

Denis Diderot's *Rameau's Nephew*

A Multi-Media Edition



EDITED BY MARIAN HOBSON. TRANSLATED BY KATE E. TUNSTALL AND CAROLINE WARMAN.
MUSIC RESEARCHED AND PLAYED BY THE CONSERVATOIRE NATIONAL SUPÉRIEUR
DE MUSIQUE ET DE DANSE DE PARIS UNDER THE DIRECTION OF PASCAL DUC

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RAMEAU'S NEPHEW

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Contributors

Pascal Duc began his career in music working in the Direction régionale for Cultural Affairs in the Paris basin (the Île de France) and as administrator of the Festival of the Île de France. He met Philippe Herreweghe at a moment when the rediscovery of ancient music was taking off in France; this led to a collaboration round the Chapelle Royale with the Orchestre des Champs-Élysées. Pascal then became musical advisor to William Christie and *Les Arts florissants*. He still holds this post while being the Head of the Department of Early Music at the Conservatoire national supérieur de musique et de danse de Paris. Pascal has prepared a great number of working scores for *Les Arts florissants*, among which may be mentioned: Monteverdi's *Madrigals*, Books 1 to 7 (8 and 9 are in preparation); Handel's *Belshazzar* and *Te Deum* HWV 208; Fauré and Messager's *Mass for the Association of the Fishermen of Villerville*, a version for choir, organ, and violin; Purcell's Incidental Music for *The Virtuous Wife*; and for *Distress'd Innocence*.

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Kate E. Tunstall is Lecturer in French at the University of Oxford and a Fellow of Worcester College. She is the author of *Blindness and Enlightenment* (2011), which includes new translations of Diderot's *Letter on the Blind* and of La Mothe Le Vayer's *Of a Blind Man*. She has published on a broad range of subjects in French literature and culture from Diderot to Zola, and from Chardin to Racine and silent cinema. She has recently edited the volume of the Oxford Amnesty Lectures, entitled *Self-Evident Truths? Human Rights and the Enlightenment* (2012), and co-edited a special issue of *Romance Studies* on questions of naming and renaming in early-modern Europe, to which she and Caroline Warman both contributed articles.

Caroline Warman is Lecturer in French at the University of Oxford and a Fellow of Jesus College. She is the author of *Sade: From Materialism to Pornography* (2002) and has written widely on eighteenth and nineteenth century intellectual history. She is currently preparing a book on Diderot's late text, the *Eléments de physiologie*. She is also the translator of Isabelle de Charrière's *The Nobleman and Other Romances* (2012). She and Kate Tunstall both have essays in the periodical *Europe's* 2013 celebratory Diderot issue. In 2010, together they wrote and presented a series of BBC Radio programmes on Diderot.

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List of Musical Pieces

The music mentioned by Diderot in *Rameau's Nephew* is French and Italian, although Diderot was also well aware of the work of other foreign composers, such as C.P.E. Bach. The pieces specially performed and recorded for this multi-media edition were chosen to provide samples of music or composers that are less well known today, or to give examples of transcription, one of the principle ways that pieces came to be known and played in a private setting at the time.

Throughout this book the musical note symbol  identifies when a recording is available. To access these musical pieces either click on the symbol or refer to the relevant endnote. If your device supports MP3 files you will be able to listen to the music directly. Alternatively, you can access the music online by following the links or scanning the QR codes provided.

The musical extracts recorded for this edition are available to download at www.openbookpublishers.com/isbn/9781783740079#resources. All musical recordings have been released under a CC BY license and their copyright belongs to the Conservatoire national supérieur de musique et de danse de Paris.



François-André Danican Philidor, *L'Art de la modulation* [*The Art of Modulation*], extract:

Sixth suite: Sinfonia (Adagio – Allegro ma non troppo)

Clémentine Frémont, traverso

Josef Žák, violin

Tatsuya Hatano, violin

Rémy Petit, cello

Felipe Guerra, harpsichord

Recording available at <http://dx.doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0044.04>

Score available at [http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b9057234b/f2.image.r=art de la modulation.langEN](http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b9057234b/f2.image.r=art%20de%20la%20modulation.langEN)





Jean-Philippe Rameau, *Fêtes de Polymnie* [*The Festivals of Polyhymnia*], extract:

100

Air: 'À la beauté tout cède sur la terre' [Everything on earth gives way to beauty]

Dania El Zein, soprano

Rémy Petit, cello

Camille Ravot, harpsichord

Recording available at <http://dx.doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0044.05>

Score available at [http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k398018b/f70.image.r=fêtes de polymnie.langEN](http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k398018b/f70.image.r=fêtes%20de%20polymnie.langEN)



Jean-Philippe Rameau, *Fêtes de Polymnie* [*The Festivals of Polyhymnia*], extract:

100

Air: 'Au vain plaisir de charmer...' [To the empty pleasure of charming...]

Dania El Zein, soprano

Rémy Petit, cello

Camille Ravot, harpsichord

Recording available at <http://dx.doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0044.06>

Score available at [http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k398018b/f145.image.r=fêtes de polymnie.langEN](http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k398018b/f145.image.r=fêtes%20de%20polymnie.langEN)



Jean-Philippe Rameau, *Fêtes de Polymnie* [*The Festivals of Polyhymnia*], extract:

101

Air en rondeau: 'Hélas, est-ce assez pour charmer...' [Alas, in order to charm, is it enough...]

Dania El Zein, soprano

Rémy Petit, cello

Camille Ravot, harpsichord

Recording available at <http://dx.doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0044.07>

Score available at [http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k398018b/f107.image.r=fêtes de polymnie.langEN](http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k398018b/f107.image.r=fêtes%20de%20polymnie.langEN)



Pietro Locatelli, Sonata op. VI n° 5, extract:
Aria (Vivace)

103

Tania-Lio Faucon-Cohen, violin










Sarah Gron-Catil, cello

Camille Ravot, harpsichord

Recording available at <http://dx.doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0044.08>

Score available at <http://digital.blb-karlsruhe.de/id/1034692>



- 
 Domenico Alberti, Sonata for the fortepiano op. I no. 5, extract: 104
 Andante – Allegro
 Luca Montebugnoli, piano (Clarke/Lengerer)
 Recording available at <http://dx.doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0044.09>
 Score available at <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b9058374h/f15.image.r=alberti.langEN>

- 
 Giovanni Battista Pergolesi, *Stabat Mater*, extract, transcribed for 123
 solo violin by Johan Helmich Roman.
 Tania-Lio Faucon-Cohen, violin
 Recording available at <http://dx.doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0044.10>
 Score available at http://conquest.imsip.info/files/imglnks/usimg/e/e5/IMSLP14647-Roman_Stabat_Mater__arr_solo_violin_.pdf

- 
 Jean-Féry Rebel, Pieces for the violin, divided into suites by 125
 keys, extract:
 First suite in G-sol-ré: Allemande
 Josef Žák, violin
 Antoine Touche, cello
 Loris Barrucand, harpsichord
 Recording available at <http://dx.doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0044.11>
 Score available at <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b90099503/f9.image.r=Pièces pour le violon.langEN>

- 
 Jean-Féry Rebel, Pieces for the violin, divided into suites by 125
 keys, extract:
 First suite in G-sol-ré: Prelude
 Josef Žák, violin
 Antoine Touche, cello
 Loris Barrucand, harpsichord
 Recording available at <http://dx.doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0044.12>
 Score available at <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b90099503/f7.image.r=Pièces pour le violon.langEN>

- 
 Jean-Joseph Mouret, *Les Amours de Ragonde, ou la soirée de village* 127
 [*The Loves of Ragonde*, subtitled *An Evening in the Village*], extract:
 Bourrées I-II
 Clémentine Frémont, traverso
 Nicolay Sheko, oboe

Josef Žák, violin
Tatsuya Hatano, violin
Felipe Guerra, harpsichord
Rémy Petit, cello

Recording available at <http://dx.doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0044.13>

Score available at <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b9058670w/f24.image.r=ragonde.langEN>



Jean-Joseph Mouret, *Les Amours de Ragonde, ou la soirée de village* [*The Loves of Ragonde*, subtitled *An Evening in the Village*], extract:
Air: 'Accourez, jeunes garçons' [Come running, young men]

128

Marie Soubestre, soprano
Sarah Gron-Catil, cello
Camille Ravot, harpsichord

Recording available at <http://dx.doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0044.14>

Score available at <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b9058670w/f23.image.r=ragonde.langEN>



Egidio Duni, *Le Peintre amoureux de son modèle* [*The Painter in Love with his Model*], extract:
Arietta: 'Dans le badinage, l'Amour se plaît' [Love is pleased with playfulness]

130

Marie Soubestre, soprano
Clémentine Frémont, traverso
Josef Žák, violin

Recording available at <http://dx.doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0044.15>

Score available at <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b9067334z/f64.image.r=le peintre amoureux.langEN>



Johann Adolf Hasse, *Cléofide*, extract:
Air: 'Vuoi saper se tu mi piaci?' [Do you want to know if I like you?]

132

Fiona McGown, mezzo
Josef Žák, violin
Rémy Petit, cello
Louis-Nôel Bestion de Camboulas, harpsichord

Recording available at <http://dx.doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0044.16>



- 14  Nicola Antonio Porpora, *Polyphemus*, extract: 133
 Act III, sc. 5: Aria: 'Alto Giove' [Jove on high]
 Victoire Bunel, soprano
 Tania-Lio Faucon-Cohen, Ajay Ranganathan, altos
 Juliana Velasco, Marie Bouvard, Josef Žák, Patrick Oliva,
 Catherine Rose Barrett, Cyril Lacheze, Tatsuya Hatano, violins
 Sarah Gron-Catil, Rémy Petit, Antoine Touche, cellos
 Benoît Berrato, bass
 Alejandro Perezmarin, bassoon
 Takahisa Aida, harpsichord/organ
 Martin Gester, conductor
 Recording available at <http://dx.doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0044.17> 
- 15  Nicola Antonio Porpora, *Polyphemus*, extract: 134
 Act III, sc. 5: Recitativo and Aria: 'Senti il fato' [Feel the hand of
 destiny]
 Victoire Bunel, soprano
 Tania-Lio Faucon-Cohen, Ajay Ranganathan, altos
 Juliana Velasco, Marie Bouvard, Josef Žák, Patrick Oliva,
 Catherine Rose Barrett, Cyril Lacheze, Tatsuya Hatano, violins
 Sarah Gron-Catil, Rémy Petit, Antoine Touche, cellos
 Benoît Berrato, bass
 Alejandro Perezmarin, bassoon
 Takahisa Aida, harpsichord/organ
 Martin Gester, conductor
 Recording available at <http://dx.doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0044.18> 
- 16  Leonardo Vinci, Twelve solos for a German flute or violin with 137
 a thorough bass for the harpsichord or cello, extract:
 Sonata II: Sicilienne and Allegro
 Clémentine Frémont, traverso
 Felipe Guerra, harpsichord
 Recording available at <http://dx.doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0044.19> 
- 17  Leonardo Vinci, *Elpidia*, extract: 138
 Air: 'Barbara, mi schernisci' [Cruel woman, you scorn me]
 Fiona McGown, mezzo
 Tatsuya Hatano, violin
 Rémy Petit, cello

Camille Ravot, harpsichord

Recording available at <http://dx.doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0044.20>

Score available at <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b90675797/f10.image.r=elpidia.langEN>



Pietro Locatelli, Six sonatas for three parts, two violins, or two flutes, and bass with a harpsichord, extract:

140

Sonata op. V no. 2: 1st Movement: Largo-Andante

Tania-Lio Faucon-Cohen, violin

Clémentine Frémont, traverso

Sarah Gron-Catil, cello

Camille Ravot, harpsichord

Recording available at <http://dx.doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0044.21>

Score available at <http://digital.blb-karlsruhe.de/id/1004479>



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Fig. 1 The 'real' Rameau's Nephew? Reproduction of a drawing by J.G. Wille, at present not traced. The reproduction was first published by G. Isambert in his edition of Diderot, *Le Neveu de Rameau*, with notices, notes and bibliography (Paris: A. Quantin, 1883).

Preface

In a famous Parisian chess café, a down-and-out, HIM, accosts a former acquaintance, ME, who has made good, more or less. They talk about chess, about genius, about good and evil, about music, they gossip about the society in which they move, one of extreme inequality, of corruption, of envy, and about the circle of hangers-on in which the down-and-out abides. The down-and-out from time to time is possessed with movements almost like spasms, in which he imitates, he gestures, he rants. And towards half past five, when the warning bell of the Opera sounds, they part, going their separate ways. This is the plot of *Rameau's Nephew*.

Why present another translation of such a well-known work?

Translations need to adapt the work being translated to the language into which it is being put; so much is obvious. Less so is that language creates a context that changes constantly, sometimes at great speed. There is a need for renewal in the reception of a work in translation. A new *Rameau's Nephew*, we felt, was called for.

Why an interactive, on-line, Open Access edition?

Such an edition opens possibilities not available to earlier translations – techniques move on, as well as languages. An interactive, on-line edition is particularly suited to Diderot, who wrote mostly in dialogue, though sometimes the dialogue was asymmetric (as in *Rameau's Nephew*, between HIM and ME). In fact, he loved talking. As if in conversation, his writings change their relation to the reader constantly, forcing her to laugh, to argue, to wonder. He usually doesn't write in discursive form but in fragmentary, often teasing fashion. He would like an audience, clearly, he tacks around to force one into being and into action – but he is dead, he is words on a

page (and dust in the Church of Saint Roch, Paris). We may come closer to discussing with him through an interactive edition than in any other way.

Rameau's Nephew is called 'Satyre' on the title page of the autograph manuscript. The spelling reminds us of the licentious mythical beast, the goat-man; the work itself has some very funny dirty stories. Yet it is a satire in a different sense, it is stuffed with personal allusions, it names and shames a whole roll of minor actresses and big stars, Grub Street inhabitants, dodgy newspapers and especially the then version of bankers, the 'farmers' of taxes or of offices. It takes them off, it takes them down, several or every peg they ever climbed. This kind of edition makes it much easier to understand who these people are, why Diderot may be getting at them: at a click, the reader can cause their portrait and their biography to appear.

The click is worth making – the similarity to our post-financial crisis world is hard to miss: bankers, celebrities, *paparazzi*, rise from the pages, with little sense of shame and often little talent, except for pushing themselves ahead. The dialogue's very lack of conclusion, where the talkers just separate at the sound of the opera bell announcing the performance, leaves us looking at what may be coming towards us, in somewhat shaky or indistinct fashion. The instability of attitude, the changes of scale and weight in what HIM and ME talk of, makes me wonder about what is only a couple of decades down the time-line: 1789, and ask whether its shadow is perceptible.

Yet something seems at odds with the scabrous comedy, the personal satire, the blighting corruption embedded in the dialogue: *Rameau's Nephew* has a running concern with music. What is music doing in such a work? – music, the art that seems to us in our century closest to the expression of pure feeling. The title warns us, we are encased in an inheritance, but a lateral one, one that is not direct: Rameau is only a nephew. The tradition of French music after Lulli, that of the high baroque culminating in the great operas of Jean-Philippe Rameau, that is Rameau the uncle, is being countered by a very different style, that of Neapolitan comic opera, and its development in French music by Philidor, Duni working in France, and, not mentioned by Diderot, Grétry. We need to understand the upstream of that wave of creativity, its self-positioning in relation to high art and baroque opera. From this, Diderot can foreshadow that transformation in music which will reach its fullest expression in Mozart and Berlioz and which will open out to the nineteenth century; he seems to foretell a transformation in our relation to our own feeling for music. We hope to have made an

understanding of this possible in this edition – the digital form has enabled us to embed into the text pieces of music specially selected by Pascal Duc, who directs its performance by students of his Department of Early Music, at the Conservatoire de Paris. This engenders, we hope, an awareness of the musical context of the dialogue, enlarging it well beyond its relation to opéra comique, which is now fairly generally understood.

Diderot's bringing forward of Neapolitan comic opera, with its often physical comedy, connects implicitly with his dazzling descriptions of the Nephew's pantomimes. The foolery performed with musical instruments by the great Swiss clown, Grock (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-JUgPO2VF-k>, one of many clips), and the telling movements of the great violinist Gidon Kremer when playing (for an extreme version, performed with others and developed into dance, see <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UAM2y1SOsIs>) are both inheritors of the tradition into which Diderot places his dialogue: the near-dancing, the use of the body as an instrument. But the clowning, the spilling-over of expression moves with Rameau the nephew from the active and the liberating into almost painful movements, into bows and scrapes which are as if extorted. He is, but he is also made to be.

So gesture and pantomime as well as utterances explore the self-awareness of HIM, his consciousness of his lack of freedom, subject as a musician both to his instrument and to his audience. HIM has exploited this lack of freedom – he bows, he scrapes with artistic flair. By perfecting his flattery through self-consciousness, by not being identical to what he is made to be by his patrons, he has contrived to turn his very servitude into a kind of liberty, a liberty raised to the second power, arrived at through an awareness of his bonds. His ironic exploitation of his own turpitude brings it to the level of an art. The strange form of the dialogue reinforces this, for it allows a sideways take on what is said, a striking but puzzling contrast between an objectivized persona, HIM, and first person experience – the narrative by ME. The form, a dialogue not as face to face but as if skewed, seems to have been invented by Diderot and it is puzzling that, to my knowledge, this form is only found in German authors who actually met Diderot or who were interested in him: Lessing, Wieland, Herder, F.H. Jacobi.

Indeed, the first interest in the work, *Rameau's Nephew* came from Germany. It was Goethe who at the promptings of Schiller engineered in 1805 its first appearance on the stage of 'world literature' – to use a term

first coined by the great German poet himself. It was thus not in French but in Goethe's German translation that the work was first read. Goethe produced the term '*Weltliteratur*' to seal the claims of his national literature to an attention equal to that accorded to classical French literature or the works of Shakespeare. The term fits the work of Diderot like a glove, if only by the roster of major thinkers who have commented on it: Hegel, Engels, Freud, Bernard Williams.

Each has found there a link to his own work. To take the closest to Diderot in time: Hegel probably had personal reasons to draw attention to *Rameau's Nephew* in his *Phenomenology* (1807), for earlier he had asked Goethe for help in obtaining a post. But there are intellectual reasons also. With exemplary insight, through careful quotation, he picks out two main threads in Diderot's dialogue: first, the question of '*species*', *espèce*, translated in the present version as *specimen*. One of the philosophical problems that Hegel embeds in the very structure of his major work is the '*besondere*', the particular. As he moves through the experience of humanity, like a weaver's shuttle between the universal and the singular, all and one, summarizing and linking, he picks out what lies between them, the particular, what can form a '*species*', what catches different possible groupings of experience, of moments of thought. And Diderot throughout his work plays with lists, with different ways of collecting together actions and professions and characteristics. The second area on which Hegel insists is music. What appears to interest him most is the way in which Diderot has, through music, sketched out a kind of movement of history, whereby consciousness and hence sensibility make each moment unique, differentiated from the past by what has been in our past. Our ears carry our experience, and we cannot have innocent ears, or innocent experience either. Having listened to the music of the Italian comic opera, Diderot suggests through the mouth of HIM, we cannot go back unchanged and listen to the French composers, to Rameau.

There is another attraction for Hegel. The '*hero*' of *Rameau's Nephew* twists and turns in his argument, moving from assertion to negation and back through negation to assertion. Hegel places his discussion of Diderot's work in the moment before the great cataclysm that was the French Revolution, in an historical space where complex historical forces vie against each other, *acting and reacting against each other*. Jean Starobinski, examining in detail the texture of Diderot's writing has pointed out the use of a rhetorical

form which is not one of true Hegelian dialectic (where we might move from a thesis which is negated to a new thesis developed from negating the negation) but is that of *chiasmus*. In this figure of rhetoric, a position negated leads us back to the starting point; we do not move on, but stay as it were blocked by a contradiction. Yet Diderot ends his dialogue by letting it swing into an open future, one of generality and indistinctness conveyed by the proverbial saying – ‘he who laughs last laughs longest’, says HIM.

How then does Diderot structure his dialogue, if it is left wide open? He makes the beginning and end definite in time and place: as said, it begins after lunch, at the café de la Régence; it comes to a stop shortly before five-thirty, when the opera is about to commence – it was close by. Diderot, then, seems to place different sections of the composition, one after the other, with no linear order that can be discerned in my opinion – indeed, one wonders if some sections do not recur as variations on a theme. For example, Voltaire’s play, *Mahomet*, occurs twice in relation to Voltaire’s public actions, one criticized – his writing *In Praise of Maupéou*, the other praised – his rehabilitation of the judicially murdered Protestant, Jean Calas. The reader in fact wanders and wonders. We move through a hailstorm of allusions, a multitude of moods. We hope that the appreciation of this strange work, the route we take as we read, will be made clearer and livelier by this new translation, by the musical extracts of illustration, and by the images and notes.



Fig. 2 *Portrait of Denis Diderot (1766)*, by Jean-Baptiste Greuze.

Rameau's Nephew

Second Satyre¹

Vertumnis, quotquot sunt, natus iniquis

[‘Vertumnus scowled on his birth, and made him a versatile failure.’]

Horace, Book II, 7th Satire.²

It is a habit of mine to go for a walk in the Palais Royal³ pleasure gardens every afternoon at five, whatever the weather. That’s me you see there, always by myself, daydreaming on d’Argenson’s bench.⁴ I have conversations with myself about politics, love, taste or philosophy. I give in to my mind’s every fancy. I let it be master and allow it to pursue the first idea that comes to it, good or mad, and to behave just like those young libertines of ours we see chasing some flighty, pretty courtesan with bright eyes and a snub nose along Foy Walk, leaving her for another one, stalking them all and sticking to none. In my case, my thoughts are my sluts. If it’s too cold or too rainy, I like to take shelter in the Café de la Régence and watch chess being played. Paris is the place in all the world, and the Café de la Régence the place in all of Paris, where it is played the best. Rey’s café is where Legal the Unfathomable,⁵ Philidor the Cunning,⁶ and Competent Mayot do battle, and where you can see the most surprising moves and hear the most vulgar things, for if you can be a clever man and a great chess-player like Legal, you can also be a great chess-player and a dunce, like Foubert and Mayot.⁷ One afternoon, when I was there, doing a lot of watching, not much speaking, and listening as little as I could, I was approached by one of the most bizarre characters in a country which, thanks to God’s bounty, isn’t short of them. He’s a mixture of the lofty and the sordid, of good sense and unreason. The notions of what’s decent and what’s indecent



must be strangely mixed up in his head since he displays the good qualities that nature has given him unostentatiously and the bad ones shamelessly. Moreover, he is possessed of a strong constitution, a singularly heated imagination, and an exceptionally vigorous set of lungs. If ever you meet him and his originality doesn't capture your attention, either you'll need to put your fingers in your ears or you'll turn on your heels and run. Heavens, what a terrifying pair of lungs! Nothing is more unlike the man than he himself. Sometimes, he is as thin and pale as someone in the last stages of consumption and you can count his teeth through his cheeks – you'd think he'd not eaten for days or that he'd just come out of a Trappist monastery. A month later, he is as fleshy and replete as if he'd been at a banker's dinner table the whole time or been comfortably cloistered with the Bernardins.⁸ Today, skulking in dirty linen, with torn breeches, his coat in tatters, his shoes hanging off his feet, and his head held low, you'd be tempted to call him over and slip him a coin. Tomorrow, hair powdered and curled, well shod and well dressed, he goes about in public, his head held high, and you would almost take him for a respectable man. He lives from one day to the next. Sad or cheery, depending on the circumstances. His first concern when he gets up in the morning is where he'll have dinner; after dinner, he wonders where he'll go for supper. Nightfall brings its own anxiety. Either he makes his way back, on foot, to his tiny attic, unless his landlady has got fed up with waiting for the rent and asked him to return the key, or he falls back on a tavern on the outskirts of town where he waits for dawn with a bit of bread and a mug of beer. When he hasn't even got sixpence in his pocket, which does happen to him sometimes, he has a word with either a cab driver or the coachman of some great lord to see if they'll let him bed down in the straw next to the horses. In the morning, he still has half his mattress in his hair. If the season is mild, he spends the night walking up and down the Cours-la-Reine or the Champs-Élysées.⁹ He reappears in town along with the daylight, still wearing the clothes he had on yesterday, which, moreover, sometimes stay on him for the rest of the week. I have no respect for such oddballs. Other people make close acquaintances out of them, even friends. But they do stop me in my tracks once a year when I meet them because their character is so unlike other people's: they disrupt that annoying uniformity which our education, social conventions, and codes of conduct have inculcated in us. If such a man is present in a group, he acts like a pinch of yeast, fermenting and giving a portion of each person's natural individuality back to them. He stirs things up, shakes them about, provokes approval or blame; he makes the truth come out; he

reveals who's genuinely good, he unmask villains; and that's when a man of good sense pricks up his ears and sees the world for what it is.

I had known this one for a long time. He frequented a household that had opened its doors to him because of his talent. They had an only daughter. He kept on swearing to both mother and father that he would marry their daughter. They would shrug their shoulders, laugh in his face, tell him he was mad – but I actually saw him do it. He used to borrow money, which I gave him. He had somehow gained entry to some honest households where a place would always be set for him on the condition he not speak without permission. He would keep silent and eat with rage. Muzzled in this way, he was a magnificent sight. If ever he got it into his head to break the agreement and open his mouth, no sooner had he uttered a word than everyone round the table would shout: Oh Rameau! And then his eyes would burn with rage, and he would go back to eating even more furiously. You were curious to know the man's name, and now you do. He's the nephew of that famous musician¹⁰ who delivered us from Lulli¹¹ and his plain chant which we had been intoning for more than a hundred years, and who set down all those unintelligible visions and apocalyptic truths about the theory of music which neither he nor anyone else ever really understood, and who left us with a certain number of operas which have some harmony, some snatches of song, some disconnected ideas, some banging and crashing, some flights, some triumphs, some spears, some glories,¹² some murmurings, some breathless victories, along with a few dance tunes which will last forever and which, having killed off the Florentine, will in turn be killed off by the Italian virtuosi – something he foresaw and which made him sombre, unhappy and aggrieved, for there is no one as bad-tempered, not even a pretty woman who wakes up in the morning with a spot on her nose, as an author threatened with outliving his own reputation, as we are reminded by the examples of Marivaux¹³ and Crébillon the Younger.¹⁴

He comes up to me. Aha! There you are, Mister Philosopher, and what are you doing hanging around here with this bunch of layabouts? Don't tell me you too are wasting your time pushing pawns about a board? That's what people mockingly call playing chess or draughts.

