Europeans. For them colonialism and exploration entail the loss of their blissful society. Diderot's *Le Supplément au voyage de Bougainville* recognizes this loss and proffers the work of art as a way of filling it.

Chapter Three- The *Encyclopédie*: Changing the Way People Think

From its beginnings, there has been considerable debate as to whether the *Encyclopédie* is a revolutionary work. In his in-depth investigation into the popularity and publishing of the *Encyclopédie* Robert Darnton questions the relationship between the dawn of the *Encyclopédie* and the French Revolution less than forty years later. Both Diderot and d'Alembert do at times refer to their work as revolutionary. Robespierre, for one, was critical of the *Encyclopédie* for not being revolutionary enough. He writes, "Cette secte, en matière de politique, resta toujours au-dessous des droits du peuple: en matière de morale, elle alla beaucoup au-delà de la destruction des préjugés religieux. Ses coryphées déclamaient quelquefois contre le despotisme, et ils étaient pensionnés par les despotes; ils faisaient tantôt des livres contre la Cour, et tantôt des dédicaces aux rois, des discours pour les courtisans, et des madrigaux pour les courtisanes" (*Oeuvres de Maximilien de Robespierre,* III, 628). Daniel Brewer presents a different view in his study on the *Encyclopédie*, "The *Encyclopédie* is not revolutionary, at least not in a narrowly political sense of the term. Yet it exemplifies a textual experimentation with representing knowledge and which involves a kind of discursive politics" (16). I agree with Brewer that the ideological comments in the *Encyclopédie* never openly call for a revolution yet they are clearly advancing a revolutionary way of reading and thinking. Readers who consider the *Encyclopédie* as not being revolutionary enough because it was not revolutionary *politically* fail to grasp the truly revolutionary aspect of the *Encyclopédie:* its technology.

Jacques Proust, in his fundamental work *Diderot et l'Encyclopédie,* summarizes

what goals Diderot and the other contributors had. He argues, "Toucher un vaste public, encourager la recherche à tous les stades de la production, mettre au jour tous les secrets de fabrique; ce triple objectif supposait une délicate mise au point de la méthode d'exposition et de la langue. Diderot a beaucoup réfléchi à ces problèmes d'expression, et c'est par la façon dont il les a resolus qu'il a fait faire un pas décisif à la technologie" (205). What was important for Diderot was not just the content of his *Encyclopédie* but the format which would enable him to put these goals immediately into action. Therefore, what makes Diderot revolutionary is that he had to create the proper technology to fit his ideological and philosophical goals in writing the *Encyclopédie.* Proust continues, "Il est sans doute le premier homme de lettres qui a considéré la technologie comme une partie de la littérature, dans laquelle par conséquent, le "littéraire" avait son mot à dire au même titre que le technicien"(205).

I would like to suggest in this chapter that our current revolution in information technology, namely the internet, allows us to fully appreciate what Diderot introduced in his *Encyclopédie.* One aspect of the *Encyclopédie* that has been neglected by modern critics is that it is an instrument of pleasure. It promises pleasure to readers first because it satisfies curiosity and the desire for knowledge which Diderot thought was innate in everyone. Pleasure is maximized because the alphabetic order in any encyclopedia or reference work gives way to a personal ordering of information based on individual interests. Pleasure is enhanced as well because the answer to their questions is provided immediately. Finally, the *Encyclopédie* was not a static work like other reference works; it was written by a number of people who sometimes complemented each other in their

views and in their knowledge and sometimes contradicted one another.

According to Joseph Le Gras's *Diderot et L'Encyclopédie* the desire for knowledge suddenly became fashionable in the middle of the eighteenth century. One indication of this phenomenon is that the number of people in France who subscribed to the *Encyclopédie* reached 4,250 before the work was complete in 1772. Indeed, the readiness of editors such as Panchoucke to add a supplement to the already prodigious work of 14 volumes of text and 7 volumes of plates, as well as numerous plans to reprint the *Encyclopédie* in all shapes and sizes testifies to its ever increasing popularity throughout the century.[9] The large readership extended beyond scientists and academicians and encompassed a vast portion of the bourgeoisie. As Le Gras explains it, the growing middle class, including bankers, magistrates, members of Parliament, and even worldly women felt the need to know something about topics ranging from astronomy to coal mining and the need to understand how some very common place objects such as silk or stockings were created.

The *Encyclopédie* was not the only manifestation of readers' growing taste for erudition, and reference works were not lacking. There were a myriad of dictionaries to consult including those written by Nicod, Cazanave, Ménage, Richelet, Furetière, and of course the Academy.[10] The problem was that these dictionaries were often too specific for

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Robert Darnton *The Business of Enlightenment: A Publishing History of the Encyclopédie* 1775-1800. Harvard Univ. Press, 1979.

10

Diderot's French predecessors included: The *Grand dictionnaiare historique* by Moréri (1964), the *Dictionnaire universel* by Furetière (1690), the three volume *Dictionnaire des art et des sciences* by Thomas Corneille (1694), the *Dictionnaire historique et critique* by Pierre Bayle (1697), and the *Lexicon technicum* by Harris (1704). (Pons, 23-24).

a wide general reading public. Moreri's work dealt only with history and genealogy. Bayle's dictionary was a book of criticism and Trévoux's was too orthodox a work to provoke amateur's interest. Not only were they too specific but they were inherently incomplete. Diderot explains this in his article, "Encyclopédie", "L'Académie française ne fournirait à une *Encyclopédie,* que ce qui appartient à la langue et à ses usages; l'académie des inscriptions et belle-lettres, que de connaissances relatives à l'histoire profane, ancienne et moderne, à la chronologie, à la géographie et à la littérature;" (GF,42). His list goes on to enumerate all the different institutions, each of which might issue its own incomplete reference work.

Dictionaries were not confined to the French language: Ephraim Chambers' work *Cyclopedie or Universal Dictionary of Arts and Sciences* (1728),for instance, seemed to offer a new ideal. This work was a compilation of articles covering many different subjects in an easy to read style and therefore, it presented itself as a work worthy of translation into French. On February 25, 1745, Le Breton, an enterprising publisher, received a privilege to publish a translation of the work. The abbé de Guaves was hired as a translator. He was a qualified candidate due to his specialization in Geometry, and his membership in the Academy of Science and his seat at the Collège de France. He immediately foresaw the need to expand Chamber's work, because it too was terribly deficient, and proposed a grander dictionary with longer and more varied and more up-to-date articles. The publisher readily agreed. Diderot's work was not only aimed at a larger public, it was created by a much larger group of collaborators.

Sensing the promise of such a large enterprise, four Parisian booksellers agreed on

October 18, 1745 to work together to publish an expanded version of Chamber's dictionary and a new privilege was granted on February 8, 1746. Two of the four publishers were already in the middle of translating another reference work, *The Dictionary of Medicine* by Robert James. The translator was a relatively unknown scholar, Denis Diderot. Diderot agreed to take on the additional translation and later eagerly expanded his responsibilities to include editing, which was fortuitous because the abbé de Guaves withdrew from the project in 1747. Diderot was seconded by Jean Lerond d'Alembert who was an expert in Mathematics and a member of the Academy, thereby giving balance and prestige to Diderot's contribution. Together they set out to create a transformed dictionary that would, as Diderot later defines as their central goal in his article, "Encyclopédie": "traiter tout ce qui a rapport de l'homme à ses devoirs, à la curiosité, et à ses besoins et à ses plaisirs." Diderot's articulation of the scope of the *Encyclopédie* demonstrates his desire to produce an all encompassing work. This explains his use of opposing terms: both man's duties and his curiosities, his needs and his pleasures. For Diderot, learning was spurred by both a sense of duty as well as a natural inclination to pleasure. The goals in composing this work, I would argue, were certainly not limited to *what* they would write about; but *how* they would write to make their greatest impact and leave the most lasting impression possible.

In this chapter I will propose a new interpretation of the *Encyclopédie* as a revolution in technology similar to today's use of the internet. Readers needed to be introduced to all the possibilities of this new technology and I propose to look first at how readers were inscribed in the text and instructed on how to approach the work by the

Prospectus and by the Discours Préliminaire, as well as in the article written by Diderot entitled, "Encyclopédie." The *Encyclopédie* had explosive potential and so Diderot had to be acutely aware of the powers that he was calling into question. As in his other works, he manipulates different audiences, but in this instance the stakes are significantly higher. The content of Diderot's articles shows that he maintains a balance between two very distinct types of readers: those who will be drawn to the potential offered by this new technology and those who are threatened by it.

The Pleasure of reading the *Encyclopédie*

Offering a pleasurable reading experience is a great departure from other reference works and what makes the *Encyclopédie* unique. This is in opposition to academic works that "se refusent à toute lecture suivie"(122). Indeed, the majority of critics who have studied the *Encyclopédie* have emphasized the political, [11] revolutionary,[12] philosophical,[13] or audacious quality[14] of the work or have studied the meaning of its organization. [15] Very few critics ever discuss the pleasurable aspects of reading the *Encyclopédie*. Unlike our

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Jacques Proust claims that all the articles have an inherently political stance. See his *Diderot et L'Encyclopédie*, Slatkine, 1982, 16.

12

Robert Darnton's fascinating study of the printing of the *Encyclopédie, The Business of the Encyclopédie* is his question: Did reading works like the *Encyclopédie* lead to the revolution?

13

Laurent Versini's introduction in *Collection bouquins* frames the *Encyclopédie* as an encapsulation of Diderot's philosophy.

14

Pierre Grosclaude's somewhat dated study of the *Encyclopédie* insists upon the importance of the *renvois* as a way to expound its philosophical point of view.

15

Daniel Brewer looks at how the *Encyclopédie* translated the Enlightenment philosopher's desire to order their discourse and give a new meaning to knowledge.

modern twentieth century encyclopedias the *Dictionnaire des sciences et des arts* was not only a reference book to be occasionally consulted for information, it was also a source of enjoyment. Jorge Luis Borges is one of the few critics who concentrates on the pleasurable aspect found in Diderot and D'Alembert's *Encyclopédie.* He writes in an introduction to a 1979 Italian reprinting of the *Encyclopédie*, "L'encyclopédie est peut-être le plus délectable des genres littéraires. Du moins l'a-t-il été...*L'Encyclopédie* garde toute sa vertu et son charme" (12). It is crucial to see the *Encyclopédie* not just as a virtuous philosophical work trying to spread enlightenment and knowledge, but also as a work that could be read either as a reference work (thus the need to alphabetize the articles), or as an enjoyable book to be read straight through or according to readers' personal interests.

Part of the rapid expansion of the internet is that it is a source of pleasure for many users. The same was and is true for the *Encyclopédie.* The pleasure emanates from the fact that although the articles are organized alphabetically the *Encyclopédie* does not have to be read in a linear fashion from A to Z. Most texts are written in such a way that they are linear, bound, and fixed and intended to be read from beginning to end. The *Encyclopédie,* like modern hypertext, gives readers an infinitely re-centerable system whose provisional point of focus depends upon the choices made by active readers. Each reader then manipulates the text to read what interests them most. This might mean reading all the articles written by a particular author, focusing on a particular domain of knowledge such as Metaphysics or Grammar. What really promotes reading in a non-sequential fashion is Diderot's use of *renvois* or cross-references. Diderot tells us in his article, "Encyclopédie" that the word encyclopedia means, "enchaînement de

connaissances." He outlines different ways in which the cross references are used to link knowledge. Links can be used to complement each other by providing supplementary information or they can be used to bring together two disparate subjects. This was Diderot's greatest weapon in composing the *Encyclopédie.* He explains to readers, who are perhaps unfamiliar with the technique, or unaware of its potential: "Ils attaqueront, ébranleront, renverseront secrètement quelques opinions ridicules qu'on n'oserait insulter ouvertement"(II,54). This is the way he plans to use the *Encyclopédie* to change "la façon commune de penser.' Most likely this quote refers to changing readers' interpretation of superstition, Catholic dogma, and tyrannical political authority against which the *Encyclopédie* was fighting. (See articles such as Autorité politique, Casuistes, Cérémonies, Cité, etc.) The quote also indicates an effort to institute a new way of conceiving of knowledge. Diderot writes in his article "Beau" that real beauty is discerned when people perceive the relationship that exists between the different elements of the work. He defines beauty as "Tout ce qui réveille en nous l'idée de rapports"(I, 275). What these relationships consist of depends upon whether we are talking about a painting, a person, or an idea. It is thus easy to make the connection between Diderot's aesthetic philosophy and his epistemology. Understanding comes about when readers do not just read passively, in a linear manner, but rather, when they jump from one idea to another, from one subject to another and discover their own relationships between them. Diderot claims that one way of increasing knowledge it to increase the volume of knowledge but a second more important way is to order the knowledge in a coherent and meaningful way.

Je cultive deux moyens de cultiver les sciences: l'un d'augmenter la masse

> des connaissances par des découvertes; et c'est ainsi qu'on mérite le nom *d'inventeur*: l'autre de rapprocher les découvertes et de les ordonner enter elles, afin que plus d'hommes soient éclairés, et que chacun participe, selon sa portée, à la lumière de son siècle (II, 42).

Diderot did not believe that we were all capable of being inventors but that does not prevent each reader from making connections and organizing it a revealing way. In hypertext, as in the *Encyclopédie,* the author no longer controls the unfolding of readers' comprehension. Authors provide them with the tools (an overall framed work with linked pieces) and force them come to their own conclusions.

This unusual reading situation creates uncertainty for authors and readers alike. Indeed, readers of the *Encyclopédie* feel, at times, that they are walking through a labyrinth. This is ironic in light of the attention given by Diderot and d'Alembert as well as critics to the overarching, carefully ordered architecture of the work: I believe that they call attention so heavily to the structure so that readers will not be completely lost. This architecture, whether it is called an "Explication détaillée du système des connaissance humaines" that introduces the work, or the later modified, "Observations sur la division du chancelier Bacon," or the numerous metaphors used by Diderot including a map and a globe, is the hardware that makes reading possible. It is equivalent to the world wide web. Knowing that there is an overall structure and confident that they are capable of putting some of the pieces together to form their own order, readers wander tranquilly through the labyrinth of articles. According to Pierre Saint-Amand, the labyrinth is, for Diderot, the ideal method for generating genius. Diderot explains the prerequisite conditions necessary

for eliciting genius in his article entitled "Génie"[16]. He writes,

> Il faut des hommes qui puissent disposer de l'ordre et de la suite de leurs idées; Il en suivre la chaîne pour conclure, ou l'interrompre pour douter: il faut de la recherche, de la discussion, de la lenteur; et l'on n'a ces qualités ni dans le tumulte des passions, ni avec les fougues de l'imagination. Elles sont le partage de l'esprit étendu, maître de lui-même; qui ne reçoit point une perception sans la comparer avec une perception; qui cherche ce que divers objets ont de commun et ce qui les distingue entre eux; qui pour rapprocher des idées éloignées, sait parcourir pas à pas un long intervalle; qui pour saisir les liaisons singulières, délicates, fugitives, de quelques idées voisines, ou leur opposition et leur contraste, sait tirer un objet particulier de la foule des objets de même espèce ou d'espèce différente, poser le microscope sur un point imperceptible et ne croit avoir bien bu qu'après avoir longtemps regardé (II, 144).

The *Encyclopédie* seems to embody these qualities and instead of exhorting methods of developing genius for men it could apply equally well to the development of ideal readers of the *Encyclopédie*. Modern readers are struck by the similarities with hypertext. Readers are master of their own reading experience, free to compare the ideas of one web page with another, and constantly encouraged to make their own connections. In the *Encyclopédie* and in hypertext alike readers follow an overall order which leaves time and distance for weighing the validity of what has just been read.

Most reference works are static. This is not the case with hypertext, nor with the *Encyclopédie.* Articles are based on research (studies in the artists' studios, reference to books such as Jacob Brucker's *Historia critica philosophiae* in five volumes, or books written by experts such as Locke, Hobbes etc.) and provoke discussion. Discussion and

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16

There is some controversy as to whether Diderot is the author of this article or whether it was written by Jaucourt. Critics agree that even if Diderot was not the primary author he was very influential in formulating the ideas and in editing the article. See the introduction to *Oeuvres esthétiques* by Paul Vernière (Classiques Garnier, 1994) as well as Herbert Dieckmann's article, "Diderot's Conception of Genius," *Journal of the History of Ideas,* April 1941, 151-182.

debate occurs numerous times between both reader and the author of the article, between institutions,[17] and also between readers who discuss what they have read.[18]

Genius can be encouraged and facilitated by non linear, non-hierarchical texts that mimic the unique works of the human mind and the free association of ideas. Nothing, then, seems more apt to cause this genius then the format of the *Encyclopédie*. Using alphabetical order, as the links do, meant juxtaposing articles that had nothing in common, thereby allowing readers to draw their own connections and intuitions regarding knowledge. The *renvois*, a practical tool for getting around the censors, also suggest certain links that readers can make and propose one way of comparing and contrasting different ideas. Some people already have the seed of genius within them. Diderot describes them as "ces hommes qui vont d'observation en observation, à des justes conséquences, et ne trouvent que des analogies naturelles." This resembles web surfers who click from one link to the next, one web page to the next constantly making pertinent connections. Other readers need more guidance and have to be presented with the different view points on an issue, so that they can draw their own conclusions. As Brewer points out, the route to knowledge in the *Encyclopédie* differs remarkably from a Cartesian methodology. Here there are no "vérités absolues;" rather, readers must search to formulate their own "vérités absolues." Diderot proposes going from "ce qu'on ne connaît

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17

One example would be found in comparing the religious beliefs advocated by the Jesuits at the Sorbonne versus the *philosophes'* views on materialism. Another example would be on the various opinions regarding the role of luxury in the economy which come up at different points in the *Encyclopédie*.

18

This is supported by Voltaire's description of the readings of the *Encyclopédie* that occurred at Versailles.

point à ce qu'on connaît moins encore," as a way of constantly advancing into unknown areas of thought. Again this resembles the web. Users start with a particular question and discover ideas and information of which they were not even aware. Both readers of the *Encyclopédie* and web users bring together disparate links in an attempt to arrive at their own valid truth or knowledge. Diderot as both editor and writer of the *Encyclopédie* initiates a new way of reasoning that builds directly upon a new way of reading.

In order to follow the map, readers must always stay alert and be attentive to what they are reading. The subversive and philosophical elements and links are only visible if the reader is attuned to it and knows how to look and read for it. The majority of articles seem very neutral and uncontroversial from their titles and most of the text follows through with the benign, unobjectionable, information. Often it is not until the very end of the article that the philosophical intent becomes clear.

The pleasure gained in reading explains why the number of subscriptions doubled from two thousand to over four thousand over the years. It also explains the eagerness of publishers throughout Europe who wanted to publish new editions of the *Encyclopédie*. This many not seem like a large number, but considering the number of people who knew how to read[19] and the cost of the *Encyclopédie*,[20] it represents a very impressive number. A wide range of readers could manipulate the text in such a way as to discover exactly

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19

It is true that the reading public as a whole grew considerably in the second half of the 18th century. Braudel notes that reading was no longer reserved for a small élite. Explaining what was found in people's libraries he writes, "Chez les urbains d'aisance modeste et chez les paysans riches [on trouvait des livres] là où l'on ne dénichait au siècle précédent qu'un ou deux livres pieux"(113).

20

See Robert Darnton, *The Business of the Enlightenment : A Publishing History of the Encyclopédie* 1775-1800. Harvard Univ. Press, 1979.

what they wanted to know. The un-centered text lends itself to greater individualization.

An anecdote from Voltaire also attests to the pleasure gleamed in reading the *Encyclopédie*. After having hunted all day, the king and the members of his court were eating when someone wondered how gun powder worked. "Et notre poudre à nous, les femmes, remarque Madame de Pompadour, savons-nous mieux comment elle est faite? Et le rouge que nous mettons sur nos joues? Et nos bas de soie? Ah si nous avions encore des dictionnaires encyclopédiques qu'on nous a confisqués!" According to Voltaire, Louis XV immediately sent for his copy of the *Encyclopédie* and the rest of the evening was agreeably spent reading articles and looking at the plates. Even Louis XV who officially suppressed the first two volumes of the work in 1752 was forced to admit that reading the *Encyclopédie* was enjoyable "Mais vraiment, finit-il par reconnaître, je ne sais pourquoi on m'a dit tant de mal de ce livre" (Grosclaude, 11) What Louis XV recognized was what many readers in the 18th century had themselves experienced: the pleasure of being able to satisfy their own personal curiosities and penchant for knowledge. Moreover, readers can do this while avoiding what they dislike or find uninteresting. Diderot writes in the "Advertissement des editeurs," "Nous n'ignorons pas cependant que sur cet article il nous sera toujours impossible de satisfaire pleinement les divers ordres de lecteurs. Le littérateur trouvera dans l'*Encyclopédie* trop peu d'érudition, le courtisan trop de morale, le théologien trop de mathématique, le mathématicien trop de théologie, l'un et l'autre trop de jurisprudence et de médecine (I, 217). Diderot warns readers not to expect too much from his work but his comment also astutely indicates to readers that they will be able to skip over the articles that they dislike. This thirst for knowledge characterized the 18th

century and the *Encyclopédie* capitalized on it making sure that readers found just what they were looking for when they consulted it - neither more nor less. It distinguished itself in its genre due to the extensiveness of the articles and its facility of use. Perhaps as a direct result of this incident the King issued a second *arrêt* in the same year but was this time much more moderate. It admits the utility of the *Encyclopédie* and therefore, the potential pleasure in reading it. "Mais comme l'intention de sa Majesté n'a point été de priver le public d'un livre qui d'ailleurs peut être utile pour les sciences et pour les arts[...] elle veut bien le permettre[...]" He was probably inclined to read the articles that he was most interested in while omitting the articles with which he was sure to disagree.