ME – No, but when I've got nothing better to do, I enjoy spending a few moments watching other people doing a good job of it.

HIM – In that case, you don't enjoy yourself very often; apart from Legal and Philidor, the rest of them don't have a clue.

ME – And what about Monsieur de Bissy then?¹⁵

HIM – Monsieur de Bissy is to chess-playing what Mademoiselle Clairon is to acting. What each of them knows is everything that can be taught.¹⁶

ME – You're very hard on them. I see that only men of sublime genius escape your judgement.

HIM – Yes: at chess, draughts, poetry, eloquence, music, and other nonsense like that. What's the point of mediocrity in such genres?

ME – Not much, I agree. But the thing is that you need a lot of people working really hard at something for one man of genius to emerge. He is one in a multitude. But let's move on. It's been an age since I saw you last. You know, when I don't see you, I barely think about you – but I'm always pleased to see you when I do. What have you been up to?

HIM – What you, me, and everyone else have been doing: some good things, some bad things, and a great deal of nothing. And sometimes I've been hungry and I've had something to eat when I could; and having eaten, I got thirsty and sometimes I got a drink. Meanwhile, my beard kept growing, and when it did, I had it shaved off.

ME – You shouldn't have. That was the only thing missing for you to be a sage.

HIM – I agree. My forehead is large and furrowed, my eyes blaze, my nose is prominent, my cheeks are broad, my eyebrows are black and bushy, my mouth is wide, my lips are full, and my jaw is square. If this great chin were only adorned with a long beard, don't you think that it would look rather good modelled in bronze or marble?

ME – Right up there with a Caesar, a Marcus Aurelius, a Socrates.

HIM – No. I'd be better off somewhere down between Diogenes¹⁷ and Phryne.¹⁸ I'm as impudent as the one, and I do enjoy a visit to the others.

ME – Are you still keeping well?

HIM – Yes, mostly, but today, I'm not quite in the pink.

ME – What? Look at you with your belly hanging out like Silenus's¹⁹ and a face...

HIM – A face you'd think was at odds with the belly. The problem is that the spleen shrivelling up my dear uncle appears to be having the opposite effect on his dear nephew.

ME – Talking of said uncle, do you see much of him?

HIM – Oh, you know, to pass in the street.

ME – Is he really never kind to you?

HIM – If he's ever kind to anyone, it's entirely without realizing it. He's some species of philosopher. He thinks of no one but himself; he couldn't give a damn about the rest of the universe. His wife and daughter can drop dead whenever they feel like it, just so long as when the parish bells ring for them, they resonate at the twelfth and seventeenth intervals²⁰ – then everything will be fine. It's lucky for him he's like that, and it's what I particularly value in geniuses. They're only good for one thing. Apart from that, nothing at all. They don't have the least idea what it is to be a citizen, father, mother, brother, relation, friend. Between you and me, we should aspire to be like them in every way, but shouldn't want the spark to be too widespread. We need men, but, as for men of genius, no thanks. Good God, no, we don't need them at all. They're the ones who change the face of the planet, but when it comes down to the smallest things, stupidity is so widespread and so dominant that no one can do anything about it without kicking up a huge fuss. Some of what they dreamt up gets done, and some stays just as it was, and that's why there are two versions of the gospel, like a Harlequin costume. The wisdom of Rabelais's monk is best for his own peace of mind and for everyone else's: do one's duty as far as possible, always have a good word for the Reverend Prior, and let the world follow its fancy. The world is fine as it is, because the multitude is happy with it. If I knew any history, I'd show you that here on earth, evil is always caused by some man of genius. But I don't know any history because I don't know a thing. I'll be damned if ever I learnt a thing, and if, having never learnt a thing, I was any the worse for it. One day I was seated at the table of one of the King of France's ministers who's as clever as they come;²¹ well, he

showed us as clear as two and two make four that nothing was more useful to all peoples of the world than lies, and nothing more dangerous than the truth. I can't remember now exactly how he proved it, but the obvious conclusion was that geniuses are an odious lot, and that if any child should come into the world bearing the mark of this dangerous gift of nature on its forehead, it should either be suffocated or thrown in the gutter forthwith.

ME – And yet the type of person you're talking about always claims to possess it, however hostile to genius they say they are.

HIM – I do believe that's what they think inside themselves, but I don't believe they'd ever dare admit it.

ME – That's just because they're being modest. And it must be what made you conceive such a deadly hatred for genius.

HIM – An undying one.

ME – But I remember a time when you were despairing of ever being anything other than an ordinary man yourself. You'll never be happy if the pros and the cons upset you equally. You have to choose your side and stick to it. I agree with you that men of genius are usually unusual – as the saying goes, There is no great mind without a touch of madness – and there's nothing we can do about that, but centuries which do not produce them will be scorned. Nations which do, will be honoured on their account; sooner or later, statues will be put up to them, and they will be viewed as the benefactors of the human race. With all due respect to that sublime minister you were talking about, I believe that even if lies can be useful in the short term, they are necessarily harmful in the long term, whereas on the contrary, the truth is necessarily useful in the long term, although it can turn out to be harmful in the short term. All of which leads me to conclude that the man of genius who denounces some widely held view as false, or who helps demonstrate some great truth, will always be worthy of our veneration.²² This person may fall victim to prejudice and to the prevailing law of the land, but there are always two sorts of laws, those that are universally applicable and just, and those that are bizarre and owe their authority only to wilful blindness or to necessity born of circumstance. Infringing this second sort only temporarily sentences the guilty man to an ignominious fate; it is one that time reverses, sentencing judges and

nations in their turn to eternal ignominy. Of Socrates and the judge who made him drink the hemlock, who is dishonoured today?

HIM – That'll be a whole lot of use to him now! They still condemned him, didn't they? He was still executed, wasn't he? In any case, wasn't he a thoroughly troublesome citizen? Didn't his disrespect for one bad law encourage madmen to disobey the good ones? Was he not a most brazen and bizarre individual? What you've been saying is hardly helpful for the cause of men of genius.

ME – Now listen, my dear fellow. A society should not have bad laws, and were it only to have good ones, it would never be in a position to persecute a man of genius. I never said genius was inextricably linked to wickedness, nor wickedness to genius. A fool is more likely to be wicked than a clever man is. If a man of genius were hard-hearted, prickly, unbearable, and generally difficult to get on with, even truly wicked, what would you say?

HIM – That the bottom of the river's the best place for him.

ME – Calm down, dear fellow. Let's not use your uncle as an example. He may be hard-hearted, violent, inhumane, and grasping. He may be a bad father, a bad husband, and a bad uncle; but it is not yet clear that he really is a man of genius, that he truly has taken his art very far forward, and that anyone will still be talking about his works in ten years' time. But what about Racine? He was a genius, no doubt about it, and he's not supposed to have been a particularly nice man. And what about De Voltaire?²³

HIM – Don't press me about him because I will follow through.

ME – What would you rather? That he were a good man, forever at his shop counter, like Briasson,²⁴ or never without his tape measure, like Barbier,²⁵ regularly giving his wife one legitimate child a year, busy being a good husband, a good father, a good uncle, a good neighbour, an honest tradesman, but nothing more; or that he were scheming, cheating, only out for himself, envious, and wicked, but also the author of *Andromaque*, *Britannicus*, *Iphigénie*, *Phèdre*, and *Athalie*?

HIM – Good grief, in his case, of the two, perhaps it would've been better to be the first.

ME – That's infinitely more true than you could ever realise.

HIM – Oh there you go again, you lot! If ever we say anything worthwhile, it's got to be by accident, like madmen or fantasists. You think you're the only ones to understand yourselves. Actually, Mister Philosopher, I do understand myself, and I understand myself just like you understand yourself.

ME – We'll see about that! Why would it be better for him then?

HIM – Because all those fine things he did didn't earn him twenty thousand francs, and if he'd been a good silk merchant on the rue Saint-Denis or the rue Saint-Honoré, a good wholesale grocer, or an apothecary with plenty of customers, he'd have amassed a great fortune, and while amassing it, there wouldn't have been a single pleasure he couldn't have enjoyed: he could have tossed a coin from time to time to some poor devil of a clown like me who'd have made him laugh, procured him a girl, as required, to relieve the endless boredom of being with his wife; we'd have had excellent meals at his house, gambled large sums, drunk excellent wines, excellent liqueurs, excellent coffees, and had country parties; and so you see, I understood myself perfectly all along. You laugh, but let me speak. That would've been a great deal better for the people around him.

ME – I don't disagree, so long as he didn't do anything indecent with the wealth he'd legitimately built up, and kept his house clear of all those gamblers, parasites, tedious hangers-on, layabouts and useless degenerates, and got his shop boys to beat up the man who arranges for husbands to have a bit of variety, relieving them of the familiar tedium of their wives.

HIM – Beat up, Sir, beat up! No one gets beaten up in a well governed city. This is an honest profession we're talking about. Many people, some of them titled, are involved in it. What the devil do you want people to spend their money on, if not on good food, good company, good wine, beautiful women, every pleasure on the spectrum, every species of amusement? I'd rather be a beggar than have a great fortune and deny myself those pleasures. But let's get back to Racine. That man only did any good to people he didn't know or once he was no longer around.

ME – Granted. But you have to weigh up both sides. In a thousand years from now, he'll still be moving people to tears; he'll be admired in every

country in the world. He will inspire them with feelings of humanity, compassion, tenderness, they will want to know who he was, where he came from, and on account of him, France will be the envy of the world. He inflicted suffering on some people who are no more, people in whom we have almost no interest. We have nothing to fear either from his vices or his defects. Doubtless, it would have been better if nature had endowed him with the virtues of a good man and the talents of a great one. He is a mighty tree who starved some other trees growing nearby and stifled the plants at his feet, but his own crown reached the sky; his branches stretched out wide; he provided welcome shade for those who came, still come and always will come in search of rest by his majestic trunk; the fruits he gave were exquisite, and they keep growing back.²⁶ Of course, it would be desirable for De Voltaire to have Duclos's²⁷ kindness, the Abbé Trublet's²⁸ simplicity, and the Abbé d'Olivet's²⁹ integrity; but as that can never be, let's view the matter from the only truly interesting perspective, and disregard for a moment our position in time and space, and look beyond to the centuries to come, to the furthest lands and the peoples yet to be born. Let's consider the good of our species. If we can't be open-minded, at least let's not blame nature for being wiser than we are. If you pour cold water over Greuze's³⁰ head, you might extinguish his talent along with his vanity. If you make De Voltaire less sensitive to criticism, he may no longer be able to fathom the depths of Mérope's³¹ soul. He will no longer move you.

HIM – But if nature were as powerful as it is wise, why did it not make them good as well as great?

ME – But don't you see that with an argument of that sort, you overturn the general order of things, and that if everything here on earth were excellent, nothing would be excellent?³²

HIM – You're right. The important thing is that we should exist, you and me, and that we should exist as you and me. In any case, let everything find its way in the world. The best order of things, in my opinion, is the one that has me in it, and I couldn't care less about the best possible world, if I'm not in it. I'd rather be alive and offend everyone by speaking out of turn than not be alive at all.

ME – There isn't a single person who doesn't think like you, and who doesn't criticize the way things are, without thereby wishing himself out of existence.

HIM – True.

ME – So let's accept things as they are. Let's see what we lose and what we gain in doing so, and let's leave aside the big picture which, in any case, we don't have a clear enough view of to be able to apportion praise or blame, and which may in itself be neither good nor bad, but simply necessary, which is what many respectable people think.³³

HIM – I don't really understand what you're going on about. It sounds like philosophy to me, and I'm warning you now, I never get involved in that. All I know is, I'd rather be someone else, even if it meant being a man of genius, a great man. In fact, there's something inside me telling me so. I've never been able to listen to anyone else being praised without becoming secretly furious. I am an envious person. Whenever I hear some degrading detail about their private lives, I prick up my ears in delight. It makes us more alike. It allows me to bear my own mediocrity more easily. I tell myself: sure, you never wrote *Mahomet*, but at least you didn't write in praise of Maupeou.³⁴ I have always been and I still am angry about being mediocre. Yes, yes, I admit it, I am mediocre and angry. I have never heard the overture to *Les Indes galantes*³⁵ [*The Galant Indies*] being played, never heard *Profonds abîmes du Ténare*³⁶ [Deep Chasms of Tainaron], *Nuit, éternelle nuit* [Night, Eternal Night] sung, without feeling pain and sighing: 'That's something I'll never be able to do'. The thing is, I was jealous of my uncle, and if, at his death, there'd been a few fine harpsichord pieces among his papers, I wouldn't have hesitated a moment to stay myself and also be him.

ME – If that's all that's upsetting you, it's hardly worth the worry.

HIM – It's nothing, these things pass.

(Then he went back to singing the overture to *Les Indes galantes* and the air, *Profonds abîmes*, adding:)

HIM – That something inside me, speaking to me and saying: 'Rameau, you'd really have liked to have composed those two pieces... If you had composed those two pieces, you'd be able to do two more; and once you'd done a certain number of them, everyone would be playing and singing you, and when you walked anywhere, you'd hold your head up high, you'd be conscious of your own merit, and people would point you out. They would say: He's the one who did those pretty gavottes'. Then he sang the gavottes, and he looked touched like someone overflowing with joy, a tear in his

eye, and added, rubbing his hands together: You would have a fine house – and he showed how big it was, putting out his arms; a fine bed – and he casually stretched out on it; fine wines – and he tasted them, smacking his tongue against his palate; a fine carriage – and he lifted his foot to climb in; pretty women – and already he was feeling their bosoms and leering at them; a hundred spongers would come and worship at my feet – and now he saw them all around him; he could see Palissot,³⁷ Painsinet,³⁸ the Frérons, father and son,³⁹ La Porte;⁴⁰ he could hear them, he puffed himself up, endorsed their words, smiled, brushed them off, looked down on them, sent them packing, summoned them back again; and then he went on: and this is what it would be like: you'd wake up to hear you were a great man; you'd open the *Trois Siècles* [*Three Centuries*]⁴¹ and read you were a great man; you'd go home in the evening convinced you were a great man; and the great man, Rameau the Nephew, would fall asleep to the sweet sounds of praise, singing in his ears; even asleep, he would have a satisfied air; he would breathe easily, his chest filling out, rising and falling majestically; he would snore like a great man; – and saying all this, he lay down on a long cushioned seat; he closed his eyes, and mimed the contented sleep he was imagining. After a few sweet moments of this repose, he woke up suddenly, stretched his arms, yawned, rubbed his eyes, and started looking around for his witless sycophants.

ME – So you think a happy man does sleep?

HIM – Sure I do! As for me, poor wretch that I am, when I get back to my garret and my miserable bed at the end of the day, I huddle under the cover, my chest feels tight; my breathing is difficult; it's a strained little whimper which you can barely hear, whereas any banker will make his apartment shake and the entire street vibrate with his snores. But what's upsetting me today isn't whether or not I snore or sleep badly like miserable wretches do.

ME – Although that is still sad.

HIM – What's happened to me is much sadder than that.

ME – What is it then?

HIM – You have always shown some interest in me, have you not, because I'm a poor devil whom you basically despise but who amuses you?

ME – Yes, that's right.

HIM – And now I'm going to tell you what it is.

Before he begins, he lets out a deep sigh and clutches his head in both hands. Then, he regains his calm and says:

You know that I am an *ignoramus*, a fool, a madman, an upstart, a hanger-on, what the Burgundians⁴² call a dirty scally, a cheat, a greedy pig...

ME – What an *encomium*!

HIM – Don't argue, please. Every word is true. No one could deny it. Nobody knows me better than I know myself, and I'm not telling you the half of it.

ME – I have no wish to make you angry, and so I'm happy to go along with it all.

HIM – So, at the time, I was living with some people who took to me precisely because I was exceptionally gifted at being all those things.

ME – That's peculiar. Until now, I had always supposed that one would either hide such things from oneself or forgive oneself for them, and that one despised them in others.

HIM – Hide them from oneself – is that possible? You can be sure that when Palissot is alone and takes a good look at himself, he goes into great detail. You can be sure that when it's just him and his colleague, they openly admit that they are a right pair of low-lives. Despise them in others? Well, my lot were fairer than that, and they had the sort of character that meant I was a great hit with them. I was like a pig in clover. They made a great fuss of me. I couldn't be out of their sight for a single moment without their missing me. I was their little Rameau, their pretty Rameau, their Rameau who was such a madman, such an upstart, such an *ignoramus*, a hanger-on, a greedy-guts, a clown, such a great beast of a Rameau. Not one of these familiar epithets came without a smile, a caress, a little pat on the shoulder, a slap, a kick, or without, at dinner, a lump of meat being flung onto my plate, and after dinner, the permission to take liberties without there being any consequences, because I am of no consequence. People can do to me, with me, and in front of me whatever they like without me taking offence; and what about those little presents they showered me with? Stupid great

ass that I am, I lost it all! I lost it all because I succumbed to a moment of common sense, just once in my life. Argh! That never happens to me!

ME – So what was it all about then?

HIM – A foolishness beyond compare, beyond comprehension, beyond forgiveness.

ME – What foolishness then?

HIM – Rameau, Rameau, is that what they took you on for? Oh the foolishness of having shown a bit of taste, a bit of wit, a bit of sense. Rameau, my friend, that'll teach you to stay as God made you and as your protectors wanted you to be. So they grabbed you by the shoulders, showed you the door and said: Scum, get out and don't come back; I do believe it thinks it can have sense and reason! Out! We've got quite enough of those things ourselves. And off you went biting your lip when it was your tongue you should have bitten. And just because you didn't, here you are now, out on the street, penniless, wondering what to do next. They fed you like a king, and now you'll go back to living off scraps; you had a nice place to live, and now you'd be only too happy to get your garret back; you had a comfy bed, and now all you can hope for is a place in the straw with Monsieur de Soubise's coachman⁴³ on one side and our friend Robbé⁴⁴ on the other. Instead of the sweet and peaceful sleep you used to enjoy, you'll have horses whinnying and shuffling in one ear, and the scratching sound of harsh, barbaric verse in the other, which is a thousand times worse. Bad luck, bad judgement, I must have been possessed – by a million devils!

ME – But is there no way of going back? Is the sin you committed so unpardonable? If I were you, I'd try and get back in with them. They need you more than you think.

HIM – Ha! I'm sure that now I'm not there to make them laugh, they'll be bored to death.

ME – So I'd go back if I were you. I wouldn't give them the chance to get along without me and start seeking out some more honest amusement; for who knows what might happen then?

HIM – That's not what I'm afraid of; that'll never happen.

ME – However sublimely talented you might be, someone else can always take your place.

HIM – Only with difficulty.

ME – True. All the same, I'd go to them looking pale and wan, eyes rolling, shirt undone, hair in a mess, in the same tragic state I see you in now. I'd hurl myself at the goddess's⁴⁵ feet. I'd press my face to the ground, and without looking up, I'd say in a deep sob: I am sorry, Madame! I am so sorry! I am not worthy, I'm a disgrace. It was a mishap: as you know, I don't usually display even an ounce of common sense, and I promise never to display any ever again as long as I live.

What is funny is that while I was saying this, he was miming along. He had prostrated himself, pressed his face to the ground, he seemed to have his hands round the toe of a slipper, he was weeping, he was sobbing, he was saying: Yes, my little queen, yes, I promise, I will never show any ever again, ever. Then abruptly getting up, he added in a serious and thoughtful tone:

HIM – Yes, you are right. I think that's the best thing to do. She is a good person. Monsieur Viellard⁴⁶ is always saying what a good person she is. It's true she has been quite good to me too. Nevertheless, to have to bow down to that ape-woman! To beg for mercy at the feet of a wretched little diva who is booed by audiences everywhere! Me, Rameau, son of Rameau, apothecary of Dijon, a worthy man, who never knelt down to anyone in his life! Me, Rameau, nephew of the man who calls himself the great Rameau,⁴⁷ and who is to be seen in the Palais Royal walking upright, waving his arms in the air, ever since Carmontelle drew him bent over with his hands behind his back under his coat-tails!⁴⁸ Me, composer of harpsichord pieces that nobody plays, but which may one day be the only ones to pass into posterity, when they'll be played by everyone; me! Has it come to this? To have to go... Honestly, Sir, that cannot be. And putting his right hand on his chest, he added: I sense something here rising up and telling me: Rameau, you'll do nothing of the sort. There should always be a certain dignity bound up with the nature of man, which nothing can stifle. It awakens at the drop of a hat, yes, at the drop of a hat, for there are other days when it wouldn't cost my dignity a thing to go as low as they wanted me to; on those days, give me a farthing, and I'll kiss that little Hus's arse.

2 

3 

ME – Ahem! But, my friend, she is pretty, young, fair-skinned, soft, plump; and it would be an act of humility that a man of yet more delicate taste than you might sometimes stoop to.

HIM – Let's be clear about this: there's literal arse-kissing and there's metaphorical arse-kissing. Ask that fat Bergier who kisses Mme de La Marck's⁴⁹ arse both literally and metaphorically; and good God, how I would dislike that, literally or metaphorically.

ME – Well then, if the expedient I'm suggesting doesn't suit, have the courage of your convictions and be a beggar.

HIM – It's hard to be a beggar when there are so many wealthy fools to live off. And then there's the self-hatred; it's unbearable.

ME – You mean you've had that feeling?

HIM – Haven't I just! How many times have I said to myself: Come on, Rameau, how is it that there are ten thousand dinner tables in Paris, and room for fifteen to twenty at each, and no seat for you! There are purses full of gold, showering in every direction, and not a single coin comes your way! A thousand little men of wit with no talent or merit; a thousand little beauties, with no charm; a thousand dullards scheming for fine clothes, and yet you'd go out without a stitch on? Would you be that stupid? Can't you be as sycophantic as the next man? Can't you lie, swear an oath and then break it, make a promise, pledge allegiance and then break it? Can't you get down on all fours like everyone else? Can't you facilitate Madame's little intrigue and deliver Monsieur's love notes? Can't you encourage that young man to talk to Mademoiselle and persuade Mademoiselle to listen like everyone else? Can't you make the daughter of one of our shopkeepers see that she looks dowdy, and that a pretty pair of earrings, a dab of rouge, a nice bit of lace, and one of those Polish-style dresses with big ruched-up skirts⁵⁰ would make her look ravishing? That those dainty feet aren't made for walking outside? That there is a handsome and wealthy young man, in a suit trimmed with gold, who has a magnificent carriage and six tall footmen, and who, having caught a glimpse of her, has fallen for her charms, been unable to eat or drink ever since, and is now lying awake every night thinking of her, and generally dying of love? But what will my Papa say?

– Yes, yes, your Papa! He'll be a little bit cross to begin with. – And Mama who so wants me to be a good girl? And who tells me that the only thing that matters in this world is being a good girl? – Old-fashioned stuff and nonsense. – And my confessor? – You won't have to see him any more; or if you will persist in your fanciful desire to go and tell him all about your amusements, then it'll cost you a few pounds in sugar and coffee. – But he's a very strict man who's already refused to grant me absolution for singing *Viens dans ma cellule* [*Come into My Cell*].⁵¹ – That's because you didn't have anything to give him... But once you go and see him in your lace... – You mean I'll have lace? – Of course, you will, and lots of it... and in your diamond earrings... – You mean I'll have beautiful diamond earrings? – Yes. – Like the ones that Marquise wears who sometimes comes to buy gloves from our shop? – Exactly; in a fine carriage drawn by dapple-grey horses, two tall footmen, a negro pageboy, and a linkboy; rouge, beauty spots, someone to carry your train... – And shall I go to the ball? – Yes, to the ball... and to the Opera and the Theatre⁵² too... Her heart was already a-flutter with excitement. What's that piece of paper you've got in your hand? – It's nothing. – But it must be something. – It's a note. – Who for? – For you, if you're at all curious. – Curious? Yes, very. Let's see. (She reads.) A meeting, I can't. – On the way to mass. – Mama always comes with me; but if he came a bit early perhaps; I always get up first and I'm at the counter before anyone else is up. So along he comes; she likes what she sees; and one fine day, at dusk, the girl vanishes, and I am paid my two thousand ecus... What! You are capable of doing all that and yet you go hungry? Aren't you ashamed of yourself, you miserable wretch? It makes me think of a pack of rogues who weren't half as talented as me, but who were up to their eyes in gold. I'd be in my goatskin overcoat, and they'd be all decked out in velvet; they'd be leaning on their canes with gold knobs on or fancy beak-shaped handles, their fingers decked out with cameo rings of Aristotle or Plato. And what were this lot anyway? For the most part, miserable scribblers; but now they're all some species of lord. So I took heart, felt my soul rise up and my mind soar, and I knew I could do anything. But it appears these happy feelings were not to last, for, to date, I've not got very far. Be that as it may, this is exactly how I often address myself, and you can rearrange the words of my soliloquy however you fancy, so long as you always conclude from it that I am a man acquainted with self-hatred, that I know that tormented conscience which comes from not having been able to use the talents bestowed upon us by heaven above. It would almost have been better if such a man had never been born.

I was listening to him, and as he was acting out the scene between the pimp and the young girl he was seducing, I felt my soul pulled in two opposite directions; I didn't know whether I'd end up giving in to the urge to laugh or puffing up in furious indignation. It was painful. Twenty times, I burst out laughing and every time this stopped me from exploding in anger; twenty times, the anger that was bubbling up inside me erupted into laughter. I was dumbfounded by how insightful and at once how sordid what he said was, by how right and then how wrong his ideas were, by how totally perverse his sentiments were, by the spectacle of such utter depravity, and by how uncommonly open about it he was. He noticed the conflict going on in me: What's the matter? he asked.

ME – Nothing.

HIM – You look troubled to me.

ME – That's because I am.

HIM – But what would you advise me to do then?

ME – To change the subject. Oh, unhappy man! What a state of utter abjection you were born in, or have fallen into!

HIM – I accept that. But don't let my state get you down too much. My plan, in speaking openly to you in this way, was not to cause you any distress. I did manage to put a bit aside when I was with those people. Don't forget that I was in need of nothing, nothing at all, and that I even had a small amount of pocket money.

And then he started punching himself again on the forehead, biting his lip, rolling his eyes and staring up at the ceiling, adding: But it's over and done with now. I've set something aside. Time has passed, and it's been piling up.

ME – You mean slipping away.

HIM – No, no, piling up. We grow a little richer with every day that passes. One less day alive or one ecu more, it's all the same. The important thing is to go easily, freely, pleasurably, copiously and daily each evening on the chamber pot. *O stercus pretiosum* [O Precious Turd]!⁵³ That's the grand outcome of life whatever the rank. In their last moments, everyone is

equally rich, be they Samuel Bernard,⁵⁴ that man who, with all his thieving, pillaging, and bankrupting, is leaving twenty-seven million in gold, or Rameau, who won't be leaving anything at all, Rameau whose winding sheet will be paid for by the parish. The dead man doesn't hear the bell toll for him. It's all very well for hundreds of priests to chant themselves hoarse and for mourners, bearing flaming torches, to process ahead and follow on behind, his soul isn't there to process beside the Master of Ceremonies. Whether you rot beneath marble or under the ground, you still rot. Whether you have the Boys in Red or the Boys in Blue⁵⁵ to sing at your funeral, or no one at all, what does it matter? See this wrist, it was as stiff as the devil. These ten fingers were like sticks stuck in a wooden wrist-bone, and these tendons were like old gut strings, only drier, stiffer and with less give in them than the old ropes off a carpenter's wheel. But I really have tortured, smashed and broken your strings, haven't I, dear fingers? And you, dear hand, you don't want to move anymore. But by God, I say you will; and so it shall be.

And while he was speaking, he had grabbed his left hand in his right and was pulling his fingers and wrist backwards and forwards so that he made the very tips of his fingers touch his arm; his joints cracked with the effort, and I was worried his bones would be permanently dislocated.

ME – Watch out, I told him, you'll do yourself an injury!

HIM – Don't worry, they're used to it; I've been doing a lot worse than that to them for the last ten years. However much they complained, the poor buggers just had to get used to it and learn to land on the right keys and fly up and down the strings. So now they're fine. Yes, they're fine.



At this point, he is striking the pose of a violin-player; he is humming an allegro by Locatelli;⁵⁶ his right arm is miming the action of the bow, his left hand and fingers look as though they are skipping all the way up the fingerboard; if the tuning goes out, he stops to tighten or lower the string; he plucks it with his nail to check it's right; he picks up the piece where he left off; he beats time with his foot, he throws himself into it completely, head, feet, hands, arms, body. Which is what you will sometimes have seen Ferrari or Chiabran or some other virtuoso do at the *Concert spirituel*⁵⁷ when they go into the same convulsions and present me with the same scenes of torture and make me feel more or less the same pain; for is it not painful to see someone tormenting himself in an effort to paint me a scene

of pleasure? Screen that man off from me, if he must act the part of a man being tortured. In the midst of his writhing and howling, when there was a pause – one of those harmonious moments when the bow moves slowly across many strings at once – an expression of bliss would come across his face, his voice would soften, he would be in ecstasy just listening to himself. His ears could truly hear the chords resonating, and so could mine. Then tucking the instrument under his left arm with the hand he'd been holding it in, and letting his right hand drop with the bow, he said: So, what do you think of that?

ME – Amazing!

HIM – Pretty good, I'd say; it sounds much the same as everyone else.

And straightaway, he squatted like a musician seating himself at the harpsichord. Mercy, I implore you, for both our sakes, I said.

HIM – No, no; now that I've got you here, you have to listen to me. I don't want you singing my praises without knowing why. Your praises will ring truer, and I'll get a student out of it.

ME – I know hardly anybody, and you'll tire yourself out in vain.

HIM – I never get tired.

Since there was no point me pitying my man who was still drenched in sweat following his violin sonata, I decided to let him get on with it. So here he is, sitting at the harpsichord, legs bent, head looking up at the ceiling, which you would have thought had the music written on it, singing, warming up, playing a piece by Alberti⁵⁸ or Galuppi,⁵⁹ I'm not sure which. His voice swooped up and down and his fingers tripped along the keys, sometimes skipping from the upper keys to the lower, sometimes moving from the accompaniment back to the tune. His face expressed each of the passions in turn, tenderness, anger, pleasure, pain; you could hear the *pianos* and the *fortes*, and I'm sure that someone more attuned than me would have recognised the piece by its movement, its character, the expressions of his face, and by the snatches of song that escaped him every so often. But, what was bizarre was that from time to time, he faltered, then he corrected himself as if he'd missed a note, and looked crestfallen that his fingers no longer knew the piece.

So you see, he said, standing back up, and wiping away the drops of sweat that were rolling down his cheeks, we are just as good at augmented fourths and fifths, and we know all about the sequencing of dominants. These enharmonic passages, which one's dear uncle made such a fuss about, aren't that difficult; we'll manage.⁶⁰

ME – You have gone to a lot of trouble to show me how extremely skilled you are; I was ready to take your word for it.

HIM – Extremely skilled? Ha! No; I know my trade more or less, and that's more than I need to get by. After all, in this land of ours, do we have to understand the things we teach?

ME – No more than we have to understand what we learn.

HIM – How true, damn it! How very true! Now, Mister Philosopher, hand on heart, tell me straight. There was a time when you weren't quite so well off as you are today.⁶¹

ME – I'm still not that well off.

HIM – But you don't go to the Luxembourg Gardens⁶² in summertime any more, like you used to, remember...

ME – Can we not talk about that, I do remember, yes.

HIM – In a shaggy grey overcoat...

ME – Yes, yes.

HIM – Worn thin down one side; in a shirt with torn cuffs, and black woollen stockings darned at the back with white thread.

ME – Yes, yes, and all the rest.

HIM – What were you doing there, in the Walk of Sighs?

ME – Being pretty pathetic.

HIM – And you'd come out onto the street and go trotting off.

ME – I would.

HIM – You were giving lessons in mathematics.

ME – Without knowing the first thing about it: isn't that what you were getting at?

HIM – Precisely.

ME – I learnt by teaching others, and I produced some good students.

HIM – That may well be; but it doesn't work the same way with music as it does with algebra or geometry. Now that you're such a big man...

ME – Less of the big.

HIM – And so well-heeled.

ME – Not that well.

HIM – And get tutors for your daughter.

ME – Steady on, not yet. It's her mother who's in charge of her education – anything for a bit of peace and quiet at home.

HIM – Peace and quiet? Damn it! You'll only get that if you're either the master or the servant, and I'll tell you for free, the master's the one to be. I did have a wife. God rest her soul; but sometimes she used to talk back, so I'd bridle, I'd thunder, I'd proclaim like God: Let there be light; and there was light. And do you know, in four years, we didn't raise our voices at each other more than ten times. How old is your child?

ME – That's irrelevant.

HIM – How old is your child?

ME – Damn it! Leave my child and how old she is out of it, and let's get back to the tutors she'll be having.

HIM – Good Lord! I have never come across anything as pig-headed as a philosopher. Might one be permitted to make a most humble request of Your Worship the Philosopher, that he kindly convey to one the approximate age that her little ladyship his daughter might be?

ME – Let us say she's eight years old.⁶³

HIM – Eight! Then it should have already been fingering the keys for four years.

ME – But maybe I wasn't particularly concerned about ensuring that the plans for her education included the study of something which takes up so much time and is of so little use.

HIM – And so, pray tell, what will you be teaching her then?

ME – To think logically, if I can, which is such a rare thing among men, let alone women.

HIM – Let her think as illogically as she likes, as long as she's pretty, funny, and flirty.

ME – Since nature has been so unkind as to give her delicate health and a sensitive soul, and to expose her to the same difficulties in life as someone with robust health and a heart of steel, I shall teach her, if I can, to endure them with fortitude.

HIM – So let her weep, suffer, sulk, have irritable nerves like everyone else, as long as she's pretty, funny and flirty. What! No dance lessons?⁶⁴

ME – No more than are necessary to learn to curtsy, have good posture, hold herself well and walk with grace.

HIM – No singing lessons?

ME – No more than are necessary to speak well.

HIM – No music lessons?

ME – If I could find a good musical harmony tutor, I'd have him teach her two hours a day for one or two years, but not more than that.

HIM – And what are you putting in the place of the essential things you're doing away with?

ME – Grammar, mythology, history, geography, a bit of drawing and a lot of ethics.

HIM – I could easily prove to you how useless all those subjects are in a world like ours. What am I saying, useless? They may well be dangerous. But I'll just ask one question for the time being: is she not in need of one or two tutors?

ME – I'm sure she is.

HIM – Well, there you are then! And these tutors of yours, you expect them to know the grammar, mythology, history, geography, ethics that they'll be giving her lessons in? Pipe dreams, my dear sir, pipe dreams; if they knew these subjects well enough to teach them, they wouldn't be teachers.

ME – Why's that then?

HIM – Because they'd have spent their whole lives studying them. You need a profound understanding of any art or science to have a real grasp of the basics. Textbooks can only be done properly by men who have grown old and white-haired on the job. It's the middle and the end that illuminate the darkness of the beginning. Ask your friend, Monsieur d'Alembert,⁶⁵ the leading light of mathematical science, whether he's too good to write a textbook. It was only after thirty to forty years' work that my uncle first caught sight of the first glimmers of musical theory.

ME – You are mad, stark raving mad! I exclaimed. How can there be so many good ideas jumbled up with so many outrageous ones in that wicked head of yours?

HIM – Who the devil knows? Chance throws them at you, and they stick. There are so many of them that if you don't have the whole lot, you might as well not have any. We don't know where one thing is going, where another has come from, nor where one or the other thinks it should go, which one should go first, or which would be better off in second place. Can you be a good teacher if you lack method? And method, where does that come from? Listen, my dear philosopher, in my head, physics will always be a poor science, a droplet of water lifted out of the vast ocean on the point of a needle, a speck of earth removed from the Alpine range. And the reasons behind natural phenomena? In truth, we might as well know nothing at all as know as little as we do, and know it so inadequately; and that's where I'd got to when I decided to become a tutor in musical composition and accompaniment. What are you thinking about?

ME – I'm thinking that everything you've just been saying is more specious than solid. But let's move on. You say you've taught accompaniment and composition?

HIM – Yes.

ME – And you didn't know the first thing about them?

HIM – No, believe me, and that's why I wasn't as bad as some, the ones who thought they knew something. At least I wasn't spoiling the children's judgement or their hands. When they went from me to a good teacher, since they hadn't learnt anything, at least they didn't have anything to unlearn, and that's a great saving of time and money.

ME – So what did you do?

HIM – What they all do, these teachers. I would turn up, throw myself into a chair, and say: What dreadful weather we're having! The streets are so exhausting! I would tell them some gossip: Mademoiselle Lemierre⁶⁶ was due to play a vestal virgin in the new opera, but she's pregnant for the second time, and no one knows who'll be replacing her. Mademoiselle Arnould⁶⁷ has just left her little count, and they say she's entering into negotiations with Bertin. Meanwhile the little count has happened upon Monsieur de Montamy's treatise on porcelain.⁶⁸ At the last Amateurs' Concert, there was an Italian girl who sang like an angel. That Prévile's an amazing actor, you should see him in *Le Mercure galant* [*Mercury, the Galant Messenger*];⁶⁹ the bit with the puzzle is priceless. That poor actress, Dumesnil,⁷⁰ hasn't got a clue what she's saying or doing anymore. Well now, Mademoiselle, do you want to get your music out? While Mademoiselle, who is in no hurry, is hunting about for her music and can't find it, and the housemaid is called in, and words are had, I carry on: La Clairon is making no sense at the moment. There's talk of an utterly extraordinary marriage: it's Mademoiselle – what's her name? That little woman he's been keeping, who's had two or three children by him, and who had previously been kept by all those other men. – Come on, Rameau, that's not possible; you're talking nonsense. – I am not. Apparently, the marriage has actually taken place. Rumour has it that De Voltaire is dead; that's good news. – Why should it be good news? – Because it must mean he's about to come out with some hilarious new joke. He always dies a fortnight before he does that. What else have I got to tell

you? Then I would tell some filthy new anecdotes that I'd picked up from the other households I'd been in, because we're all great gossip-mongers. I was playing the fool. They listened to me. They laughed. They exclaimed: He's always so charming. Meanwhile Mademoiselle's music had finally turned up under an armchair where it had been dragged, chewed, and torn up by some puppydog or kitten. Mademoiselle sits down at the harpsichord. To begin with she would clatter about all by herself. Then I would go over, having signalled to the mother how pleased I was. The mother: Not bad at all; if only we were willing to practice a little more, but we appear not to be. We prefer to waste our time chatting, messing about with our dresses, running about, doing goodness knows what. No sooner do you leave than the music gets put away again not to be opened until your next visit. And yet you never tell her off... So, as I did have to do something, I took her hands and placed them for her. I winced, I yelled: G, G, G; Mademoiselle, it's a G! – The mother: Mademoiselle, do you not have ears? I'm not at the harpsichord, I can't see the music, and even I can tell it should be a G. This is so painful for Monsieur. I can't believe how patient he's being. You never listen to what he tells you. You're making absolutely no progress... – So then I would tone things down a bit, and gently nodding, I would say: If I may, dear Madame, if I may. Things could be better if Mademoiselle wanted, if she were willing to practice a bit; but it's not going badly. – The mother: In your position, I'd have her working on the same piece for a year. – Well now! We could do that, and not let her off until she can do all the difficult bits, but it wouldn't take as long as Madame supposes. – The mother: Monsieur Rameau, you flatter her. You are too good. This is the only thing she'll retain from the entire lesson, and she'll be reciting it back at me at every opportunity. And so the hour would pass. My pupil would hand me my fee with a graceful flourish and the curtsy she'd been taught by her dancing master. I would be putting it in my pocket while the mother was saying: Very good, Mademoiselle. If Javillier⁷¹ were here, he'd be impressed. I would stay to chat a little longer out of politeness; and then off I'd go – and that's what used to be known as a music lesson.

ME – And is it any different these days?

HIM – Good gracious! I should say so. I arrive. I am serious. I quickly remove my jacket; I open the lid of the harpsichord; I try the keys. I am always in a hurry: if I am made to wait even for a moment, I scream as though I'm being robbed. In one hour's time, I need to be somewhere else; in two

hours, at the Duchess of XYZ's house. I am invited to dine with a beautiful Marquise; from there, I'm due to go straight to a concert that the Baron de Bacq⁷² is holding in his residence on the rue Neuve-des-Petits-Champs.

ME – And in fact you've got nowhere to go at all?

HIM – True.

ME – So why do you have to play these paltry little games?

HIM – Paltry! And why do you call them that, if you don't mind my asking? It's what everyone does in my position; I am hardly demeaning myself if I'm doing exactly what everyone else goes around doing all the time. I didn't make the rules, and it would be bizarre and hapless of me not to abide by them. I'm very well aware that if you apply certain general principles, belonging to some morality or other – which everyone preaches and no one practises – you can prove that white is black and black is white. But, Mister Philosopher, there is such a thing as a general conscience, just as there is a general grammar, and exceptions to it in every language, which you, you and your learned friends, refer to, I believe, as... what is it again, as...

ME – Peculiarities.⁷³

HIM – Exactly. Similarly, every walk of life has its own particular exceptions to the general conscience that I think we might call its peculiarity.

ME – I see. Fontenelle⁷⁴ is a good speaker and a good writer, although his style teems with French peculiarities.

HIM – And the sovereign, the minister, the banker, the magistrate, the soldier, the man of letters, the lawyer, the prosecutor, the merchant, the banker, the artisan, the singing master, the dancing master, are all very honourable people, although their behaviour deviates in many ways from the general conscience, and is full of moral peculiarities. The longer something has been instituted, the more peculiarities it will have; the unhappier the times, the more the peculiarities will multiply. A man is only as good as his profession; and vice versa – in the end, a profession is only as good as the people in it. And so we talk up our profession as much as we can.

ME – The only thing that's clear to me in all your convoluted rambling is that there are precious few professions with honourable standards, or precious few honourable men of professional standing.

HIM – Quite! There are none at all; although, that said, they're not so bad when they're not at work; and everything would be fine if it weren't for a certain number of people who get called hard-working, careful, and conscientious in the way they carry out their duties, and are high-minded, or who, and this amounts to the same thing, are always at work, doing their job from morning to night, and not doing anything else. And so they're the only ones who grow plump and become respected members of the community.

ME – All because of peculiarities.

HIM – Exactly; I see you've got my point. And so there is one peculiarity that we find in almost all walks of life, because there are some which are actually common to all countries and all times, just as there are common idiocies, and that common peculiarity is to secure as many jobs as possible, and the common idiocy is to believe that the best man is the one with the most jobs. And these are two exceptions to the general conscience and we should go along with them. It's about getting some sort of credit – it has no intrinsic worth; its value comes instead from what people say. They say *A good reputation is worth its weight in gold*. And yet the person with a good reputation is never the one with the gold, and I have noticed that these days the person with the gold is never without a reputation. What you have to have, if you can, is both the lustre and the lucre. And that's my aim when I boost my credit by resorting to what you call devious tricks and nasty little ruses. I give my lesson, and I give it well – that's the general rule. I make it look as if I've got more lessons to give than there are hours in the day, and that's the peculiarity.

ME – And so, your lesson, is it any good?

HIM – Yes, not bad, it'll pass. Dear uncle's fundamental bass has made all that much simpler. Before, I was robbing every student, yes, I was, that's for sure. These days, I earn my fee, that is, as much as anyone does.

ME – And didn't you feel any remorse?

HIM – Oh, none whatsoever! They say that when *a robber is robbed, the devil steals a smile*. The parents were up to their necks in wealth, acquired God knows how; there were courtiers, bankers, wholesalers, accountants, businessmen. I helped them redistribute their wealth, me and a load of other people they also employed. In nature, all species prey on each other; in society, people of all stations prey on each other too. We're forever passing sentence on each other without the law being involved. These days it's La Guimard,⁷⁵ like La Deschamps⁷⁶ before her, punishing the banker on behalf of the prince, and it's the dressmaker, the jeweller, the decorator, the laundrymaid, the conman, the chambermaid, the cook, the saddler, punishing La Deschamps on behalf of the banker. In the midst of all this, only the imbecile or the idler get hurt without having offended anyone, and quite right too. Which just goes to show that these exceptions to the general conscience, or these moral peculiarities, which people have been up in arms about and calling *perks of the job*, are nothing to get worked up about at all, and when it comes right down to it, the only thing you really need is a good eye.

ME – I admire yours.

HIM – And then there's the abject poverty. The voice of conscience and honour can barely be heard over the sound of hunger gnawing at the guts. Suffice it to say, if ever I get rich, I'll have to redistribute, and I am completely determined to do my redistribution in every possible way, by eating, gambling, drinking, and womanizing.

ME – But I'm worried you may never be rich.

HIM – I suspect as much myself.

ME – But if it doesn't turn out like that, what would you do?

HIM – What any beggar made good would do; I'd be the most outrageous shit ever; I'd think back to every little thing those upstarts had done, and get them back for all the times they'd humiliated me. I like being in control, and I will be. I like being praised, and I will be. I'll have the whole Villemorien⁷⁷ gang in my pay, and I will say to them what was said to me: Come on, scum, entertain me, and I'll be entertained; I'll order them to bad-mouth decent people, and they'll be bad-mouthed, if there are decent people left; and

then we'll get some girls in, and get all familiar once we're drunk; we'll get drunk and tell each other stories, we'll indulge all sorts of whims and vices. It'll be fabulous. We will prove that De Voltaire has no genius; that Buffon⁷⁸ is just stuck up and nothing more than a sermonizing old windbag; that Montesquieu⁷⁹ is merely a wit; we'll send d'Alembert back to his sums;⁸⁰ we'll give all you little Catos a good thrashing for looking down on us when really all you are is envious, your modesty merely a mask for pride, and your sobriety simply the dictate of necessity. And will there be music? Absolutely, and we'll be the ones making it.

ME – Given the noble use you'd put your wealth to, I can see what a great pity it is you should be poor. Living that way, you'd do great credit to the human race, be of great use to your fellow citizens and earn great glory for yourself.

HIM – But I sense you are mocking me. Mister Philosopher, you appear not to know who you're pitting yourself against; you appear unaware that at this moment I represent the majority in town and at court. Our wealthy fellow men in every walk of life have either said to themselves what I have just confided to you, or they haven't, but the fact is that the life I'd lead if I were them, is exactly the life they do lead. Now you know where you stand, you and your friends. You believe happiness is made the same for everyone. What a strange vision! Your happiness presupposes a certain romantic turn of mind that we do not have, a singular soul, a peculiar taste. You confer the title of virtue on this weirdness; you call it philosophy. But are virtue and philosophy made for everyone? Enjoy them if you can, hold onto them if you can. Imagine what a wise and philosophical universe would be like; you must agree it'd be miserable as hell. Come on, long live philosophy, long live the wisdom of Solomon: let's drink good wine, gorge ourselves silly on delicate morsels, roll around with pretty women, and go to sleep in lovely soft beds. What else is there? The rest is vanity.

ME – What! What about defending one's country?

HIM – Vanity!⁸¹ There is no country anymore; all I can see from one end of the earth to the other is tyrants and slaves.

ME – And serving one's friends?

HIM – Vanity! Do any of us have any friends? And if we did, why would we want to make them ungrateful? Take a good look around and you'll see that's almost always what you get for doing anyone a service. Gratitude is a burden, and all burdens are made to be shaken off.

ME – Having a position in society and fulfilling its duties?

HIM – Vanity! What does having a position matter, as long as you're rich, since you only take them on for the money. Fulfilling your duties, what does that get you? Jealousy, trouble, persecution. Is that how to get ahead? Pay court, damn it! Pay court, observe the great and powerful, study their tastes, indulge their fancies, serve their vices, approve their acts of injustice: that's the secret.

ME – Attending to the education of one's children?

HIM – Vanity! That's the tutor's business.

ME – But if the tutor is imbued with your principles and neglects his duties, who will suffer for it?

HIM – God knows it won't be me, but one day it might be my daughter's husband or my son's wife.

ME – But what happens if they both rush headlong into debauchery and vice?

HIM – That's what anyone in their position would do.

ME – But what if they are dishonoured?

HIM – Whatever you do, you can't be dishonoured if you are rich.

ME – And what if they're ruined?

HIM – Tough luck for them.

ME – I can see that if you decide you don't have to attend to the conduct of your wife, your children, your servants, you might easily end up neglecting your affairs.

HIM – Excuse me; sometimes it is difficult to put together enough money, and it is prudent to plan ahead.

ME – Won't you take any care of your wife?

HIM – No, I won't, thank you very much. The best strategy to adopt with one's better half is, I believe, to do whatever suits her best. Don't you think society would be entertaining if everyone just got on with their own thing?

ME – Why not? I never enjoy an evening more than when I am pleased with my morning.

HIM – Me too.

ME – What makes fashionable people so refined when it comes to their amusements is their profound idleness.

HIM – Don't you believe it; they're always rushing around.

ME – Since they never tire, they never need to rest.

HIM – Don't you believe it; they are constantly exhausted.

ME – Pleasure is always business to them and never a need.

HIM – Just as well – a need is always a pain.

ME – They wear everything out. Their souls stagnate. Boredom takes hold of them. Hemmed in as they are by an overwhelming abundance of riches, anyone who does away with them would be doing them a service. The only aspect of happiness they recognize is the bit that froths up quickest. I don't look down on sensory pleasures. I too have a palate, and it is tempted by a delicate morsel or a delicious wine. I too have a heart and eyes, and I love to see a pretty woman, I love to feel the firm round flesh of her bosom in my hands, to press my lips on hers, to feel aroused when I look deep into her eyes, and to expire with pleasure in her arms. Every so often, I am not averse to an evening of debauchery amongst friends, even quite a riotous one. But I will not conceal from you that I find it infinitely more delightful to come to the aid of someone in need, to bring a fraught situation to an end, to give a salutary piece of advice, to read something pleasant, go for a

walk with a man or woman dear to my heart, spend a couple of instructive hours with my children, write a good page, fulfil the duties of my position, say some tender loving words to the one I love and receive her embrace in return. There are some things I would give anything to have done. *Mahomet* is a sublime piece of work,⁸² but I would rather have cleared the Calas⁸³ name. A man I know of fled to Carthage.⁸⁴ He was a younger son, in a country where the custom is for the oldest son to inherit everything. One day, he learns that his older brother, ever the spoilt child, having stripped his over-indulgent father and mother of everything they possessed, had evicted them from their château, and that they were now languishing in poverty in a small country town. So what does he do now, this younger son, who had been so harshly treated by his parents, and had gone to seek his fortune far away? He sends them help; he hurriedly winds up his affairs. He comes back wealthy. He restores his father and mother to their home. He arranges for his sisters to be married. Oh! My dear Rameau, this man looked upon this as the happiest period of his life. He told me about it with tears in his eyes; and as I tell you this story, I can feel my heart fill with joy, and it gives me such pleasure I can hardly speak.

HIM – What a strange lot you are!

ME – What a pitiful lot you are, if you can't see that we have risen above our fate, and that no one need be unhappy ever again if only they did a couple of good deeds like this one.

HIM – Well that's a sort of felicity I'm unlikely ever to be familiar with, since one encounters it so rarely. But the way you see it, then, is that we ought to be decent and honourable?

ME – If we want to be happy? Certainly.

HIM – And yet I see infinite numbers of honourable people who are not happy, and infinite numbers of people who are happy without being honourable.

ME – That's what you think.

HIM – And isn't it because I had a moment's common sense and told the truth for once that I don't know where tonight's meal is coming from?

ME – No it isn't! It's because you haven't always shown common sense and been truthful, and because you didn't realize soon enough that the first thing you'd need to do would be to find a way of being independent and free from servitude.

HIM – Independent or not – at least, my way is the easiest.

ME – And the least secure and the least honourable.

HIM – But the most suited to my character since I'm a layabout, a fool, and an all-round waste of space.

ME – Granted.