A second group of readers receives pleasure from the thought provoking nature of certain articles. Starobinski argues, "Ainsi, le duc peut-il offrir simultanément la solide réponse rationnelle, attendue par quiconque veut 's'éclairer'et le trait vif et irrévérencieux qui surprend et charme les esprits enclins à la désobéissance"(286). Starobinski explains further that there is a strategy to seduce critically alert readers. "Une stratégie devient possible, qui glissera la critique et la propagande philosophique sous des mots apparemment insignifiants, tout en professant des opinions orthodoxes et non censurables sur les points qui font l'objet d'une observation vigilante de la part des autorités politiques et religieuses"(287). It is true that there is an added pleasure to reading the *Encyclopédie* when it is possible to decode some of the veiled criticisms against the authorities and the Church. I would also argue that this was an intentional writing tactic that Diderot employed not only in the *Encyclopédie* but throughout his oeuvre.

Another aspect of reading that made the *Encyclopédie* enjoyable was that curiosity

could be immediately satisfied. This is also why people love the internet. At any time of the day they can have access to the information that they want. Starobinski explains how this works in the *Encyclopédie.* He argues, "Le temps dont bénéficie le lecteur entre le moment de l'éveil d'un mot-question et la réponse qu'y apporte le discours du savoir" augments the pleasure of reading the *Encyclopédie.* The *Encyclopédie* was much more efficient than other reference books, just as today the web is being continually improved as technology provides users with the answers to their questions in a faster and more efficient way.

An additional component found in both the *Encyclopédie* and in hypertext was the reliance upon visual aides to complete understanding. People find it easier to understand unfamiliar material when it is explained to them not just through writing but also through pictures. Diderot fully realized that text was not sufficient to describe the complexities of certain subjects, especially unfamiliar machines. Therefore, he included 7 volumes of plates along with his 14 volumes of text. The internet allows users to manipulate images and to focus in on minute details. Diderot's plates work in a similar way. They present large scenes such as several people at work at a printing press. This plate is then followed by additional plates that show the workings of the machine in minute detail. Readers feel that they have access to more complete information and develop a fuller understanding of how these machines work and in what kind of environment. It is not as easy as clicking on link but certainly the idea of combining visuals with text was already there.

The *Encyclopédie* as a machine

I am not the first reader to notice that the *Encyclopédie* can be compared to a machine. In fact, it was because of this mechanical aspect that Goethe disliked the *Encyclopédie.* "Il faisait sur nous le même effet qu'on éprouve quand, dans une grande manufacture, on passe au milieu de broches et de métiers innombrables en mouvement; ce tintamarre et ce fracas, ce mécanisme qui trouble l'esprit, le problème d'un établissement où tout s'enchevêtre avec une variété infinie, la pensée de tout ce qu'il faut pour préparer une pièce de drap, font prendre en dégoût l'habit même qu'on porte sur le corps"(*Enc,intro.* GF, 39). Goethe's observation shows the importance of style; if readers do not like the way a text is written and organized, they will reject it, regardless of its content. Goethe makes the distinction between a type of reading that carries readers away without their having to think about structure, and the mechanics behind it. It is true that the Encyclopedists talk almost obsessively about the mechanics behind their work and that this is never far from the readers' mind. It takes away some of the magic found in fiction and, perhaps, that is what Goethe is objecting to.

Barthes calls the *Encyclopédie* a "machine de guerre"and speaks also of "la machine encyclopédique" to illustrate how it works to form a coherent whole. I agree that the *Encyclopédie* can be compared to the stocking knitting frame because in some ways it is a discourse machine. Thus, Diderot laments in his article "Bas", "D'ailleurs par où entamer ce discours? Comment faire exécuter ces planches? La liaison des parties demanderait qu'on dit et qu'on montrât tout à la fois; ce qui n'est possible ni dans le discours, où les choses se suivent nécessairement, ni dans les planches où les parties se couvrent les uns les autres." In a similar way, it is impossible to make the *Encyclopédie*

into one coherent work that can be grasped by any one person or any individual reader. In order to grasp the complexities of the knitting machine it is necessary to compare the text with the plates and then visualize how it all works together. The individual parts of the machine are similar to the individual articles that can never be read and thought about and discussed simultaneously. Diderot's solution is to dissect the machine into a number of separate systems which, when combined progressively, form a complete, comprehensible, machine. In this sense, Diderot constructs his *Encyclopédie* like a machine dividing it first into broad categories: imagination, history, and reason, and then further breaking these into subcategories that can be broken down in turn into individual parts, the articles.

In speaking about Diderot's genius, Lapape also makes a mechanical reference, "Le génie de Diderot, c'est de faire de ce compromis [between what he wanted to write and what could be written] non pas le frein, mais le moteur de sa création"(115). I would agree that having to surmount the obstacle of censorship enhanced Diderot's writing rather than inhibited it. For example, one of Diderot's favorite techniques is to advance some of his controversial and potentially offensive ideas where they are least expected. This is the case in the article "AIGLE". The article appears to be an innocent explanation of mythology. "L'aigle est un oiseau consacré à Jupiter." Unexpectedly, the description of the religious connection made between Jupiter and the eagle quickly becomes an overall commentary on superstition:

> La superstition imagine plutôt les visions les plus extravagantes et les plus grossières, que de rester en repos. Ces visions sont ensuite consacrées par le temps et la crédulité des peuples; et malheur à celui qui sans être par Dieu au grand et périlleux état de missionnaire, aimera assez peu son repos et connaîtra assez peu les hommes, pour se charger de les instruire. Si

> vous introduisez un rayon de lumière dans un nid de hibous, vous ne ferez que blesser leurs yeux et exciter leurs cris (234).

Diderot knows that only some people will be open to his criticism and that others will be the metaphoric owls who run to protect themselves. This very slightly veiled attack against religious devotees would, of course, be noticed by the censors. It makes, however, for much more interesting reading. It is an engaging technique that incites readers to read all the articles, even the ones that seem to be harmless and instructional rather than critical.

Diderot alerts readers against articles that only serve to teach some pointless piece of knowledge in the article, "Aguaxima." Again, the beginning seems benign but it is followed by a biting critique of irrelevant knowledge.

> Plante du Brésil et des îles de l'Amérique méridionale. Voilà tout ce qu'on nous en dit; et je demanderais volontiers pour qui de pareilles descriptions sont faites. Ce ne peut être pour les naturels du pays, qui vraisemblablement connaissent plus de caractères de l'aguixima, que cette description n'en renferme, et à qui on n'a pas besoin d'apprendre que l'aguixima naît dans leur pays; c'est comme si l'on disait à un Français que le poirier est un arbre qui croît en France, en Allemagne, etc. Ce n'est pas non plus pour nous; car que nous importe qu'il ait au Brésil un arbre appelé aguaxima, si nous n'en savons que le nom? À quoi sert ce nom? Il laisse les ignorants tels qu'ils sont; il n'apprend rien aux autres: s'il m'arrive donc de faire mention de cette plante, et de plusieurs autres aussi mal caractérisées, c'est par condescendance pour certains lecteurs, qui aiment mieux ne rien trouver dans un article de Dictionnaire, ou même n'y trouver qu'une sottise, que de ne point trouver un article du tout (232-233).

Here Diderot is attacking people who would prefer to have benign, albeit useless, information rather than something that provokes readers to question their beliefs. Most

dictionary entries would shy away from using a personal pronoun. Here Diderot uses the first-person pronoun to shake up readers and to develop a more direct relationship with them. It also further underlines his point that purely objective knowledge has little value. It is the subjective point of view of the Encyclopedists that makes the *Encyclopédie* more engaging to read and more meaningful to interpret. Diderot also allies himself with the reader by using the pronoun "nous". Readers and Diderot are encompassed in the same entity as French people but also as readers who question the information that they receive.

Perhaps some people did not like the mechanical aspect of the *Encycopédie* because it was difficult to manipulate. Diderot himself recognized that in order for it to work perfectly he, as the editor, would need to have all the volumes in front of him at once and at least for the first edition that would be impossible. This is clear because the *Encyclopédie* was published volume by volume and then sent to the subscribers. He explains that readers needed to understand that "La première édition d'une encyclopédie ne peut être qu'une compilation très informée et très incomplète (V, 645). But even if the readers had all the volumes in front of them, it was difficult to refer to many volumes at once. I think it would be fair to say that what Diderot and all readers would have liked is what readers today have easy access to: the internet. Using the site dedicated to the *Encyclopédie* readers today are very easily able to jump from article to article and all cross references are easily linked to one another.[21] The mechanics of the internet are perfectly

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21

The University of Chicago's ARTFL project is trying to put a large number of French texts on the internet. Their site: http://humanities.uchicago.edu/ARTFL/projects/encyc/docs/.html, which includes the entire *Encyclopédie* and important historical documents surrounding the publishing of the *Encyclopédie*, seems to be the realization of Diderot's ultimate dream concerning cross references and linking knowledge.

suited to Diderot's goals of linking all different domains of knowledge and would even be able to encompass the dialogue that Diderot hoped would ensue between different readers. The possibilities of cyberspace seem perfectly adapted to Diderot's goals of spreading knowledge and establishing a means to discuss that knowledge.

Thus in this encyclopedia people are needed to construct the machine as well as to make it work and even to question if it is working in the most beneficial way. Readers are intrinsic to the *Encyclopédie*. People provide it with its reason for being and work to form the parts and then create a final product which is a new way of thinking. Diderot proposes a new way of organizing not just machinery but the world and the way people think. Diderot sets out to "changer la façon commune de penser."

Barthes elaborates on his conception of the encyclopedic machine, "La machine encyclopédique n'est qu'un immense relais parce qu'elle exige un 'complément'interminable sur le plan du savoir ainsi que sur le plan du texte même par ce système de renvois"(11). But for exactly that reason, that it demands a complement, which is to say a reader, there is something about the *Encyclopédie* that is much more alive than merely mechanical. It is organic in the sense that it grows each time readers make new connections and have new insights when reading. James Creech argues, "Recognizing a lack and proffering a supplement is therefore, literally, a part of the *Encyclopédie*'s definition of itself"(88). It is only in reading the text that the lack is felt and it can only be filled by what the reader brings to the text. Of course this is true on some level of all texts but it is especially true in a work like the *Encyclopédie* that because of its physical limitations it is inconceivable to write down all knowledge that has ever

been accumulated by humanity. This practical constraint is further compounded by pressures from censors and critics about what could and could not actually be included in the work. Therefore, the dialogic element of the work takes on critical importance. Diderot understood this writing, "tous les êtres ont une infinité de rapports les uns avec les autres par les qualités qui leurs sont communes." The relationship developed between readers and also between readers and the work insures that it will be supplemented and made more complete.

Christie V. McDonald has also noted the significant role that readers play in the *Encyclopédie*. "Within the encyclopedic discourse, the constative gives way to the performative"(129). This is true because it is not sufficient to passively read the *Encyclopédie*, it is essential to actively work at interpreting, and I would suggest, even create a new text that has a personal significance for each individual reader. Also readers can pick up on or read into veiled criticism if they share the same philosophical assumptions as the writer. Or the reverse might also occur, where readers neglect to make some of the connections because they are not sensitive to the controversies surrounding some issues. This is sometimes the case for twentieth-century readers who fail to fully appreciate the text because they are unaware of some of the allusions made, or do not realize that some critical allusions which were in fact outright attacks against certain people and institutions.

Hans-Christoph Hobohn, in one of the most comprehensive articles written regarding censorship and the *Encyclopédie*, "Le Progrès de L'*Encyclopédie*: la censure face au discours encyclopédique" argues that the articles in and of themselves were not all

that threatening to the authorities. Rather, it was the "argument systématique auquel la censure ne peut pas se plier car il relève de son propre mode de pensée"(89). It seems obvious that it was not the text itself but rather the way in which it needed to be read and constantly supplemented by readers that was dangerous. Knowledge goes from being passed on by the authorities, to being passed on through works such as the *Encyclopédie*, to being readily accessible to readers if they know how to observe and interact in the world. Hobohm continues, "Ce caractère totalisant, non-hiérarchique ("pyrrhonien") et non-clos en même temps, représente déjà, en lui seul, un danger mortel pour l'ordre traditionnel de la souveraineté"(90).

The Threat Implicit in the *Encyclopédie*

When Diderot proposed expanding the *Encyclopédie*, he argued that instead of being compiled and written by one Academy or even one person, it should be written by many more. Jacques Proust's research has identified as many as 147 different people, all specialists in their own field. Diderot's expanded work was going to supercede all other reference works in size but, it was revolutionary in that he was changing the way that information was transmitted. Previously, information followed a strictly controlled hierarchy. Information was sanctioned either by the King or the Church. The *Encyclopédie* effectively eliminates this hierarchical, top-down transmission of information, and replaces this established system with a much more egalitarian form of side-to-side information including many people who instruct many others. The potential was infinite.

As Daniel Brewer puts it, with the *Encyclopédie*, the *esprit de système* inherited

from Cartesian philosophy becomes an *esprit systèmatique* (16). It was Diderot and d'Alembert's goal that readers should come away from the text with not just factual knowledge about how needles are made or about how bees make honey, but more importantly with a new way of seeing the world and all the connections that can be made from one realm to another. The *Encyclopédie* does not slavishly reproduce knowledge[22] but generates it by giving readers access to worlds they have never traveled to or visited before. Kant argues that *audere sapere* is the emblem of Enlightenment philosophy. I would argue that for the Encyclopedists thinking was even more important than knowing. The importance of developing a process of analyzing and accumulating knowledge supercedes the value of the knowledge itself. Summarizing the *Encyclopédie*'s project, Daniel Brewer writes, "Resolutely more materialist, atheist, and utilitarian, these programs reflect the philosophes' desire to 'demystify' knowledge"(15).

Despite d'Alembert's assertion in the beginning of his *Discours préliminaire* that he and Diderot are not exceedingly bold, their project had the implicit goal of disrupting the established centers of knowledge. Until the revolution of the *Encyclopédie* it was accepted that all knowledge

was received knowledge emanating directly from God was then sanctioned by the clergy and the King and then transmitted through channels like the Sorbonne and the Académie. In contrast, Diderot's and d'Alembert's project was directly inspired by Locke's philosophy that knowledge comes from our senses: "D'où il s'ensuit que c'est à nos

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22

The criticism that was most often repeated was that the *Encyclopédie* was made up of a lot of copied articles stolen from various sources. See the articles written by Moreau, Palissot, LaHarpe, Freron and others in *La Secte des empoisonneurs* ed. J. Vissière, Perpignon: L'université de Perpignon, 1993.

sensations que nous avons toutes nos idées"(23). The unstated but easily inferred conclusion is that God himself is no longer our primary source of knowledge. By advancing Locke's theory, Diderot and d'Alembert effectively put an end to this hierarchization of knowledge. Furthermore, in extolling sensory knowledge along with observation as the primary source of facts, the philosophers also insist upon the importance of communicating and distributing knowledge throughout society; thus the need for the *Encyclopédie.* These starting points were not new philosophical ideas and had been circulating since the late 17th century but stating them unequivocally in the *Discours* served to destabilize the paradigm of knowledge that had reigned throughout the Ancien Régime. First, they begin by advancing the idea that the real "savants" are philosophers who know how to reason for themselves. In addition, in an even more radical proposal, d'Alembert argues that, "C'est peut-être chez les artisans qu'il faut aller chercher les preuves les plus admirables de la sagacité de l'esprit de sa patience et de ses resources." This reversal of the source of knowledge from the King, his nobles, and the Church to the bourgeois philosophers and then to artisans was a revolutionary ways of seeing society and knowledge. This implies that knowledge is available to anyone who practices his trade or profession well and is no longer reserved for a privileged elite that is able to monopolize knowledge and all the power that comes from it. D'Alembert's clearly stated belief that artisans are the epicenters of knowledge is echoed throughout the *Encyclopédie.* This is articulated in the title itself, *Dictionnaire des arts et des sciences.* It is also manifested in the epigraph to Horace's *Ars Poetica*: Tantum series juncturaque pollet, Tantum de medio sumptis accedit honoris." "The philosophers are understood as

those who can give order to all our knowledge and who will give the common people the honor that is rightfully theirs." Articles and accompanying plates on subjects such as "Bas" (stockings) and "Acier" (steel) further cement this perspective by showing the scope of knowledge and the intricate machinery needed to make everyday objects that are often taken for granted. Diderot and d'Alembert had a mission to right the wrongs that had been perpetuated against artisans in not acknowledging their essential skills and their true worth. "Le mépris qu'on a pour les Arts mécaniques semble avoir influé jusqu'à un certain point sur leurs inventeurs mêmes. Les noms de ces bienfaiteurs du genre humain sont presque tous inconnus tandis que l'histoire de ses destructeurs, c'est-à-dire, des conquérants n'est ignorée de personne" (33). In praising anonymous workers and lowering warring conquerors Diderot and d'Alembert were sure to shake up the way readers conceptualized the hierarchy upon which society is built and were sure to create enemies among the powerful First and Second Estates.

The *Encyclopédie* was revolutionary because it was a reference work that held the promise of pleasure while also potentially destroying hierarchy. This is not limited to political power, it includes textual hierarchy because there is no longer any center to the text - it is molded to fit readers' own tastes and curiosities. The flow of information is no longer from a tightly controlled center of power (The Church or the King) but can flow freely from a large group of experts to an even larger group of readers. Today, we are also experiencing a revolution in information technology in which various groups are all vying for control and the attention of readers. I would argue that the globalization and the information revolution of the beginning of the twenty-first century gives us new insights

into what the Encyclopedists were trying to achieve and what was at stake. Today there are debates on who can regulate the internet; there are questions regarding taxation, pornography, gambling, and public access. There is a jockeying for control between governments, corporations, countries, and individuals. These compounding factors sensitize us to the controversy surrounding the competition for the control of readers in the 18th century. In carefully analyzing these competing realms of power and in looking at how each group is addressed and acknowledged (or ignored) in the *Encyclopédie*, we can better understand the *Encyclopédie* itself and what Diderot was proposing to accomplish with his work.

Lapape asserts in his *Diderot*, that at stake in the 18th century was the foundation for all knowledge - language. He argues that in the middle of the eighteenth century society, was in the throughs of a crisis: a spiritual, intellectual, financial, political and an overall institutional crisis. Each domain had its own language. There was thus a specific language for the Church, another for the nobility and so on, and the power of each group extended only as far as their language. Lepape argues, "Et voilà des gens qui, au nom de leur compétence, au nom de leur savoir professionnel de spécialistes du language, se lèvent pour s'arroger le droit et le devoir de définir les mots, de fixer les règles du discours public"(105). When Diderot demands in his article, "Encyclopédie" "Résolvons ces problèmes," his imperative goes beyond the language of the *Encyclopédie*. He advocates a way of thinking that proposes, "Tout examiner, tout remuer sans exception et sans ménagement;" it is because the group that controls the language will be able to define the debate. This "société des gens de lettres," Lapape explains further, "se réclament de leur

vocation de savoir et d'indépendence pour juger en toute sécurité et impartialité entre les opinions des uns et des autres et édicter une grammaire du bien public"(105-106). The public in reading the *Encyclopédie* becomes an integral part of this effort to transform society. Lepape concludes his argument, "Ni le monarque, ni son gouvernement, ni les législateurs, ni les professionnels de la parole divine ne peuvent abandonner à d'autres le pouvoir de dire le monde et les lois qui doivent le gouverner" (106). Therefore, when Diderot addresses the problems of language in the *Encyclopédie* he refers to specific problems that are encountered when anyone tries to write a reference book and most especially when writing a dictionary. But behind these practical concerns there was a much larger debate with much higher stakes as to who could define the words people use in their lives.

Diderot was not just proposing to define, once and for all, the words used by these different institutions, he was taking control of information technology which amounts to taking control of the formulation of knowledge. By creating a de-centered, non-hierarchical text Diderot and d'Alembert were calling into doubt the whole notion of univocal, irrefutable truth. With traditional books the authors cannot be questioned or challenged. Walter Ong writes in *Orality and Literacy*:

> The author might be challenged if he or she could be reached but the author cannot be reached in any book. There is no way to refute a text. After an absolutely total and devastating refution, it says exactly the same thing as before. This is one reason why "the book says" is popularly tantamount to "it is true." It is also one reason why books have been burnt. A text stating what the whole world knows is false will state falsehood forever, so long as the text exists (79).

Diderot had already had one work, *Les Pensées philosophiques,* burned. What he was

instituting with the *Encyclopédie* defies any burning of books. He is advocating a type of work in which everything can be cross-referenced in essence, nothing escapes refutation and everything is brought into question. L. Delaney argues in *Hypermedia and Literary Studies* that, "Whenever one places a text within a network of other texts, one forces it to exist as part of a complex dialogue"(18). It could be argued that every article was its own independent text presented in a network of other texts. But this web of texts also extends to include works outside of the *Encyclopédie.* Diderot did not hesitate to take articles from outside sources if necessary. Today the internet has led to a great debate regarding artistic and intellectual property. It is easy for users to take information from a web site and to use it on their own web sites without giving the original author any sort of recognition. Intellectual property was conceived of in a different way in the 18th century and Diderot believed in total freedom. One of the most damaging criticisms from those opposed to the *Encyclopédie* was that the Encyclopédists had plagiarized their articles. These criticisms ranged from attacking the cooking recipes that were taken directly from Father Noël Chomel's *Dictionnaire Oeconomique* to the plates that were supposedly a copy of Réaumur's plates drawn for the Academy. Diderot responds to these criticisms in the preface to volume two claiming that when articles that are borrowed without acknowledgment are otherwise well designed, the resulting inconvenience is fairly small. Clearly what is important for Diderot is that the articles inspire readers to further reflection not where they originated from or who wrote them. Indeed, Diderot is true to this ideology and does not always indicate which articles he himself has authored. Furthermore, most of the criticisms were unjust because Diderot most often documented

his sources, but touch upon the central issue of the Encyclopedists' working methods. What had already been written (or drawn in the case of the plates) was used as a starting point that the writers improved, augmented and made available to a wider public. The text itself was then only seen as an intermediary stage of knowledge always to be enhanced by readers. One of Diderot's greatest sources, Jacob Brucker, illustrates this point. Jacques Proust observes that there is an amazing dialogue that exists between Diderot and Brucker and wonders what made the work so influential for Diderot. He decided that it was Brucker's ability to leave the final evaluation of each philosophy to readers.

When readers become accustomed to a non-linear type of reading, they constantly juxtapose one text against another and develop a deeper understanding of the complexity of knowledge. For 18th century readers knowledge could no longer be just what the Church said or just what the King decreed. "Tout examiner, tout remuer sans exception et sans ménagement;" Examining everything, shaking up all established ideas, leaves little room for certainty. Readers were to develop a habit of critical thinking that would be applicable to all domains, with no exceptions.

If Diderot was really going to change the way people thought he needed to align himself with readers from the beginning of the work. It is his typical writing style to address readers directly from the onset, of the text but in this instance the stakes were much higher. He had to convert readers to this new type of reading and at the same time assuage the censors whose best interests could only be served by putting an end to the *Encyclopédie*. If readers did not properly use the technology, or if the authorities grasped

the potential of the *Encyclopédie*, the project would fail. Great attention is therefore paid to readers in the various prefaces of the *Encyclopédie*.

The Prospectus

Since the *Encyclopédie* was a new idea, introducing a new technology, readers had to be alerted and prepared for it. They had to be introduced to the possibilities and the potential of this work. The Prospectus was sent out prior to the publication of the *Encyclopédie* as a way of attracting subscribers. Diderot's design for the entire work is clearly set out along with a definition of his goals and his philosophical stance. Laurent Versini, in his introduction to the *Encyclopédie*,[23] refers to the Prospectus as the *Encyclopédie*'s preface. Diderot's optimism shines through the text, implying that the eight-volume work along with its six hundred plates had already been completed. Diderot also details how any future obstacles to publication will be overcome.

Diderot was relatively unknown when he started editing the *Encyclopédie* and what renown he did have was mostly negative since he had been imprisoned for seditious works. Therefore, Diderot needed to establish his credentials from the beginning. He does this in the *Prospectus* by demonstrating his extensive knowledge of other encyclopedias and by acknowledging their utility. With an almost religious fervor Diderot talks about the enlightenment that previous works have already introduced to society. "Les lumières générales qui se sont répandues dans la société, et ce germe de science qui dispose insensiblement les esprits à des connaissances plus profondes"(121-

[23]Laurent Versini ed. *Oeuvres: philosophie (tome I)* Collections bouquins, Paris: Lafont 1994.

122). This in turn furthers the need for their *Encyclopédie,* as a way of continuing the spread of light and knowledge and planting new seeds of intellectual curiosity. His message does not promise eternal salvation like some religious works, but rather, an enlightened society where everyone shares a taste for hard work and study.

In order to prove that this work is not going to be redundant and a mere rehashing of what has already been written, Diderot needs to convince readers that this *Encyclopédie* will surpass all the other previous dictionaries. He argues that these other dictionaries were only useful as a last resort to people who had no other reference books available to them. His dictionary will be written by a number of people, all experts in their individual fields,[24] and will, in this way, replace the need for all other reference works. It will also feed the nascent curiosity that already exists in the majority of people; what is more, readers will be able to immediately satisfy that curiosity by consulting the articles self-contained within the *Encyclopédie.* In explaining this, Diderot has already vastly increased his potential reading public from a select few to the majority of people who know how to read. He transforms a genre that was previously reserved to an elite as a reference source to a form of writing that is accessible to all and that is a pleasure to read because it satisfies natural human curiosity and desire for knowledge.

Whereas the authors of previous works never added to Enlightenment, but rather slavishly copied each other, the contributors to the *Encyclopédie* are creating the quintessential reference work that does not limit itself to one finite field (such as Moreri's work on History, or Brucker's work on Philosophy) but will encompass all domains of

arts and sciences. It will be the encyclopedia of all encyclopedias. "Jusqu'à ici, personne n'avait conçu un ouvrage aussi grand, ou du moins personne ne l'avait executé"(123). This is due to the fact that in addition to covering more topics the *Encyclopédie* finds a way of linking them together so that readers come away with coherent knowledge and not a series of disparate, isolated articles with no overall *fil conducteur* to bring them together.

Diderot argues that as technology and science have advanced rapidly throughout the eighteenth century, encyclopedias becomes more and more important. He explains that previous dictionaries are already outdated, "La vraie philosophie était au berceau; la géométrie de l'infini se montrait à peine; il n'y avait point de dialectique; les lois de la saine critique étaient entièrement ignorées." Diderot certainly sensed that they were on the brink of a breakthrough in knowledge and in the technology needed to transmit it. More important though than discoveries in the individual fields (philosophy or geometry) is the way people think and the methodology and technology that advance readers thinking about these subjects. The dialectic usually brings to mind Socrates' philosophical methodology. The *Encyclopédie* entails a constant dialogue between articles. What he refers to as "la saine critique" could be interpreted as this more objective stance where everything is reevaluated. Diderot's ideal *Encyclopédie* would continue to grow to always include new discoveries and new knowledge. Generally one thinks of an encyclopedia as a finite and completed work. Diderot conceived more of his work as we do hypertext, as a never ending series of link that opens up a text to constant additions. His ideal *Encyclopédie* would resemble the internet in that it would be an

infinite source of information.

Proof of Diderot and d'Alembert's ambitions is the title they choose: "dictionnaire universel." Their goal is indeed to attract a large readership that potentially excludes no one. In order to accomplish this Diderot needs to be able to vulgarize very precise information making it comprehensible to a wide range of readers who were not necessarily familiar with the subject matter. The one quality that will unify the articles is the style in which they are written. Diderot promises that "la pureté du style, la clarté, et la précision" (217) will be evident everywhere. This is like the internet where certain guidelines of style had to be established. Diderot argues that a lot of what has already been written has been lost in a flood of words that does not enlighten readers but rather plunges them into further darkness. While making the subject matter accessible to a larger public, he also had to keep the information as interesting and informative as possible. Diderot admits that it is not any easy task, "Le peu d'habitude qu'on a et d'écrire et de lire des écrits sur les arts, rend les choses difficiles à expliquer d'une manière intelligible." Diderot realized the novelty of his endeavor. He refers to the arts but this comment might be equally true of the entire work. Explaining things in an "intelligible" way requires that certain satirical and critical comments be intelligible only to those readers who are open to new philosophical ideas and not to those who will be offended by them. Again in reference to the arts, Diderot says that they are writing for "le lecteur studieux". Controversial and radically new ideas need to be presented only to readers who are capable and ready to receive them.

Thus the *Encyclopédie* will further distinguish itself in that it offers editorial

comments on a great deal of the subject matter. This makes the work dramatically more interesting to read because readers never know when a purely factual article will contain potent criticism. In this way the *Encyclopédie* proposes to conquer doubt, prejudice, and superstition. Originality and the possibility of reversing established ideas pique the readers' curiosity but also awakens the censors' vigilance. It is clear from the beginning that what Diderot qualifies as superstition and prejudice is what some see as the foundation of the Catholic faith or the foundations of royal authority. Diderot also attacks those who have spread false information and prejudice and promises their downfall. "Ces hommes avides de réputation et dépourvus de génie, qui publient hardiment de vieux systèmes comme des idées nouvelles seront bientôt démasqués" (218).

Chambers does not qualify as one of these false writers. Diderot acknowledges that he certainly contributed a lot and was successful in awakening readers' curiosity. The primary defect of his work is its reduced size. Diderot asks incredulously, "Conçoit-on que tout ce qui concerne les sciences et les arts puisse être renfermé en deux volumes in-folio?" (125). Diderot who was interested in the linking of different domains and in the nuances distinguishable in synonyms reproaches Chambers for the limited scale of his encyclopedia. He argues that the nomenclature alone could easily go beyond a two volume work. Furthermore, Chambers and others like him were inherently lacking in their responsibilities because they did not visit the actual sites to study the advances in the arts for themselves. He declares it surprising that just one man dared to think himself capable of such a work. In contrast, a large group of Encyclopedists rely on first-hand information and each writer offers his own expertise which ultimately results in a much

richer reading experience. Finally, Diderot insists here and on other occasions that any omissions at all in an encyclopedia can have catastrophic implications. "Un article omis dans un dictionnaire commun, le rend seulement imparfait. Dans une encyclopédie, il romp l'enchaînement et nuit à la forme et au fond!"(125).[25] The goal in writing the *Encyclopédie* is to provide a system of totalizing knowledge where every reader's curiosity can be satisfied. Diderot had previous experience with the fatal flaws of an incomplete reference work. He had translated the *Dictionnaire de médecine* and tells the story of a sick man consulting the *Dictionary of Medicine* who was sent from one article to another but who never found anything regarding his ailment. With all the omissions in Chambers' encyclopedia, "Il n'est donc pas à présumer qu'un ouvrage aussi imparfait pour tout lecteur, et si peu neuf pour le lecteur français, eût trouvé beaucoup d'admirateurs parmi nous"(214). If the work is missing an article, it ruins the overall content of the work because everything is supposed to be linked together. We can understand this with reference to the internet. If people go to a web page and they cannot find the information that they are looking for, or if the links are not properly working, their curiosity is not satisfied and they are frustrated. If this happens repeatedly, users are

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This preoccupation that everything be linked together all explains Diderot outrage when his publisher censored the *Encyclopédie* himself eliminating some potential offensive parts. Diderot lamented all his lost work that would never be available to readers and demanded that a new version of the *Encyclopédie* be published in which all the missing parts would be meticulously restored. Cutting out parts, even if it only the occasional paragraph, jeopardizes the whole work. It means that there will be gaps in knowledge rather than have a totalizing knowledge whether all ideas and subjects are linked together. Due to the costs of resetting the pages it was unlikely, but clearly removing any of the provocative comments that might be censored changes the entire tone of the work. Diderot worries that now the work will only be a dull, unremarkable, and unimaginative work. "On fera passer le livre pour une plate et misérable rapsodie" (182). And later he worries, "que cette volumineuse compilation, qui doit coûter encore tant d'argent au public, n'est qu'un ramas d'insipides rognures"(183).

sure to abandon that site, and if they were to visit many poorly constructed sites they would abandon the entire enterprise. This is exactly what Diderot hoped to avoid with his *Encyclopédie.* Ideally, the properly constructed encyclopedia would answer all of readers' questions while raising new paths of inquiry and their reading would continue until they had exhausted all the volumes of the encyclopedia. The promise of having all questions, both present and future, answered is exhilarating for the reader and even more for the person, or groups of people who are given the privilege of providing the answers. This is why Diderot promises to remedy the imperfections found in Chambers' work and insists upon the fact that their expanded and improved universal dictionary would interest a much larger public.

Diderot ends his Prospectus by flattering the king's generous librarian and imploring the censors to allow the *Encyclopédie* to become everything he envisions it to potentially be. Diderot demands that the *Encyclopédie* become a sanctuary of knowledge, thereby implying that it deserves to be protected in the same way that critics might feel compelled to protect religion or authority. "Que l'*Encyclopédie* devienne un sanctuaire où les connaissances des hommes soient à l'abri des temps et des révolutions" (224). This sanctuary would entail the free flow of information rather than the distribution of information through the traditional hierarchy. Diderot does not underestimate the power of the authorities. He understands what is in the balance and therefore acknowledges that the work depends on their good will and indulgence. Appropriately, Diderot concludes his Prospectus on this note. Having hopefully convinced the majority of readers of the profound usefulness and pleasure to be gained from the *Encyclopédie*, he alerts readers

that the work will only be realized if the authorities are willing to allow it.

In a final comment that may seem gratuitous but is not, Diderot mentions that the Encyclopedists had to work with the artisans in the same way that Socrates worked in Ancient Greece. This is to say that they extracted knowledge from the workers that they themselves were often unaware of and were certainly unable to articulate themselves. In the same way, readers might turn to the *Encyclopédie* to answer one particular question and find a cross-reference to another subject that also interests them but that they would never have thought to look up. Throughout his works Diderot returns to the image of Socrates as the supremely intelligent philosopher who was nevertheless persecuted for having offended the authorities something which eventually led to his death. Diderot knows that if he has a goal similar to Socrates', that is, to put an end to the prejudices of the day, he will to have to do it in as subtle a way as possible. When Socrates was put to death he was confident that his philosophy would be continued by his followers. But if Diderot's work was terminated before readers had internalized this new way of thinking about knowledge, then the entire enterprise of the *Encyclopédie* would be ended before it had begun. Diderot needed to ally himself with the authorities so that they would not suppress his work; he also had to ally himself with his reading public. If he could succeed in demonstrating to readers the pleasure and the potentially infinite amount of knowledge to be found in the *Encyclopédie* he could assure the survival and continuation not only of his work but of all the future works the *Encyclopédie* would inspire.

Following the Prospectus is an explanation of the "Système des connaissances humaines" and an explanation as to why the *Encyclopédie* used this system to organize

knowledge and the work. Clearly, Diderot recognized the limits of what he could modify from already existing systems. Darnton argues, "Setting up categories and policing them is a serious business. A philosopher who attempted to redraw the boundaries of the world of knowledge would be tampering with the taboo" (*The Great Cat Massacre*, 193). The best example of Diderot's caution is when he orders the philosophy of God to be placed before the philosophy of man in the hierarchy of knowledge. (Bacon, in contrast, had put natural philosophy before natural theology as two subsets of Metaphysics.) In the first volume of the *Encyclopédie*, this will again be modified to put Metaphysics before the Science of God. Thus we see that Diderot plays with what is and is not acceptable to the authorities and tests how far he can go without causing the censors to put an end to the entire work. As Foucault argues in *Les Mots et les choses* (1966) ordering is always arbitrary and systems only remain if they remain unquestioned. Diderot and d'Alembert, like Foucault, saw the need to constantly question the systems put in place. Therefore, what they needed was to construct a system that provided an overall framework or guiding principle but that never inhibited new paths of inquiry. Also, in restructuring the systems of knowledge they were calling attention to the fact that knowledge was being transmitted in a revolutionary, non-hierarchical way. D'Alembert goes even further than Diderot in the audacious reordering of knowledge in his *Discours*. They were testing the limits to see how far they could go in establishing a system that reflected their true goals of the work: unobstructed, non-totalitarian knowledge available to all readers.

Discours Préliminaire

The *Discours Préliminaire* was written by d'Alembert and was published with the first volume of text in June 1751. In this preface d'Alembert also starts by insisting upon the expertise of each of the contributors. He writes, "Nous n'avons point eu la témérité de nous charger seuls d'un poids si supérieur à nos forces" (17). The tone, however, differs dramatically from Diderot's Prospectus that was written only a year earlier. Diderot's "l'ouvrage n'est plus à faire" from the Prospectus, becomes "L'ouvrage que nous commençons (et que nous désirons finir)" (22). The added parenthesis is a nod acknowledging the critics and their ability to put an end to the *Encyclopédie*. Between the publishing of the Prospectus in November of 1750 and the publication of the first volume in June of 1751 the Encyclopedists had already met with a great deal of resistance from different factions of the establishment. This was most pronounced in the *Journal de Trévoux* where the Jesuit Berthier cleverly criticized the adoption of Francis Bacon's tree of knowledge by printing the two versions side by side in the same issue. The attacks in the *Journal de Trévoux* escalated the controversy surrounding the *Encyclopédie's* denigration of royalty and saints, its advocation of freedom of speech and its plagiarism of different sources including the Jesuit's own *Dictionnaire de Trévoux*. The year that the *Encyclopédie* was released was fraught with additional controversy surrounding the abbé de Prades. Prades had defended his heretical theological thesis at the Sorbonne, and although it was originally accepted, it was later condemned to be burned by Parliament and de Prades was forced to flee France. This reflected poorly on the *Encyclopédie* because it supported criticism that the *Encyclopédie* was itself a heretical work due to the fact that de Prades had contributed the article "Certitude" to the *Encyclopédie*; it was also

rumored that Diderot himself had helped the abbé write his thesis.

For these reasons it is understandable that d'Alembert assumed a defensive stance in his *Discours*. He tries to minimize any current or future criticism by dealing with their (potential) objections from the beginning before the critics could gain enough power to launch a campaign to destroy the *Encyclopédie*.[26] D'Alembert makes his intentions clear, "Ce début est donc uniquement destiné à ceux de nos lecteurs qui ne jugeront pas à propos d'aller plus loin" (21). This insinuates that the critics have not even read the work and also suggests that the *Encyclopédie's* most ardent critics were people who objected to the enterprise as a whole, based entirely on principle, rather than on a solid knowledge of the work itself.

Not only is the tone of the *Discours Préliminaire* different from the Prospectus, its organization is quite different as well. D'Alembert is not trying to write an organized philosophical treatise here, he is attempting to show that everything in the *Encyclopédie* has an overall coherence. To do this he gives a quick summary of all the different branches of knowledge and shows how they each grew out of one another. Darnton argues that this slightly confused organization is well suited to the philosophically daring ideas of the *Discours*. For example, at times, d'Alembert seems to support a Cartesian view of knowledge and at other points, he extols a very Lockean view. Darnton argues that it is confusing because d'Alembert uses different levels of language, drawing upon

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It is Georges Minois' thesis that the only reason that the attacks against the *Encyclopédie* did not lead to total suppression of the work or at the very least greater censorship is that the Jesuits at the Sorbonne and those writing for the Journal de Trévoux and the Janseinistes in Parliament and with their own magazine, Les Nouvelles Eclésiastiques, and the King were never unified in their attack. This same idea is presented by Barbara de Negroni *Lectures interdites* (Paris: Champion, 1997).

scholastic, Cartesian and Lockean language. Darnton asserts, "A certain amount of slippage suited the meandering character of the Discourse"(*The Great Cat Massacre,* 203). This shifting between discourses leaves the final analysis up to the readers, who remain in control of their own knowledge. The *Discours* might be summed up as saying that the diffusion of knowledge is no longer reserved to a small group of specialists and goes so far as to encompass all cultivated readers who, according to d'Alembert, represent the future and the wealth of the nation. If, however, this was too radical an idea for readers they could fall back on a more traditional way of looking at the text as a traditional explanation of the branches of knowledge.

Coming to the *Encyclopédie* in the twentieth century, readers must be mindful of that contract and must remember that the writers were not writing with the same freedom that we take for granted today. Foucault in *L'Ordre du discours* argues that institutions police discourse by distributing the right to speak to a select group and by imposing a certain number of parameters as to what can be said. The institutions restricting writing in France during the Ancien Régime were numerous: the King who controlled the granting of permission to publish, the Directeur de la librairie, like Malesherbes, Inspecteur des publications, who decided what censors would read what texts and which texts were publishable, the Jansenists in Parliament, the Jesuits at the Sorbonne and even to a certain extent the public itself voiced its opinion by what it bought, and finally, the authors themselves, who often relied on auto-censorship to avoid prison and other serious repercussions such as banishment, scandal and living in ignominy. Jacques Proust suggests that the story of the *Encyclopédie* is the story of all these institutions vying for

power to control what was published (71).

The *Prospectus* and the *Discours préliminaire* are important because they frame the Encyclopédie. The *Encyclopédie* was a radically new type of writing that aimed to institute a new way of reading that would ultimately cause readers to think differently. This change could not come about immediately. The first step before even instructing readers on the subject matter itself is to explain to them how they should interpret what they read. By prefacing their reading experience with clear indications of what they would encounter Diderot and d'Alembert indicate not just what but also *how* they should read. When Diderot's *Prospectus* was issued, claiming that the *Encyclopédie* was already completed, he was being more than just overly optimistic; he was presenting the image of this text's editor of this text that Derrida refers to in *Dissemination*. He argues that the author of the preface is an all powerful writer with complete mastery of his product. Derrida writes,

> Le texte est écrit - un passé - que dans une fausse apparence de présent, un auteur caché et tout puissant, en pleine maîtrise de son produit, présente au lecteur comme son avenir... le pré de la préface rend présent l'avenir (33).

It was imperative for Diderot to present himself as such because of the inevitable controversy surrounding the Encyclopedia project. Derrida's insistence on the future is essential because the Encyclopedists were indeed trying to shape the future reading experience and also hoped to have a significant impact on the future world of these readers.

Lorraine Piroux writes in *Le livre en trompe l'oeil* on the role of prefaces, that when an author writes a preface, "Il met le lecteur face à son propre avenir car on ne dit

pas quelque chose à quelqu'un sans lui dire en même temps qu'il ne sera plus ce qu'il était avant qu'on ait parlé"(15). I would argue that this is even more evident in a work such as the *Encyclopédie* where the explicitly stated goal is to spread happiness and virtue.

Piroux asserts that while institutions and authorities often constrain what can be said, the act of dedicating the book to a particular reader is proof that the work is aimed at someone outside that paradigm of power. She argues that the dedication is a sort of reading contract established between the reader and the writer. This may be true of the "Avertissement des éditeurs" that preceded some of the volumes but it does not seem to apply to the dedication which ironically inscribes all the constraints that the authorities had over the editors rather than circumventing them.