HIM – And since I can make my own happiness through vices that are natural to me, which I have done no work to acquire and make no effort to maintain, which suit the morals of my nation, are to the taste of my patrons, and are better tailored to their particular little needs than those virtues which would simply embarrass them by showing them up from morning to night, it would be very odd of me to go and torture myself like a soul in hell, castrate myself, and turn myself into someone I'm not, to go and adopt a character and qualities that are alien to me, though I accept they are highly admirable because I don't want to get into an argument, and which would cost me an awful lot of effort to acquire and put into practice, and would get me nowhere or worse than nowhere, given that I'd be showing up the rich people that beggars like me have to try and live off. We praise virtue but in fact we hate it and run away from it because it's freezing cold, and in this world you need to keep your feet warm. On top of that, it would put me in a foul mood, inevitably – why else do we so often see the pious being so harsh, irritable, and unsociable? It's because they have inflicted on themselves a task which isn't natural to them. They are suffering, and when you suffer, you make other people suffer too. That's not my way and it's not my patrons' way either; I need to be cheery, versatile, amusing, foolish, funny. Virtue commands respect, and respect is uncomfortable. Virtue commands admiration, and admiration is no fun. My business is people who get bored, and I need to make them laugh. And ridicule and madness are what make people laugh, so I need to be ridiculous and mad; and even if nature hadn't already made me that way, the easiest thing would be to pretend to be. Luckily, I don't need to be a hypocrite; there are already so

many hypocrites, of every stripe, and that's not including the ones who are downright hypocritical with themselves. That Chevalier de La Morlière,⁸⁵ with his hat cocked over one ear and his head held high, looking down his nose at you as you go by, with his great long sword smacking against his thigh as he strides about and an insult ready for anyone not carrying one, who looks ready to jump down everyone's throat, what's he actually doing? Everything he can to convince himself that he's a man of courage – but he's a coward. Go over and flick him on the nose, and he'll take it lying down. How do you make him lower his voice? Raise your own. Show him the end of your stick or apply your foot to his backside, and he'll be so astonished to discover that he's a coward that he'll ask you who told you so and how you found him out. He himself was unaware of it till the moment before; he'd spent so long aping heroics that he'd ended up convincing himself. He'd played the part so often, he thought he was the real thing. And as for that woman who mortifies herself, does prison visits, is involved in every parish act of charity, who walks along with her eyes downcast, wouldn't dare look a man in the face, and is forever on guard against the temptation of her senses: does all this prevent her heart from burning, hold back her sighs, keep her true nature from flickering into life, does it stop her being haunted by her desires or replaying in her imagination, all night and all day, scenes from *Le Portier des Chartreux*⁸⁶ [*The Charterhouse Porter*] and Aretino's *Positions*?⁸⁷ What becomes of her? What does her maid think when she wakes up in the night and goes running in her nightdress to the aid of her mistress who sounds as though she's at death's door? Justine, go back to bed, it wasn't you your mistress was calling out for in her delirium. And if good old Rameau were, one day, to start looking as if he despised money, women, feasting, idleness, and start behaving like a little Cato⁸⁸ instead, what would that make him? A hypocrite. Rameau has to be who he is: a happy thief in the company of wealthy thieves, and not someone who trumpets his virtue or who is actually virtuous, chewing his crust of bread on his own or with other beggars. And to be perfectly blunt with you, your felicity doesn't suit me in the slightest, nor does the happiness of a handful of visionaries like you.

ME – I see, my dear man, that you have no idea what it is, and that you haven't even got it in you to find out.

HIM – Just as well, damn it! Just as well. I'd end up dying of hunger, of boredom, and of remorse, perhaps.

ME – In that case, the only advice I have for you is to get straight back into that household you so carelessly got yourself kicked out of.

HIM – And do what you don't disapprove of when it's literal, and what I'm slightly disgusted by when it's metaphorical.

ME – That's what I think.

HIM – Quite apart from this metaphor, which I am finding unpleasant right now, but which I won't mind another time.

ME – How odd!

HIM – There's nothing odd about it. I'm happy to be abject, but I don't want there to be any constraints on it.⁸⁹ I'm happy to give up my dignity... Are you laughing?

ME – Yes, your dignity makes me laugh.

HIM – Everyone has their own; I'm happy to forego mine, but at my discretion and not at someone else's command. Should people be able to say to me: Crawl, and then I have to crawl? It's what worms do, it's what I do; and that's what we both do when left to our own devices, but we rear up when people step on our tails. I have had my tail stepped on, and I shall rear up. And besides, you've got no idea what a madhouse it is. Imagine a melancholic and surly personage, consumed by the vapours, all wrapped up in his great big dressing gown, who dislikes himself and everything else, whom you can hardly get a smile out of whatever contortions you push your mind or body into, who sits in stony silence, unmoved by the funny faces I pull, and the even funnier sentences I pronounce; because, between you and me, that wretched Benedictine, Father Noël,⁹⁰ for all his famous funny faces and success at court, is, in comparison with me – and I'm not saying this to flatter myself, let alone him – no better than a wooden doll. It's all very well my torturing myself to reach the sublime heights of Bedlam, there's nothing doing. Will he laugh? Won't he laugh? That's what I'm reduced to wondering in the midst of my contortions, and you can imagine how such uncertainty undermines my talent. My lord hypochondriac, his head stuffed up inside a nightcap which comes right down over his eyes, looks like some kind of paralyzed puppet⁹¹ sitting in an armchair with a string attached to its chin dangling down all the way to the floor. You wait

for the string to be pulled, but no one pulls it, or, if the jaw does happen to open, it's to utter some distressing remark that reveals that your best efforts have gone unnoticed, and all your mimicry and monkeying around have been in vain. The remark is a reply to a question you asked him four days before; and once it's been uttered, the mastoid spring releases, and the jaw closes back up.

Then he began to do an impression of his man; he'd sat himself in a chair, head perfectly still, hat pulled down low, eyes half-closed, arms dangling, moving his jaw like an automaton, and saying: Yes, you are quite right, Mademoiselle, it needs a little refining there. The thing is, it gets to decide, it's always doing the deciding, and its decisions are always final, in the evening, in the morning, as it gets dressed, at dinner, at the café, at cards, at the theatre, at supper, in bed, and, I do believe, God forgive me, in the arms of its mistress. I'm not party to the latter decisions, but I'm damn tired of the rest of them. Miserable, indecipherable, and immovable, like destiny, that's what our boss is.

His opposite number is a stuck-up prude, with looks you could just about bring yourself to compliment as she's still got them, although she does have a few sores on her face here and there, and is gaining fast on Madame Bouvillon⁹² for sheer size. I love a nice bit of flesh myself, but there is such a thing as too much, and motion is an essential quality of matter, after all.⁹³ And another thing, she is nastier, prouder and sillier than a goose. And another thing, she thinks she's witty. And another thing, you have to convince her all the time that you think she's wittier than anyone else. And another thing, it has no idea about anything, and it also gets to decide things. And another thing, you have to applaud these decisions with your feet, as well as your hands, you have to jump for joy, be struck dumb with admiration: That's so wonderful, so exquisite, so beautifully expressed, so subtly observed, it shows such original feeling! How do women learn all that? Untutored, by sheer force of instinct, by natural insight alone: it seems miraculous. And then people come and sob to us about the beauties of experience, study, thought, education, and a whole load of other nonsense. Bowing ten times a day, one knee bent in front of the other, the other leg stuck out behind, arms outstretched towards the goddess, trying to read her every look, hanging on her every word, awaiting her command, and shooting off in a flash. What sort of a person is it who can subject themselves to such a role, if not the wretch who has no other way of appeasing the

torment of his intestines two or three times a week? What are we to make of the others, people like Palissot, Fréron, the Poinsets, Baculard,⁹⁴ who aren't even in need, and whose abject behaviour can't be excused by the rumblings of a suffering stomach?

ME – I'd never have taken you for such a stickler.

HIM – I'm not. When I was starting out, I would watch what the others were doing, and I would do the same, but better, because I am more openly brazen, a better actor, hungrier, and possessed of a better pair of lungs. Apparently, I am directly descended from the famous Stentor.⁹⁵

And to give me a proper idea of the strength of this organ, he began to clear his throat so violently that the café windows rattled and all the chess-players looked up.

ME – But what's the use of being able to do that?

HIM – Can't you guess?

ME – No, I'm a bit limited.

HIM – Imagine an argument in full swing and the outcome as yet undecided: up I get, and unleashing my thunder, I say: Mademoiselle is quite right. Now that's what I call good judgement. That really gives our pretty little wits something to think about. A genius couldn't put it any better. But you mustn't always show your approval in the same way. It'd be monotonous. You'd seem false. You'd become insipid. That can only be avoided with good judgement and constant inventiveness; you have to know how to pave the way for the major chords so that you can suddenly bring them in, grasping the opportunity at the right moment;⁹⁶ when, for instance, there is a difference of opinion, and the argument has reached its highest pitch, when you can't hear the sound of your own voice and everyone's talking at once, you've taken up a position on the side-lines, in the corner of the room the furthest away from the battlefield, you've kept quiet for a good long time so as to create maximum impact and suddenly you drop like a mortar bomb into the midst of the combatants. Nobody is more skilful at this than I am. But my most surprising skills are at the other end of the scale; I can produce tiny sounds which I accompany with a smile, an infinite variety of approving expressions; my nose, my mouth, my forehead, my eyes can

all come into play; I can bend my back with ease, I have a way of twisting my spine, of raising and lowering my shoulders, extending my fingers, inclining my head, closing my eyes and being awestruck as if I had just heard an angelic and divine voice coming down from heaven. That's what really flatters them. I am not sure you entirely appreciate the impact of this last pose. I am far from having invented it, but nobody has surpassed me in its execution. Look, look...

ME – It is true that that is unique.

HIM – Do you think there's a female brain alive with even the slightest touch of vanity that could hold out against it?

ME – No. I have to agree that you have taken the art of playing the fool and abasing yourself as far as it can go.

HIM – They can try as hard as they like for as long as they like but they'll never get as far. Even the best of them, Palissot, for instance, will never be more than a good apprentice. If the role can be fun at first, provided you can enjoy laughing at the stupidity of the people you're diverting, in the long run, the joke wears off; and besides, after you've invented a certain number of things, you end up having to repeat yourself. Thought and skill have their limits. Only God and a few rare geniuses can have careers that keep stretching out before them as they advance. Bouret⁹⁷ may be one such genius: some of the things he does seem to me – yes, even me – to be sublime strokes of genius. The little dog, the Book of Felicity, the torches lighting the way to Versailles are amongst those things which confound and humiliate me; it's enough to make me think there's no point carrying on with the profession.

ME – What do you mean, the little dog?

HIM – Where have you been all this time? What, seriously, you really don't know what this extraordinary man did to persuade his little dog to leave him for the Keeper of the Seals,⁹⁸ who'd taken a fancy to the creature?

ME – No I really don't, I admit.

HIM – Oh good. It's one of the most brilliant things anyone ever came up with; the whole of Europe marvelled at it, and there wasn't a courtier

alive who wasn't green with envy. You're not short of ideas, let's see what you'd have done in his place. Remember Bouret was adored by his dog; remember that the bizarre clothes the minister wore terrified the little animal; remember that Bouret only had a week to overcome these obstacles. You need to understand all the background to really appreciate how ingenious the solution was. So come on then!

ME – Oh I give up! I must confess that even the slightest thing of this kind is too much for me.

HIM – Listen then, he said, giving me a little slap on the shoulder, because he's familiar that way, listen and be amazed. He has a mask made that looks just like the Keeper of the Seals; he borrows the voluminous robe⁹⁹ from a valet. He covers his face with the mask. He puts on the robe. He calls his dog, he strokes him. He gives him a little biscuit.¹⁰⁰ Then all of a sudden, changing costume, he's no longer the Keeper of the Seals, he's Bouret calling his dog and whipping him. In under two or three days of doing this morning to night, the dog knows to run away from Bouret the Tax Farmer and run towards Bouret the Keeper of the Seals. But I'm being too kind, you don't believe in this sort of thing and so you don't deserve to be initiated into the mysteries of the miracles happening around you.

ME – Even so, I beg you, please, what about the book, the flaming torches?

HIM – No, no. Even the cobblestones know about them, so go and ask them; you should take advantage of happening to find yourself in my company to discover things that nobody knows apart from me.

ME – You're right.

HIM – Borrowing the Keeper of the Seals's robe and wig – I had forgotten the wig! Having a mask made to look like him! It's the mask I find so staggering. What's more, this man is held in the highest esteem; what's more, he has millions. There are people with the Cross of Saint-Louis¹⁰¹ who've got nothing to eat; so what's the point of going all out for a cross and risking a broken back, when you can choose a walk of life that doesn't put you in danger and is never without its recompense? Now that's what I call aiming high. But role models like these are depressing. You feel sorry for yourself, and you get discouraged. The mask! The mask! I'd give my little finger to have come up with the mask.

ME – But with such enthusiasm for brilliant things and such a fertile genius, haven't you invented anything yourself?

HIM – I beg your pardon; what about the way of doing an admiring bow which I told you about; I consider it to be mine, although my claim may be contested by the envious. I believe it may well have been in use before me; but who ever realized how well-suited it would be for having a secret laugh while bowing down before some upstart? I have over a hundred ways of setting up the seduction of a young girl, while in her mother's presence, without the latter realizing, and sometimes even turning her into an accomplice. I'd hardly started out in this career when I realized that all the common ways of slipping someone a love-letter were beneath me. I have ten different ways of forcing people to snatch them from me, and among those ways, I flatter myself that some of them are novel. I have a particular talent for encouraging shy young men; guided by me, even men as thick as two short planks and as ugly as sin have been successful. If it were ever written down, I believe people would acknowledge I had some genius.

ME – Doing you a singular honour.

HIM – I don't doubt it.

ME – If I were you, I'd get it all down on paper. It would be a pity if it were lost.

HIM – True; but you have no idea how unimportant I think method and instructions are. If you need a manual, you won't get very far. Geniuses read little, do a lot, and are their own creators. Look at Caesar, Turenne,¹⁰² Vauban,¹⁰³ the Marquise de Tencin, her brother the Cardinal and his secretary, the Abbé Trublet.¹⁰⁴ And what about Bouret? Who ever gave Bouret any lessons? No one. It's nature that forms these rare men. Do you think the dog and the mask is written down anywhere?

ME – But what about those wasted hours in the middle of the night when you can't sleep because your empty stomach is bothering you or your bloated stomach is troubling you so badly it keeps you awake...

HIM – I'll think about it. It's certainly better to write great things than perform small ones. That's when your soul takes wing, your imagination heats up, catches fire and blazes forth, whereas it shrivels up when it has

to express astonishment to the little Hus about the applause the stupid audience insists on lavishing on that simpering little Dangeville¹⁰⁵ whose acting is so flat, who walks about on stage practically bent double, whose particular affectation is to always look the person she's speaking to in the eye, but still underact, who thinks the way she grimaces is terribly subtle and the way she trots about is graceful; applause which it also lavishes on that booming Clairon who is more scrawny, affected, studied, and stilted than you could possibly imagine. That idiotic audience claps until it hurts¹⁰⁶ and does not realize what a mass of charms we are; it is true that the mass is increasing a bit, but what does that matter? We have the most beautiful skin, the most beautiful eyes, the prettiest little pouty mouth, not very tender, it's true, we're a little heavy on our feet, but not quite as clumsy as people say. When it comes to feeling, on the other hand, we're a cut above the rest.

ME – What do you mean? Are you being ironic or are you telling the truth?

HIM – The problem is that this wretched feeling is all inside, and not one glimmer gets out. But let me tell you because I know, I really do, that she has lots of feeling. Or if that's not precisely what it is, it's something like that. When we're in a bad mood, you should see how we treat the valets, how the chambermaids get slapped about, how we stick the boot in Old Casual Parts, whenever he fails to show us the respect we are due. She's a little fiend, I tell you, full of feeling and dignity... Look at you, you still can't make head or tail of it, can you?

ME – I admit I am completely unable to tell whether you're speaking in good faith or spreading wicked lies. I am a decent man; kindly have the decency to be more straightforward with me, and leave out the clever stuff.

HIM – That's the sort of thing we wheel out for the little Hus, about La Dangeville and La Clairon, along with a few words here and there that would tip you the wink. I'm happy for you to think I'm a waster but not a fool, for only a fool or a man madly in love could come out with such absurdities in all seriousness.

ME – But how can anyone bear to say such things?

HIM – It doesn't come easily at first, but bit by bit, you get there. *Ingenii largitor venter* [That teacher of art, that donor of talent – the belly].¹⁰⁷

ME – Your belly would really have to be grumbling to go that far.

HIM – That may well be. But, however egregious such things seem to you, believe you me, the people to whom they are addressed are far more used to hearing them than we are to venturing them.

ME – Is there anyone amongst you brave enough to agree with you?

HIM – What do you mean, anyone? It's what the whole of society says and feels.

ME – In which case those of you who aren't terrible wasters must be terrible fools.

HIM – Fools, us? I swear there's only one, and it's the man who rewards us for deceiving him.

ME – But how can anyone allow themselves to be taken in by such a cheap trick? Because it's not as if we don't know that La Dangeville and La Clairon are far more talented.

HIM – People can swallow whole any flattering lie, but the bitter truth only goes down in tiny drops. And besides, we look so convinced, so sincere!

ME – But surely you must have sinned against the principles of your art, and just once, by mistake, let slip one of those bitter and wounding truths, because I do believe, in spite of the wretched, abject, vile, abominable role you play, that, deep down, you possess a delicate soul.

HIM – Me? Not at all. I'll be damned if I know what I am, deep down. In general, my mind is as straight as a rule, and my character as honest as the day; never false when it's in my interest to be true, never true when it's in my interest to be false. I say whatever comes into my head: if there's any sense in it, so much the better; if it's absurd, nobody takes any notice. I take every opportunity to speak my mind. Never in my life have I reflected, before, during or after speaking. So I never give offence.

ME – But nonetheless that must have been what happened with those honest people you used to live with, and who were so kind to you.

HIM – What do you mean? It was bad luck, a bad moment – they happen in life. There's no such thing as uninterrupted felicity; I was having too

much of a good time; it couldn't go on. We have, as you know, more friends than anyone else and ours are the best. We are a school for humanity, we revive the hospitality of the Ancients. All those failed poets, we give them a home. We took in Palissot in the wake of his *Zara*,¹⁰⁸ Bret following *Le Faux Généreux* [*The False Benefactor*],¹⁰⁹ all the musicians who've been jeered at, all the authors no one reads, all the actresses who've been booed, all the actors who've been hissed at, a load of miserable rejects, dull parasites led by yours truly, brave chieftain of a faint-hearted flock. I'm the one who encourages them to eat the first time they come; I'm the one who gets them a drink. They hardly take up any space! Some of them are young men in tatters who don't know where to turn, but have a certain something; others are old leeches who fawn over their host and lull him into a stupor so that once he's finished, they can get at the hostess. We appear cheerful; but deep down, we are resentful and voracious. Wolves are not as hungry, nor tigers as cruel. We are as ravenous as wolves after the long winter snows; we rip to pieces anyone or anything that is at all successful. Sometimes the Bertin, Monsaige and Villemorien¹¹⁰ gangs get together, and that's when it gets really noisy in the zoo. You've never seen so many miserable, embittered, spiteful and ferocious beasts all in one place. You hear nothing but the names Buffon, Duclos, Montesquieu, Rousseau,¹¹¹ Voltaire, d'Alembert, Diderot, along with God knows what epithets. None shall have wit unless he be as foolish as thee and me.¹¹² That's where the play *Les Philosophes*¹¹³ was born; the scene with the man hawking books, that was mine, based on *La Théologie en quenouille* [*Theology Fallen into Female Hands*].¹¹⁴ You come in for just as much as the others.

ME – Good! Perhaps I'm being done a greater honour than I deserve. I'd be mortified if those people who say bad things about so many clever and honourable men took it upon themselves to say good things about me.

HIM – There are a lot of us, and we each have to pay our way. Once we've sacrificed the great beasts, we slaughter the rest of them.

ME – To attack knowledge and virtue for your living – that's pretty expensive bread.

HIM – I've already told you, we are people of no consequence. We insult everybody and upset nobody. Sometimes we are joined by that ponderous Abbé d'Olivet, that fat Abbé Leblanc,¹¹⁵ and Batteux,¹¹⁶ that hypocrite. The fat Abbé only starts to get nasty after dinner. Once he's had his coffee, he collapses into an armchair, puts his feet up against the fireplace, and falls

asleep like an old parrot on its perch. If things get too riotous, he yawns, stretches his arms, rubs his eyes and says: Well, now! What's happening, what's happening? – We're arguing about whether Piron¹¹⁷ is wittier than De Voltaire. – Let's be clear. You're talking about wit? Not taste, because where taste is concerned, Piron hasn't got a clue. – Hasn't got a clue? – No. And then we're off on a discussion about taste. And that's when the boss raises his finger to get our attention, because taste is what he really prides himself on. – Taste, says he... taste is something which... Good grief, I don't know what the something was, and neither did he.

Sometimes our friend Robbé joins us. He entertains us with his cynical stories, his eye-witness accounts of the Convulsionaries and their miracles,¹¹⁸ and a few cantos from the poem he's writing on a subject he knows all too well. I can't stand his verses, but I like hearing him recite them: he looks like a man possessed. Everyone around him exclaims: There's a real poet for you! Between you and me, that sort of poetry is nothing but a hullabaloo, a whole load of noises jumbled up, like the barbaric squawking coming from the Tower of Babel.

There's also this fellow who comes to visit: he looks dull and stupid, but he's got the devil of a wit and is sneakier than an old monkey.¹¹⁹ He's got one of those faces that's just asking to be made fun of and that you want to stick your tongue out at, and which God created in order to teach those who judge on appearances something they should already have realized from looking at themselves in the mirror, that is, that it is as easy to be a witty man and look like a fool as it is to conceal a fool beneath a witty physiognomy. There's nothing so common or so lazy as attacking a good man for the amusement of others. And this fellow is always on the receiving end. In fact, we set him as a trap for newcomers, and I've practically never seen anyone fail to fall into it.

I have on occasion been surprised at the accuracy of this madman's observations about men and characters, and I told him so.

The reason is, he replied, that there are rewards to be had from keeping bad company just as there are from following your fancies. You lose your innocence but the compensation is that you also lose your prejudices. If you live alongside wicked people, they show you their true face, and you learn what they're really like. Besides, I've done a bit of reading.

ME – What have you read?

HIM – I have read and am reading and forever re-reading Theophrastus, La Bruyère, and Molière.

ME – Those are indeed excellent books.

HIM – They're even better than people think; but who is capable of reading them?

ME – Everyone, according to their level of intelligence.

HIM – Hardly anybody then. Would you mind telling me what it is they're reading them for?

ME – Amusement and instruction.

HIM – But what sort of instruction? Because that's the point.

ME – Knowing what your duty is, loving virtue, hating vice.

HIM – What I take from them is what to do and what not to say. So when I read *L'Avare* [Molière's *The Miser*], I tell myself: be a miser if you like, but make sure you don't speak like one. When I read *Tartuffe*, I tell myself: be a hypocrite if you like, but make sure you don't speak like one. Hold onto any vices that you find useful, but don't sound or look as if you have these failings because they'd make you seem ridiculous. To protect yourself from sounding or looking as if you do, you have to know what they're really like, and these authors have portrayed them extremely well. I am myself and I remain myself, but I act and I speak according to the rules. I am not one of those people who despises the moralists; they've got a lot to offer, particularly the ones who show morality in action. Vice itself only occasionally causes harm, but a character displaying obvious signs of it causes permanent offence. Perhaps it would be better to be contemptuous than to have a contemptuous physiognomy; the contemptuous character is only insulting from time to time, whereas the contemptuous physiognomy is continuously insulting. And don't go thinking I am the only reader like this. The only merit I can claim for myself is that I have a system, based on clear thinking and rational, true observation, for doing what most people do instinctively. And that's why when they read, they are not improved any

more than I am; on the contrary, they carry on looking ridiculous; whereas I only look ridiculous when I want to, and then, I leave them far behind, because the skill which has taught me to escape ridicule when I need to, is the same skill which enables me to attract it to a remarkable degree. At such times, I draw on everything people have said, everything I've read, and add in everything I can call up from my inner fund which, when it comes to this sort of thing, is surprisingly fertile.

ME – I am glad you revealed these mysteries to me; otherwise, I would have thought you were being inconsistent.

HIM – No, I'm not; because if there are times when I have to avoid ridicule, fortunately there are hundreds more when I have to make sure I don't. There's no better role to play in the company of great men than the fool. The title of King's Fool was in existence for a long time, you know, whereas the title King's Wise Man never was. I myself am Bertin's fool, and lots of other people's fool too, maybe yours at the moment, or perhaps you're mine: a wise man wouldn't have a fool; a man with a fool is therefore not wise; if he's not wise, he is a fool; and perhaps, if he were king, he'd be his fool's fool. Besides, remember that when it comes to a subject as variable as morals, there are no absolute, essential or general rights or wrongs except the law of self-interest, according to which we must always be what it wants us to be, good or bad, wise or foolish, decent or ridiculous, honest or wicked. If virtue had happened to offer a route to fortune, I would have been virtuous or pretended to be, like everyone else. Ridiculous is what they wanted me to be, and so that's what I became; as for wicked, nature did that all by herself. When I say wicked, I'm speaking your language, for if we were ever to have it out, we might discover that what you call vice, I call virtue, and what you call virtue, I call vice.

We are also joined for dinner by the dramatists from the Opéra-Comique, their actors and actresses, and more often their managers, Corbi, Moette¹²⁰... all resourceful people of great merit.

And I was forgetting the great literary critics, *L'Avant-Coureur* [*The Herald*],¹²¹ *Les Petites Affiches* [*What's On*],¹²² *L'Année littéraire* [*The Literary Year*],¹²³ *L'Observateur littéraire* [*The Literary Observer*],¹²⁴ *Le Censeur hebdomadaire* [*The Weekly Critic*],¹²⁵ the whole clique of hacks.

ME – *L'Année littéraire! L'Observateur littéraire!* That's impossible; they hate each other.