Diderot and d'Alembert dedicated the *Encyclopédie* to the Count d'Argenson, the Minister and Secretary of the State of War. Considering all the material and moral support that they received from more enlightened people with whom they shared similar ideas, this seems to be a strange choice. Madame de Geoffrin, for one, not only welcomed the *philosophes* to her Salon, she also financed in great part their work. Also, d'Holbach should be noted for offering the *philosophes* and Diderot in particular a refuge from all his troubles in Paris and a place where he could work without interruptions. Readers can better understand the dedication if they know that d'Argenson was responsible for Diderot's release from Vincennes in September of 1749. Apparently to allow for his release Diderot promised to never publish subversive works again and also agreed to the dedication. This is no small affair because it caused d'Argenson's fame to spread

throughout the general reading public, abroad, and even to all future readers. With a great deal of irony, Diderot notes that the *philosophes* admire d'Argenson for who he is and not because they have anything to gain from him. In a very lofty tone, Diderot speaks of offering a durable monument of gratitude owed to d'Argenson for his protection.

While this might have been part of Diderot's bargain, and certainly it could not have hurt to be in a powerful Minister's good favor, it strongly reminds readers of Diderot's stay in prison and highlights the dangers of subversive writing. This dedication sets the tone for the *Encyclopédie* in which articles are written by the "humble and obedient servants" of the state who would never dare to transgress the limits placed upon them by it. At the same time, it reminds readers that authors are subservient to the censors and that it is impossible for them to openly criticize established beliefs. It tells them that they must read more closely to understand what cannot be said overtly. In conclusion the dedication can be seen as a way for Diderot and d'Alembert to flatter d'Argenson with their deferential posture and their esteem for him but it causes other readers to think of a statement made by Figaro: "Sans la liberté de blâmer, il n'est point d'éloge flatteur."

Piroux is then correct in more ways than one in saying that the dedication is a contract; it was a contract between d'Argenson and Diderot that Diderot did fulfill, and a future contract between readers and Diderot that they must be willing to interpret what they read and not just take it at face value. I believe it is also seductive for readers who are encouraged to believe that one type of reader is being duped while other readers are reaping the full benefits, which is to say the full editorial, ideological comments of the

contributors. It makes those readers feel superior and desired because it is for them that the text is really primarily written and with them that it takes on its full meaning. The ideological position of the editors is evident from the *Prospectus* and the *Discours préliminaire.* Once readers are alerted to this controversial positioning it is up to them to read the rest of the work in light of those philosophical assumptions.

The influence of the reading public should not be underestimated and, in my view, it played a large part in Diderot's mind. His *Lettre sur le commerce de la librairie* shows how the vagaries of readers' tastes strongly impacted on the world of publishing. Malesherbes shared this view and grasped the economic importance of book selling. Critics have often praised Malesherbes for his enlightened attitude toward the *Encyclopédie.* A close reading of his *Mémoires sur la librairie* reveals that he was equally concerned with the economic consequences of prohibiting the *Encyclopédie.* He writes, "Le commerce des livres est aujourd'hui trop étendu, et le public en est trop avide pour qu'on puisse le contraindre à un certain point sur un goût qui est devenu dominant" (125). His argument against suppressing the work was that if the *Encyclopédie* was published abroad, or if it was sold on the black market, it would deprive the state of a great deal of tax revenue. His concern was justified. Publishers in Switzerland and in Holland, where there was a lot more freedom of the press, were eager to print the twenty-one volumes of the *Encyclopédie.* Furthermore, Catherine the Great tried to persuade both Diderot and d'Alembert to finish the *Encyclopédie* in what she promised would be a more rewarding and welcoming environment. Frederick of Prussia made the same claim to d'Alembert and was loudly seconded by Voltaire who was already enjoying all the

privileges that Prussia afforded him. He wrote to d'Alembert, "Nous connaissons mieux que personne tout ce qui manque à cet ouvrage. Il ne pourrait être bien fait qu'à Berlin, sous les yeux et avec la protection et les lumières de votre prince philosophe" (in Proust, 72). The right conditions were needed in order for the *Encyclopédie* to reach its full potential; most important was a government that allowed ideas and information to be freely exchanged without any interference from authorities who had the power to control and censor the information. Frederick II was held in great esteem by the *philosophes* as a representation of the philosopher king who would foster this exchange.

Malesherbes's concern was seconded by the publishers who used the threat of publishing outside of France as a way of exerting pressure on the government. The publishers never hid that their interest was primarily economic. On July 28, 1749, they wrote a letter stressing the economic importance of releasing Diderot from jail. They sought Berryer's protection of their fortune and their entire undertaking which aimed to honor the nation "mais nous ruinera si l'on ne nous met pas incessamment en état d'imprimer." Indeed, according to the publishers what was at stake was not just the tax revenue nor even their own personal investments in the work but the entire industry. Writing to protest the suspension of the *Encyclopédie* (1752) they explained that "elle consomme le travail de nos manufactures, elle entretient & fait vivre un grand nombre d'ouvriers différents."[27] As subscriptions went from two thousand to over four thousand

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This is a similar argument to the one that Diderot used to try to persuade d'Alembert not to leave the project of the *Encyclopédie* because his leaving would jeopardize the project and would in turn lay off many of the workers in printing houses.

and the number of printing houses expanded to meet the printing demands of the *Encyclopédie* and all the imitation encyclopedias and other reference works that followed this became a very cogent argument. According to Robert Darnton, between 1780 and 1790, including all editions in all sizes and countries the number of circulation copies of the *Encyclopédie* surpassed eighty thousand of which eleven thousand were in France alone.

"Encyclopédie"

The dialogic component of Diderot's work is obvious in works such as *Le Supplément au voyage de Bougainville, Le Neveu de Rameau,* and *Le Rêve de d'Alembert.* The same style of writing that addresses the reader as an interlocutor is found here where Diderot systematically responds to objections that could be or had already been made by those who oppose the ideas behind the *Encyclopédie.* The article entitled, "Encyclopédie" is the third part of the text that, while an article, is similar to the preface in that it directs itself at readers and tries to instruct readers on how they should decipher the text, its organization, and its meaning. Diderot responds to his average reader who might wonder why frivolous seeming articles such as those on artichokes or pompons were included, but more precisely addresses the defense of his project to the more powerful detractors ranging from theologians to scientists to artisans. This dialogic makes it more interesting for twentieth-century readers, because it becomes that much clearer that Diderot really had to surmount a number of formidable obstacles in order to publish a work that sought to spread enlightenment, knowledge and ultimately happiness

and virtue to not just his compatriots in France but to all readers everywhere. Diderot argues that by objecting to the *Encyclopédie* "[ils] sacrifient le bonheur des siècles à venir & de l'espèce entière"(252). He also asserts that anyone who has ever deplored our loss of knowledge of ancient cultures should immediately see the need and utility of the *Encyclopédie.*

One specific problem that Diderot addresses is the temporal quality of language. He feared that even if the *Encyclopédie* was completed in much less time than most other dictionaries, that the language would change, making the *Encyclopédie* outdated virtually from its inception. After Diderot exhorts us, his reading public, to resolve these problems, he offers three of his own solutions that, when employed, could maintain the utility of the work for future generations. This was critical because Diderot defines his reading public as not just his contemporaries but also the readers of future centuries from different countries. He punctuates his articles with references to his "neveux" that will better understand and hopes that posterity will be able to fully appreciate the work in ways that his contemporaries cannot. Also, in the event of a revolution or a great social upheaval, leading to the destruction of knowledge, the *Encyclopédie* would serve to inform future readers about past knowledge and inventions. Diderot deplored the great amount of knowledge lost due to the burning of the libraries in Alexandria and hoped to prevent such devastating and irreversible loss of knowledge in the future.

Port Royal grammar was based on nominalism, meaning that the word was thought to fully represent the object. Diderot realized that languages evolve, and what is more, that they evolve very quickly. The *Encyclopédie* took twenty five years to be

completed which shows its superiority over other dictionaries like the Academy's which is much more limited in subject matter and took longer to be completed, but the time needed to produce such a work can still be a dangerous flaw. The *Encyclopédie* most advanced purpose was to be useful. Its utility would be severely reduced if the language it used was archaic and outdated and therefore sought to complete his work as quickly as possible. The plates explained some things that were easier to explain with images than with words and contained their own message[28] but were nevertheless limited in what they could say and convey. Diderot proposed going beyond the simplistic belief of Port Royal that all words accurately represent the word and recommends starting articles with a definition such as he does here with "Encyclopédie." Many articles, especially those written by Diderot, do in fact seem like long dictionary entries rather than articles in an encyclopedia. In such cases, Diderot tries to define words, providing their synonyms and explaining the nuances between them. For example, in the entry, "ADORER" Diderot explains the distinction between adorer, honorer and révérer. Often a sentence is used to illustrate the difference: "On adore une maîtresse, on honore les honnêtes gens, on révère les personnes illustres & celles d'un mérite distingúe"(278).[29]

Certain words though are difficult to define because they are the very foundations upon which language has been constructed. In that event, Diderot advocated fixing the

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See Jacques Proust's *En Marges de l'utopie* where he argues that the plates present an unrealistic and utopian vision of the workplace that showed very good working conditions with none of the overcrowding, disorganization, and poorly insulated working conditions that were in fact the norm in the eighteenth century in France.

word in a permanent state that defies the temporality of language through its etymologyy. This entails primarily the use of Greek and occasionally Latin. Using this dead and therefore unchanging language, it would be possible to understand meaning across languages. For example an English speaker searching for the definition of one of these "radicals"could consult both an English and a French translation of a Greek text. Diderot favors Greek because it offers a large vocabulary, thereby decreasing the chances of ambiguity. This method does not fix the pronunciation of words, but it does at least cement the meaning against the never ceasing tide of changing words.

These proposed solutions to language "problems"are never fully adequate. Diderot accepts this, "Les caractères de l'écriture s'étendent à tout, mais ils sont d'institution; ils ne signifient rien par eux-mêmes." Brewer then elaborates on what Diderot means: "usage is determined by a 'pact' among speakers, an arbitrary agreement that can never be fully explained since the process of signification cannot be made totally explicit"(46). I agree with Brewer that Diderot is fascinated with what Brewer refers to as "linguistic indeterminability," but he advances that Diderot saw this as a risk that jeopardized the entire encyclopedia enterprise. I would argue that Diderot reveled in all the possibilities that were available to him. The ambiguity found in some word can be a great advantage, especially when a part of the reading public is very hostile to what is being advanced. In this way Diderot is able to insert a controversial element into the generally neutral genre of the encyclopedia. A definition in a dictionary usually tries to define a word in the simplest way possible, but Diderot uses it to express his philosophical stance. The definition for "Adorer" is a case in point. Diderot equates

adoring, honoring and revering by saying that they are for "le culte religieux & pour le culte civile." Religious leaders objected to this use of adoration for God was being put on the same level as a mistress. Also as numerous critics have pointed out, the renvois might obstensibly serve to define terms that were otherwise difficult to define, but in actuality were most often used to express a philosophical stance. The most commonly cited example is the article, "Capuchon" which is an inoffensive article describing the different types of headware worn by various religious orders. This article refers readers to "Cordeliers" where they find a much more forthcoming attack of the religious orders. These two examples, however, are not good ones because they are too obvious. On other occasions, Diderot's definitions and his renvois are much more subtle and therefore are more successful in getting the message across, not to the vast majority of readers who are probably going to be offended and outraged, but rather to a minority of perspicacious readers who are capable of reading into the text.

Diderot uses the universe as an analogy. He writes: "L'univers soit réel soit intelligible a une infinité de points de vues sous lesquels il peut être représenté, et le nombre des systèmes possibles de la connaissance humaine est aussi grand que celui des points du vue." Again this cause of concern for Brewer who wonders, "If in the case of painting the viewer's judgement (or desires) must be relied on to fill pictorial gaps, in the case of language does it fall to the reader of the *Encyclopédie* to supply his or her own definitions? Can the truth of encyclopedic representation, to say nothing of its effect, be assured?"(47) I suggest that on the contrary, the fact that language cannot be pinned down to mean just one thing is the key toDiderot's entire project. Since there are multiple

points of view he can use the indeterminability of language (to use Brewer's terms) to present certain readers who share his philosophical, materialistic outlook while offering his critics nothing that could very specifically be used against him. This might be one way of interpreting the article "ADMIRATION". Diderot writes,

> Saint-Evermond dit que l'admiration est la marque d'un petit esprit: cette pensée est fausse; il eût fallu dire, pour la rendre juste, que l'admiration est une chose commune est la marque de peu d'esprit: mais il y a des occasions où l'étendue de l'admiration est, pour ainsi dire, la mesure de la beauté de l'âme et de la grandeur d'esprit. Plus un être crée et pendant voit loin dans la nature, plus il a de discrernement & plus il admire. Au reste il faut un peu être en garde contre ce premier mouvement de notre âme à la présence des objets; & ne s'y livrer que quand on est rassuré par ses connaissances & surtout par des modèles auxquels on puisse rapporter, l'objet qui nous est présent (277).

Diderot is telling us that it is easy to admire a common object just as it is easy to understand a straightforward Encyclopedia article. However, the more readers looks into something, is creative and thoughtful, the more they can think about what they have just read and not just take it for what it first seems to mean, the more philosophical they are in reading, the more the text will reveal itself to be an admirable device for propagating philosophical ideas. Readers should be a little suspicious of what they initially read and see what it reveals upon further reflection. One of the next entries written by Diderot shows how this is enacted.

> ADRAMELECH: faux dieu de Sépharraïmitess, peuples que les rois d'Assyrie envoyèrent dans la Terre sainte après que Salmanagaar eut détruit le royaume d'Israël. Les adorateurs d' Adramelech faisaient brûler leurs enfants en son honneur. On dit qu'il était représenté sous la forme d'un mulet; d'autres disent celle d'un paon. (279)

Some readers might see this as nothing more than an esoteric piece of mythological

information. Other readers might think of the dangers that develop when piety becomes excessive, and in reflecting on burning children as a way of honoring God, they might think of the Catholic Church's Inquisition having heretics burned at the stake to honor God.[30] Perhaps this is reading a bit much into a brief entry on mythology, but it does show what might be revealed when the *Encyclopédie* is a work in which connections are made rather than a purely informational source.

Proof that this manipulation of language worked within some strict limits is that when critics such as Berthier published articles or when Chaumeix released his treaty, *Préjugés légitimes contre l'Encyclopédie, et essai de réfutation de cet ouvrage* (1758-9), objecting to certain articles in the *Encyclopédie,* they usually had to infer what controversial and unorthodox philosophy Diderot was advancing. Further evidence of the success of this technique is that when the Arrêt du Conseil d'Etat du Roi issued a condemnation of the *Encyclopédie* on February 7, 1752, effectively suppressing the two published volumes of the *Encyclopédie* and putting an end to the *Encyclopédie* project, their criticism was very vague. Their objection is reduced to Diderot's having written in "des termes obscurs & équivoques" leading to the corruption "des moeurs, de l'irréligion et de l'incredulité." Later, a tacit permission was granted, and in my view one reason for this is that, although there was certainly a subversive undercurrent to many of the *Encyclopédie*'s articles, there were few examples that could be quoted as openly going against the Church and royal authority.

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The Inquistion as an example of the Church's excessive demonstrations of their belief was a common theme in Enlightenment works and is also used by Voltaire in *Candide.*

The remainder of "Encyclopédie"is dedicated to future readers. Diderot wonders what the limits are to knowledge. He says that we do not even know the limits of any one person's intelligence much less that of the entire human race. He overflows with optimism for the future.

Yet, he writes, "Les révolutions sont nécessaires"(II, 49). Diderot proceeds to explain that revolutions impede progress and that we need monuments to knowledge, such as the *Encyclopédie,* to insure that all learning is not lost during times of turbulence and violence. Would it be going too far to also interpret this sentence by advocating revolutions in learning? I think Diderot is not just being pessimistic and saying that revolutions are unavoidable, with the right safeguards in place they can be desirable. Diderot sees the *Encyclopédie* as just the beginning and as a starting point for future generations. He does acknowledge that there are many flaws in the work but in his optimism, he is sure that they will all be remedied. "Mais ces défauts sont inséperables d'une première tentative, et il m'est évidemment démontré qu'il n'appartient qu'au temps et aux siècles à venir de les réparer"(II, 54). Diderot correctly foresees a second edition followed by many others.

Finally, Diderot explains how art (by which we can understand knowledge because he is referring to the mechanical arts here) progresses towards perfection. He writes, "L'un recueille le chanvre; un autre le fait baigner; un troisième le tille: c'est d'abord une corde grossière; puis un fil; ensuite une toile"(II, 65). It is interesting that what we end up with is a "toile." This toile is like the "toile d'araignée." The end result then is not an empty canvas but a web of ideas. No one would argue that our own

revolution in information technology has ended in perfection. Yet, I believe that Diderot even in all his optimism would be amazed at how the conception of a new way of reading and thinking, first established in the *Encyclopédie* is commonly put into practice today with the use of the internet.

Chapter Four: The *Salons*: Engaging Pictorially

In his introduction to the *Salon 1767,* Diderot claims that he cannot be as, "rich, various, wise and fertile,"as he has been in previous *Salons.* He explains that this is due to exhaustion but also because the rules of art: its principles and its applications change only in very limited ways. Readers who have a volume worth of criticism before them note the complaint is somewhat ironic. In fact, the *Salon 1767* is just as vast as what he has written in the *Salon 1765* which was three times longer than what he had written in the *Salon 1763,* the latter eight times more text than he had originally submitted for the *Salon 1759.* Diderot's tone might suggest that take his second reason be viewed with some scepticism as well. Since Diderot believed that aesthetic theory remains basically the same regardless of the painting to which it is applied, he multiplied the ways in which it is possible to *respond* to paintings. The basic description remains; the dimensions, composition, color, size, genre are still an integral part of Diderot's criticism. As Thomas Crow notes in his introduction to *Diderot on Art,* Diderot's language oscillates between, "its generic extremes: from abstract speculation on the falsity of experience to ecstatic celebration of the senses"(xiii). The "ecstatic celebration of the senses" is often translated through a text that awakens the readers' emotions as well. The text constantly moves between an accurate, realistic description of paintings and a fiction sketch to which Starobinski refers to as "une ébauche du roman." The *Salons* are progressively embellished from one year to the next because Diderot weaves in many digressions and narratives. He aims to represent different voices: these complementary, at times conflicting, voices come from Diderot's desire to transmit to his readers the reactions of

the very varied public viewing the Salon. Diderot himself explains in the beginning of the Salon of 1765, "J'ai ouvert mon âme aux effets. Je m'en suis laissé pénétrer. J'ai recueilli la sentence du vieillard et la pensée de l'enfant, le jugement de l'homme de lettres, le mot de l'homme du monde, et les propos du peuple"(Seznec,57). Thomas Crow writes in *Painters and Public Life in 18th Century Paris*, "His task was to reproduce the variety of voices and concerns that went into making the new public sphere for art"(16). I contend that in multiplying the number of voices and in the different ways to react to a painting, Diderot personalizes the text for each reader. Grimm, his friend, or Sophie Volland his mistress, or Catherine, the tzarina of Russia, all used the text in different ways. Surprisingly, modern readers find that Diderot's criticism is still meaningful today. In this way, Diderot maintains the same writing style in which he addresses different audiences that he had already adopted for previous works, and yet the circumstances of the *Salons* were very different from those surrounding his other works.

Diderot started composing the *Salons* in 1759 as the vast project of the *Encyclopédie* came to an end. In editing and writing the *Encyclopédie*, Diderot was addressing a mass audience and always had to camouflage his criticisms to avoid further confrontations with the censors, whether his own publisher, Le Breton, the *Jansenistes* in Parliament, or the authorities emanating from the King. Compiling a work as extensive as the *Encyclopédie* was a monumental task whose principal goal was clearly stated: to emancipate the reading public from the holds of dogma and superstition. Even if Diderot did not achieve his philosophical goals of enlightenment for all, the popularity of the *Encyclopédie* shows that at the very least Diderot was successful in attracting a very large

readership.

The writing of the *Salons* turned out to also be a colossal work but it was different in that he was taking works that were already accessible to the general Parisian public and writing about them for a restricted audience. The *Salons* were set up by the Academy and staged annually or biannually in the Louvre from 1739 until 1855. The promoters of the Academy needed to gain public support for it to fund their efforts; they also wanted the public to acknowledge the distinction between the officially recognized and trained artists in the Academy and the craftsmen supported by the guilds. In this way they could restrict access to royal commissions and the right to open a school to only Academicians.

It was unusual in the Ancien Régime to have such a disparate and heterogeneous public gather in such a large and unregulated space. Previously, art had been displayed at Versailles for an elite audience and the rest of society was only exposed to art exhibitions during religious celebrations in churches or during the Corpus Christi processions that paraded religious works of art throughout the streets of Paris. There were also a few public exhibitions arranged at the Place Dauphine. The Louvre was unique in that it presented a free place to discuss and debate the works of art, and perhaps most significantly, to observe how others responded to the works of art.

Paintings were stacked one upon another in contrast to today's modern exhibits. Binoculars were sometimes used to better see the works that were several feet away from the viewers and in no way labeled or set apart from each other. The Academy tried to bring order to the displays by printing a small booklet giving the name of the work and the painter and the dimensions of the work. This was very successful and became an

important source of revenue for the Academy. This official booklet led to other pamphlets discussing the works of art. The Academy, of course, had its own critics commenting on works. Their hope was to increase interest in the Salons and to develop a greater appreciation of certain artists, namely those that had been recognized by the Academy: at the same time they had to combat criticisms spread by other critics. This anti-Academy criticism was especially dangerous because the viewers were often not able to scrutinize the works for themselves. One popular pamphlet writer was LaFont de Saint-Yenne who used art criticism as a way to disseminate his political views. He railed against the abuses of royal authority and promoted resistance to despotism under the guise of art criticism. His aesthetic viewpoints were, however, severely limited. These pamphlets were useful, though, for monarchs who were trying to improve their personal collections and for a growing number of dealers who catered to rich nobles moving away from Versailles and settling in large houses in Paris.