HIM – True, but beggars can't be choosers. Damn that *Observateur littéraire*, him and his paper can go to hell! That stupid little dog of a priest,¹²⁶ with his penny-pinching, stinking, grasping ways, he's the one who caused my downfall. He appeared over our horizon yesterday for the first time; he arrived at the moment when we all come out of our dens: dinnertime. When it's raining, you're a lucky man if you've got the cab fare in your pocket. One of our number made fun of another for having arrived in the morning all spattered in mud and completely wet through, but when he went home in the evening, exactly the same thing happened to him. Someone else, I can't remember who it was now, got into a fight, a few months ago, with the shoe-cleaner from Savoy who'd set himself up outside our front door. They had set up a running account; the creditor wanted the debtor to settle up, and the latter was not in funds. Dinner is served,¹²⁷ the Abbé is guest of honour and is seated at the head. I come in, I see him. What's all this, Abbé, I said, are you presiding at this table? That's all very well for today, but tomorrow, you'll come down by one place, if you please, and the next day, by another one, and so on, from one place to the next, either down the left side or the right, until you reach the place I sat in once, where Fréron once sat after me, Dorat¹²⁸ once after Fréron, Palissot once after Dorat, until you come to a halt next to me, a poor useless bugger just like yourself, who *siedo sempre come un maestoso cazzo fra duoi coglioni*.¹²⁹ The Abbé, who's a genial old rogue, and who can take anything, started laughing. Mademoiselle, penetrated by the truth of my observation and the accuracy of my comparison, started laughing too; everyone sitting to the left and right of the Abbé and who'd been bumped down a notch by him, started laughing; by this time, everyone is laughing, except for Monsieur, who gets angry, and starts saying things to me which wouldn't have meant a thing if we'd been on our own: Rameau, you are an impertinent upstart. – I'm well aware of that, and it was on that basis that you took me on. – Scum. – No more than the next man. – A beggar. – Would I be here otherwise? – I'll have you kicked out. – After dinner, I'll go of my own accord. – I suggest you do. So we ate dinner; I ate up every last bit. Having eaten a lot and drunk more, after all that's what I'd have done anyway, Maestro Gastro¹³⁰ being someone I've never resisted, I made up my mind, and prepared to leave. I had given my word in front of so many people that I had no choice but to

keep it. I spent quite some time wandering around the room looking for my hat and cane in places where they couldn't possibly be, still hoping that the boss would come out with a fresh torrent of invective, that someone would step in, and we would finally be able to argue ourselves back together again. I walked round and round for an age, for I bore no grudge myself, but the boss was looking darker and more brooding than Homer's Apollo shooting his arrows at the Greek army;¹³¹ his cap even lower than usual, he paced up and down with his chin sunk on his fist.¹³² Mademoiselle comes up to me: But, Mademoiselle, what's so extraordinary about what I did today? Was I any different from how I normally am? – I want him out. – I will go; I didn't let him down. – I beg your pardon; Monsieur l'Abbé was our guest, and... – He brought it on himself by inviting the Abbé, and by letting me in, along with a whole load of spongers like me. – Come on, my little Rameau, go and ask Monsieur l'Abbé for his forgiveness. – I don't care about his forgiveness. – Come on now, come on, it'll all calm down... She takes me by the hand and drags me over to where the Abbé is sitting; I stretch out my arms, I gaze at the Abbé with a sort of admiration, for has anyone ever asked the Abbé for forgiveness before? Abbé, say I, Abbé, this is all quite ridiculous, is it not? And then I start laughing, and so does the Abbé. So that's me forgiven on that front, but now I've got the other one to deal with, and what I had to say to him was a whole other kettle of fish. I can't quite recall how I phrased my apology... Sir, here's our fool come to see you. – I've been finding him a bloody nuisance for too long now; I don't want to hear another word about him. – He's angry. – Yes, I am very angry. – He'll never do it again. – Until the next time. I don't know whether it was one of those days when he was in a bad mood and Mademoiselle is afraid to go near him, or has to treat him with kid gloves, or whether he didn't hear what I said properly, or whether I just didn't say it properly, but it was worse than before. Damn it! Doesn't he know me by now? Doesn't he know I'm like a child, and that sometimes I can't hold it in? And in any case, I don't believe I'd ever get a moment to myself, God forgive me, to let it out in private. Even a puppet made of steel would get worn out if its strings got pulled all day and all night. My job is to keep them from getting bored; that's the deal; but I've got to have some fun myself sometimes too. In the midst of all this hoohah, a dangerous thought flashed through my mind, a thought which puffed me up with pride and insolence: the thought that they couldn't do without me, that I was indispensable.

ME – Yes, I believe you are very useful to them, but they're even more useful to you. You wouldn't be able to find another situation in such a good household, even if you wanted to, because for every vacancy they've got for a fool, a hundred will come knocking.

HIM – A hundred fools like me! I can assure you, Mister Philosopher, they're not that common. Sure, there are plenty of basic fools. But stupidity is more demanding than talent or virtue. I am uncommon in my species, yes, very uncommon. Now they haven't got me anymore, what do you think they're doing with themselves? They'll be bored to death. I am an endless source of rude remarks. I was always ready with a quip that would make them weep with laughter, I was their own personal little Bedlam.

ME – And besides, you had bed and board, jacket and breeches, coat and shoes, and a monthly allowance.

HIM – Well, that's the upside and those are the advantages; but what you're not mentioning are the costs. For starters, if there was the slightest rumour of a new play, whatever the weather, I'd have to ferret around in all the garrets of Paris until I found the author, got hold of a copy, and gently hinted that one of the parts might be exactly right for someone I happened to know... And who might that be, if you don't mind saying? – Who might that be? You're so right to ask! She's the embodiment of grace, sweetness, and delicacy. – Do you mean Mademoiselle Dangeville? Do you know her, by any chance? – I do, a little, but it's not her. – Then who? I'd whisper her name. – Her! – Yes, her, I'd repeat, a little ashamed, for I do sometimes feel shame, and you should have seen how the poet's face fell at her name, and at other times how they laughed in my face. But whatever his reaction was, I'd have to bring my man along to dinner, and watch him trying to avoid making a commitment he'd regret, baulking at the idea, and thanking me all at once. You should've seen how they treated me when my negotiations didn't come off: I was an idiot, a fool, an oaf, I was completely useless; I wasn't even worth the water they gave me to drink. It was much worse when she was on stage, and I had to be brave and stand right in the middle of an audience that was booing loudly – and they are good judges, whatever anybody says – and clap loudly enough to be heard; have people stare at me, sometimes attract the catcalls instead of her, and hear people around me whispering: It's only because he's in the pay of the man

she's sleeping with. Won't that lout ever shut up?... They don't realize what drives a man to it; they suppose it's sheer ineptitude, but in fact, the reason behind it excuses everything.

ME – To the extent of disturbing the peace.

HIM – After a while, they knew who I was anyway, and they'd say: Oh! It's just Rameau. What I used to do was make a few snide remarks to stop them ridiculing my solitary applause, which they then interpreted as the opposite. You will accept that you'd need a powerful motive to brave such an assembled audience, and that every single one of these tasks was worth more than the pittance I was paid.

ME – Why didn't you call in reinforcements?

HIM – Sometimes I did, and I made a bit extra out of it. Before turning up at the scene of torment, I'd have to memorize where all the best speeches fell so as to make sure the others knew when to clap. If ever I forgot and came in at the wrong bit, I'd come home a nervous wreck; you've never heard such a rumpus. And then back at the house, there'd be the pack of dogs to look after; it's true that I'd stupidly taken this task upon myself; and then there were the cats I had to supervise, and I was only too pleased if *Kitty* deigned to use her claws on my cuffs or my hand. *Fluffy* is prone to colic; it's my job to rub her tummy. Mademoiselle used to have the vapours; these days, it's nerves. I won't even go into the other slight indispositions that they talk about quite freely in front of me. I let it go; I've never been one to censor. I read somewhere, I can't remember where, that a prince known as The Great, sometimes used to lean over the back of his mistress's privy. We make our familiars privy to our every movement, and back then, I can tell you, I was more familiar than anyone. I am the apostle of familiarity and of privy movements. I used to practice what I preached, without anyone taking offence; the only thing they could do was to let me get on with it. I've already sketched out the boss for you. Mademoiselle is beginning to get a bit heavy, and you should hear the funny stories they're telling about her.

ME – You're not one of those people, are you?

HIM – Why shouldn't I be?

ME – Because it's indecent, to say the least, to ridicule your benefactors.

HIM – But isn't it even worse to use your benefactions as a means of giving yourself the authority to humiliate your protégé?

ME – But if the protégé hadn't degraded himself all on his own, there'd be no way the protector could acquire that authority.

HIM – But if these characters hadn't made themselves ridiculous all on their own, there'd be no funny stories to tell. And anyway, is it my fault if they degrade themselves? And is it my fault, if, once they have degraded themselves, they get betrayed and cast aside? Once you resign yourself to living with the likes of us, if you've got any common sense, you'd better be prepared to be endlessly stabbed in the back. When they take us on, do they not see us for the self-interested, low-down, treacherous souls that we are? If they do, all's well with the world. There is a tacit agreement¹³³ that they will be good to us, and that sooner or later, we will repay them for it by doing them harm. Is this not the same agreement that exists between a man and his monkey or a man and his parrot? Brun¹³⁴ is going around screeching that Palissot, his companion and friend, has written some verses attacking him. Palissot had no choice but to write those verses, and it's Brun who's at fault. Poinciset is going around screeching that Palissot is blaming him for the verses Palissot wrote attacking Brun. Palissot had to blame Poinciset for the verses he wrote attacking Brun, and it's Poinciset who's at fault. Little Abbé Rey¹³⁵ is going around screeching that his friend Palissot has snatched his mistress from under him, when it was thanks to him that Palissot was even allowed through the front door in the first place. The point is that you should never allow a Palissot anywhere near your mistress, unless you're prepared to lose her; Palissot did what he had to do, and it's Abbé Rey who is at fault. David,¹³⁶ the bookseller, is going around screeching that his associate Palissot has been sleeping with his wife, or that he wanted to; and the wife of David the bookseller is going around screeching that Palissot is hinting to anyone who's interested that Palissot did sleep with her, whether Palissot had slept with her or not, which is difficult to be sure about, since the wife had no choice but to deny it, and it was quite within Palissot's power to hint at something which wasn't true. Whatever the truth of the matter, Palissot did what his role required of him, and it's David and his wife who are at fault. The same goes for Helvétius who's currently going around screeching that Palissot has represented him

on stage as a dishonest man, when Palissot still owes him the money he lent him to pay his doctor's bills, and to buy food and clothes.¹³⁷ What else should he have expected from a man who'd taken depravity to new depths, who'd make his friend renounce his religion for the hell of it,¹³⁸ who'd steal his associates' possessions, who lacks all faith, principles, and feeling, who's only after the money and will do whatever it takes to get it *per fas et nefas* [by hook and by crook] who measures his life in wicked deeds; and who has even represented himself on stage as a most dangerous scoundrel,¹³⁹ the outrageous cheek of which I don't think has ever been seen before or will ever be seen again. No. No, it is not Palissot, but Helvétius who's at fault. If you take a young man from the provinces to the zoo at Versailles, and he is stupid enough to stick his hand through the bars of the tiger or the leopard cage; and if he doesn't pull his arm away when the wild animal opens its jaws, whose fault is that? All of this is written down in the tacit agreement. Tough luck on anyone who didn't realise that that was how it worked, or had forgotten. With the help of this universal and sacred pact, I can defend anyone accused of wickedness, when in fact it's ourselves we should be accusing of stupidity. Yes, you, you fat Countess,¹⁴⁰ you're the one who's at fault when you surround yourself with what is known amongst people of your sort as specimens,¹⁴¹ and when these same specimens play nasty tricks on you, make you play nasty tricks on others, and lay you open to the indignant resentment of honourable people. Honourable people do what they must, and so do specimens, and you're the one who's at fault for welcoming them in. If Bertinhus¹⁴² had lived quietly and peacefully with his mistress; if they had been of honourable character and had therefore known honourable people; if they had surrounded themselves with men of talent, people well known for their virtue; if they spent time in each other's company, loving each other, and saying so in silence and seclusion, and then set aside a few of those precious hours for a small and select company of enlightened people; do you think we'd have told any stories about them at all, good or bad? So what did they get? What they deserved. They were punished for their carelessness; and we're just the ones appointed by Providence to stand in eternal judgement on the Bertins of the day,¹⁴³ us and people like us; our nephews in generations to come will stand in judgement on the Montsauges and the Bertins of the future. And yet while we are busy passing Providence's rightful judgement on stupidity, you are busy painting us as we are, and passing Providence's rightful judgement on us. What would you think of us if, with our filthy morals, we claimed we were in good standing with the public? That we were out of our minds.

And as for those who expect to have honest dealings with people who were born wicked and whose characters are vile and abject, are they being wise? Everything has to be paid for in this world. There are two public prosecutors, and one of them is at your door, punishing crimes against society; the other is nature herself. She is familiar with all those vices that escape the law. If you go in for debauchery and women, you'll get dropsy. If you're venal, you'll get consumption. If you invite rogues into your house and surround yourself with them, you'll be betrayed, made a fool of, and despised. The easiest thing to do is to resign yourself to the fairness of these judgements, say to yourself, fair enough; shake yourself down and mend your ways, or stay as you are, albeit in accordance with the aforementioned conditions.

ME – You're right.

HIM – And moreover, all those awful stories, they're not mine, I don't make them up; I just hawk them around. What I've heard is that a few days ago, at about five in the morning, there was a massive racket; all the bell-pulls were going; what you could hear was the strangled and stifled cries of a man who was suffocating: Help, help, I'm suffocating! I'm dying! These cries came from the boss's room. Everyone rushes in to help. Our fat creature who had lost her head, didn't know where she was and couldn't see straight, as does happen in such moments, continued with her pounding motion, raising herself on both hands as high as she could and letting the entire weight of her two to three hundred pounds come crashing down on top of his casual parts, at a speed of furious pleasure. We had a lot of trouble getting him out from underneath. What possessed such a little hammer to place itself beneath such a heavy anvil?

ME – You just can't resist a dirty joke. Let's change the subject. All the time we've been talking, there's been something I've been wanting to ask you.

HIM – What's been stopping you?

ME – I was afraid it might be indiscreet.

HIM – After what I've just told you, I can't imagine what secrets I could possibly have left.

ME – You are not in any doubt as to my judgement of your character, are you?

HIM – Not at all. In your eyes, I am an utterly abject, thoroughly despicable being, and that's what I am in my own eyes too sometimes, but not very often. I more usually congratulate myself on my vices than blame myself for them. You are more consistent in your contempt.

ME – True; but why would you reveal the depths of your moral turpitude to me?

HIM – You already knew most of it anyway, and I thought I stood to gain more than I'd lose if I told you the rest.

ME – How could that be, may I ask?

HIM – If there's one genre it's worth being sublime in, it's evil.¹⁴⁴ We'll spit in the face of a petty thief, but can't help admiring a great criminal – his courage astounds us and his atrocities make us shudder. We value unity of character in all things.

ME – But this admirable unity of character, you don't yet have it. I think you yourself waver from time to time with respect to your principles. It is unclear whether you were born naturally wicked or whether you learnt it, and indeed, whether your learning has taken you as far as it might.

HIM – I agree, but I've done my level best. Have I not had the modesty to acknowledge that there are beings more perfect than myself? Have I not sung Bouret's praises? Bouret is, to my mind, the most admirable man in the world.

ME – But just beneath him, it's you?

HIM – No.

ME – So it's Palissot?

HIM – It is Palissot, but not Palissot alone.

ME – And who is worthy of sharing second place?

HIM – The Renegade of Avignon.¹⁴⁵

ME – I've never heard of this Renegade of Avignon, but he must be a very remarkable man.

HIM – Indeed he is.

ME – I have always been fascinated by the lives of great men.

HIM – I can well believe it. This one lived with a good and honest man, one of the descendants of Abraham, father of the faithful, whose seed was promised to him numberless as the stars.

ME – You mean, with a Jew?

HIM – Yes, with a Jew. The Renegade had initially managed to inspire him with compassion, then with kindness, and finally with complete confidence; for that's the way it always goes: we value our good deeds so highly that we rarely keep a secret from those to whom we give generously. How can you possibly expect there not to be lots of ungrateful scroungers when the temptation is there and they can get away with it? This is an important consideration which didn't occur to our Jew. He confided in the Renegade that his conscience would not let him eat pork. You will soon see what an inventive mind did with a confession like this. A few months went by in which our Renegade became increasingly affectionate. Once he believed his attentions had so thoroughly moved, ensnared, and convinced his Jew that he had no better friend in all the tribes of Israel, then... Admire the lengths the man went to. He doesn't rush it. He lets the pear ripen before shaking the branch. If he'd been too keen, the whole plan could have fallen through. The point is that, ordinarily, greatness of character is the natural result of two or more opposing qualities balancing each other out.¹⁴⁶

ME – Leave out the musings, and get on with the story.

HIM – That's just not possible. There are some days when I have to muse. It's a disease which has to be allowed to run its course. Where was I?

ME – The Jew and the Renegade were already intimate friends.

HIM – So the pear was ripe... But you're not listening, what are you thinking about?

ME – I'm thinking about how unequal your tone is, sometimes lofty, sometimes low.

HIM – Can a wicked man keep to a single tone? The Renegade turns up one evening at his friend's house, looking terrified, hardly able to speak, shaking all over, looking like death. – What's wrong? – We are done for. – Done for, how? – Done for, I tell you; there's no way out. – Tell me what you're talking about. – Give me a moment to recover. – Of course, take your time, said the Jew instead of saying: You are a liar and a crook, I don't know what you've got to tell me, but you're a liar and a crook; and all this terror is an act.

ME – And why should he have said that to him?

HIM – Because he was false and because he'd overdone it.¹⁴⁷ It's perfectly clear to me, and don't interrupt me anymore. – We are done for, done for, there's no way out! Can't you hear how affected all this repetition of 'done for' is? A traitor has reported us to the Holy Inquisition, you as a Jew and me as a renegade, a vile renegade. See how the traitor doesn't blush to use the most odious expressions. It takes more courage than you might think to say out loud what you really are. You have no idea how hard it is to do that.

ME – No, I don't. But what about this vile Renegade?...

HIM – He's duplicitous, but his duplicity is extremely clever. The Jew takes fright, tears his beard, flings himself to the ground, sees the guards already at the door and himself in a sanbenito¹⁴⁸ with his sacrificial pyre¹⁴⁹ ready and waiting. – My friend, my dear friend, my only friend, what shall we do? – Do? Go out in public, pretend not to have a care in the world, behave as if nothing was wrong. The tribunal works in secret, but at least it's slow. We must make use of this time to sell up. I'll go and hire a ship or get someone else to do it for us; yes, a third party, that would be best. We'll stow your wealth on it, because it's your wealth they're really after; and we shall sail away, you and I, to a far-off land where we will be free to serve our God and follow the law of Abraham and our conscience. The crucial thing, given our perilous situation, is not to do anything rash. – It was no sooner said than done. The ship is hired and stocked with provisions and sailors. The Jew's wealth is on board. Tomorrow at the break of day, they'll set sail. They'll be able to have their meals in peace and sleep soundly.

Tomorrow, they escape their persecutors. During the night, the Renegade gets up, relieves the Jew of his wallet, purse, and jewels, boards the ship, and off he goes. And if you think that's the end of it, well, just you wait and see. When I first heard this story, I worked out what was really going on, but I've kept it from you to see how sharp you are. You were right to be an honourable man because you'd have been a lousy crook. So far, the Renegade is nothing more than that. He's a contemptible little cheat whom nobody would want to resemble. What's truly sublime about his wickedness is that his good friend, the Israelite, really had been denounced, and it was the Renegade who had done it. The Holy Inquisition came for the Jew the next morning, and put him on a nice, big bonfire a few days later. And that's the story of how the Renegade came to enjoy the fortune of this accursed descendant of those who crucified Our Lord.

ME – I don't know what I find more horrific, the wickedness of your Renegade, or the way you talk about it.

HIM – But that's the point: the atrocity of his actions takes you beyond contempt, and that's why I am perfectly sincere in my admiration. I wanted you to know how brilliant I am at my art, to compel you to admit that at least I have an original way of degrading myself, to make you think of me as the latest in a long line of glorious good-for-nothings, and proclaim: *Vivat Mascarillus, fourbum imperator* [Long live Mascarillus, Master Trickster]. Come on, Mister Philosopher, make it joyful, all together now: *Vivat Mascarillus, fourbum imperator*.

And at that, he began to sing a fugue, a thoroughly singular one. At times, the melody was serious and full of majesty, at others, light and playful; one moment, he was imitating the bass, the next, the top parts; he would stretch out his arm and neck to show when to hold a note, performing and composing his own triumphal march, and showing he knew more about good music than good morals.¹⁵⁰

I wasn't sure, for my part, whether I should stay or run away, laugh or get angry. I stayed, with the aim of bringing the conversation round to some subject that would clear my soul of the horror that was overwhelming it. I was beginning to find it hard to bear the presence of a man who could talk about a horrendous deed, a hideous crime in the same way as a connoisseur of painting or poetry would examine the beauties of a work of art, or as a

moralist or a historian would bring out and highlight the details of a heroic deed. I became sombre despite myself. He noticed, and said:

HIM – What's the matter? Are you feeling ill?

ME – A bit, but it'll pass.

HIM – You have the worried air of a man tormented by some distressing idea.

ME – Exactly.

We were both silent for a while, during which time he walked up and down, whistling and singing. To get him to talk about his talent again, I said: What are you working on at the moment?

HIM – Nothing.

ME – That must be very tiring.

HIM – As if I wasn't already feeling low enough, I went to hear that music by Duni¹⁵¹ and our other young tunesters, and it really finished me off.

ME – So you approve of this genre, do you?

HIM – Certainly.

ME – And you can hear beauty in these new kinds of song?¹⁵²

HIM – Can't I just! By God, I can, I swear. You should hear how they sing the words! How true it feels! How expressive!

ME – All imitative arts have their model in nature. What model does the musician choose when he writes a song?

HIM – Why don't we start with a more fundamental question? What is song?

ME – I confess this question is beyond me. And so it is for all of us. We have nothing in our memory but words, which we think we understand because we use them frequently and sometimes even accurately; and nothing in

our minds but vague notions.¹⁵³ When I say the word 'song', I don't have any clearer notion than people like you do when they say reputation, guilt, honour, vice, virtue, modesty, decency, shame, ridicule.

HIM – Song is the imitation of a scale, either invented by art or inspired by nature, whichever you prefer, using either vocal or instrumental sound to imitate either physical noises or emotional accents; and you'll see that if you just replace a few of the terms in this definition, it would also apply to painting, eloquence, sculpture and poetry.¹⁵⁴ Now, to come to your question, what's the model for either the instrumentalist or the singer? The model is declamation, if the model's model is living and thinking; the model is noise, if the model's model is inanimate. We should consider declamation as one line, and song as another line, winding its serpentine way¹⁵⁵ around the first. The more confident and true the declamation, which in itself is a type of song, the more frequently the song line following it will cross back and forth: the truer the song will be, and the more beautiful. And that's what our young musicians have instinctively felt. When we hear: *Je suis un pauvre diable* [I am a poor devil], we recognise a miser's lament; if he weren't singing it, he would entrust his gold to the earth in the very same tones, and say: *O terre, reçois mon trésor* [O Earth, receive my treasure].¹⁵⁶ And that young girl, her heart beating fast, blushing, getting flustered, and begging His Lordship to let her go, would she express herself any differently? In these works, there are all sorts of characters, infinite varieties of declamation. This is sublime, I assure you, and I should know. You must go and hear the piece in which the young man feeling his life slipping away, cries out: *Mon cœur s'en va!* [My heart is departing!]¹⁵⁷ Listen to the singing; listen to the way the parts fit together; and then tell me if there's any difference between the way a man who's really dying speaks, and the shaping of this song.¹⁵⁸ You'll see whether the line of the melody exactly coincides with the line of the declamation or not. I'm not talking about beat or time, which is another necessary component of song, I'm only talking about expression, and there's nothing clearer than the following saying which I've read somewhere:¹⁵⁹ *Musices seminarium accentus*, accent is the seedbed of melody. This tells you how difficult and how important it is to know how to do recitative well. There's no fine aria that can't be turned into a fine piece of recitative, and no fine piece of recitative that a talented man can't draw a fine aria out of.¹⁶⁰ I wouldn't want to claim that someone who can declaim well will also sing well; but I'd be surprised if

someone who sings well wasn't able to recite well. And you should believe everything I'm telling you, because it's the truth.

ME – I should like nothing better than to believe you, only there's a slight problem holding me back.

HIM – And that problem is?

ME – That if this sort of music is sublime, then the music of the divine Lulli,¹⁶¹ of Campra,¹⁶² Destouches,¹⁶³ Mouret, and even, between you and me, dear uncle's, must be rather flat.

HIM, coming over and whispering in my ear, said: – I wouldn't want to be overheard, as there are lots of people here who know me, but the thing is, you're right, it really is. It's not that I'm concerned about dear uncle, since we're calling him 'dear'. He's a stone. I could have my tongue hanging down to the ground with thirst, and he still wouldn't give me a glass of water. But it's all very well him doing his octaves and sevenths, with his la, la; fa, fa; tra, tra, tra, tralala,¹⁶⁴ and making a devil of a racket; but those people who know anything about it, and who therefore no longer mistake cacophony for music, will never want to listen to it again. It should be forbidden by order of the police for anyone of any quality or status to arrange a performance of Pergolesi's *Stabat Mater*.¹⁶⁵ This *Stabat* should have been burnt by the public executioner. Good God, these wretched Italians with their opera buffa, their *Servante Maîtresse* [*The Servant Turned Mistress*],¹⁶⁶ their *Tracollo*,¹⁶⁷ have really bugged us up the arse. In the past, pieces like *Tancrède*,¹⁶⁸ *Issé*,¹⁶⁹ *Europe galante*,¹⁷⁰ *Les Indes*,¹⁷¹ and *Castor*¹⁷² or *Les Talents lyriques*,¹⁷³ used to run for four, five, six months. There was no end to the performances of a piece like *Armide*.¹⁷⁴ Now that's all come tumbling down like a house of cards. And so Rebel and Francœur¹⁷⁵ are erupting in flame and fury. They're saying it's all over, that they're ruined, and that if we allow the rabble from the fairground theatres to carry on with their caterwauling, then our national music is doomed, and the Royal Academy down its back passage might as well shut up shop. There's something in this. All the old fogeys who've been coming along every Friday for thirty or forty years, instead of enjoying it like they did in the past, are now yawning in boredom without quite knowing why.¹⁷⁶ They're wondering what's gone wrong, and they haven't got an answer. Why don't they come to me? Duni's prophecy will be fulfilled, and at this rate, I'll bet my life that



four or five years after *Le Peintre amoureux de son modèle* [*The Painter in Love with his Model*],¹⁷⁷ there won't be any bums on any seats down that famous passage.¹⁷⁸ These good people, they've given up their own symphonies to play the Italian symphonies instead. They supposed their ears would get used to listening to them and that it'd have no effect on their vocal music,¹⁷⁹ as if instrumental music weren't to song, depending on how much free play the range of the instrument and the nimbleness of the fingers allow, what song is to actual speech.¹⁸⁰ It's not as though the violin doesn't ape the human voice, although one day, if difficulty takes the place of beauty, the human voice will ape the violin.¹⁸¹ The first person to play Locatelli was the apostle of the new sort of music. Every age has its own apostle. We'll get used to hearing the accents of passion or the phenomena of nature being imitated in song, voice, and instrument, for that's all music really aims to do, and you're telling me we'll keep our taste for flights, spears, glories, triumphs, victories?¹⁸² *Va-t'en voir s'ils viennent, Jean* [Pull the other one, John].¹⁸³ They imagined they could laugh or cry at scenes of comedy or tragedy, set to music, that their ears could hear the accents of fury, hatred, jealousy, the true laments of love, the ironies and jokes of Italian and French theatre, and that they'd still admire *Ragonde*¹⁸⁴ and *Platée*.¹⁸⁵ I swear that's what they thought, they'd believe anything, the fools: they even thought they'd be able to experience how easily, how smoothly, how subtly the Italian language, with its harmony, prosody, ellipses, and inversions, lends itself to the art, movement, expression and phrasing of song, as well as to tempo, and that they would remain unaware of how stiff, deaf, hefty, heavy, pedantic, and monotonous their own language is.¹⁸⁶ Oh yes, yes indeed! They were convinced that after having cried along with a mother grieving for her son, and trembled at a tyrant ordering a murder, they would not be bored by all their whimsical fairyland, their insipid mythology, their sickly little madrigals¹⁸⁷ which are as much a mark of the bad taste of the poet as they are of the poverty of the art which finds them acceptable. Oh good people! That didn't happen and it was never going to. The true, the good, and the beautiful will always have their way.¹⁸⁸ We can argue with them all we like, but we end up admiring them. If art doesn't bear their hallmark, we'll admire it for a while, but it'll end up making us yawn. Yawn away, gentlemen, yawn away at your leisure. Don't hold back. Nature and my Trinity are quietly establishing their empire, and the gates of hell will never be strong enough to withstand my Trinity: the True, which is the Father and engenders the Good, which is the Son who creates the Beautiful, which

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is the Holy Spirit. The foreign god humbly goes to sit down next to the local idol on the altar; bit by bit, he grows stronger; and one fine day, he gives his companion a little shove, and booboom, down the idol falls.¹⁸⁹ That's how they say the Jesuits planted Christianity in China and the Indies. And the Jansenists can say what they like, but this way of doing politics, which achieves its goal without making a stir, without any bloodletting, without creating martyrs, without so much as a tuft of hair being pulled out, seems the best to me.¹⁹⁰

ME – There's some sense, more or less, in everything you've just said.

HIM – Sense! Just as well. I'll be damned if that's what I was aiming at. I just say whatever comes to me. I'm like the musicians of the Back Passage, when my uncle turned up. If I hit the mark, it's because the coal boy will always explain his trade better than a whole academy and all the Duhamels¹⁹¹ in the world.

And off he goes, walking up and down, making guttural humming noises to the tunes of *L'Île des fous* [*The Island of Fools*],¹⁹² *Le Peintre amoureux de son modèle*,¹⁹³ *Le Maréchal-ferrant* [*The Blacksmith*], *La Plaideuse* [*The Lady Litigant*],¹⁹⁴ and occasionally he would raise his hands and look up to the skies, and exclaim: Is it beautiful? Good grief! Is it beautiful? How can you have two ears on your head and ask such a question? He started getting all impassioned and singing softly. He got louder the more impassioned he became; next came the gestures, the grimaces, and the bodily contortions; and I said: Here we go, he's lost his head, and we'll be seeing some new scene any minute now, and in fact, he immediately lets rip: *Je suis un pauvre misérable* [I am a poor wretch]¹⁹⁵ ... *Monseigneur, monseigneur, laissez-moi partir* [Your Lordship, Sir, please let me leave]... *O terre, reçois mon or, conserve bien mon trésor* [O Earth, receive my gold, keep my treasure safe]... *Mon âme, mon âme, ma vie! O terre!* [My soul, my soul, my life! O Earth!]... *Le voilà le petit ami, le voilà le petit ami!* [Here he comes, the likely lad, here he comes, the likely lad], *Aspettare e non venire* [Wait and do not come]... *A Zerbina penserete* [Zerbina always on your mind]... *Sempre in contrasti con te si sta* [I never know where I am with you].¹⁹⁶ He piled up and mixed together thirty tunes, Italian, French, tragic, comic, with lots of different characters;¹⁹⁷ at points, he would descend to the depths of the underworld in a low baritone, at others, he would go right up high in a glass-shattering fake falsetto, mimicking the different

singing roles in the way he walked, held himself, and gestured; by turns furious, soothed, imperious, sneering. Now he's a young girl weeping, and he acts out her every simpering move; now he's a priest, he's a king, he's a tyrant, he threatens, he commands, he loses his temper; he's a slave, he obeys. He calms down, he is sorry, he complains, he laughs; never a false note, never out of time, always capturing the meaning of the words and the character of the music. All the pawn-pushers had left their chessboards and gathered round him. The café windows were crammed with passers-by who had stopped to see what the noise was. The laughter was loud enough to bring the ceiling down. He was completely oblivious; he carried on, in the grip of a fit of mental alienation, of enthusiasm so close to madness as to make it uncertain whether he'd ever emerge from it, or whether we oughtn't throw him in a cab and have him taken straight to Bedlam,¹⁹⁸ while singing a passage from Jomelli's *Lamentations*.¹⁹⁹ He performed the most beautiful sections of each piece with extraordinary precision, truth, and intensity; that beautiful passage of accompanied recitative²⁰⁰ when the prophet describes the devastation of Jerusalem had him and everyone watching in floods of tears. It had everything, exquisite singing, powerful expression, and great sorrow. He emphasised those places where the composer had displayed particular mastery; if he abandoned the sung part, it was so as to pick up the instrumental line, which he would then suddenly drop to go back to the voice, weaving the two together in such a way as to respect the relation between each of the parts as well as the unity of the whole; capturing our souls and keeping them suspended in the strangest state I have ever experienced... Was it admiration? Yes, it was! Was I moved? Yes, I was, but these feelings were tinged with ridicule, and it transformed their nature.²⁰¹

But you would have roared with laughter at the way he impersonated the different instruments. The horns and bassoons, he did puffing his cheeks up like balloons, and making hoarse, low sounds; he made a piercing, nasal noise for the oboes; his voice catapulting up and down at incredible speed, he did as close an imitation of the strings as he could; he whistled the piccolos and cooed the flutes; shouting, singing, charging about like a madman, single-handedly doing the dancers, both male and female, the singers, both male and female, a whole orchestra, a whole opera company, dividing himself between twenty different roles; running around, suddenly stopping and looking like a man possessed, his eyes blazing, foaming at the mouth. It was boiling hot in there, and the sweat

running along the furrows in his brow and down his cheeks got some hair powder mixed in with it, and streamed down and streaked the top of his coat. What did I not see him do? He wept, he laughed, he sighed; he gazed tenderly or serenely or intensely; he was a woman, overcome with sorrow; he was an unfortunate man, giving in to despair; he was a temple going up; birds falling silent at sunset; water burbling in a cool and solitary grove, or gushing forth in torrents from the mountain tops; a storm, a tempest, the cries of those about to perish, together with the howling of the wind and the crashing of the thunder; he was night in all its darkness, he was shadow and silence, for even silence can be painted in sound.²⁰² He had completely lost his head. Worn out with exhaustion, like a man emerging from a long sleep or from deep concentration, he was unable to move, he was stupefied, stunned. He kept on looking around, like a man lost and trying to work out where he was. He waited for his strength and wits to come back; he kept mechanically wiping his face. Like a man who wakes up and sees a large number of people grouped round his bed, and who has completely forgotten or never known what he has been doing, he immediately exclaimed: Oh hello, gentlemen, what's going on? Why are you laughing and looking so surprised? What's going on? And then he added: Now that's what we ought to call music and being a musician! Nevertheless, gentlemen, there's no need to despise all of Lulli. I challenge you to improve on the *Ah! j'attendrai* [Ah! I'll wait for you]²⁰³ scene without changing the words. There's not even any need to despise all of Campra, nor my uncle's violin tunes, nor his gavottes, nor the bits where the soldiers, priests, and high priests all come on... *Pâles flambeaux, nuit plus affreuse que les ténèbres* [Pale torches, more hideous than the shadows]²⁰⁴ ... *Dieu du Tartare, Dieu de l'oubli* [God of Tartarus, God of oblivion]²⁰⁵ ... At this point, his voice swelled; he held the notes; the neighbours came to their windows; we stuck our fingers in our ears. He added: This is when you need really good lungs, proper organs, some serious air capacity. But before you know it, it's goodbye to Assumption Day; Lent and Epiphany are long gone.²⁰⁶ They don't yet know what to set to music or what will suit composers. Lyric poetry is yet to be born. But they'll get there if they listen to enough Pergolesi, Hasse the Saxon,²⁰⁷ Terradellas,²⁰⁸ Traetta,²⁰⁹ and the rest,²¹⁰ if they read enough Metastasio,²¹¹ they'll get there in the end.

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ME – What! Are you saying that Quinault, La Motte, Fontenelle²¹² didn't have a clue?

HIM – Not when it comes to the new style.²¹³ No six lines together in any of their charming poems could be set to music. They are ingenious maxims, light, tender and delicate madrigals, but if you want to know how unproductive they are for our art, which is the most violent of them all, not excepting Demosthenes's, get someone to recite those passages to you, and you'll see how cold, languishing, monotonous they are. That's because they haven't got anything, which could serve as a model for song. I'd sooner have to set to music La Rochefoucauld's *Maxims* or Pascal's *Pensées*.²¹⁴ It's for the animal cry of passion to dictate the line we should take. These expressions need to come thick and fast; the phrasing needs to be tight; the meaning cut off, left hanging; the composer needs to be able to freely arrange the whole and each of the parts, to leave out or repeat it, to add what he feels is missing, to twist it and turn it inside out like a polyp, without destroying it; all of which makes French lyric poetry much harder than languages that use inversion, which do these things all by themselves... *Cruel barbarian, plunge your dagger into my breast. I am ready for the fatal blow. Strike. Don't be afraid... Ah! I am fading, I am dying... A secret fire inflames my senses... Cruel love, what do you want from me?... Do not deprive me of that sweet tranquillity that gave me such delight... Bring me back from madness...*²¹⁵ These passions need to be strong; the composer and the lyric poet must be capable of the highest emotional pitch. The tune is almost always the culmination of the scene. We need exclamations, interjections, half-finished or broken-off phrases, affirmations, negations; we appeal, we invoke, we shout, we moan, we weep, we laugh out loud. None of that wit, none of those epigrams, none of those dainty thoughts. That's all too far removed from the simplicity of nature. So don't go thinking that the way actors move and speak on stage could serve as a model. Not at all! It needs to be more energetic, less mannered, more truthful. Simple speeches, the shared voices of passion are all the more important when the language is monotonous and unaccented. The animal or human cry gives it its accent.

While he was telling me all this, the people who had crowded round us, who had either not understood or not been interested in what he was saying, given that children, like adults, and adults, like children, would always rather have fun than learn anything, had moved away; everyone had gone back to their games; and we were back by ourselves in our corner. Sitting on a banquette, his head leaning against the wall, his arms dangling, his eyes half open, he said: I don't know what's the matter with me; when

I got here, I was refreshed and on form, whereas now I'm shattered and broken as if I'd just run ten leagues. It came over me quite unexpectedly.

ME – Would you like something to drink?

HIM – Very much so. I feel completely shattered. All my strength is gone; and I have a bit of a pain in my chest. This happens to me almost every day and I don't know why.

ME – What can I get you?

HIM – Whatever you fancy; I don't mind; beggars can't be choosers.

We order beer and lemonade. He pours himself two or three large glassfuls and downs them one after another. Then, like a man coming back to life, he coughs loudly, stretches, and says: But in your opinion, Milord Philosopher, is it not rather odd that a foreigner, an Italian, one Duni, should be the one to come and teach us how to put accents into our music,²¹⁶ how to make our singing obey movement, tempi, interval, declamation, without harming the prosody? It really shouldn't have been all that difficult. Anyone who'd ever heard a beggar in the street asking for money, a man in a rage, a jealous and furious woman, a lover in despair, a flatterer, yes, a flatterer, sweetening his tone, pouring honey on his every syllable, in a word, anyone who'd ever heard the voice of passion, any passion, so long as it had energy enough to serve as a worthy model for the composer, should have noticed two things: firstly, that the syllables, whether they're long or short, have no fixed duration and no predetermined relationship between their durations; secondly, that passion can arrange prosody almost as it wishes; thirdly, that it can jump huge intervals, and that the man who cries out when his pain is at its most intense: Oh! Woe is me!, is taking the exclamatory syllable up to the highest, most acute pitch, and the others down to the lowest and deepest pitch, jumping an octave or an even bigger interval, and giving each sound the quantity that best suits the turn of the melody, without being offensive to the ear, and without either the long or the short syllable retaining the length or brevity they have when calmly uttered. How far we've come since the time we used to hold up the incidental remark in *Armide: Le vainqueur de Renaud, Si quelqu'un le peut être* [Renaud's conqueror, If anyone can be];²¹⁷ the line in *Les Indes galantes: Obéissons sans balancer* [We should obey without hesitating],²¹⁸ as marvels of

musical declamation! Nowadays, such marvels make me shrug they're so pathetic. The rate this art is moving forward, I can't imagine what the final result will be. Meanwhile, let's have a drink.

He downs two, three, without realizing what he was doing. He would have carried on and drowned himself without realizing, he was so exhausted, if I hadn't removed the bottle he was absent-mindedly reaching out for. So then I said:

ME – How can it be that you have such insight, such a delicate sensibility when it comes to the beauties of musical art, and yet be so blind to things of beauty when it comes to morals, so indifferent to the charms of virtue?

HIM – It's because apparently there's this sense I don't have, a fibre I wasn't given, a loose fibre you can pluck all you want, it still won't vibrate; or perhaps it's that I've always lived with good musicians and bad people; with the result that I have developed a very finely tuned ear, but my heart is tone deaf.²¹⁹ And then race also has something to do with it. My father's blood and my uncle's blood are the same blood. My blood is the same as my father's. The paternal molecule was hard and obtuse, and that accursed first molecule has absorbed everything else.

ME – Do you love your child?

HIM – Do I, the little savage! I'm mad about him.

ME – Won't you want to do everything you possibly can to impede the progress of the accursed paternal molecule?

HIM – Any effort I'd make, would, I think, be a complete waste of time. If he's meant to become a good man, I won't put anything in his way. But if the molecule wanted him to be a waster like his father, any trouble I might have gone to to turn him into an honourable man would turn out to be very damaging to him: since his education would be forever going against the bent of the molecule, he'd be pulled in two opposing directions at once, and would zigzag his way through life, as I've seen so many do, and they're all as inept as each other in their attempts to be either great men or great criminals; they're what we call species, that most daunting of epithets, because it signals mediocrity, and is the ultimate mark of contempt. A great waster is a great waster, but is not a sort of species.²²⁰ Before the paternal

molecule managed to reassert itself and guide him to the same state of consummate abjection that I have attained, he'd need endless amounts of time; and he'd have passed his prime. I'm not doing anything about it at the moment, I'm just letting him get on with it. I'm keeping an eye on him. He is already greedy, duplicitous, thieving, lazy, and a liar. I fear it runs in the family.

ME – And will you make a musician of him as well to complete the resemblance?

HIM – A musician! A musician! Sometimes I look at him and grind my teeth, and say to myself: if you ever learn so much as a single note, I do believe I'll wring your neck.

ME – And why would that be, may I ask?

HIM – Because it gets you nowhere.

ME – It gets you everywhere.

HIM – Yes, if you excel at it; but who can be sure his child will excel? It's ten thousand to one he'll never be any good and will just saw away at the strings, like I do. Do you realise that it might be easier to find a child able to govern a kingdom and be a great king than to find one who could ever become a great violinist!

ME – I would say that a man able to please others with his talents, mediocre though they might be, will go far and fast in a country without morals, sunk in depravity and luxury. Believe you me, I overheard the following conversation between some species of patron and some species of protégé.²²¹ The latter had been introduced to the former as an obliging man likely to be able to help him: – Monsieur, what can you do? – I'm fairly good at mathematics. – In that case, teach mathematics; and after having pounded the streets of Paris in all weathers for ten or twelve years, you'll be able to command four hundred pounds a year. – I have studied jurisprudence and am well versed in the law. – If Puffendorf and Grotius²²² were to come back to life, they'd die of hunger on the roadside. – I know a lot about history and geography. – Were there any parents truly devoted to their children's education, your fortune would be made; but there aren't. – I'm quite a good musician. – Why didn't you say so in the first place? And to give you some

idea of how well you can do out of that talent, I have a daughter. Come along every day from seven-thirty to nine in the evening, give her a lesson, and I will give you twenty-five louis a year. You'll have lunch, dinner, tea, and supper with us. The rest of the day will be yours to do with what you like.

HIM – And this man, what became of him?

ME – If he'd been wise, he'd have made his fortune, which appears to be the only thing you have in view.

HIM – No doubt about it. Gold, gold. Gold is everything; and without it, the rest is nothing. And therefore, instead of stuffing his head with fine maxims, which he'd need to forget for fear of ending up no better than a beggar, if ever I have a louis, which doesn't happen very often, I plant myself squarely in front of the child. I take the louis out of my pocket. I show it to him admiringly. I look up to heaven. I kiss the louis in front of him. And to make him really understand the importance of the sacred coin, I make my voice tremble when I point out all the things you can buy with it, a fancy jerkin, a fancy cap, a tasty cake. Then I put the louis in my pocket, strut around with pride; I lift my coat-tails; I pat my purse; and that's how I make it clear to him that it's only the louis I've got in there that gives me this confidence.

ME – It couldn't be done better. But if one day, his profound conviction of the louis's value were to mean that...

HIM – I see what you're saying. One must turn a blind eye. There's no moral principle that doesn't have its downside. At worst, it'd be a bad fifteen minutes, and then it'd all be over.²²³

ME – Even after having heard such brave and wise views, I persist in believing that it'd be good to make a musician of him. I know of no quicker way of getting close to the great and powerful, of serving their vices and profiting from one's own.

HIM – True; but I have some plans that guarantee rapid results. Oh! If only he were a girl! But you don't always get what you want, you have to take what comes and make the best of it, and not do what most fathers stupidly do, which, if they'd given a moment's thought to how unhappy it would

make their children, they would realise was the very worst thing to do, that is, give a Spartan education to a child destined to live in Paris.²²⁴ If it's wrong, then it's my nation's morals that are to blame, not mine. And who'd be willing to shoulder that? I want my son to be happy, or, what comes to the same thing, I want him to be respected, rich, and powerful. I know a bit about the easiest ways of reaching that goal, and I'll teach them to him early on. You may blame me, you and your wise friends, but the masses will absolve me, and so will success. He'll have gold; believe you me. If he has a lot of it, he'll want for nothing, not even your esteem and respect.

ME – You might be mistaken.

HIM – Or he'll go without, as many have done before him.

In all of this, he said lots of the things we all think, and which guide what we do, but which never get said out loud. And here, in truth, we have the most significant difference between my man and most of the people around us. He admitted to the vices he had and which everybody else has, but he wasn't a hypocrite. He was neither more nor less horrendous than anyone else, he was simply more open, and more logical; and occasionally, he was profound in his depravity. I trembled to think what his child would become with such a master. There can be no doubt that, by modelling ideas of education so strictly on our morals, he would go far, unless his progress were to be prematurely cut short.

HIM²²⁵ – Oh! You needn't worry, he said: the main thing, the really difficult thing a good father must pay particular attention to, is not so much giving his child vices that will make him rich, or comic quirks that will endear him to the great and powerful – that's what everyone does, even if they haven't got a system like I do, but just teach by example and lecture instead – but showing him where the limits are, the art of avoiding shame, dishonour, and the law; these are dissonances within the social harmony, which you have to learn how to introduce, set up, and pull off. There's nothing so flat as a sequence of perfect chords. What's needed is something sharp, which splits the bundle of rays, and makes them fan out.²²⁶

ME – I quite agree. Your comparison has taken me away from morals and back to music, which I'd got diverted from in spite of myself; and I am very grateful to you, because, to be perfectly honest, I like you more as a musician than as a moralist.

HIM – And yet I'm well below average at music, whereas at morals, I'm near the top.

ME – I very much doubt that; but even if it were true, I'm a good man, and your principles have nothing in common with mine.

HIM – That's too bad. Oh! If only I had your talents!

ME – Leave my talents out of it, and let's get back to yours.

HIM – If only I knew how to express myself like you! The way I speak makes me sound like a bloody cageful of squawking birds; it's half high society literary, half barrow-boy.

ME – I'm not good at speaking. I only know how to tell the truth, and that doesn't always go down very well, as you know.²²⁷

HIM – But it's not so I can tell the truth; on the contrary, it's so I can lie better that I'd like to have your talent. If only I knew how to write, how to throw a book together, turn a dedicatory epistle, intoxicate a fool with his own merits, worm my way into the company of women!

ME – All of which, you can do a thousand times better than I can. I am not even worthy of being your pupil.

HIM – So many great qualities gone to waste, and you don't even know what they're worth!

ME – I earn from them what I think their value is.

HIM – If that were true, you wouldn't be wearing that shabby coat, that flimsy waistcoat, those woollen stockings, those clumpy shoes and that antique wig.

ME – Agreed. A man must be really quite inept if he's not rich but will do anything to get rich. But the thing is that there are people like me – bizarre people indeed – who don't regard wealth as the most precious thing in the world.

HIM – Very bizarre. No one is born that way. You have to want to be like that since it's not natural.

ME – In man?

HIM – In man. Everything alive, without exception, seeks to ensure its own well-being at the expense of whatever it is dependent on; and I'm sure that if I let the little savage grow up without me telling him anything, he'd want to be richly dressed, lavishly fed, prized by men, loved by women, and to surround himself with all the pleasures of life.

ME – If the little savage were left to himself, remaining in a state of imbecility, and combining the feeble reasoning abilities of a small infant with the violent passions of a grown man,²²⁸ he'd wring his father's neck and sleep with his mother.²²⁹

HIM – That just goes to show the necessity of a good education; and who'd argue with that? And what's a good education if it doesn't mean you get to enjoy all sorts of things without getting into danger or difficulty?

ME – I almost entirely agree with you, but let's not get into that.

HIM – Why not?

ME – Because I fear we only appear to agree with each other, and that, were we to get into a discussion of the dangers and difficulties to be avoided, there'd no longer be any agreement between us.

HIM – And what's the problem with that?

ME – Let's drop it, I mean it. I could never make you learn what I know about the subject, but you can easily teach me what I don't know about music, and you do. Dear Rameau, let's talk music; tell me why it is that, given your facility for hearing, remembering, and reproducing the most beautiful passages from the great masters, and given the enthusiasm they inspire in you and which you communicate to others, you've not managed to produce anything of value yourself.

Instead of replying, he began to nod his head, and then, raising his finger to the sky, exclaimed: What star was I born under? What star? Nature smiled when she made Leo,²³⁰ Vinci,²³¹ Pergolesi, Duni. She had an imposing and a serious air as she was forming dear uncle Rameau, whom we'll have spent ten years calling the 'great Rameau', and soon won't be calling anything at all.²³² When she threw his nephew together, she pulled a face, and

then another one, and kept on pulling faces. And as he was saying this, he was pulling all sorts of faces, contemptuous, disdainful, ironic; and he seemed to be squeezing a piece of paste with his fingers, and smiling at the ridiculous shapes he was making. Once he'd finished, he hurled the funny little figure away, and said: That's how she made me and then she cast me down alongside other little figures, some with fat little tummies, short necks, huge eyes bulging out of their heads, looking apoplectic, others with sideways necks; there were dried out ones, with beady eyes and hooked noses; when they saw me they all started killing themselves laughing; and I dug my fists into my sides and split them laughing back, for fools and madmen find each other entertaining; they seek each other out, they are attracted to each other. If, at that moment, the proverb *The foolish man's money is the clever man's inheritance* hadn't already existed, I'd have had to invent it. I felt that nature had put my rightful portion into the purses of the funny little figures, and so I invented thousands of ways to get it back.

ME – I know what those ways are; you've told me about them, and I have been very admiring of them. Yet, with all those talents, why haven't you tried to produce a work of art?

HIM – That reminds me of the kind of thing a man of the world would say to the Abbé Leblanc.²³³ The Abbé said: Madame de Pompadour²³⁴ takes me by the hand, leads me as far as the threshold of the Académie française, where she lets my hand go. I fall over and break both my legs... The man of the world replied: Come on now, Abbé, you have to get up and use your head instead... The Abbé retorted: That's what I was trying to do; and guess what I got for it? A bump on the forehead.

After telling this little story, my man started pacing to and fro, looking down, with a pensive and a weary air; he sighed, wept, grieved, raised his hands, and looked up, punched himself in the head so violently that he nearly broke his forehead or his fingers, adding: It seems to me that there must be something in there, but however hard I hit it or shake it, nothing comes out. Then he began shaking his head again, and hitting his forehead even harder, saying: Either there's nobody at home, or they're refusing to answer.