In editing the *Encyclopédie* Diderot permanently changed the nature of reference works. His *Encyclopédie* distinguished itself from others in that it was not destined just for an exclusive, highly educated elite; it was made accessible and comprehensible to average bourgeois readers. His success spawned numerous imitations and new editions of every size. By contrast, in writing his art criticism and in publishing it in the *Correspondance littéraire*, he took the art work that was openly available to anyone in society and wrote about it for a highly exclusive and very discrete restricted audience of fifteen. The *Correspondance littéraire* was a manuscript newsletter or *nouvelles à la main* compiled by Diderot's close friend Melchior Grimm. It was distributed through

diplomatic channels to fifteen monarchs including the czarine Catherine of Russia, Frederick of Prussia, as well as monarchs in Poland, Sweden and Germany. There was a strict agreement that forbade anyone from copying or lending their individual copy. One indication that this was respected is a story recounted by Goethe where he tells of his extreme sense of honor and privilege when he was given access to a copy for a few minutes (Crow, Intro to *Diderot on Art,* xii).

With this restricted reading public Diderot was free to say what he wanted without any fear of reprisal from the censors. Crow writes, "Diderot's *Salon* takes on a form and a scope which the illicit (not to mention the approved) print trade in Paris could never have supported" (Crow, iv). Diderot is never shy about offering his opinions regarding works and he sometimes diverges off of the topic of the painting to criticize the government or to talk about how the Academy should be improved. Overall, however, he is writing without any philosophical viewpoint that he wants to get across to his readers. Certainly, he develops his own aesthetic principles but even then it does not seem to readers that he is trying to convince them that his ideas were always right; nevertheless, he reacts to these works in a way that was personal for him and would, in turn, result in a personal, emotional reaction in his readers. His audience lived abroad and so did not have access to the paintings. On occasion Diderot adopts the role of lofty art critic judging the work using established art criteria. More often, he emotionally connects with the work and therefore minimizes or disregards entirely any artistic flaws. And on occasion Diderot finds the work to be too horrible to discuss and banishes it to the *pont de Notre Dame,* where amateur artists sometimes displayed their works. This is because a bad work it

does not elicit any feeling in Diderot and therefore it is useless to even describe it. It would then be description just for description's sake rather then the description as a way into an emotional response. Although Diderot most often seems to appeal to the emotional side of his readers he does not hesitate to have them think about art in a theoretical way.

In Diderot's introduction to the *Salon of 1767,* he discusses Plato's ideas on forms. Diderot poses his question to any hypothetical artist but clearly the questions are intended for readers as well. "Si vous aviez choisi pour modèle la plus belle femme que vous connussiez et que vous eussiez rendu avec le plus grand scrupule tous les charmes de son visage, croiriez-vous avoir représenté la beauté?"(II,57). Diderot immediately provides his answer and mocks anyone who might have hazarded a yes. He argues that even the most elementary art student would know that the painter had merely produced a portrait. The talent of a true artist is to take various parts of different people and to put them together. If nothing new is created then the result is just a copy of a copy. This is useless, because as Diderot shows with a quote from Plato, it would only be a phantom and not the thing itself. Artists will never achieve the ideal, they will never succeed in correctly rendering true beauty, but they must be careful to avoid the third level of representation. To prevent endless copying artists should, according to Diderot, observe many examples of whatever they are trying to capture (i.e. beautiful women) and then take parts of each to create something that emanates from the artist's own imagination. In this way, artists could hope to approach the representation of the second level or the object itself. Diderot explains the success of the Ancients.:

> Par une longue observation, par une expérience consommée, par un tact exquis, par un goût, un instinct, une sorte d'inspiration donnée à quelques rares génies, peut-être par un projet naturel à un idolâtre d'élever l'homme au-dessus de sa condition, et de lui imprimer un caractère divin, un caractère exclusif de toutes les contentions de notre vie chétive, pauvre, mesquine et misérable, ils ont commencé par sentir les grandes altérations les difformités les plus grossières, les grandes souffrances (II,60).

Diderot later explains that this is why many of his contemporaries were doomed to produce mediocre works. By copying the work of the Ancients they were getting further and further away from a true representation. The Ancients themselves had no copies so they relied solely on their own observations of nature. They too were unable to represent the ideal; however, they realized this and sought to produce an individualized version of the ideal. Through careful and painstaking observation of nature they approach the truth, the ideal. For example, they studied how age affected beauty and then created a beautiful statue taking both qualities into consideration. This is only possible for a genius but French artists continue to fail because they slavishly copy nature. "Ils étudient la nature comme parfaite, et non comme perfectible"(II, 61).

Readers might wonder why Diderot is discussing this. Diderot responds to his impatient interlocutor that there is always some metaphysics in art. Diderot often displays his knowledge of and admiration for the Ancients and in particular for Plato and Socrates but there must be another reason. By introducing Plato's theory of forms he gives readers a framework with which to judge art. Diderot must describe hundreds of paintings and he uses this criterion to assess their quality. I believe that there is another reason. Diderot considers himself an artist in his own right and in writing the *Salon* he must question the best way to translate his reaction to the painting. The best way, he decides, is not through

a careful, detailed analysis of the painting. Diderot needs to use his own imagination to engage his readers. He intertwines his stories and his digressions as a way of diverting readers and a way of making them be more active in their own appraisal of the works he describes. By avoiding a copy of a copy he is more likely to create something new and approach his own ideal. Readers might not visualize the work exactly as it appears on the canvas but they will encounter some truth. This truth can take various forms: it might be agreeing with Diderot on a aesthetic concept or it might be picturing a landscape described by Diderot as true to nature for them. Finally, Diderot is inspired by the Ancients to individualize his work, so that he is not trying to represent one general idea but rather a specific example of it. For example, rather than paint the idea of an old woman the Ancients represented one particular woman. In the same way, Diderot discusses a particular work of art, and from that, readers can extract his broader standards for judging art. He is writing for a select aristocratic audience but his texts are tailored to fit a heterogeneous readership. A wide range of readers discover pleasure and truth in the *Salons*. Readers who are more interested in 18th-century art will be satisfied, but so will readers who are looking to be amused by Diderot's stories or readers who read the *Salons* as a commentary on 18th-century life (i.e. Diderot's discussion of Louis XV or his debate regarding luxury). This is why the *Salons* are still read today and not just as a source of 18th-century art criticism. Diderot's diverse responses to the many paintings makes the text come alive for readers because they are never sure what to expect. It is impossible to look at a painting and foretell Diderot's reaction or even guess at how he might go about describing it to his audience.

Diderot was fully aware of the attraction that his text would have for his readers. Throughout we see that Diderot maintains a conversational tone as if he were speaking to friends rather than that of the erudite esthetician communicating his lofty ideas. In a letter to Sophie Volland dated November 10, 1765. Diderot emphasizes the originality of what he was doing, the result of his total freedom in writing, and also highlights the conversational aspect found throughout the *Salons*.

> C'est certainement la meilleure chose que j'ai faite depuis que je cultive les lettres, de quelque manière qu'on la considère, soit par la diversité des tons, la variété des objets et l'abondance des idées qui n'ont jamais, j'imagine, passé par aucune tête que la mienne. C'est une mine de plaisanteries tantôt légères, tantôt fortes. Quelquefois c'est la conversation toute pure comme on la fait au coin du feu. D'autres fois, c'est tout ce qu'on peut imaginer ou d'éloquent ou de profond. Je me trouve quelquefois tiraillé par des sentiments bien opposés. Il y a des moments où je voudrais que cette besogne tombât du ciel tout imprimée au milieu de la capitale; plus souvent, lorsque je réfléchis à la douleur profonde qu'elle causerait à une infinité d'artistes qui ne méritent pas d'être si cruellement punis d'avoir fait des efforts inutiles pour mériter notre admiration, je serais désolé qu'elle parût.
>
> Alors je condamne à l'obscurité une production dont il ne me serait pas difficile de receuillir gloire et profit. J'ai pris la plume; j'ai écrit quinze jours de suite, du soir au matin, et j'ai rempli d'idées et de style plus de deux cent pages[...] ce qui fournirait environ deux volumes d'impression (544).

Previously, I have tried to show how Diderot works within the framework of the novel to expound upon philosophical questions or within the short story to translate his views on the function of art or how he manipulates the straight-forward reference work to reveal his criticism to the most astute readers. In many ways, the *Salons* was Diderot's ideal form of writing. First, he was only addressing the most interested and well-informed readers so none of his knowledge would ever be lost on them. More importantly, he

never had to camouflage any of his criticisms. He was given total liberty to express his ideas and his feelings. He did not have to worry about offending any of the artists that he criticized nor did he have to fear any censorship that might eliminate any offensive parts of the text. Given this liberty, he could be funny and serious, erudite and down to earth, straightforward or ramble on about seemingly unrelated ideas and stories. In creating the text inspired by his own individual genius, expressed in many different ways, he was more hopeful of achieving the ideal, just as the Ancients did. The negative side to this liberty, that he greatly lamented, was that his greatest text was in all likelihood condemned to obscurity and would never be read by a larger public and give him the laurels and recognition that they he would have otherwise received. Nevertheless, being able to express his ideas truthfully, after having led a career fraught with conflict, was his greatest reward.

What really stands out in this letter is that Diderot was writing as much for himself as he was for others. The joy and enthusiasm he got from describing paintings along with all the tangentially related anecdotes and aesthetic theories is what makes reading the *Salon* so enjoyable. He continues,

> **J'ai appris en même temps que mon amour-propre n'avait pas besoin d'une rétribution populaire, qu'il ne m'était même assez indifférent d'être plus ou moins apprécié par ceux que je fréquente habituellement, et que je pourrais être satisfait s'il y avait au monde un homme que j'estimasse et qui sût bien ce que je vaux. Grimm le sait, et peut-être ne l'a-t-il jamais su comme à présent! Il m'est doux aussi de penser que j'aurai procuré quelques moments d'amusement à ma bienfaitrice de Russie, écrasé par-ci, par-là le fanatisme et les préjugés, et donné par occasion quelques leçons aux souverains, qui n'en deviendront pas meilleurs pour cela; mais ce ne sera pas faute d'avoir entendu la vérité et de l'avoir entendue sans ménagement (545).**

Herbert Dieckmann, the first critic to have brought serious attention to the question of address in Diderot's works, gave a series of lectures at the Collège de France entitled, "Diderot et son lecteur" in 1959. He argues that for Diderot it is a concrete, individual reader that preoccupies him and not the public at large. The letter to Sophie shows that it was the case in the *Salons.* Diderot clearly states that while writing he thinks mostly about Grimm and then about Catherine of Russia. When critiquing a work of art Diderot takes into consideration not just his personal reaction but imagines how his friends would also view the work. Dieckmann believes that the reason why Diderot did not publish the majority of his works was because he was afraid of angering the people he knew. Dieckmann highlights *Le Rêve de d'Alembert* as a good example of this because we know that all three characters: Doctor Bordieu, Mademoiselle de Lespinasse, and his co-editor d'Alembert were incensed by the way they were portrayed in that work. The same holds true for the *Salon.* Diderot might have tried to publish what he had written for the *Correspondance littéraire* because clearly he was very proud of what he had accomplished. He did not publish his *Salons* for fear of offending the artists who did not deserve to be attacked publicly just because they were poor artists or were unable to meet Diderot's rigorous standards. Dieckmann makes the conjecture that in all of Diderot's writing he was also addressing some particular person and that person was usually either Sophie, Grimm or Catherine. Starobinski concurs arguing that the *Salons* provided Diderot with exactly the type of writing he liked best, "L'occasion s'offrait à Diderot de parler comme il aimait parler: à une personne déterminée, dans un moment déterminé,

devant une série d'objects déterminés, mais en pensant à des destinataires éloignés dans l'espace et dans le temps"(13). Here we see that Diderot was concentrating more on writing for Catherine of Russia than for Sophie but that Grimm takes on the most important role of prime reader and that there is always the idea that Diderot is writing for a much larger posthumous public than just the fifteen subscribers. Diderot's use of the pronoun *you* and the numerous references to *mon ami* are important because although they might be directly aimed at Grimm, they are used in a general way so that all readers get the impression that Diderot is speaking directly to them.

It is impossible for us to ascertain whether Diderot was thinking foremost of his friends as his primary readers or whether he hoped to create a text that would remain interesting for future readers. What is clear is that he writes in a way that is ambiguous enough to incorporate all readers. The most obvious example is the one just mentioned, when he addresses his text to *mon ami.* Readers might take that to be specifically aimed at Grimm, following Dieckmann's argument, but the references are so oblique that they encompass any reader: male or female, 18th-century reader or modern reader. Another example is when Diderot overtly plays the role of royal scout looking for pieces of art that are worthy of becoming part of a royal collection. Indeed. according to Crow, this was one of Diderot's distinguishable voices in the text. Crow argues, "He was reaching directly, with no mediation by contrary voices, the most prestigious of possible patrons, who had whole state treasuries at their disposal. Certainly one of the voices woven through the *Salons* is that of the scout or purchasing agent"(33). Indeed, we have many examples of Diderot playing the intermediary between artists and buyers. One example is

that when Greuze demanded a very high price for a painting, the only buyer willing to pay his price for *La Piété filiale* was Catherine of Russia. Also, when commenting on his friend Falconet's sculptures he must have been influenced by his personal recommendation to Catherine for Falconet to make an official state sculpture for her. Diderot readily acknowledges the influence he has over these monarchs. In a tongue-in-cheek way he often reminds them of his superiority in judging what is worth buying and what is not. Diderot incorporates a dialogue between himself the advisor and a buyer, who foolishly wants to buy one of La Grenée's paintings, as a way of humorously pointing out the strengths and flaws of La Grenée's works on display in the *Salon.* In the end he relents. "Revenons sur tout cela et voyons. Tenez, puisque vous avez de l'argent à mettre en peinture mauvaise ou médiocre, je m'en tiendrais, oui, je m'en tiendrais à ce *Bacchus et Ariane*, ou à cette *Diane et Endymion*" (I, 91). The dialogue continues a back and forth discussion between "N'achetez pas" and then finally concludes with, "Achetez donc." This makes the whole text much more lively and engaging than just discussing the merits and faults of La Grenée's works in a more traditional way. Yes, Diderot is addressing those readers who have the resources to buy these painting but it is an equally effective technique to debate the redeeming and the poor qualities found in La Grenée's work. Modern readers quickly fall into the role that Diderot is setting out for them.

This is not the tone that dominates the *Salons,* so modern readers may not see it as irrelevant commentary for them, but rather as another interesting technique Diderot uses to entice and amuse readers, regardless of who they might be. Another example is Diderot's famous piece on Fragonard's *Corésus et Callihoé* in the *Salon 1765.* Readers

who had not seen the work or who were unaware of its subject might not realize until the end of the text that Diderot is not, in fact, describing his dream but rather the painting through the description of his dream. Readers who are more familiar with Diderot's other works such as *Le Rêve de d'Alembert* might see it as Diderot once again advancing the power of dreams and the truth to be found in the subconscious. Or again, readers who are familiar with Plato's "Allegory of the Cave" in *The Republic,* and the importance of Socrates for Diderot, might interpret it as a commentary on living in a world or illusion where paintings play a large part. The point is that regardless of what readers bring to the text or looks for in the text, they are never deterred from entering into the text, in such a way as to make them feel as if Diderot was writing for them.

Diderot uses dialogue in a number of his descriptions, thereby creating a place for his interlocutor which is quickly assumed by the reader. Discussing the price at which Roslin's "Un père arrivant à sa terre, où il est réçu par sa famille," Diderot writes, "Mais, me direz-vous, Greuze fait le portrait, et supérieurement à Roslin... Il est vrai... Greuze compose, et Roslin n'y entend rien... D'accord..."(II, 125). Readers familiar with Diderot's admiration for Greuze's painting and may quickly adopt the position that this painting might be worthy of the price for which it was sold. Diderot's use of dialogue goes beyond just discussing the monetary value of paintings. In discussing Le Prince's painting, "Le Baptême russe" he admires the painted characters of the godmother and godfather. He imagines that they are real people and discusses with his interlocutor how he would act towards them if he knew them.

Si je le retrouve hors d'ici, je ne pourrai jamais me défendre de

> recherecher sa connaissance et son amitié. J'en ferai mon ami, vous dis-je. Pour cette marraine, elle est si aimable, si décente, si douce... que j'en ferai, dites-vous, ma maîtresse, si je puis... Et pourquoi non?... Et s'ils sont époux, voilà donc votre bon ami le Russe...Vous m'embarrassez. Mais aussi, c'est qu'à la place du Russe, ou je ne laisserais pas approcher mes amis de ma femme, ou j'aurais la justice de dire: Ma femme est si charmante, si aimable, si attrayante... Et vous pardonneriez à votre ami?... Oh! non. Mais ne voilà-t-il pas une conversation bien édifiante, tout au travers de la plus auguste cérémonie du christianisme; celle qui nous régénère en Jésus-Christ, en nous lavant de la faute que notre grand-père a commise il y a sept à huit mille ans?...(II, 179).

At the end of the conversation, Diderot remarks that he forgot he was talking about a painting. Diderot loses himself in his text and forgets what his primary goal in writing is supposed to be. As a result, readers also lose themselves and become the individual that Diderot is addressing. Indeed, the conversation strays far from a description of the painting itself. The text revolves more around this Russian couple and whether Diderot would be friends with them than around the painting itself. This conversation serves several purposes for Diderot. As with his other dialogues, it makes the painting more alive for readers because they enter into a conversation about it with Diderot. He is also able to convey the personality of the people painted and in this way goes much further in rendering the effect of the painting to his readers than a physical description ever would have. The fact that Diderot would consider being friends with them implies that their portraits give a sense of their moral characteristics that go beyond their mere physical attributes. Diderot is also able to show how a painting can lead to a conversation that is more edifying than religion itself and takes a quick swipe at the absurdity of the concept of original sin. This is very different from what readers usually expect when reading art criticism. On several occasions Diderot offers what would be a much better setting

for the painting. Upon viewing "L'Amour rémouleur" Diderot suggests that rather than make the subject mythical, the artist should have placed the scene in a neighborhood cutler's shop. "Cela est infiniment moins vrai, moins intéressant, moins en mouvement que la même scene, si elle se passait dans la boutique d'un coutelier, par ses bambins, un jour de dimanche, dans l'absence du père et du mère"(II, 96). It would be better because the spectators would find it much easier to imagine what the scene was all about, what preceded it and what would follow. It would become more meaningful for viewers because it would be easier to relate to. At other times Diderot takes the work of two different artists, Doyen and Vien. He shows how a superior painting would be accomplished by combining the individual talents of each artist. This again is like the ideal artist who takes different example from nature to produce something that is more perfect than what would ever actually be found in nature. Diderot also improves upon not just what is found in nature but on symbols used to evoke more abstract concepts. He recounts his suggestions to La Grenée for a subject representing Peace and a scene depicting a nude young girl who is, despite her nudity, virtuous and modest. And finally when the painting he describes is not inspiring on its own Diderot provides his own story to inspire readers. In reference to Le Prince's "La Bonne aventure" Diderot wonders "Et puis où est l'intérêt de toute cette composition? Il faut que je vous dédommage de cela par une aventure domestique" (II, 209). Diderot then proceeds to tell a story of when his mother visited a fortune teller and was robbed. The story is much more interesting then just a description of an uninspiring work and conveys Diderot's unfavorable point of view on fortune tellers. Diderot's art criticism is never static it always offers more than just a

description of what he saw.

Diderot was pioneering a new genre with his *Salons* and it is perhaps the novelty of the genre that allows Diderot to take all the liberty he needs to fully describe the works. Art criticism had been written by others but Diderot introduces another type of writing that interweaves esthetic theory, novelistic short stories, and asides with his readers. In *Diderot critique d'art et le problème de l'expression* (1969) Michael Cartwright argues that Diderot was forging a new type of writing that mixes details from the painting along with anecdotes to form a hybrid style unique to Diderot. Norman Bryson asserts that in some ways Diderot's criticism is far superior to modern critics because today emphasis is put on,"fugitive mental states in the presence of the object." Diderot's criticism was written after the *Salon* had already closed and he had to rely solely on his notes and sketches. He reminds his reader of this: "Au reste, n'oubliez pas que je ne garantis ni mes descriptions, ni mon jugement sur rien; mes descriptions parce qu'il n'y a aucune mémoire sous le ciel qui puisse remporter fidèlement autant de compositions diverses; mon jugement, parce que je ne suis ni artiste, ni même amateur" (II,33). It is certainly true that Diderot could not have remembered all the paintings in the *Salon* but this sentence also serves as a disclaimer that gives Diderot the freedom to change any of the aspects of the painting and to develop on what he wants to because these are the parts that he "remembers" best. Modern art criticism focuses primarily on the gaze and studies what part of the painting attracts our attention the most. Diderot's criticism, in contrast, is what Bryson calls a "mental excursion away from the object"(33). This is true for both Diderot, the writer, as well as for his readers, neither of whom had the painting nearby to

consult. This "mental excursion" led to Diderot's criticism taking on the form of the dream in describing Fragonard's *Coresus and Callirhoe* and an imagined entrance into the painting to describe Vernet's landscapes. But it is perhaps in describing the painting by Greuze that we see his most interactive position with the static, lifeless painting that comes alive for Diderot, and therefore for the readers of his criticism as well. Certainly Diderot had an extraordinary memory. What is important though is not what he remembers about the paintings' characteristics but about what emotion he felt when looking at them and of what the paintings reminded him. In fact what he remembers most often is what he felt while looking at the painting and the paintings that affect him emotionally are sure to be the ones that he remembers with the greatest detail. Starobinski applauds Diderot's genius that can conform to all types of art and render them each in their own way, "C'est devenir un être pluriel, parlant plusieurs langages"(21). Diderot himself reminds Grimm and his readers of the multiplicity of his character when studying such a large variety of art,

> Pour décrire un Salon à mon gré et au vôtre, savez-vous, mon ami, ce qu'il faudrait avoir? Toutes les sortes de goût, un coeur sensible à tous les charmes, une âme susceptible d'une infinité d'enthousiasmes différents, une variété de style qui répondît à la variété de pinceaux; pouvoir être grand ou voluptueux avec Deshays, simple et vrai avec Chardin, délicat avec Vien, pathétique avec Greuze, et produire toutes les illusions possibles avec Vernet (in Starobinski, 21).

Diderot's greatest compliment is the one that he gives to Greuze's "Une petite fille qui tient un petit capucin de bois," "Quelle vérité!" Certainly, Diderot admires Greuze's technique in that he was able to render this little girl exactly as she would be in real life. What he says here in reference to Greuze is echoed throughout the *Salon* in

reference to not only Greuze but also to Chardin and Vernet. The reason that truth is the most important criteria for Diderot is because once the viewer perceives a scene that is depicted in such a way that it reverberates as *real* for the viewer, it implies that readers can easily visualize the painting for themselves because it is true to nature. The painting that closely imitates natures serves as a springboard to Diderot's imagïnation and consequently to readers' imaginations as well.[31] Viewers then begin to wonder who this little girl was, how she got the doll, etc. Diderot criticizes a painting of Cupid by La Grenée, "L'Amour rémouleur" for not being real enough. "Cela est infiniment moins vrai, moins intéressant, moins en mouvement que la même scène, si elle se passait dans la boutique du coutelier, par ses bambin, un jour de dimanche, dans l'absence du père et de la mère" (II, 96). When the scene is similar to what we see in life then Diderot can create his own painting. The rest of his description is what he would see in the painting if it had been given a more prosaic setting. However, when the original painting is false, meaning artificial or unnatural, then it cuts off Diderot's ability to superimpose his fiction onto the work. He is forced to discuss an entirely different subject unrelated to the text or attack its defects from an artistic point of view. Numerous though are the occasions where he says the painting is simply too bad to discuss. It results in criticism that is much more enjoyable for both readers and Diderot alike.

One of the painters that Diderot admired the most and whose artistic effect he

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Michael Fried argues in *Absorption and Theatricality* that the theme of absorption was created out of an anti-Rococo sentiment felt in the early and mid 1750's. This vogue tried to avoid "exquisite, sensuous, intimately decorative paintings," while returning to an art distinguished by "high seriousness, elevated morality and timeless esthetic principles"(Fried, 35). We see Diderot's praise of artists who can depict what is real and what is a true reflection of nature as characteristic of this sentiment.

was best able to render in his criticism was Greuze. Diderot preferred Greuze's paintings because, in addition to advocating a moral position that was in line with Diderot's own, the truthfulness of the scenes depicted meant that he could create a story around the picture presented and in this way, heighten the emotional effect. Diderot writes in the *Salon of 1763* "C'est vraiment là mon homme ce Greuze. D'abord le genre me plaît, c'est la peinture morale." Greuze's genre paintings transposed on the level of the plastic arts what Diderot was trying to do with his plays. Diderot was forging another new form of writing, *le drame bourgeois,* with *Le Père de famille* and *Le fils naturel.* Diderot and Greuze are similar in that they both use their art to instill moral values in their viewers. Diderot felt that the Church was no longer able to morally educate the people and that art could replace the Church in teaching virtue. In response to *Jésus-Christ baptisé par Saint-Jean* by Lépicié, Diderot writes, "A mon sens un peintre d'église est une espèce de prédicateur plus clair, plus frappant, plus intelligible, plus à la portée du commun, que le curé et son vicaire. Ceux-ci parlent aux oreilles qui sont souvent bouchées. Le tableau parle aux yeux, comme le spectacle de la nature, qui nous a appris presque tout ce que nous savons..."(II, 184). In case what the painting is saying is not clear to viewers Diderot develops an entire story often supplemented by dialogue to develop the narrative and moral potential of the painting. Diderot believes that art speaks to people on a level that is more emotional and therefore more convincing. Greuze failed at being a History Painter, which was the most respected position in the Academy, but for Diderot he occupied a much more important place as someone who could effectively transmit secular values. Greuze and Diderot seemed to agree that virtue did not necessarily emanate from the use

of reason or from a rational calculation but rather from the heart. Norman Bryson explains that in these scenes, "happiness is visible because it is rational and that it is rational because it is quantifiable"(126). It then follows that a heightened sense of *sensibilité* is a sort of moral calculus derived from these painting and resulting in virtue. Diderot believed that, in witnessing these scenes of virtue which often culminated in an apogee of happiness, people would automatically strive to improve themselves. An example of this supreme state of bliss would include the touching reunion of the family in *Le Père de famille* or as the Goncourt brothers point out in their writing on Greuze in the scene where Valmont in *Les Liaisons dangereuses* gives alms to the poor or the moving scene of a daughter being given away to her future husband in Greuze's *L'Accordée du Village.*

According to Bryson, these scenes function by using a technique of emblisation which he defines as a technique where everything is included. Bryson thus explains how it works, "We need a totality of human types from whose variety the idea of humanity with its powerful, emotional, and didactic charge can be generated"(130). In *L'Accordée* we have all age groups ranging from the chubby baby still clinging to his mother's skirt to the father. Although both of these figures were criticized for being poorly painted (the baby being too tall for his supposed age and the father who at sixty, is slightly too old to be this girl's father) it was necessary to provide viewers with the spectrum of life stages in human existence. All classes are represented as well: the notary is a member of the bourgeoisie, the mother and her children seem to be peasants while the daughter seems to Diderot to resemble a pretty Parisian shop girl, her fiancé is a member of the upper class. The dichotomy between culture and nature is also represented with the sack of money, the

legal document symbolizing the law in opposition to the mother and her chicks painted in the foreground. In addition to showing the spectrum of social groups, the painting is also divided into a masculine sphere including the fiancé, the father and the notary on the right, contrasting with the bride, her mother, and her sisters on the left. There are two exceptions but the brother on the left seems quite feminine with his long curly hair, whereas the girl on the right seems to be carefully considering the contract being signed and thus fits well with the serious male-dominated, side. Diderot admired the flowing yet pyramidal quality of the composition. Indeed, the pyramidal shape focuses attention on the couple but the circle is closed by the animals in the front. In this way members of all the classes and all age groups could learn a moral lesson from viewing these touching scenes of virtue. Diderot believes that any of the viewers as the *Salon* would benefit from such a painting. In addition to focusing on a scene of family virtue, it is meaningful for all spectators who can imagine the preceding and subsequent events of the story for themselves.

Diderot great attraction to Greuze's work is based on a narrative quality developed in each of his paintings. Diderot admonishes a bad painter for not having chosen the proper moment of the story to depict. The proper moment is the one that allows viewers to easily infer what precedes the event and the immediate outcome. Greuze's painting allow viewers to invent their own story and at the same time avoid being restricted to just one possible eventuality. Norman Bryson argues that from an aesthetic point of view on one level the paintings seem relatively simple yet upon further study they reveal a confrontation between opposing forces that are difficult to articulate. One example is Greuze's painting of a young boy who seems rather androgynous. Similarly, in the series

of paintings of young girls who have just lost their virginity (represented with broken eggs, a broken mirror, or a cracked flower pot), the girls are all depicted as very young, innocent, virginal looking girls. "These young girls come to represent both innocence and experience, both child and woman, both the sacred and the profane" (Bryson, 129). The effort to explain these ambiguities gives an original verve and force to Diderot's criticism. Because Greuze's paintings resist a simple anecdotal reading, the viewer and the critic are given a significant degree of freedom in reading and deconstructing the painting. Diderot takes advantage of this freedom to graft his own story onto the painting. He is inspired by the literary sensibility that he admired in writers like Samuel Richardson. Diderot claims, "Greuze has made, without question a 'Paméla'"(144-5).

In talking about the painting *La Jeune fille qui pleure son oiseau mort,* the text begins, "On s'approcherait de cette main pour la baiser." The use of the conditional is important because it reveals Diderot's desire to interact with this desirable young girl but some reticence due to his respect for her pain. Equally important is the use of the pronoun "on" implying that Diderot is reacting to this painting in the same way that any one of his readers would have. The image of this girl is, however, quickly transformed into a dialogic in which Diderot plays the most important role. As in "Le baptême russe" the figure in the painting becomes a real person with whom Diderot can imagine speaking. Here the painting is so powerful that Diderot does not just imagine that he might speak to the young girl, as he did with the Russian woman, he directly enters into a conversation with her.

Brewer advances, in reference to the *Encyclopédie,* that the person who controls the discourse is able to impose his own version of the story. More specifically related to

the *Salons,* he argues in his article, "Diderot and the Image of the Other (Woman)" that it was common throughout the Enlightenment for the male *philosophes* to place their discourse on women who were deprived of the ability to tell their own story. He argues, "The image of the other can be exploited not only epistemologically but also ideologically. An image of the other may in fact be an imaginary representation, by which I mean not a fictional, erroneous representation but rather one created in order to integrate all the more effectively the very real other within a given ideology and the socio-economic system that produce it" (*Esprit createur,* 53-54). Since Diderot is imposing his own story it is impossible for him to be objective about it; also, in telling this young girl's story he gains power over her. Brewer continues, "A discourse of women is overlaid by a discourse *on* women"(54). That is what happens in this text but I would contend that Brewer is overstating his argument. It is not just because this is a painting of a young girl that Diderot desires her; it is more importantly a painting that calls out, in Diderot's view, to be narrated. Diderot does assume a certain power over the painting and in turn over the distraught young girl but only insofar as he is the person writing her story. The girl is, of course, only a representation, but at this moment in the text for Diderot she is entirely alive. She is alive because Diderot's text has brought her to life. In turn, it is his narrative that has the power to decide the truth about what happened to this girl. Was she complicit in losing her virginity or is she a victim who was taken advantage of? Both interpretations would explain the painting but it is Diderot who is able to have the last word.

What reigns supreme in his judgement of a painting is its ability to conjure up a story. The young girl's emotion does that. Once Diderot enters his world of the imagined

story he loses his objectivity. He exclaims his rapture by repeating the word "délicieux" three times and therefore he hardly resembles the objective art critic that Norman Bryson extols. Or perhaps it is precisely because of his lack of aesthetic a prioris, as to which genre of painting (Still lifes, Genre, History) is more "noble" that allows him to fully appreciate Greuze's work instead of disregarding it as being part of a minor genre. Diderot becomes emotionally involved in the painting and he begins to talk with the young girl to the point where, as narrator of her story, he is as active a participant as any of the other characters. Diderot exhorts her to tell him her story, "Ouvrez-moi votre coeur: parlez-moi vrai" (OE, 534). But since she does not respond, "Vous baissez les yeux, vous ne me répondez pas" Diderot has to imagine what must have happened, "Eh laissez-moi continuer," he writes showing that he has taken control of the story. He supposes that the mother went away and that the young girl was hesitant in response to her lover's advances but that she ends up giving in. The entire scene, as described by Diderot, is bathed in tears, an element which is also an integral part of Diderot's aesthetic.

When we read Diderot's story surrounding this painting we become viewers by proxy. As a result, in reading about Diderot's tears we feel the emotional power of the scene. Tears are an outward sign that the viewer has reacted to the action that was just witnessed. Diderot's crying magnifies the effect because it is an example of his very personal reaction to the painting and at the same time suggests that crying is a human act in which all viewers can be united. Diderot also invites all his readers to share in this "delicious"sensation of crying. Crying is a way for us all (viewers and readers) to become an active part of this virtuous aesthetic community and therefore we can all enjoy her pain.

At the end of his supposed story he writes with a great deal of irony, "Je sais tout cela; vous le voulez." Readers are easily taken into the narrative and forget that Diderot knows the entire story precisely because he is the creator of the story. It is not at all unusual for Diderot to use personal pronouns but in this instance the *vous* is quite ambiguous. Is he addressing the girl herself, saying that she brought about the action of the story or is he addressing the readers/viewers stating that they too wanted to fantasize about the girl's story in the same way that Diderot has done, or is this the beginning of his dialogue with Grimm that he has in the second part of this text? Nothing really indicates which of these addresses is the most accurate. Diderot, realizing that maybe he has gone too far, surmises that Grimm (and therefore all readers) might be mocking his ecstacy. "Quoi mon ami, vous me riez au nez!" He explains himself, "Mais aussi, voyez qu'elle est belle! Qu'elle est intéressante!" The second sentence is necessary to qualify the first because in fact the important aspect of this painting is not beauty but rather desire. In reference to a painting by Loutherbourg Diderot remarks, "Enfin, c'est un très beau tableau où il y a très peu à désirer,"which reveals Diderot's position that it is not sufficient for a painting to be beautiful, the best paintings are those that pique the viewer's interest and make them desire the subject. He does not necessarily mean that the subject of the painting is desirable but rather that it incites the viewer with the desire to recount the story and feel the emotions surrounding the work.

In the final part of the text Diderot becomes again the distanced, more objective art critic who is capable of noting certain flaws in the work. He criticizes the girl's hand which resembles the hand of a much older girl whereas the head is that of a younger girl. It would seem appropriate for him to end on this note because it is a perfect example of

the ambiguities found in Greuze's paintings that were highlighted by Bryson as so intriguing in the first place.

Diderot's cheerful attitude while he looks on at this girl in pain reminds readers of another painting in the Salon of 1765, *La Chaste Suzanne* by Carle Van Loo. Diderot readily adopts the position of the voyeur spying on a young girl's innocence thereby causing her added anguish. He writes, "Je regarde *Suzanne;* et loin de ressentir de l'horreur pour les vieillards, peut-être ai-je désiré d'être à leur place." It seems that Diderot has however transformed himself from voyeur-narrator to a much more active participant. "Le vieillard qui est à gauche est vu de profil; il a la jambe gauche fléchie, et de son genou droit il semble presser le dessous de la cuisse de la Suzanne. Sa main gauche tire le linge qui couvre les cuisses, et sa main droite invite Suzanne à céder." In Greuze's painting Diderot was only asking to relive the young girls' story, here, he is actively waiting to undress and seduce the innocent young woman. Also, Diderot imagines the young girl as having willingly given in to her lover's desires but this Suzanne is clearly pained to be unable to protect herself from these two voyeurs who continue to stare and take pleasure in her shame. Diderot appreciates the potential of the scene's staging yet he complains that there is a lack of action and feeling. "La tête est bien choisie; mais il fallait y joindre plus de mouvement, plus d'action, plus de désir, plus d'expression." To increase the viewer's reaction to the painting Diderot wishes that the emotions displayed were more acutely portrayed and could be better transmitted from the canvas to the viewer. He appreciates the potential displayed by Suzanne, "La belle figure! La position est grande; son trouble, sa douleur, sont fortement exprimés," but would have preferred more emotion from the old men. And what he really would have

preferred is for the painting to inspire Diderot with a story as to how the scene came about. This power to weave a story around a painting is what makes Diderot's art criticism enjoyable to read rather than static and erudite.

Diderot is consistent in seeking paintings that display innocent young girls who reluctantly find themselves in compromising situations. The more emotion the painter is able to put into the character's faces the better, because it will intensify the viewer's reaction as well. Similarly, Diderot is critical of painters like Boucher and Baudouin who leave little for the viewer to imagine. Boucher, according to Diderot, paints exactly the opposite type of young girl than what would be found in a Greuze painting. He complains, "N'a-t-il pas été un temps où il était pris de la fureur de faire des vierges? Eh bien, qu'était-ce que ses vierges? De gentilles petites caillettes. Et ses anges? De petits satyres libertins" (OE, *455-6).* But Diderot objects not just to the subject matter. After all *la jeune fille* was no longer a virgin either. He takes umbrage at how these women were displayed. Writing about how Boucher usually painted women's nipples and behinds he writes, "Je suis bien aise d'en voir; mais je ne veux pas qu'on me les montre" (OE, 459). He enjoys seeing Suzanne's upper thigh because it gives the hint that there is more to see, but with Boucher everything is revealed and there is little left to discover and imagine.[32] Diderot would like to admire a beautiful nude statue but would be offended by a *Medici Venus* that was wearing some clothes. He argues that if she were wearing a little hat and garters this beautiful work would become an indecent one. This is because Diderot's imagination would not be given liberty to picture the nude as he wanted to; he would be

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This is the same idea that Barthes develops in *Le Plaisir du texte* (Paris: Éditions de seuil, 1973) He writes, "L'endroit le plus érotique d'un corps n'est-il pas *là où le vêtement baille?*" [his emphasis] (19).

forced to see the woman in the situation that her clothes indicated, which in this case would be more of a prostitute than a desirable, virtuous woman.

Diderot likes paintings that not only feed his imagination but also fit into his moral schema by presenting viewers with scenes of virtue where the young girls are either like Suzanne trying to protect their innocence, or like the Greuze girl, lamenting her lost innocence. In contrast, Baudouin's paintings would not inspire morality; they encourage debauchery.

> La probité, la vertu, l'honnêteté, le scrupule, le petit scrupule superstitieux, font tôt ou tard main basse sur les productions déshonnête. En effet, quel est celui d'entre nous qui, possesseur d'un chef-d'oeuvre de peinture ou de sculpture capable d'inspirer le débauche, ne commence pas à en dérober la vue à sa femme, à sa fille, à son fils? Quel est celui qui ne prononce, au fond de son coeur, que le talent pouvait être mieux employé? Quelle compensation y a-t-il entre un tableau, une statue, si parfaite qu'on le suppose, et la corruption d'un coeur innocent? (OE,471).

Greuze's painting are appropriate for all types of audiences whereas Diderot sees the need to hide scenes that are obscene which might seem ironic for an author who was imprisoned for having written lascivious novels. However, even in *Les Bijoux indiscrets* there was only the suggestion of what was occurring and there were no graphic details. Diderot thought that if a family looked upon a Greuze painting they would be motivated to try to imitate and duplicate the touching scenes of family love. Paintings like those by Boucher and Baudouin do nothing to bring the family together; instead, they lead to dishonesty and deception between the father and his family.

Diderot demands a lot from a good painting because he needs it to depict a virtuous scene and, at the same time, he needs to be able to impose his own desire on the work. It is merely a question of sexual desire but rather of narrative desire. When the

works are successful in eliciting this desire Diderot's description fills readers with their own desire. In this way readers work to visualize the painting for themselves and enter easily into the fiction created by Diderot. This explains why Diderot admires sketches as much as he does. They are not developed enough to represent anything obscene and at the same time they leave a lot to the viewer's imagination. For example he describes, Greuze's sketch for *Une mère bien aimée:* "La belle poissarde avec sa tête renversée en arrière, dont la couleur blême, le linge de tête étalé en désordre, l'expression mêlée de peine et de plaisir, montrent un paroxysme plus doux à éprouver qu'honnête à peindre" (OE, 544). Diderot's sentence is crucial in understanding that something slightly obscene might cause pleasure for viewers because it fills them with desire but that if it were clearly depicted, with any detail it would be offensive. Likewise, if the details are added then, often times, the desire is taken away. When Greuze painted the final version of the *Mère bien aimée* Diderot was no longer enthralled by it because the image of feminine pleasure had been changed into a touching but not very desirable woman surrounded by her bourgeois family. The woman was not changed very much; it is what frames her that has changed, thereby blocking Diderot's imagination.

As Reinhard Luthje suggests in his article, "De la problématique de l'esquisse dans le Salon de 1767" Diderot's writing style can easily be compared to a sketch, a form he clearly admires in his *Salons*. Diderot writes in the Salon if 1767, "Voici mon ami, des esquisses de tableaux et des esquisses de description." Later, in reference to paintings by Loutherbourg, Diderot complains to Grimm that it is very difficult to find the perfect tone to convey the harmony of the paintings: "Ah, mon ami, quels soins il faudrait donner encore à ces quatre pages, si elles devaient être imprimées et que je voulusse y mettre

l'harmonie dont elles sont susceptibles. Ce ne sont pas les idées qui me coûtent, c'est le ton qui leur convient. En littérature comme en peinture, ce n'est pas une petite affaire que de savoir conserver son esquisse." In this quote "esquisse"seems to represent the overall feeling evoked by the painting and therefore that should be equally felt by any reader reading the text. Diderot is always concerned with trying to elicit the same emotional reaction in his reader as he himself had while looking at the painting. In addition to this, he fully understands the power that a sketch holds for viewers.

In his article for the *Encyclopédie*, "Croquis, Ebauche, Esquisse" Watelet explains that sketches are useful for painters because they translate, "le mouvement de leur âme"as well as transmitting, "la saison de l'enthousiasme [...] où l'on est impatient de produire" (in Lüthje, 57). What Diderot knows is that artists are impatient to complete the final project, as are the viewers, and so they give free reign to their imagination to fill in the missing details. In this way, viewers can create their own version of the final painting which is always very satisfying because individuals fill the sketch in with all the elements that they would want to see in the final product. This is why Diderot prefers rapturous sketches of undefinable, unknown women rather than the final product which shows a particular instance of a respectable, bourgeois mother.