A moment later, he took on an air of pride, lifted his head, placed his right hand over his heart; he strode up and down, saying: I can feel something, yes, I can. He imitated a man getting angry, indignant, being moved,

giving orders, imploring; he extemporised speeches that were angry, commiserating, full of hatred or love; he sketched out the characters of the different passions with surprising subtlety and truth. And then he added: That's it, I think. It's coming out now; that's what happens when you find an accoucheur who knows how to get a reaction, to bring on the pains, and get the baby out. When I'm alone, I pick up my pen, I want to write. I bite my nails, I wear my forehead out. Your servant. Good evening. The god has gone out; I had convinced myself that I had some genius; when I get to the end of my line, I read that I'm a fool, a fool, a fool. But how are we supposed to feel, be inspired, think, paint powerful pictures, when we have to frequent the kind of people we are obliged to in order to make a living, when we have to say and listen to the kinds of things we have to, such as this drivel: Today, it was quite charming out on the boulevard. Have you been to see the little marmot? Her acting is quite exquisite. Monsieur So-And-So had the most beautiful dappled grey mount imaginable. Beautiful Madame Whatsherface is beginning to fade; can you get away with wearing your hair like that at forty-five? Little Miss Whatsit is head to toe in diamonds that she got for free. – You mean that she got for a fee? – No, I don't. – Where did you see her? – When I went to see *L'Enfant d'Arlequin perdu et retrouvé* [*Harlequin's Child Lost and Found*].²³⁵ – They did the despair scene as it had never been done before. The Punchinello at the Fair has got lungs on him, but no subtlety, no soul. Madame So-And-So has just given birth to two children at once. One for each father... And you think hearing that, day in day out, is inspiring and leads to great things?

ME – No. It'd be better to shut yourself away in a garret, drink water, eat dry bread, and seek inspiration from within yourself.

HIM – Perhaps, but I'm not brave enough for that; and besides the idea of giving up on happiness when there's no guarantee of success! And what do I do about the name I bear? Rameau! Being called Rameau is quite a burden. Talents aren't like noble titles that can be handed down, and which become more and more illustrious as they go from grandfather to father, from father to son, from son to grandson, without the ancestor impressing any particular merit on his descendant. The old stump ramifies into one great stem of fools; but so what? That's not what talent does. Merely to equal your father's reputation, you need to surpass him in talent. You have to inherit his fibre. I missed out on the fibre, but my wrist is nice and loose; the bow works, and the pot is simmering away. It might not be glory, but it is good stock.

ME – If I were you, I wouldn't take that as read; I'd have a go.

HIM – And you think I haven't been trying? I was barely fifteen when I first said to myself: What's up, Rameau? You're dreaming. What are you dreaming of? Of having done something or doing something to excite universal admiration. Sure, all you have to do is blow and move your fingers. All you need is a duck, and hey presto, golden eggs. When I was a bit older, I was still saying the same thing as I'd said when I was a child. Today, I'm still saying it, and I'm still waiting around the statue of Memnon.²³⁶

ME – What are talking about with your statue of Memnon?

HIM – It's obvious, I'd have thought. Around the statue of Memnon, there were countless other ones, all equally struck by the sun's rays; but his was the only one that resonated. If it's a poet you're after, there's De Voltaire; and who else? De Voltaire; and in third place? De Voltaire; and in fourth? De Voltaire. If it's a composer, there's Rinaldo di Capua,²³⁷ there's Hasse, there's Pergolesi, there's Alberti, there's Tartini,²³⁸ there's Locatelli,²³⁹ there's Terradellas, there's my uncle, there's that little Duni who doesn't look like much, but who has feeling, God yes, who understands the voice and is very expressive. The rest of them, surrounding this little group of Memnons, are no better than pairs of ears stuck on the end of a stick. And so we're beggars, poor beggars, so poor that it's a blessing. Oh! Mister Philosopher, poverty is a terrible thing. I can see her now, crouching down with her mouth wide open, trying to catch a few drips of the icy water leaking from the barrel of the Danaïdes.²⁴⁰ I don't know whether it sharpens the wits of a philosopher; but it damn well freezes the head of a poet. Not much good singing goes on under that barrel. And if you can get yourself under there, you're one of the lucky ones! I used to be, but I couldn't work out how to hold on to it. I'd made that foolish mistake once already. I went on a journey to Bohemia, Germany, Switzerland, Holland, Flanders; I went to the devil and the back of beyond.

ME – Beneath the leaky barrel?

HIM – Beneath the leaky barrel; it was a wealthy, profligate Jew, who loved music and my follies. I musicked away like an angel; I played the fool; I wanted for nothing. My Jew was a man who knew his law, and who followed it to the letter, that is, he sometimes did with his friends, and he always did with people he didn't know. He got involved in some bad

business that I must tell you about, because it'll amuse you. In Utrecht,²⁴¹ there lived a charming courtesan. The Jew was tempted by the beautiful Christian; he had his courier deliver her a pretty substantial promissory note. The bizarre creature rejected his offer. He was in despair. The courier said to him: Why are you getting in such a state? You want to sleep with a pretty woman; nothing could be simpler, and you could even sleep with a woman who's prettier than the one you're pursuing. Which is to say, my wife, whom I will surrender to you for the same price. No sooner said than done. The courier keeps the promissory note, and my Jew sleeps with the courier's wife. The deadline for paying the promissory note arrives. The Jew allows it to go by and disputes its validity. Trial. The Jew said: This man will never dare to admit what the payment is for, and I shall not pay it. At the hearing, he summons the courier. – This promissory note, who gave it to you? – You did. – Is it for money you lent me? – No. – Is it for merchandise supplied? – No. – Is it for services rendered? – No. It's not about any of that; I am in possession of it; you signed it; and you will pay it. – I did not sign it. – Are you saying I forged it? – You or someone you represent. – I may be a coward, but you're a crook. Believe me, you don't want to push me too far. I'll tell all. I'll lose my honour, but I'll ruin you... The Jew dismissed the threat, and the courier revealed all at the following session. The judgement went against them both; the Jew was sentenced to pay the promissory note, and the money went to the relief of the poor. So I left him. I came back here. What could I do? For if I didn't want to die of hunger, I'd have to do something. All sorts of schemes came to mind. One day, I decided I was leaving the next day to join a travelling band of musicians just as well or ill-suited to play in theatres or orchestras; the next day, I was considering having one of those paintings done that you attach to a pole and plant by a crossroads, where I would stand shouting at the top of my voice, pointing out the different scenes: This is the town where he was born; here he is saying goodbye to his father, the apothecary; here he is arriving in the capital, looking for where his uncle lives; here he is kneeling before his uncle, who sends him packing; here he is with a Jew, et cetera, et cetera. The day after that, I got up, absolutely determined to join the street singers; it's not the worst thing I could have done; we'd have gone and sung outside dear uncle's windows, and he'd have died of rage. I chose to do something else.

At this point, he stopped, and adopted the poses, one after another, of a man holding a violin and endlessly tuning it, a poor devil worn-out with

fatigue, who has no strength left, whose legs are giving way beneath him, on the point of expiring unless he's thrown a piece of bread; he indicated the urgency of his need by pointing at his drooping mouth; then he added: You get my point. They threw me a scrap. There were three or four of us starving wretches, and we fought over it; then try and think great thoughts; see if you can create things of beauty when you're in that state of wretchedness.

ME – It'd be difficult.

HIM – I'd taken one tumble after another, and ended up down here. I'd been like a pig in clover. No longer. So I'll have to go back to sawing at the cat-gut, and pointing at my gaping mouth. Nothing is stable in this world. Today, I'm up on top; tomorrow, the wheel has turned and I'm back down below. We are led by unfortunate circumstances, and very badly they lead us too.

Then, gulping down what was left in the bottle and turning to his neighbour, he said: Monsieur, would you, out of the goodness of your heart, give me a little pinch? What a pretty snuffbox you've got there! You wouldn't be a musician, would you? – No. – Lucky you, as they're poor sods deserving of your pity. Fate decreed that I should be one, myself; whereas somewhere, in Montmartre perhaps, in a windmill,²⁴² there is a miller or a miller's assistant, who'll never hear anything except the clickety-clack of the ratchet, but who might have come up with the most beautiful tunes. Rameau! Get to the mill, off you go, that's the place for you.

ME – Whatever man applies himself to, is what Nature destined him for.

HIM – She has strange blind spots. The vantage point I see things from is not so lofty that things become indistinguishable, that the man pruning a tree with his shears and the caterpillar nibbling at one of its leaves simply look like two insects going about their business. Perch astride the epicycle of Mercury,²⁴³ and from up there, classify, should you so wish – like Réaumur²⁴⁴ sorting the class of flies into three kinds of female worker, the snippers, the measurers, the spinners – the species of man into various different kinds of male worker, the carpenters, the joiners, the roofers, dancers, singers – that's your business. I won't get involved. I'm in this world and I'm staying in it. But if it's natural to have an appetite, given that everything brings us back to appetite and to my ever-present sensation,

I consider it out of order not always to have something to eat. What a bloody awful economy! Some men are full to bursting while others are as clamorous as their stomachs, their hunger reviving as often as they do, but without a thing to chew on. The worst of it is how need forces you into certain postures. The man in need doesn't walk like other people; he jumps, he crawls, he contorts himself, he drags himself along; he spends his life in positions that he has had to take up and maintain.

ME – What do you mean by positions?

HIM – Go and ask Noverre.²⁴⁵ There are even more of them in society than his art could ever imitate.

ME – And now you're up there, *astride the epicycle of Mercury*, to use your expression, or rather Montaigne's, looking down at the human species doing its various mimes and dances.

HIM – No, no, I'm not. I'm too heavy to get up there. I leave others to walk about with their heads in the clouds. I'm very down to earth. I look around, and I take up my positions, or I laugh at the positions I see other people taking up. I am an excellent mime artist, as you can judge for yourself.

Then he began to smile, to act the admiring man, the imploring man, the obliging man; right foot forward, left foot back, back bent, head up, hanging on someone else's look, mouth half-open, arms stretched out towards some object; he awaits an order, he receives it; he darts off; he returns, it has been carried out; he says so. He attends to every detail; he picks things up; he places a cushion or a stool beneath someone's feet; he holds a saucer, he moves a chair closer, he opens a door; he closes a window; he draws curtains; he watches the master and mistress; he stands still, his arms by his sides and his legs parallel; he listens; he tries to read their faces; and he adds: That's my mime, and it's more or less the same as what any flatterer, courtier, valet and beggar does.

The follies of this man, the stories of the Abbé Galiani,²⁴⁶ and the wild imaginings of Rabelais have at times sent me into deep reverie. These three storehouses supply me with ridiculous masks to put on the faces of the most serious of personages; and so I see a prelate as Pantaloon,²⁴⁷ a high court judge as a satyr,²⁴⁸ a cenobite as a piglet, a minister as an ostrich, his

private secretary as a goose. In your account, said I to my man, there are a good number of beggars in this world; moreover, I don't know anyone who doesn't do a few steps of your dance.

HIM – You're right. There's only one man in the whole of any kingdom who walks upright, and that's the sovereign. Everyone else just takes up positions.

ME – The sovereign? Surely, there's something more to be said on that score. Don't you think he mightn't sometimes find himself next to a little foot, a little chignon, a little nose that mightn't make him do a few moves in the mime? Anyone who needs someone is indigent and takes up a position. The King takes up a position before his mistress and before God; he dances his steps in the mime. The minister does all the steps of the courtier, flatterer, valet and beggar in front of his King. Crowds of ambitious people dance your positions, in hundreds of different ways, each more base than the next, in front of the minister. The noble-born Abbé in his bands and long robes²⁴⁹ does his at least once a week, in front of the keeper of the list of benefices. Good God, what you're calling the beggar's mime show is the rhythm the earth moves to. Everyone has a little Hus and a Bertin.

HIM – I find that consoling.

But while I was speaking, he was hilariously doing the positions of the characters as I mentioned them; for instance, for the little Abbé, he held his hat under his arm, and his breviary in his left hand; with his right, he held up the train of his robe; he walked forward, with his head slightly tilted to one shoulder, eyes looking down, in such a perfect imitation of a hypocrite that I thought I was watching the author of the *Réfutations* in front of the Bishop of Orleans.²⁵⁰ When I mentioned the flatterers and the ambitious people, he lay flat on his stomach on the ground. It was Bouret in the office of the Auditor-General.²⁵¹

ME – That's superbly executed, I tell him. But nonetheless there is one person who is exempt from dancing the mime. And that's the philosopher who has nothing and asks for nothing.

HIM – And where is such an animal to be found? If he has nothing, he'll suffer; if he doesn't ask for anything, he won't get anything, and then he'll always be suffering.

ME – No he won't. Diogenes couldn't have cared less about his needs.

HIM – But you need clothes.

ME – No you don't. He went about naked.

HIM – Sometimes it was cold in Athens.

ME – Not as cold as it is here.

HIM – There were things to eat.

ME – I'm sure there were.

HIM – At whose expense?

ME – Nature's. What does the savage turn to? To the earth, the animals, the fish, the trees, the plants, the roots, the streams.

HIM – Nasty food.

ME – But plentiful.

HIM – A bit basic.

ME – Yet it's the basis for ours.²⁵²

HIM – But you must agree that the art of our cooks, pastry chefs, meat roasters, caterers, confectioners does something for it. Given the austere diet your Diogenes followed, his organs can't have misbehaved very often.

ME – How wrong you are. What used to be the cynic's habit is now the monk's habit, and it had the same virtues. The Cynics were the Carmelites and the Franciscans of Athens.²⁵³

HIM – I've got you there. Diogenes must therefore have danced the mime; if he didn't do it in front of Pericles, then he must have done it in front of Laïs or Phryne.²⁵⁴

ME – Wrong again. Other people had to pay a lot of money to sleep with the courtesan but she gave herself to him for the sheer pleasure of it.

HIM – But what would happen when the courtesan was busy, and the cynic in a hurry?

ME – He'd go back into his barrel and get by without her.

HIM – And are you suggesting I copy him?

ME – I'm as sure as I can be that it'd be better than crawling or abasing and prostituting yourself.

HIM – But I need a good bed, good food, a warm coat in winter, a light one in summer; rest, money and plenty of other things besides, which I would rather owe to the generosity of others than have to work for.

ME – That's because you're a layabout, a greedy pig, a coward, and a real old scumbag.

HIM – I believe I told you that myself.

ME – Things in life doubtless have their price; but you don't realize how high a price you're paying for them. You are dancing, you have danced, and you will keep on dancing the vile mime.

HIM – That is true. But it didn't cost me much, and it doesn't cost me anything anymore. And that's why it'd be a bad idea for me to adopt a different posture, which in any case I'd find painful, and would be unable to keep up. But I see from what you're saying that my poor little wife was a species of philosopher. She was as brave as a lion. Sometimes we went without bread and didn't have a penny. We'd sold almost all our clothes. I had thrown myself on the end of the bed, and was racking my brains to come up with anyone who might lend me some money that I wouldn't pay back. She, meanwhile, happy as a lark, sat herself down at her harpsichord, and accompanied herself as she sang. She warbled like a nightingale; it's a great shame you never heard her. When I was playing in some concert,²⁵⁵ I'd bring her along. On the way, I would say to her: Do make sure, Madame, that everyone admires you; show off your talent and your charms. Show us your brio. Give us a crescendo. We arrived; she sang; she showed her brio; she gave us a crescendo.²⁵⁶ Alas! I lost her, poor little thing. Apart from her talent, what she also had was a mouth so tiny it couldn't even take a little finger; teeth like a string of pearls; eyes, feet, skin, cheeks, tits, legs like a

gazelle, thighs and a bottom you'd want to sculpt. Sooner or later, she'd have had a Tax Farmer²⁵⁷ at the very least. The way she walked! The arse on her! Oh God, her arse!

And now here he is doing his wife's walk. He took little steps; he flung his head back; he played with his fan; he wagged his backside furiously; it was the funniest and most ridiculous caricature of our little coquettes.

Then taking up the thread of his speech, he added:

I took her out in public everywhere, walking in the Tuileries,²⁵⁸ in the Palais Royal, along the Boulevards. There was no way she was ever going to stay with me. When she crossed the street, in the morning, without her hat on and in the little cropped jacket that stopped short of her arse, you'd have stopped and stared, and you could easily have held her waist in one hand. Those following her, watching her trip along on her little feet, sizing up that large arse with its contours outlined by her flimsy skirts, would speed up; she'd let them get close; then she'd spin round and fix her two big, black, sparkling eyes on them, and bring them up short. The fact was that the head was as good as the tail. But alas! I lost her; and my great expectations all vanished into thin air with her. I'd only taken her for that, I'd confided all my schemes in her; and she had too much foresight not to see that they were bound to succeed, and too much sense not to approve of them.

And now he's weeping and wailing, saying: No, no, I'll never get over her loss. I've since become a man of the cloth.

ME – Out of sorrow?

HIM – If you like. But the truth is, so I could wear my dog bowl on my head...²⁵⁹ But look how late it is, it's time for me to go to the Opera.

ME – What's on?

HIM – The Dauvergne opera.²⁶⁰ There are some quite good things in his music; what a pity he didn't come up with them first. Amongst the illustrious dead, there are always some who'll drive the living to despair. What do you expect? *Quisque suos patimur manes*.²⁶¹ But it's half-past five, and I can hear the bell ringing for the Abbé de Canaye's²⁶² vespers, and

mine too. Adieu, Mister Philosopher, is it not true that I'm still the same as I was before?

ME – Alas! Yes it is, unfortunately.

HIM – Let's hope I only have that misfortune for another forty years or so. He who laughs last laughs longest.

Notes

1. Diderot's spelling of *Satyre* with a 'y' brings out libidinous associations with the mythical 'Satyr'. His *Satire première* has as its full title *Satire I sur les caractères et les mots de caractère, de profession etc* [*Satire on Characters and on the Language Peculiar to Them and to Professions*] and is subtitled *A mon ami M. Naigeon, sur un passage de la première satire du second livre d'Horace* [*To my friend M. Naigeon on a passage from the first satire in the second book of Horace's Satires*]. The expansion of the main title is however in fact owed to Jacques-André Naigeon (1738-1810), Diderot's acolyte and the dedicatee of this satire; nevertheless, it has relevance to the *Satyre seconde* as well as to *Satire I* in that Rameau's Nephew is also interested in the various ways of grouping men (character, trades) and contains a large number of lists, as if partially to enumerate them.
2. Tr. Niall Rudd, *Horace, Satires and Epistles; Persius, Satires*, 1973 (rev. 2005). London: Penguin Classics, p. 67. Vertumnus is the god of change and transfer, of weather and of money. Diderot's epigraph for his *Satire seconde* is taken from the seventh satire by Horace in the second book, the same as for *Satire I*. Its subtitle since antiquity is 'only the wise are free', from a Stoic paradox, that only the philosopher/the wise man is free (see translations in the Loeb edition by H. Rushton Fairclough).
3. The Palais Royal was built in the 1630s and was given to the crown by Cardinal Richelieu at his death. It became the residence of the Orléans family, after the title of Louis XIV's younger brother. Its famous gardens were open to the public.



Fig. 3 The Palais Royal, detail from the *Plan de Turgot* (1734-39), by Michel-Étienne Turgot.



Fig. 4 *Galerie et Jardins du Palais Royal* (late 18th century), artist unknown.

4. Marc-Pierre de Voyer de Paulmy comte d'Argenson (1696-1764), head of the Parisian police (lieutenant général de police) 1720 and 1722, then Secretary of State for War 1742-57. The d'Argenson bench was on the d'Argenson walk, on the east side of the garden, opposite the Foy walk, which was presumably named after the café keeper of that name.
5. François Antoine de Le Gall (1702-92), said to be the first professional chess player (i.e. playing for money). A game of his is described at <http://www.chessgames.com/perl/chessplayer?pid=77039> (all links cited in this volume were active on 23 June 2014).
6. An acquaintance of Diderot, François-André Danican Philidor (1726-95) is said to have been one of the greatest chess players ever, of truly international fame. A nephew of Rameau, almost certainly not 'our' Nephew, but a child of Rameau's brother's second marriage, placed the chess pieces for a game Philidor played blindfolded in London in 1793 (see *The Sporting Magazine*, II, no. 1, April 1793, p. 8). Philidor was also an important composer. He is buried in St. James, Piccadilly.



Fig. 5 Frontespiece from A.D. Philidor, *Analyse du jeu des échecs* (1803; 1st edition, 1748).



François-André Danican Philidor, *L'Art de la modulation* [*The art of modulation*], extract:

Sixth Suite: Sinfonia (Adagio – Allegro ma non troppo)



To listen to this piece online scan the QR code
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The sixth suite is made up of an adagio, an allegro and a minuet. The play on the modulations as a principle of composition is quite remarkable in these pieces. The adagio movement, which stresses the key of D major by long ascending scales, played in alternation with two groups of two instruments, moves away from this key, taking on those of A major and E major, with an intervening B flat which, in spite of the major key of the piece, gives a sense of melancholy to the whole of the adagio. The allegro, on the contrary, with its repeated staccato notes, its trills and appoggiatura, never forsakes the spirit of joy it began in. With its sonata form, the piece offers a development through careful modulation and numerous harmonic sequences.

7. Fabre suggests, after Isambert in his edition of 1883, that Foubert may have been a surgeon from the rue de la Monnaie. Mayot has not been traced.
8. Diderot contrasts a monastic order famed for austerity (Trappist) with one possessing great wealth (Bernardin).
9. The Champs-Élysées were a kind of park at this point in time.



Fig. 6 The Champs-Élysées, detail from the *Plan de Turgot* (1734-39), by Michel-Étienne Turgot.

10. I.e. Jean-Philippe Rameau (1683-1764). See the French edition associated with this one, *Satyre Seconde: Le Neveu de Rameau*, ed. Marian Hobson, 2013. Droz: Geneva (hereafter referred to as the French edition), for an extended discussion of the role of music in this dialogue. Rameau the uncle was an important theorist of the acoustical basis of harmony (see Thomas Christensen, *Rameau and Musical Thought in the Enlightenment*, 1993. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).



Fig. 7 Jean-Philippe Rameau (c.1728), attributed to Jacques-André-Joseph Aved.

11. Jean-Baptiste Lulli (1632-87), born in Florence, Lulli was the major composer of Louis XIV's reign, in particular of operas and opera-ballets (see fig. 8).
12. Diderot here is mocking the formulaic vocabulary employed in French opera seria.
13. PierreCarlet de Chamblain de Marivaux (1688-1763), playwright, journalist and important novelist (see fig. 9).
14. Claude-Prosper Jolyot de Cr billon (1701-77), novelist and journalist (see fig. 10).
15. Claude de Thiard de Bissy (1721-1810), soldier, author, member of the Acad mie fran aise at 29, on a rather slim output which included at least one work of doubtful orthodoxy. He would repay further investigation; see the French edition, p. 11.
16. Stage name (1723-1803) (see figs. 11 and 12). A famous actress and a supporter of the *philosophes*. What is said of Mademoiselle Clairon here is close to the account given of her acting in Diderot's dialogue, *Paradoxe sur le com dien* [*Paradox on the Actor*], which he probably worked on at about the same time as *Rameau's Nephew*, c.1772-73. See the French edition, pp. 228-32, for further details of her as a huge star in Paris.



Fig. 8 Jean-Baptiste Lulli (early 18th century), by Henri Bonnart (1642-1711).



Fig. 9 Pierre Carlet de Chamblain de Marivaux (1743), by Louis-Michel van Loo.

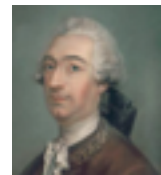


Fig. 10 Claude-Prosper Jolyot de Cr billon, by Jean-Baptiste Andr  Gautier-Dagoty (1740-86).



Fig. 11 Mlle Clairon en M d e, detail (1760), by Charles-Andr  van Loo.



Fig. 12 Mlle Clairon dans 'L'Orphelin de la Chine' (n.d.), by J.B. Le Prince.

17. Diogenes of Sinope (c.412-323 BC), a Greek philosopher and one of the founding fathers of Cynic philosophy.
18. Phryne, a famous prostitute in 4th century BC Greece. Diogenes and Phryne reappear in the dialogue just before the end – an indication of careful construction not always accepted by Diderot's critics.
19. Silenus, a fat and bald follower of Dionysus, the god of wine and sometimes wine-inspired frenzy.



Fig. 13 Diogenes (18th century), by Maurice Quentin de La Tour (1704-88).



Fig. 14 *Drunken Silenus supported by Satyrs* (c.1620), attributed to Anthony van Dyck.

20. A reference to the acoustical basis given to harmony by Rameau, most clearly in his *Génération harmonique*, 1737.
21. Le Duc de Choiseul was an enemy of the *philosophes* because the political and military enemy of the French, Frederick II of Prussia, called 'the Great', supported intellectuals who were in difficulties in France owing to their unorthodox thinking. Frederick gathered a group of such around him, and used them for political ends. Diderot, unlike Voltaire, did not have contact with this particular enlightened despot, and refused to visit Berlin on his way back from Russia in 1774.



Fig. 15 Etienne-François de Choiseul (1763), by Louis-Michel van Loo.

22. A principle for Diderot throughout his life. See his final bitter denunciation (in private, on paper) of his 'friend' Baron von Grimm, for his criticism of the Abbé Raynal and his *Histoire des deux Indes* [*A History of the Two Indies*], 1770, a major attack on European colonization. Grimm thought Raynal's work incautious and upsetting to the great (Lewinter, vol. XIII, p. 67; all references to works of Diderot are to this edition, *Œuvres complètes*, ed. Roger Lewinter, 15 vols. 1973. Paris: Club français du livre).
23. Throughout the dialogue, Diderot amuses himself at Voltaire's membership of the nobility by inserting his 'particule', incorrectly for cultivated usage. Voltaire (see fig. 16) used the 'particule' from time to time well before he acquired a firm right to do so, on being made *gentil-homme ordinaire du Roi* in 1746.
24. Antoine-Claude Briasson (1700-75), one of the publishers of Diderot's and d'Alembert's *Encyclopédie*.
25. A draper dealing in luxury fabrics, according to Jean Fabre, and earlier Maurice Tourneux, in their editions.
26. Diderot throughout his life struggled with a version of what could be called 'the problem of evil'. He was unwilling to see any action as irremediable, any situation as unchangeable. This is why a tragic vision is quite simply missing from his work, unlike his former friend Rousseau. Behind this difference in viewpoint is a radical difference in their experience of time and of causality. See M. Hobson, "'Nexus effectivus" and "nexus finalis": Causality in Rousseau's *Discours sur l'inégalité* and the *Essai sur l'origine des langues*', in M. Hobson, ed. and trans. Kate Tunstall and Caroline Warman, *Diderot and Rousseau: Networks of Enlightenment*, 2011. Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, pp. 165-99.
27. Charles Pinot Duclos (1704-72), journalist and moralist (see fig. 17). He managed to remain friends with Rousseau.
28. Nicolas Charles Trublet (1697-1770), essayist, journalist and object of Voltaire's satirical attentions; he eventually became a member of the Académie française (see fig. 18).