Watelet warns students about the potential dangers in sketching too much. "L'indécision dans l'ordonnance, l'incorrection dans le dessein, l'aversion de terminer, en sont ordinairement la suite; & le danger est autant plus grand, qu'ils sont presque certains de séduire par ce genre de composition libre, dans lequel le spectateur exige peu, & se charge d'ajouter à l'aide de son imagination tout ce qui y manque"(in Lüthje, 57). Watelet even refers to sketches as those "productions libertines,"which underlines the

unrestricted freedom behind the sketch and also suggests that viewers, like Diderot, tend to give in to their more erotic fantasies when looking at a sketch.

Diderot explains further why sketches can be more beautiful than the final painting, "C'est qu'il y a plus de vie, et moins de formes. A mesure qu'on introduit les formes la vie disparaît." Then he asks, "Pourquoi un jeune élève, incapable de faire même un tableau médiocre, fait-il une esquisse merveilleuse?" His answer might be anticipated; "C'est que l'esquisse est l'ouvrage de la chaleur et du génie" (VII, 285). A good sketch is not just the result of the artist's genius but is also powerful because it solicits the creative impulse in the viewer. As Diderot later writes in his *Pensées*, "On retrouve les poètes dans les peintres, et les peintres dans les poètes." The virtuoso painter creates a sketch that channels the poetic qualities of the viewer. Sketches are successful because creativity is their inspiration but also their byproduct. Therefore, there is more life in sketches because it comes from the artist but is then supplemented by the viewer.

> L'esquisse ne nous attache peut-être si fort que parce qu'étant indéterminée, elle laisse plus de liberté à notre imagination qui y voit tout ce qu'il lui plaît. C'est l'histoire des enfants qui regardent les nuées, et nous le sommes tous plus ou moins. C'est le cas de la musique vocale et de la musique instrumentale. Nous entendons ce que dit celle-là; nous faisons dire à celle-ci que nous voulons (VII, 286).

The sketch can be activated by the viewer's imagination and become anyone or anything because they have so little character of their own. In the *Paradoxe sur le comédien* Diderot admires actors who have so little of themselves that they can become anything, "Et peut-être est-ce que parce qu'il n'est rien qu'il est tout par excellence." Clearly this applies not only to the actor but to the sketch as well. Using a musical analogy Diderot clarifies his ideas. "Un grand comédien n'est ni un piano-forté, ni une harpe, ni un

clavecin, ni un violon, ni un violoncelle" (*OE*,347). Put another way, this could apply to a great sketch that is neither an orgasmic young woman nor a bourgeois mother, like the actor who can be all instruments at once this sketch can represent all women. Both the sketch and the sublime actor allow the poet's or the painter's genius to come through with very little interference. Diderot argues,

> [...] et comme je sais mieux que personne la manière de m'affecter, par expérience que j'aide mon propre coeur, il est rare que l'expression que je donne aux sons, analogue à ma situation actuelle, tendre ou gaie ne me touche plus qu'un autre qui serait moins à mon choix. Il en est à peu près de même de l'esquisse et du tableau. Je vois dans le tableau une chose prononcée: combien
> dans l' esquisse y suppose-je de choses qui y sont à peine annoncées!
> (AT X, 352).

Another advantage to sketches is that they represent the moment of inspiration and are that much more valuable because they evoke the ephemeral aspect of real genius. The sublime actor must work to keep his performance as fresh and meaningful after weeks of performances as it was the very first night. A sketch however inherently keeps that quality.

Throughout the *Salon of 1767,* Diderot criticizes his work; he openly admits to becoming bored and fears that he will in turn bore the reader. "Je serais au désespoir qu'on publiât une ligne de ce que je vous écris." It is hard for readers to believe this but it does provide Diderot with a handy excuse. He includes some flawed descriptions because he believes that he may never be equally inspired again and that makes the text nevertheless worth publishing. Like a painter who has trouble executing his final product, Diderot regrets that he cannot put all his ideas into one, coherent esthetic treatise. "Vous m'avouerez que le traité du beau dans les arts est à faire, après tout ce que j'en dis dans

les *Salons* précédents, et tout ce qu'en dirai dans celui-ci." However, when Diderot sits down to finally write this treatise it continues to resemble a sketch. The titles of the chapters clearly indicate that Diderot is satisfied with simply transmitting some of his moments of inspiration because the had not achieved the unified, thought-out treatise that he had previously promised Grimm. The chapter titles of the *Essai sur la peinture* (1765) include:

I. Mes pensées bizarres sur le dessin.

II. Mes petites idées sur la couleur.

III. Tout ce que j'ai compris de ma vie du clair-obscur.

Diderot liked the open, free style found in a sketch and seems to adopt that quality in his own writing. Diderot's ideas are often nothing but half thought out moments of his inspiration yet to be fully developed. They are not even formulated in full paragraphs but are just isolated sentences containing the nugget of an idea. Each idea might be the first line of a full text but it is never fully explored by Diderot before he jumps on to his next idea. Inspired by a Chardin painting Diderot writes, "Il faut, mon ami, que je vous communique une idée qui me vient, et que peut-être ne me reviendrait pas dans un autre moment"(I, 111). Again inspired by the work he studies, Diderot asks a series of questions. "La première, c'est : Qu'est-ce que la véritable poésie? La seconde, c'est: S'il y a de la poésie dans ces deux dernières esquisses de Greuze"(I, 159)? Diderot has a list of five questions in total, all to which he clearly has his own answers. He holds back the answers though writing. His excuse is transparent, "Vous vous doutez bien que je n'entamerai point ces question; votre projet ni le mien n'est que je fasse un livre dans un autre"(I, 159). Never before has Diderot withheld his view points for fear of going too far

astray. This is similar perhaps to an artist who never finishes the painting but who has a sketchbook full of beautiful instances of inspiration. It also serves the same purpose as a sketch for Diderot forces readers to fill in their own answers. This means they have to think more while reading his criticism, and at the same time insures that he will not provide an answer that clashes with their own views on art. He constantly displaces the answer which increases readers' interest in the text because they have to find their own answer. It also underlines Diderot's importance as the person who can indeed supply those answers.

Reinhard Lüthje concludes his article on sketches in Diderot's criticism arguing that the sketch is a promise that must be later fulfilled by a beautiful painting: "Il faut cependant insister que Diderot est convaincu que la promesse que représente l'esquisse doit être tenue par la création d'une oeuvre finie qui joint la chaleur originelle de l'inspiration ou déploiement des forces techniques et artistiques"(32). He then cites research done by Herbert Dieckemann that Diderot worked to complete many of his works when he was older saying, "Vous ébaucheriez peut-être pour vous; c'est pour les autres que vous finissez." I would add, however, that some sublime works are not finished *for* others but rather *by* others which is why Diderot left the sketchy, fragmentary, quality found in so many of his works: *L'Interprétation sur la nature, Les Pensées détachées sur la peinture,* and even in *Jacques le Fataliste* Diderot leaves it to readers to choose which ending they feel is the most suitable. Diderot knew that to remain meaningful for future generations his readers would have to add their own interpretations and add their own genius to make the works whole and complete.

Diderot gives the idea that his genius was so spontaneously generated that he

never had the time to further develop the ideas. *Les Pensées* have the same labyrinthian quality as found in the *Encyclopédie* where different ideas and viewpoints are juxtaposed against each other. This creates a richer, more engaging text and requires a specific type of reader who is able to group the common themes that appear throughout the works and put them together to form their own coherent meaning. Another similarity with the *Encyclopédie* is that readers of the *Salons* cannot expect Diderot to always give them the answers. His goal seems more to provoke thought and feelings than to establish the *right* way to interpret art.

Because there is no one right answer to questions as vast as "What is poetry?" but also because Diderot does not want to impede any of the readers' own ideas, Diderot uses dialogue to offer readers some possible answers. Sometimes the dialogue is one that he has with himself. Dieckmann thus explains Diderot's methodology, "Le philosophe s'entretient avec lui-même, il réfléchit et médite, pour ainsi dire, non seulement à l'aide de ses idées, mais à l' intérieur de ses idées" (80). At other times he reports conversations that he remembers having with authorities such as Chardin. In either event it is easy for readers to place themselves on one side of the debate. Occasionally this debate is between two unknown spectators, or it might be a dialogue that Diderot has with the reader/Grimm who is addressed as *vous*.

> Je ne regarde pas toujours, j'écoute quelquefois. J'entendis un spectateur d'un de ces tableaux qui disait à son voisin: "Le Claude Lorrain me semble encore plus piquant..." et celui-ci qui lui répondait: "D'accord mais il est moins vrai." Cette réponse ne me parut pas juste. Les deux artistes comparés sont également vrais; mais le Lorrain a choisi des moments plus rares et des phénomènes plus extraordinaires. Mais, me direz-vous, vous préférez donc le Lorrain à Vernet? (OE, 566).

This gives another dimension to the text and also gives readers' an understanding that art

can be looked at in numerous ways and that these can all be defensible positions. It is up to the readers of the *Salons* to see where their ideas fit and with whom they agree most. Moreover, the oscillating quality of the text and the intermingling of various voices draws readers further into the text.[33] Readers are never exactly sure which position Diderot is advocating and so they must decide for themselves.

Sometimes Diderot creates a text that differs little from *Le Neveu de Rameau* in which readers are not sure which side Diderot supports. One example of this is a conversation Diderot has with a woman standing in front of a painting of the baby Jesus by Raphael. At first the reader thinks this woman is ignorant, "une femme du peuple"and then at the end of the dialogue readers realize that she has perceived an inconsistency not obvious to the brilliant Diderot. Readers might on occasion wonder whether Diderot really had this conversation or whether he is just the puppet-master putting his own perceptive comments in the mouth of others. Regardless, it transforms the ordinarily univocal genre of art criticism into a concert of different voices. Another example is a dialogue about a painting by Boucher, *Caravane.* From the beginning the reader understands that there not merely one way to assess this painting, "Si mon ami trouve quelqu'un qui lui dise que la *Caravane* de Boucher était un des meilleurs tableaux du Salon, qu'il ne le contredise pas; s'il trouve quelqu'un qui lui dise que la *Caravane* de Boucher était un des plus mauvais tableaux du Salon, qu'il le contradise encore moins" (*OE*,456). Diderot then tells his friend, Grimm or perhaps the reader, that, to be amusing,

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See Jean Starobinski's article, "Diderot dans l'espace des peintres" where he admires Diderot's ability to be a "Vertumn". *Diderot dans l'espace des peintres* in Diderot et l'art de Boucher à David. Ed Madeleine Rebérioux, Paris: Edition de la Réunion des Musées nationaux, 1984, 21-40.

he is going to set the scene of two people discussing this painting. Significantly he does not give the identity of these two people. Again it seems as if one of the characters has in the stronger position and has a lot more knowledge about painting. Only at the end of this little scene does the reader find out that the "ignorant" character is Chardin. "Voilà précisement les critiques que je faisais à Chardin qui s'est moqué de moi" (*OE,*466). And finally, even when Diderot is only giving us his own opinion, he adds a disclaimer saying that he can not be held responsible if his tastes change. "S'il m'arrive d'un moment à l'autre de me contredire, c'est que d'un moment à l'autre j'ai été diversement affecté, également impartial quand je loue et que je me dédis d'un éloge, quand je blâme et que je me dépars de ma critique" (II, 133). The importance is that as long as viewers respond to the work they are viewing and readers respond to Diderot's description of these works, they have succeeded. Diderot takes into account the fact that readers come to the work with different ideas on art as well as different moods depending upon when they are reading and therefore his text will also affect different readers in a variety of ways.

To better understand what makes for a successful work, meaning a work that elicits readers' participation, it is useful to compare Diderot criticism on Chardin and Vernet, two painters that he very much admired. Diderot's intense fervor for Chardin comes not from an impulse to create his own narrative around the painting but rather from an admiration that borders on awe of his technique in his still lifes. Diderot's greatest praise is often directed at the truthfulness found in a painting. It is here that Chardin and Vernet surpass all their contemporaries. In his article *Sur le génie,* Diderot writes that what makes the genius a genius is a unique sensibility to what is true and what is false. "C'est une machine rare qui dit [...] cela est vrai et cela est faux...et cela se

trouve comme il l'a dit"(OE, 20). Chardin and Vernet both possess this genius because they are both able to instinctively know what is true and then how to render that on the canvas. A famous anecdote by Chardin is that when he was painting a still life with a stuffed, dead rabbit, the rabbit began to disintegrate. He never finished the painting because he could not find another rabbit that would have the same effect. This clash would create a false note in the painting and rather than have anything that was not entirely true, he abandoned the painting entirely. Diderot continues his observations on genius, writing: "Cette sorte d'esprit prophétique n'est pas le même dans toutes les conditions de la vie; chaque état a le sien (OE, 20). Clearly, genius creating with different mediums would express his genius differently but even among painters there is a wide disparity between one painters' "truth"and another's. There is, for example, an enormous difference between Chardin's works and Vernet's and this in turn results in very different reactions from Diderot, the critic.

Chardin's work, for the most part, leads to relatively dull and lifeless descriptions. Diderot is enthusiastic about Chardin's work but his commentary is never the inspired musing brought about by a Greuze, a Vernet, or even numerous lesser artists who occasion amusing asides. Diderot's conviction is that Chardin's paintings are so well done and true to life that you don't even need to go see them. Pierre Frantz argues that when discussing Chardin's paintings Diderot's imagination "s'enflamme; il saisit, il possède et jouit"(78). Undoubtably, Diderot takes pleasure is revealing Chardin's skill,

> C'est que ce vase de porcelaine est de la porcelaine; c'est que ces olives sont réellement séparées de l'oeil par l'eau dans laquelle elles nagent; c'est qu'il n'y a qu'il prend ces biscuits et les manger, cette bigarade l'ouvrir et la presser, ce verre de vin et le boire, ces fruits et les peler, ce pâté et y mettre le couteau."(*Salon 1763*, 432).

Since what Chardin is offering is just a slice of reality, it never leads Diderot's imagination beyond reality into the domain of fiction where his creativity assumes its greatest power. Arthur C. Danto in his review of the recent Chardin exhibit at the Metropolitian Museum, "Painting the Kitchen," asks why anyone would buy one of Chardin's paintings if it was sufficient just to read Diderot's description and then place the objects in the proper place (39). He supplies his own answer by saying that in looking at Chardin's painting viewer's get a greater sense of his artistic power than in just reading Diderot.

Danto suggests that modern art criticism began with Diderot. He writes, "Diderot was nothing if not ingenious in finding devices to aid his readers in visualizing the works under description, but in the case of Chardin, his invention somewhat betrayed him" (39). It is easy to argue that Diderot's criticism is entirely different from today's art criticism now modern critics and readers have easy access to the painting critiqued. Diderot, however, relied solely on his memory and a few sketches and his readers had no access at all to the works in question. Danto is right in asserting that Diderot's technique are not able to render Chardin's work. Simply telling his readers to put the objects found in the painting on a table does not reproduce the magical effect of the work anymore than Diderot's descriptions do. Diderot advises his readers to buy Chardin's works precisely because a detailed description is inadequate in capturing Chardin's art.

Ironcially, Danto's own criticism of Chardin's work reverts back to the same style used by Diderot. Danto particularly admires Chardin's *A Lady Taking her Tea* (1735) and to render the maagic of this work Danto lists the various elements of the painting. Danto,

like Diderot, fails to communicate what he sees as magical in the painting. Danto argues that in Diderot's criticism this inability is due to the fact that Chardin's art contains no *trompe l'oeil* or gimmicks. As a result, art cricitism cannot render it with artificial means.

Yvon Pinchon in his book *Le Musée retrouvé de Diderot* (1989) argues that Diderot's genius in art criticism is that he is able to move back and forth between fiction and real life. Pinchon marvels that Diderot can go from a "simulacre pictural à une réalité poétique" that gives free license to Diderot's creativity. With Chardin, the criticism is somewhat impoverished because it is always anchored in every day reality and is never tempted to enter into the world of fiction. Diderot tells readers that they could attain exactly the same effect as produced by the paintings in their own home, if they just set out the same items in the same order on a table. His descriptions then become detailed lists of what you would have to display in order to recreate the painting. Diderot's criticism, and fiction in general, carries readers away to far away places like the Congo, Tahiti, or fictional spaces such as that created around any Greuze painting, but Chardin's paintings work in the opposite way, by grounding viewers and, therefore readers as well, in their everyday reality. His feat is remarkable precisely because the imagination does not have to work to interpret the meaning of the painting. The only natural reaction is, as Diderot notes, to want to drink the wine, peal the fruit, and eat the biscuits.

Vernet's paintings provoke exactly the opposite reaction. Diderot writes, "Il n'est presque impossible d'en parler, il faut les voir" (OE, 562) He writes this sentence in his commentaries for the *Salon 1761* and then subsequently repeats it for every other *Salon* in which Vernet's paintings were displayed. In the *Salon of 1765,* we again read, "Il est impossible de rendre ses compositions, il faut les voir"(570). He feels incompetent as a

writer to render the power of a Vernet painting. "Mais que signifient mes expressions exagérées et froides, mes lignes sans chaleur et sans vie, ces lignes que je viens de tracer les unes au-dessous des autres? Rien, mais rien du tout; il faut voir la chose"(576). And as if to prove his point that these paintings are beyond descriptions he writes, "Quelle immense variété de scènes et de figures! Quelles eaux! Quels ciels! Quelle vérité! Quelle magie! Quel effet!" (OE, 562) Diderot starts out describing what is in the painting just as he does with Chardin still-lifes and tries to describe paintings of water scenes but lapses into an ecstatic appraisal of Vernet's magic, truthfulness, and effect. It is as if Diderot cannot find the proper words to elicit the same effect in the reader so he forgoes the long descriptions for an attempt at describing his own reaction. He uses exclamation points to render the heightened emotional state. This is a common technique for Diderot but it is rare that it should accompany such a paucity of description. Scott Bryson explains how the exclamations work for Diderot: "Diderot's frequent use of exclamation underscores the immediacy and the intensity of the painting's effect upon the viewer. The exclamation is a physical reflex, expressed in language, to emotional or physical stimuli. It operates by suppressing language (ellipse) and thus intensifying it; it condenses and concretizes thought; it seeks to mime, to reproduce the speaker's actual lived experience in all its emotional intensity"(23). Diderot uses the exclamations to render the heightened emotion all while not describing it which leaves it open to readers to imagine for themselves. Diderot realizes that the more specific he is about the paintings he describes the less the readers will be forced to sum up their own image. "Plus on détaille, plus l'image qu'on présente à l'esprit des autres diffère de celle qui est sur la toile" (II, 231). The details are an obstacle to readers creating their own meaningful work. How to render

a painting in an accurate way that is still free enough to inspire readers is a major preoccupation of Diderot's. He returns to this theme in a painting by Renou, writing, "Un trait seul, un grand trait, abandonnez le reste à mon imagination"(II, 303). Diderot's one stroke of description is often rendered with the exclamation point.

In his *Entretiens sur le fils naturel* (1757), Diderot explains that for him the artist is on the same plane as God because they are both creators. And in some ways the artist is even able to surpass God in the perfection of his creations. Nature serves as the source of the artist's enthusiasm and then once he is taken with the force of his élan he is able to go beyond the natural world.

> Le poète sent le moment de l'enthousiasme; c'est après qu'il a médité. Il s'annonce en lui par en frémissement qui part de sa poitrine, et qui passe, d'une manière délicieuse et rapide, jusqu'aux extrémités de son corps. Bientôt ce n'est plus un frémissement; c'est une chaleur forte et permanente qui l'embrase, que le fait haleter, qui le consume, qui le tue; mais qui donne l'âme, la vie à tout ce qu'il touche. Si cette chaleur s'accroissait encore, les spectres se multiplieraient devant lui. Sa passion s'élèverait presque au degré de la fureur. Il ne connaîtrait de soulagement qu'à verser au dehors un torrent d'idées qui se pressent, se heurtent et se chassent (OE, 98).

While Diderot was working on the *Salon of 1767* he was developing his ideas on materialism. The act of creating seems to take on a materialistic force of its own. The artist is consumed and even killed by the power of his enthusiasm but it gives life to something new, in the form of what he creates. This description of the creative force is similar to what Diderot had written about geniuses and how they create in his article, *Sur le génie.* And it applies not only to what Vernet has been able to accomplish but also to how Diderot responds to Vernet's work. Certainly, Diderot did meditate after he responded to Vernet's works which

explains why it is all written in a coherent and logical way, but the force behind Diderot's genius and creativity can certainly be felt and marveled at by readers reading his criticism.

Diderot tries to overcome his loss for words and begins his description with several sentences that all begin with "S'il." He writes, "S'il projette des objets sur le cristal des mers, il sait l'enteindre à la plus grande profondeur sans lui faire perdre ni sa couleur naturelle, ni sa tranparence" (OE, 562) It is as if Vernet himself is a God who is able to express any possible weather conditions. Diderot reserves this status of powerful, godlike creator for Vernet. One reason that he is like God in that he has produced such a large number of paintings. "C'est comme le Créateur pour la célérité"(OE, 568).

More important than his prolific number of paintings is that he gives an accurate representation of nature. Diderot transcribes a conversation that he has with Naigeon where he realizes the primordial importance of rendering nature correctly. He writes, "La nature! La nature! Quelle différence entre celui qui l'a vue chez elle, et celui qui ne l'a vue qu'en visite chez son voisin"(Seznac, III, 116). The painting falls short of Diderot's expectations if it is only able to render an imitation of a copy of nature. Vernet is like God because, in addition to the speed with which he creates, he has been initiated into the secrets of Nature and can *control* nature. "Il a volé à la nature son secret; tout ce qu'elle produit, il peut le répéter"(563). According to Diderot, it is nature that is submissive to Vernet's power. "Les mers se soulèvent et se tranquillisent à son gré; le ciel s'obscurcit, l'éclair s'allume, le tonnerre gronde, la tempête s'élève (562). Also like God, Vernet is able to create order out of chaos. In case there was any doubt as to Vernet's God like power, Diderot echos *Genesis*: "Que la lumière se fasse, et la lumière est faite; que la nuit

succède au jour, et le jour aux ténèbres, et il fait nuit, et il fait jour"(577).

Throughout the *Salons* Diderot relies on synesthesia to try to convey a better impression of the painting's effect. Talking about a dog in one of Greuze's paintings Diderot says that if you look at the painting for a few minutes you will hear it bark. With Vernet's paintings this technique is magnified to the extreme. According to Diderot, Vernet's paintings give off not only noise but something superior, silence. They also send out a feeling of coolness. Sound dominates the description of the paintings shown in 1765, "La mer mugit, les vents sifflent, le tonnerre gronde"(569). The verbs not only give the varying sounds but also a sense of action. Part of what makes the paintings so alive is the action of what it depicted. Diderot summarizes, "Les édifices tombent, les animaux s'effarouchent, et les habitants des villes gagnent les campagnes."

In the same way that Diderot writes a dialogue to play contrasting ideas off of one another, Diderot juxtaposes Vernet's paintings with each other. He contrasts Vernet's paintings of night scenes and day scenes, paintings of shipwrecks alongside paintings with perfectly tranquil waters. Diderot often mentions that when Chardin was hanging the paintings for the *Salon* he did a service to some artists by placing their paintings in a corner where they would be noticed by no one and that he did a disservice to other painters by putting their works next to a very talented artist's work, making them even worse than they really were. Similarly, by discussing Vernet's different paintings one after another Diderot emphasizes the amplitude of Vernet's subject matter and his limitless ability.

Vernet seems to have reached the height of his genius in the *Salon of 1767* and Diderot responds to the challenge of describing these paintings with a series of

interconnected short stories around the seven paintings. One criterion that Diderot uses to judge a work is how much it engages the imagination. By that measurement Vernet surpasses all other painters in the *Salon*. Similarly to the technique he uses to describe Fragonard's work, his commentary immediately enters into the imaginary world. "J'avais écrit le nom de cet artiste au haut de ma page, et j'allais vous entretenir de ses ouvrages, lorsque je suis parti pour une campagne voisine de la mer et renommé pour la beauté de ses sites"(129). Diderot makes a distinction between the world of affairs, the government, art and this new world that the has enter with, "les plus beaux sites du monde." It is a voyage through time (the whole journey takes several days) and space (seven sites are visited in total), but even more to another realm of existence. Diderot is no longer the art critic and philosopher; he is the enthusiastic traveler to unknown worlds. Diderot states that his project is to describe these sites but he does so from the perspective of the travel guide, far removed from the art critic that he strives to be throughout the majority of the *Salons*. Scott Bryson argues in his book *The Chastized Stage* (1989) that the role that Diderot plays as critic undergoes a transformation. "If the critic as an instrument of reason still remains, by definition, outside the work of art, he is nevertheless intensely effected by it emotionally" (23). And as a result the critic's perspective changes. Bryson continues, "A new critical program in which the critic judges henceforth a work of art from "within," based not only on external, institutionalized rules of art, but on his emotional response as a human being to the work set before him" (24).

Bryson asks a crucial question that might not be obvious to most readers of the *Salons*: "Can a gaze continue to be called authoritarian when it is always at least partially complicitious with the object that it is to judge, when its criterion for excellence is always

to a certain extent the loss of itself within the object?" (24). Without a doubt, readers must adjust their understanding not only of the text they are reading but also of the work to which Diderot is referring. In an indirect ways Diderot finds ways to express his praise of Vernet's work. It is, nonetheless, legitimate to question Diderot's critical stance. Diderot offers us his own answer to this dilemma. He explains: "Je fais deux rôles, je suis double; je suis Le Couvreur et je reste moi (Salon 1767, 7,153). Diderot advances this theory not only for the art critic but later in *Le Paradoxe* for the actor as well. He argues that the actor is a double person, both the part that he is playing as well as his or her own self. The spectator of a painting has this same cleavage in identity.[34]

Diderot loses his ability to be authoritarian when he literally enters into some of the paintings. To describe a painting by Roberts, "La cuisine italienne," Diderot advises his readers to leave behind their own objectivity and enter into the painting. "Entrons dans cette *Cuisine*; mais laissons d'abord monter ou descendre cette servante qui nous tourne le dos, et faisons place à ce bambin qui la suit avec peine"(II, 239). Diderot never claims to be offering an objective or definitive answer as to what these paintings are about. Quite the opposite is, in fact, what he offers. What Bryson does not mention, though, is that in addition to the complicity established between Diderot and the work that he is raising there is an even greater complicity between Diderot and his readers. They are entering the scene together. Or in the case of the Vernet painting, it is never explicitly stated until the very end of the text that Diderot is in fact describing his

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This duality is what is makes the experience of looking at *La Jeune fille qui pleure son oiseau mort* such a "delicious"experience. The viewer is able to share the young girl's pain and then just a few sentences later remark on the inadequacies of Greuze's drawing the girl's hands.

paintings. Describing the sixth site, Diderot is overcome with enthusiasm and reveals his strategy. He writes, "Ce n'est point un port de mer que l'artiste a voulu peindre. L'artiste! - Oui mon ami, l'artiste. Mon secret m'est échappé et il n'est plus temps de recourir après"(158). Readers, of course, were never duped. They are after all reading this as part of *La Correspondance littéraire* or in the case of today's readers as part of the *Salons*. Diderot's goal, though, is to incite the reader with the same emotions that he himself had while viewing the paintings. For him any technique is appropriate as long as it achieves that result, which is to say, that the reader's imagination is engaged. The elaborately detailed short story connecting the seven different paintings reveals his overall appraisal. Vernet's paintings are exemplary precisely because the illusion that they create is impossible to resist. Even if readers are fully cognizant of Diderot's strategy they eagerly play along because his writings are similar to Vernet's paintings ; the illusion is easy and enjoyable. Evidence of this is that Diderot only needs one paragraph to prepare his readers for their journey into fiction.

There is, nevertheless, a transition to be made between the world of detached critic and reader who are able to maintain an appropriate distance between them and the work and the submissively entering into this fantasy world inspired by Vernet. In 18th-century stories of utopia or other fictitious worlds, the place was difficult to attain because it was blocked off by a natural border. This is the case here, "une montagne élevait son sommet vers la nue" (129). The traveler also needs to be accompanied by a guide who will initiate the traveler into the unknown world. Here there is a knowledgeable abbé who can guide Diderot throughout the land and serve as, the ever necessary, interlocteur who will allow Diderot to explore any new ideas. Diderot details

his guide's expertise: "Mon compagnon de promenades connaissait [...]"(129). The guide in this case knew the lands well enough to reveal the most interesting aspects as well as the most auspicious time of the day to discover them. And as the abbé guides the character Diderot's exploration, Diderot the author does the same for his readers. Diderot repeatedly uses the term *cicerone* which is ambiguous enough to refer to a fictional guide only to be found in the short story, the artist who created the work, or the writer who might in fact be dialoguing with himself. At the same time cicerone evokes the rhetorical skill of Cicero. Here Diderot argues convincingly with the cicerone that Vernet would indeed be capable of creating such a scene. The counter arguments of the cicerone are of often those that would be used by the average amateur art critic. Later, the cicerone concedes the possibility that maybe Vernet could have painted such a scene but holds back claiming, "ce n'est pas Dieu". This gives the perfect opening to the Diderot character to reiterate what Diderot has argued throughout all his previous criticism of Vernet paintings - that Vernet has insights into nature that no other mortal has. "Vous ne connaissez pas cet homme; jusqu'où les phénomènes de la nature lui sont familiers"(130). Diderot responds that he is too overwhelmed by the splendor of the scene to argue any further. He later continues, "En bonne foi, lui dis-je, croyez-vous qu'un artiste intelligent eût pu se dispenser de placer ce nuage précisement où il est?" The reference to "bonne foi" is important because readers are still oscillating between their being taken in by the situation and wanting to read the text as a short story, and their knowing full well that they are participating in a fiction.

This irony characterizes the entire text. It is further proof that Diderot and readers are equally willing to maintain the illusion of fiction. There are numerous comments that

can be read as Diderot winking at his readers. He writes with great irony, "J'observai deux figures que l'art n'aurait pas mieux placées pour l'effet"(130), followed by, "C'était encore un incident que l'art aurait suggéré"(130). Each site has heavily ironic comments. In the second site the cicerone asks the Diderot character, "Est-ce que vous extravaguez?" (135), and wonders why he is talking about coloring, background, and composition in the middle of nature. Diderot responds, "Je substitue l'art à la nature, pour en bien juger"(135). Later, Diderot remarks, "C'est une vue romanesque dont on suppose la réalité quelque part." The author and the readers' complicity to accept this fiction as reality gives them power over it. Diderot openly acknowledges the irony. He wants his companion's reaction to the second site and reports, "Cependant il me dit d'un ton ironique: Et Loutherbourg, et Vernet, et Claude Lorraine?" (133). The ironic tone can be explained because the abbé insists that the artists would never achieve the same magnificent effect. Their extreme pleasure before this "natural" scene seems to prove his point. Perspicacious readers would while still enjoying the fiction remain anchored in the real world enough to realize that it is doubly ironic because they are in fact referring to a Vernet painting.

Even the most alert readers can be drawn into this mise-en-abyme in Diderot's imagination. In this already imaginary world Diderot imagines further improvements. "Mon imagination échauffée place à l'entrée de cette caverne une jeune fille qui en sort avec un jeune homme. [...] Mais si ces personnages n'y étaient pas, il y avait proche de moi, sur la rive du bassin une femme [....]"(134). The mise-en-abyme serves to bring readers deeper into the illusion. Diderot plays with the reader's imagination because he gives not reason as to why this woman would have to shield her eyes. He leaves it to

readers to imagine. Julie Arnold Wagner argues in, *Art Criticism as Narrative* that, "It is a seductive method; it encourages the reader to pretend the representation is real, to expand the images further in his own mind and send the narrative in new directions" (95). Indeed, as readers add their own details to Diderot's imaginings they become more deeply involved in the story. From the concrete painting by Vernet to Diderot's transformed world to the readers' own visualisation of this world a huge psychological space has been traversed. There has been a shift from beholding to creating.

For those readers who are too anchored in the concrete world to fully succumb to this imaginary spiral Diderot appeals to all their senses. I have previously noted Diderot's recourse to sound to describe paintings. These paintings have the same audio quality. "Un bruit éclatant,"alerts him to a waterfall. They evokes tactile sensations as well: "la mousse la plus verte et la plus douce" At another moment he claims, "Qu'il est doux de goûter ici la fraîcheur de ces eaux, après avoir éprouvé la chaleur qui brûle ce lointain!"(135).

Yet even without these strategies most readers give in to the power and facility of the illusion. We might question why the illusion is so easy to establish with this series of Vernet paintings. The answer might be found in 18th-century views on art and more particularly on theater. Many critics have drawn parallels between Diderot's views on theater and his views on art showing that in many ways his dramaturgical theories compliment his esthetic views and vice versa. One of Diderot's foremost goals in creating the bourgeois drama was to make it more realistic than classical theater. One of his methods to accomplish this was to use stage props. They had not been used in 17th-century theater but for Diderot they became almost as important as the words themselves. Reassessing the need for props and how to assemble them to heighten their effect was a

major debate among playwrights of the 18th century. Diderot asks in his *Discours sur la poésie dramatique*, "D'où dépend l'illusion?" His answer is not very specific: "Des circonstances. Ce sont les circonstances qui le rendent plus ou moins difficile à produire." Marmontel suggests what one of the necessary circumstances might be in his article, "Décorer" in the *Encyclopédie*. He argues that the proper placement of the scenery is crucial for having spectators enter the fictional realm more completely. He writes:

> Après avoir employé presque toute la hauteur du théâtre à élever son premier ordre d'architecture, il avait laissé voir aux yeux la naissance d'un second ordre qui semblait se perdre dans le cintre que l'image achevait; ce qui prêtait à ce peristyle une élévation fictive, double de l'espace donné. C'est dans tous les arts un grand principe, que de laisser l'imagination en liberté: on perd toujours à lui circonscrire un espace; dans là vient que les idées générales n'ayant point de limites détérminées, sont les sources les plus fécondes du sublime.

Pierre Frantz in his book, *L'esthétique du tableau dans le théâtre du XVIIIe siècle* (1998) explains the significance of Marmontel's statement. He argues that once the field of vision is reduced by the frame that viewers want to look beyond what is represented and it is then that their imagination is activated. He writes, "Le cadre n'exclut que le spectateur; il ne borde la fiction que pour lui ouvrir un champ illimité"(73). Painting becomes meaningful for spectators when there is a fusion between the real and the imaginary. Frantz writes, "La fiction et la réalité, l'art et la nature s'unissent alors dans l'expérience esthétique"(73). Esthetic experience is successful then when the frontier between the image and reality is abolished and the imagination acts to extend it beyond what is depicted within the confines of the frame. In looking at the best paintings in the *Salon* Diderot, and his readers, forget that there is any separation between reality and fiction. A beautiful painting by Diderot's standards goes beyond any concrete measure of skill. Of

course the painting needs to be well drawn, the figures need to be well arranged, and the coloring must be natural but it is a certain combination of these elements, and even an added indescribable something, that causes an awakening of the imagination.

This concept of cutting off the scene by the frame of the stage or also with the frame of the painting is essential for understanding the depth of the illusion created by Vernet's scenes. The cicerone argues that Vernet could not have painted such a scene because it is too brilliantly composed. The placement of a cloud introudces a new plane of vision for viewers. This cloud, "annonce un espace en deça et en delà, ... il recule le ciel, il fait avancer les autres objets"(131). Diderot's character argues that other painters include clouds simply to break up the monotony of their paintings whereas in Vernet paintings the cloud introduces movement and even magic. The magic is the ability to have viewers imagine the scene beyond the confines of the canvas. In this way viewers naturally do what Diderot does here; they create a much greater scene full of action, characters, and philosophical debate. Vernet also does this with the people in his paintings. The woman next to the fisherman, described in site two, is only seen from the back. This reminds us of Diderot's actors who sometimes turned their back on the audience. This makes the scene seem less contrived and viewers have to activate their imaginations to mentally visualize what they cannot see. It has the realness to it that is the first stage in activating a viewer's imagination and then only suggests part of the whole to readers, somewhat like the sketch does or Diderot does when he only half develops one of his aesthetic ideas thereby giving viewers or readers full liberty to develop what they want out of the work.

Often artists, whether they are playwrights, writers, or painters, constrict what is

shown to spectators and inadvertently ruin the overall effect of their work. Diderot's character argues that Vernet knows how to compose painting so as to double our enchantement. Pierre Frantz concludes his book arguing that, "L'image va fermer dans une boîte magique, accessible à tous ceux qui peuvent s'acheter le voyage dans la fiction"(257). He is generalizing about all 18th-century art but his comment seems to apply best to Vernet's painting in the *Salon of 1767.* And by not showing us the entire scene Vernet makes the fiction that much more accessible. Vernet is a sublime artist because although his paintings are exceedingly accurate and conform to nature truthfully, he does not servilely copy nature; he presents his scene in a careful way which elicits not just admiration for the stunning beauty of the scene but also awakens our imagination which results in a much more enticing scene. His paintings then, serve only as a point of departure into an all engrossing world of fiction .

Its important to understand that Diderot believes that just because a feeling or a sensation is imagined does not make it any less real. He wrote in his article for the *Encyclopédie:* Imaginaire: qui n'est que dans l'imagination; ainsi l'on dit en ce sens un *bonheur imaginaire*, une *peine imaginaire.* Sous ce point de vue *imaginaire* ne s'oppose point à réel; car un bonheur *imaginaire* est un bonheur réel, une peine *imaginaire* est une peine réelle"(VII, 149). He adds in his article that we can be enriched by our "biens *imaginaires.*" The feelings evoked by Vernet's painting might be imaginary but they have concrete effects on Diderot's character, "J'étais las, mais j'avais vu de belles choses, respiré l'air le plus pur, et fait un exercise très sain. Je soupai d'appétit et j'eus la nuit la plus douce et la plus tranquille. Le lendemain, en m'éveillant, je disais: Voilà la vraie vie, le vrai séjour de l'homme" (138). The use of the word *vrai* emphasizes that although this

is all imaginary it could have real physical effects on the person imagining the scene.

The cicerone concedes that Vernet art indeed embodies a creative force but that this cannot equal nature's force and that it does not compare with the energy found in natural creation. Diderot counters that it is that much more remarkable and admirable that a mere mortal could create something as beautiful as nature itself. He illustrates his point using the example of the pyramids. He says they represent a more impressive feat than a majestic mountain precisely because it was created by man and that man is always limited by his poor means and his limited life time. One way to counter these impediments is, of course, to produce something that inspires others to create their own works of art. Creators of the pyramids encouraged the construction of other architectural achievements. Similarly, Vernet's and Greuze's paintings incite the viewer to create their own works of fiction where the painting only represents the point of departure for an even greater form of expression. This is what Diderot has done in writing his criticisms and his goal seems to be to inspire a similar reaction in his readers. Solitary creation is meaningless.

> C'est pour moi et mes amis que je lis, que je réfléchis, que j'écris, que je médite, que j'entends, que je regarde, que je sens; dans leur absence, ma dévotion rapporte tout à eux, je songe sans cesse à leur bonheur; une belle ligne me frappe-t-elle, ils la sauront; ai-je rencontré un beau trait, je me promets de leur en faire part; ai-je sous les yeux quelque spectacle enchanteur, sans m'en appercevoir j'en médite le récit pour eux. Je leur ai consacré l'usage de tous mes sens et de toutes mes facultés; et c'est peut-être la raison pour laquelle tout s'exagère, tout s'enrichit un peu dans mon imagination et dans mon discours; ils me font quelquefois un raproche, les ingrats!

Knowing that his friends will read his criticism gives meaning to Diderot's work. It is precisely them that he is thinking of when he exaggerates (or imagines) things that will

embellish the work and make it more pleasing to them. The creative act only takes on meaning when the artist thinks about the reception of the work. He thinks about the happiness that this will afford them and that it might engender other works of art.

Art, according to Diderot, is on a higher plane than natural creation, not only because it inspires other works of art but also because it can add various instances of beauty to form a more perfect object than would ever really exist. The Diderot character and the cicerone both agree that there is nothing as beautiful and as perfect as the *Venus de Medici* or the *Antinoüs*. What is more, is that because they are human creations we take a greater interest in them just as the cicerone sometimes gets more pleasure from his students statement than from Tacitus.

The real genius considers not just what the truth is but how it render it to a diverse public so that it will become meaningful for many. Diderot calls our attention to the English actor, Garrick's conversation between the chevalier de Chastelux in which Garrick explains what must be taken into consideration when acting. "C'est qu'il y a pour vous, pour moi, pour le spectateur tel homme idéal possible qui dans la position donnée, serait bien autrement affecté que vous" (II, 63). Garrick argues that it is this ideal, imaginary spectator for whom you are acting and that you must be more rare, more marvelous and more sublime that the actor normally is to capture his attention. The chevalier is surprised; "Vous n'êtes donc jamais vous?"and Garrick's answer, "Je m'en garde bien"(II,63-4). Diderot applies this idea to his own writing of the *Salons*. He writes for particular readers, as argued by Dieckmann, but he also writes for this ideal reader and for this reader Diderot must individualize his text which entails becoming all things to all readers. If readers were to ask Diderot the same question as the chevalier, "Vous n'êtes

donc jamais vous?" the answer would be that he is not one Diderot but rather he varies his response to works, adopts different positions to critique a work and expresses this critique in different voices. Readers today can appreciate the *Salons* not only as a work of art criticism but also as a multifaceted text directed as much at them as it was aimed for Grimm of Catherine of Russia. Ideal readers, then, are not just those who can appreciate the diversity of a text but who will draw on it for their own inspiration, their own ideas and their own creations. Diderot tells these readers, "Si mes pensées sont justes, vous les fortifierez de raison qui ne me viennent pas, et de conjecturales qu'elles vous sont vous les rendrez évidentes et démontrées. Si elles sont fausses, vous les détruirez. Vraies ou fausses, le lecteur y gagnera toujours quelque chose" (II, 84). Diderot's art criticism is then another step in the creative process, albeit a very significant one. His text is based on what he views in the Salon but it must then serve to inspire others to create. These ideal readers will build on what he has already created improving where necessary, destroying where necessary, and building on what they find to be truthful and inspiring.

Many critics would conclude that the *Salons* is about painting: what subject makes a good painting, what size is appropriate for that composition, questions regarding technique such as use of color, shadow, and light. The *Salons* is equally about how to read Diderot's criticism. Speaking about the musicality of poetry, yet another of Diderot's digressions, Diderot argues, "Sans l'habitude de la sentir ou de la rendre, on ne sait pas lire; et qui est-ce qui sait lire?" His question, "who knows how to read" applies not just to poetry but to the *Salons* as well. If Diderot himself cannot feel the power and the magic behind a painting, he will never be able to convey that quality to readers. This is why he quickly passes over many deficient works. However, when he does feel the

emotional impact of the work he uses all the writing techniques possible to translate that effect through his writing. Readers need to know how to read so that they conjure up their own image, create their own meaning found in the work. The answer to the question, "who knows how to read?" is those readers who make the text come alive and who make Diderot's observations, ideas, and anecdotes the inspiration for their own.

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