Fig. 16 Voltaire (18th century), by de La Tour (1704-88).



Fig. 17 Charles Pinot Duclos (first half of the 18th century), by de La Tour (1704-88).



Fig. 18 Nicolas Charles Trublet (late 18th century), artist unknown.

29. Pierre-Joseph Thoulier d'Olivet (1683-1768), head of the religious party at the Académie française and famously intolerant. His works on poetics and prosody are still of interest.
30. Jean Baptiste Greuze (1725-85), painter especially known for introducing new, more ordinary subjects, see his painting *L'Accordée de village* [*The Village Bride*] (fig. 21). Diderot appreciated this style of painting, which one may think attempts to do in paint something like what Diderot tried to accomplish in his plays, *Le Fils naturel* [*The Natural Son*], 1757, and *Le Père de famille* [*The Family Man*], 1758. He was also famous for his vanity.



Fig. 19 Pierre-Joseph Thoulier d'Olivet (n.d.), after Charles-André van Loo.



Fig. 20 Jean-Baptiste Greuze, *Self-portrait* (before 1785).



Fig. 21 *L'Accordée de Village* (1761), by Greuze.

31. *Mérope*, 1743, tragedy by Voltaire, an imitation of the Italian Scipione Maffei's tragedy of the same name. Voltaire's contemporaries experienced the play as extremely moving.
32. 'Good' is thus only a comparative term, and only has meaning if there is also evil in the world.

33. Diderot here puts forward what is sometimes his own view: that there is a strict net of causality enveloping the world, so that actual freedom (as opposed to the subjective experience of action as free) is an illusion. It is when he envisages a more statistical view of causality that this necessitarianism is countered – see his novel *Jacques le fataliste*.
34. *Mahomet*, tragedy by Voltaire, first acted in Lille in 1741 and in Paris in 1742; according to the code of allusions in eighteenth-century French tragedy, attacks on Muslim intolerance were interpreted as attacks on Christian bigotry (see below n. 82). Voltaire wrote the *Eloge de Maupeou* [*In Praise of Maupeou*] in 1771, in support of the chancellor René-Augustin de Maupeou (see fig. 22) and his attempt to reform the state finances. Since this had involved authoritarian action with the aim of breaking the opposition of the *Parlements* to the reform, the *philosophes* were in general opposed to it. For more on the politics of this, see the French edition, p. 25, n. 55.
35. *Les Indes galantes*, 1735, an opéra-ballet by Rameau. See <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3zegtH-acXE>.
36. From *Le Temple de la gloire*, an opera by Rameau, with libretto by Voltaire, written to celebrate the victory of the French army over the British, Dutch and Hanoverian armies at Fontenoy in 1745. See <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=we6vxXQ9hwo>.
37. Charles Palissot de Montenoy (1730-1814), enemy of the *philosophes*, flatterer of Voltaire, journalist, playwright, satirist (see fig. 23). Of pretty scabrous morality. See the French edition, pp. 205-11, especially p. 207, for the treatment of his sister.
38. Antoine Alexandre Henri Poinsinet (1735-69), known as 'little Poinsinet' (see fig. 24). He collaborated with Diderot on the libretto of the first version of Philidor's opera, *Ernelinde*, 1767, the first French 'reform' opera.



Fig. 22 René-Augustin de Maupeou (18th century), by Pierre Lacour (1745-1814).



Fig. 23 Charles Palissot de Montenoy, *Oeuvres de M. Palissot* (1788).



Fig. 24 Antoine Alexandre Henri Poinsinet, *Oeuvres de Poinsinet* (1784).



Fig. 25 Elie-Catherine Fréron (1771), Ch.E. Gaucher, after Ch.-N. Cochin.

39. Elie-Cathérine Fréron (1718-76), journalist, enemy of the *philosophes*, most especially of Diderot and Voltaire (see fig. 25). His son, Stanislas Fréron (1754-1802), was one of the organisers of the bloody repression of the insurrections against the Revolution at Toulon in 1793, which involved large-scale summary executions (see fig. 26).
40. Joseph de La Porte (1713-79), journalist, gossip, an acquaintance of Diderot. It was he who related to Diderot the story of the split between Hus and Bertin (see Diderot's letter to Sophie Volland of 12 September 1761 and French edition, p. 218). For Louis Carrogis de Carmontelle's portrait of La Porte see [www.wikigallery.org/wiki/painting_92775/Louis-\(Carrogis\)-de-Carmontelle/The-Abbe-de-La-Porte-and-the-Marquis-de-Saint-Chamans,-c.1766](http://www.wikigallery.org/wiki/painting_92775/Louis-(Carrogis)-de-Carmontelle/The-Abbe-de-La-Porte-and-the-Marquis-de-Saint-Chamans,-c.1766).
41. *Les trois siècles de la littérature française* [*Three Centuries of French Literature*], 1772-74, by Sabatier de Castres, opponent of the *philosophes*, after having failed to gain their approval.
42. The Rameau family was from Dijon, in Burgundy.
43. The Hôtel de Soubise, Paris, now houses the Archives nationales; it had the largest stables in Paris, now the reading room (see fig. 27).
44. Robbé de Beauveset (1712-92), a satiric and erotic poet, known to Diderot, who liked Robbé's enthusiastic method of declaiming his verses, see Diderot, *Essais sur la peinture* [*Essays on Painting*], 1766 (Lewinter, vol. VI, p. 292).



Fig. 26 L.-M.S. Fréron, *Album du Centenaire* (1889), by H. Rousseau and E. Thomas.



Fig. 27 The Hôtel de Soubise, detail from the *Plan de Turgot* (1734-39), by Michel-Étienne Turgot.



Fig. 28 Robbé de Beauveset (1765), by Jean Baptiste II Lemoyne.

45. The first appearance of the 'heroine', Mlle Adélaïde-Louise-Pauline Hus (1734?-1805), a mediocre actress of the Comédie française. She was the lover of the 'hero' of the text, Louis-Auguste Bertin de Blagny (1725-1788). From 1742 Blagny occupied the office of Treasurer of the king's private funds for 'les parties casuelles', that is, the sale of public offices when they became vacant ('the casual parts' of his title). Legal and standard procedure, it was of course a major source of income for Bertin, and for the throne. He was also co-author of the libretto of the opéra comique *L'Île des fous* (see n. 192).
46. Monsieur Viellard, lover of Mlle Hus.
47. The *Fêtes de Polymnie* is an opéra-ballet in three acts (or 'entrées') by Jean-Philippe Rameau. The air *A la beauté tout cède sur la terre* occurs at the end of the first *entrée*, entitled *La Fable* [Fable], to which respond *L'Histoire* [History – second *entrée*] and *La Féerie* [Fairytale – third *entrée*].



Fig. 29 Mlle Hus, *Galerie historique des portraits des comédiens* (1861).



Jean-Philippe Rameau, *Fêtes de Polymnie* [The Festivals of Polyhymnia], extract:
Air: 'A la beauté tout cède sur la terre' [Everything on earth gives way to beauty]



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or follow this link: <http://dx.doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0044.05>

Three stories and three distinct moods to celebrate the French victory at Fontenoy in the War of Austrian Succession. In this air, the music is subordinate to the text, brilliant in order to evoke the triumph of beauty, stormy in order to evoke the 'terrible God of thunder'. The piece is a rondeau in three parts. The opening is a triumphal march, in three sections separated by a kind of attack from the voice with high-pitched notes and *a cappella*, starting off a second part with more movement and resolving in a final section with strongly marked cadences.



Jean-Philippe Rameau, *Fêtes de Polymnie* [The Festivals of Polyhymnia], extract:
Air: 'Au vain plaisir de charmer...' [To the empty pleasure of charming...]



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or follow this link: <http://dx.doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0044.06>

This air occurs in the third *entrée* of the opera, *La Féerie*. It appears as a march in triple time in the key of A minor. It is made up of two parts which contrast in their key, but are in a stable tempo. The second part begins in the related key of C major, bringing a kind of luminosity to the term ‘victory’ before returning to A minor, with a close in cadence emphasized by a very lyrical leap of a major seventh, which projects the voice into a high register before returning to the tonic.



Jean-Philippe Rameau, *Fêtes de Polymnie* [*The Festivals of Polyhymnia*], extract:
Air en rondeau: ‘Hélas, est-ce assez pour charmer...’ [Alas, in order to charm, is it enough...]



To listen to this piece online scan the QR code
or follow this link: <http://dx.doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0044.07>

This air from the beginning of *La Féerie* is characterized by its vocal writing, which is very free and natural, over an accompaniment showing great stability, with many held notes; the melody is emphasized by the appoggiatura which unfolds into a short *da capo* aria, culminating on a high A sharp at the end of the middle section.

48. A similar portrait of Rameau was drawn by Charles-Germain de Saint-Aubin.



Fig. 30 *Avez vous Jamais vu le Celebre Rameau?* (c.1740-c.1775),
by Charles-Germain de Saint-Aubin.

49. Mme de La Marck (1719-93, a natural death, not the guillotine), was a supporter of the opera (see David Charlton, *Opera in the Age of Rousseau*, 2012. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press). Her relation to Diderot and his friend Grimm is not well understood; she would repay further investigation (see French edition, pp. 179-80). Bergier: there were two brothers, Claude and Nicolas Sylvestre, the latter an enemy of the *philosophes*. It is probably the latter (1719-90) who is being referred to here (see fig. 31): he was author of such works as *Le Déisme réfuté par lui-même* [*Deism Disproved from its Own Arguments*], 1766, and *La Certitude des preuves du Christianisme* [*The Certainty of the Proofs of Christianity*], 1767, and attacked Diderot's friend, d'Holbach, despite frequenting his salon.



Fig. 31 Abbé Nicolas-Sylvestre Bergier (18th century), by Jacques-André-Joseph Aved (1702-66).

50. Polish-style dresses, which first came into fashion in the 1770s, had a close-fitting bodice and a large skirt which was gathered up at the back to reveal the petticoat below.



Fig. 32 A Polish-style dress (c.1777), Carl Gottlieb Guttenberg, after Jean-Michel Moreau.

51. As yet, this song is unlocated.

52.



Fig. 33 Lulli's *Opera Armide*, performed at the Palais Royal (1761), by Gabriel de Saint-Aubin.

53. A quotation from Virgil's *Georgics* and a joke attributed to d'Alembert when at stool (he suffered from hæmorrhoids), see French edition, p. 40, n. 88.
54. Samuel Bernard (1651-1739), an immensely rich financier who lent money to Louis XIV and Louis XV for their wars; he had been born a Protestant but converted when the toleration of Protestants was abolished in 1685.



Fig. 34 Samuel Bernard (1729), by Pierre Imbert Drevet.

55. Choir boys from orphanages in two different areas of Paris – the red boys from the Marais in the third arrondissement (see <http://www.evous.fr/Histoire-du-Marche-des-Enfants,1118276.html>) and the blue boys from the rue Saint-Denis in the second arrondissement (see fig. 35 and <http://www.paris-pittoresque.com/rues/190.htm>).



Fig. 35 Les Enfants Bleus, detail from the *Plan de Turgot* (1734-39), by Michel-Étienne Turgot.



Fig. 36 Pietro Locatelli (1733), by Cornelis Troost.

56. Pietro Antonio Locatelli (1695-1764), born in Bergamo, but established in Amsterdam (see fig. 36). Said by Grove's *Dictionary of Music and Musicians* to be the founder of modern virtuoso violin playing. See Daniel Heartz, 'Locatelli and the Pantomime of the Violinist in *Le Neveu de Rameau*', *Diderot Studies*, XXVII, 1998, pp. 115-27.



Pietro Locatelli, Sonata op. VI no. 5, extract: Aria (Vivace)



To listen to this piece online scan the QR code
or follow this link: <http://dx.doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0044.08>



This aria is taken from the fifth of the twelve sonatas for solo violin and chamber basso continuo dating from 1746, which make up opus VI by Pietro Antonio Locatelli. This movement follows the andante and allegro movements,

and constitutes a set of four variations on the same air, made up of two musical phrases. The basso continuo remains the same throughout the air, and the solo violin offers four different versions of it, with ever increasing embellishments, first by the arrival of more rapid rhythms, then by the expanding of the range, and lastly through the intervention of a second voice which doubles the main melody at the interval of a third. This movement constitutes the final of the sonata and seems to foreshadow the classical rondeau which will take up the idea of variations on a theme.

57. *Concert spirituel*, a concert series set up in 1725 to provide music in Lent, when theatres and the Opéra were closed.
58. The name of Alberti is associated with the transition between the baroque and the classical styles, and in particular with that invention of a bass line which would become typical for the classical style.



Domenico Alberti, Sonata for the fortepiano op. I n° 5, extract:
Andante – Allegro



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This, known as 'Alberti bass', is found everywhere in Mozart and his contemporaries. It departs from the baroque principle of the 'continuous bass', in that it is a line of broken arpeggios. This 'Alberti bass' makes up the greater part of the accompaniment in the second movement of this sonata, and allows one single voice to accompany the melodic line, thus making possible a great freedom of development. So the second movement is written right through for two voices only, and the bass line on its own represents the combination of two or three voices, making up a single line, a feature that is highly idiomatic in music for a keyboard instrument.

Like the writing, the form of this sonata is characteristic of the pre-classical period in which Alberti was working. The first movement is made up of an exposition leading from the main key (A major) to the dominant (E major); there is then a development that leads to a restatement bringing back the main key. This movement has the main characteristics of a sonata. In his early years, Mozart had studied the scores of Alberti. He then extended these principles of composition and made them the driving force of the developments in his music, which was built on a larger scale. The second movement of this sonata,

more virtuoso in style, is likewise based on the same tension in the keys, but in a simpler binary form allowing a coming and going between the tonic and the dominant (section A), and then from the dominant to the tonic (section B).

59. Baldassare Galuppi (1706-85), a Venetian composer, especially of comic opera; he collaborated with Carlo Goldoni (1707-93), a Venetian playwright who moved to Paris in 1761 to work at the Comédie italienne. Galuppi travelled widely, working in England, Russia, and for a while in Vienna; see for instance http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fxFR_r_Wb0L.
60. See Christensen, *Rameau and Musical Thought*, pp. 200-5. Rameau's enharmonic modulatory progressions were so difficult that they were originally not singable by everyone in the cast of *Hippolyte et Aricie* at the Opéra (p. 205).
61. Van Loo's portrait of Diderot, painted in 1767, shows him as a well-dressed and apparently well-off gentleman.



Fig. 37 Baldassare Galuppi (1751), artist unknown.



Fig. 38 Denis Diderot (1767), by Louis-Michel van Loo.

62.



Fig. 39 The Luxembourg Gardens, detail from the *Plan de Turgot* (1734-39), by Michel-Étienne Turgot.

63. Angélique Diderot (1753-1824), sole surviving child of Diderot and his wife, Toinette Champion, and much loved.

64. Luckily, the teenage Angélique did in fact dance at balls, see her letters conserved at the Institut et musée Voltaire, Geneva. She actually went to a ball held by one of the butts of this text's satire, Bertin. Diderot, moreover, took a great deal of trouble over her musical education. This sort of discrepancy suggests we should be careful not to align 'ME' and Diderot.

65. Jean Le Rond de D'Alembert (1717-83), major mathematician (among many other important contributions to mathematics, he formulated what is now known as 'd'Alembert's principle'), co-editor of the *Encyclopédie*, littérateur, hero of Diderot's dialogue *Le Rêve de d'Alembert* [*D'Alembert's Dream*], illegitimate son of the novelist and former nun Mme de Tencin, left on the steps of the church of Saint-Jean-le-Rond (hence his name), cared for by his father, who however died young, though his family contributed to his son's upkeep; adopted by his wet-nurse, the wife of a window-maker.



Fig. 40 Jean Le Rond de D'Alembert (1753), by de La Tour.

After he became famous, very young, his real mother is said to have made overtures, which he refused: he regarded Mme Rousseau, the woman who had adopted him, as his mother. See <http://www-groups.dcs.st-and.ac.uk/history/Biographies/D%27Alembert.html>.

66. Marie-Jeanne Lemierre (1733-86), singer at the French Opéra (Académie royale de musique) and at the *Concert spirituel*. Through marriage to the singer Henri Larrivée, she is also referred to as Mme Larrivée.
67. Sophie Arnould (1740-1802), actress, opera singer, and courtesan. Famous for her liaison with the comte de Lauraguais ('the little count').
68. M. de Montami (1702-65), maître d'hôtel of the duc d'Orléans, who presumably lived in the Palais Royal, owned by the Orléans family. He was an industrial chemist. Diderot published his book for him posthumously: *Traité des couleurs pour la peinture en émail et sur la porcelaine* [*Treatise on Colours for Enamel Painting and on Porcelain*], 1765. Paris: G. Cavelier. A letter to Diderot's lover, Sophie Volland, recounts a visit to Montami after having failed to find her at their rendez-vous in the allée d'Argenson (letter of 12 October 1759).
69. Pierre-Louis Dubus Préville (1721-99) was allied with the anti-*philosophe* group at the Comédie française. He starred in a restaging of the play, *Le Mercure galant*, by Edme Boursault (1638-1701) in 1763 (source: Bibliothèque nationale de France, catalogue).
70. Mlle Dumesnil (1713-1803), actress at the Comédie française; see Virginia Scott, *Women on the Stage in Early Modern France*, 2010. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, for an interesting account of her career. The journal *Mémoires secrets*, a kind of eighteenth-century 'celebrity mag' suggests why she doesn't know what she's doing – she was an alcoholic (see French edition, p. 229).



Fig. 41 Sophie Arnould (c.1770), after Jean-Baptiste Greuze.

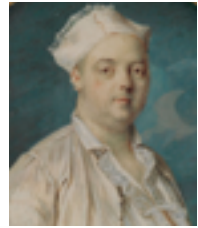


Fig. 42 Pierre Louis Dubus Préville, attributed to Jean-Baptiste Massé (1687-1767).



Fig. 43 Mlle Dumesnil: Phèdre (1770-88).



Fig. 44 Mlle Dumesnil: Agrippine (1754).

71. Jean-Baptiste Javillier came from a famous Parisian line of dancing masters; for instance he taught the comte de Cheverny, see *Mémoires sur les règnes de Louis XV et Louis XVI et sur la Révolution par J.N. Dufort, comte de Cheverny, publiés avec une introduction et des notes par Robert de Grèvecœur, 1886.*



Fig. 45 *A Rake's Progress: 2. The Levee* (1732-33), by William Hogarth.

72. C. Ernest Baron de Bagge (1718-91) – Diderot is spelling by ear – was a Flemish music-lover. See Georges Cucuel, *Un mélomane du XVIII^e siècle: Le Baron de Bagge et son temps (1718-1791)*, 1911. Paris: F. Alcan. Bagge was famous for the concerts given in his private house.



Fig. 46 C. Ernest Baron de Bagge (1781), by Charles-Nicolas Cochin the Younger.

73. French: *idiotisme*, which until relatively recently (1835) only referred to specific turns of phrase proper to a dialect or language, see *Encyclopédie*: 'article IDIOTISME, [...] c'est une façon de parler éloignée des usages ordinaires, ou des lois générales du langage, adaptée au génie propre d'une langue particuliere. R. ἰδιος, *peculiaris, propre, particulier*' [a way of talking removed from ordinary usage or the general laws of language, adapted to the genius proper to a particular language].

74. Bernard le Bovier de Fontenelle (1667-1767 – he died one month short of his 100th birthday), popularizer of science, writer of light verse, secretary in perpetuity of the Académie des Sciences until 1737, a head of the *modernes* in the long-running quarrel between the partisans of classical literature and those who preferred the moderns.



Fig. 47 Bernard le Bovier de Fontenelle (n.d.), by Nicolas de Largillière (1656-1746).

75. Marie-Madeleine Guimard (1743-1816), a famous ballerina and courtesan, even more famous for the luxury of her dwelling houses – one on the Chaussée d'Antin was designed by the great architect Claude Nicolas Ledoux. Diderot seems to have known her, see French edition, p. 57, n. 125, for his letter to Sophie Volland of 22 November 1768.



Fig. 48 Marie-Madeleine Guimard (n.d.), artist unknown.

76. According to Jean Fabre in his great edition (*Le neveu de Rameau*, 1950. Geneva: Droz, p. 177), Anne Marie Pagès, called la Deschamps (1730-75?), courtesan, dancer and a famous spendthrift; Fabre refers to Diderot's letter of 26 October 1760: 'la Deschamps, who is barely thirty years old and who boasts that she has already spent her way through two millions' (Lewinter, vol. IV, p. 937). Lewinter points out that the sale of her furniture (9 April 1760) to pay her debts caused so much interest that there was nearly a riot.



Fig. 49 *Casseuse de Porcelaine, chez le Fermier Général de Vilm... (1753?1764?)* [The Smasher of China at the house of the tax farmer de Vilm[orien]?..., or la Deschamps, a famous courtesan, (1753?-1764?)], by Charles-Germain de Saint-Aubin.

77. Philippe Charles Le Gendre de Villemorien (1717-89), son-in-law of the financier Bouret. It was Villemorien's wife who in 1753 helped Diderot, by means of bribery, to keep an office connected with the distribution of tobacco in the family of his future son-in-law (see French edition, p. 203).

78. Georges Louis Leclerc, comte de Buffon (1707-88), important naturalist, became superintendant of the Jardin Royal (still to be visited in Paris as the Jardin des plantes). His work as a naturalist was more important because of the collections he assembled for the king, and because of his publication of the *Histoire naturelle*, 1749-1804, a work of synthesis written with collaborators, than for his own discoveries. The exception to this is his first article, on mathematical probability. He was famous in his lifetime for his style, and was already criticized for being too ponderous. Ironically enough, he is today principally famous, among a non-specialist French public, for his 'Discourse on Style'.



Fig. 50 Georges Louis Leclerc, comte de Buffon (1753), by François-Hubert Drouais.

79. Charles-Louis de Secondat, baron de la Brède et de Montesquieu (1689-1755), author of *De l'esprit des lois* [*On the Spirit of the Laws*], 1748. Diderot was the only man of letters to follow Montesquieu's coffin at his funeral in 1755, according to Rousseau, who himself was ill at the time. Montesquieu and Voltaire, both distinguished elders, in that they belonged to the preceding generation, contributed to the *Encyclopédie*, mostly on the relatively neutral subject of aesthetics, and probably as a sign of support.



Fig. 51 Montesquieu (1728), artist unknown.

80. An urge felt by Diderot on occasions: see his letter to Sophie Volland, 31 August 1760.
81. Diderot is parodying the Old Testament here, *Ecclesiastes*, I, v.2.
82. *Mahomet*, by Voltaire is a plea for toleration, under cover of an attack on fanaticism. In the play, the fanaticism is Mahomet's; Voltaire made it clear elsewhere, however, that it is any fanaticism that is at stake, and at the time, this meant Christian fanaticism. France was after all a Christian country, and intolerance shown there was Catholic intolerance. Contemporary readers were

quite used to reading 'Christian' where the text said 'Muslim', and had little doubt that it was the institution of Christianity that Voltaire was attacking.

83. Jean Calas, a Protestant, was tortured to death by order of the Parlement of Toulouse in 1763, in order to extract a confession to the murder of his son. This confession was not forthcoming, and the case against Calas collapsed. Voltaire had begun by believing him guilty, and had inveighed against Protestant bigotry. However when he met Calas's family, who had fled, he became convinced of his innocence. He conducted a Europe-wide campaign to clear Calas's name, and succeeded. Calas was rehabilitated in 1765. Voltaire wrote an influential *Traité de la tolérance* on the basis of the case.



Fig. 52 *Les adieux de Calas à sa famille* (n.d.), by Daniel Chodowiecki (1726-1801).

84. Probably to become a merchant in Cartagena, in what is now Colombia.
85. Jacques Rochette, chevalier de La Morlière (1719-85), a novelist who is still sometimes in print (*Angola, histoire indienne*, 1746); contemporary accounts are very like the description Diderot gives through the mouth of 'HIM' (for further information, see French edition, p. 67, n. 142).
86. A famous pornographic novel, published in 1741. The author is not known with certainty, but it is often attributed to Jean-Charles Gervaise de La Touche (1715-82).



Fig. 53 Frontispiece from Jacques Rochette de La Morlière, *Contes du chevalier de la Morlière - Angola* (1879).

87. *I Modi*, 1524, by Pietro Aretino, a pornographic classic written to accompany paintings by Julio Romano, engraved by Raimondi, then by Agostino Carracci.
88. The two Catos, 'the censor' and 'the younger' were famed for their austere morals.
89. The whole question of freedom here, of finding a kind of freedom to be abject, asserted against social circumstances which insist on abjection, is one of the elements which fascinated Hegel, see G.W.F. Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A.V. Miller, with analysis of the text and foreword by J.N. Findlay, 1977. Oxford: Oxford University Press. The paragraph numbers cited below refer to this translation.
90. Father Noël, a Benedictine monk, in favour with Louis XV because of the optical lenses he fashioned. See French edition, p. 70, n. 50.
91. French: *Pagode*. The Nephew refers here to a porcelain figure, known as a 'pagoda', which was popular in the eighteenth century (see fig. 54).



Fig. 54 Seated figure (c.1715),
Meissen Porcelain.

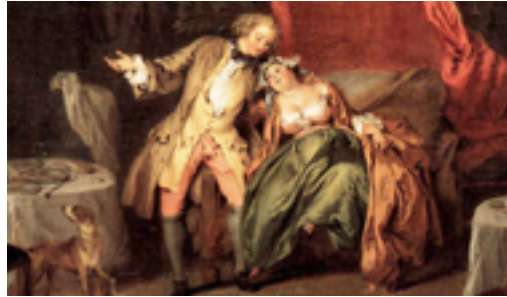


Fig. 55 Mme Bouvillon (early 18th century),
by Jean-Baptiste Pater (1695-1736).

92. Madame Bouvillon (see fig. 55), a personage from Scarron's novel, the *Roman comique* (1651-57).
93. One of the key ideas in Diderot's materialism of the 1770s.
94. François Thomas Marie Baculard d'Arnaud (1718-1805), an acquaintance of Diderot from the early 1740s, when they both inhabited Grub Street. See French edition, pp. 221-22.
95. Stentor, a herald of the Greek army in the Trojan War. A classical reference in a low-market context – a typical satirical procedure.

96. The Nephew discusses his performance as parasite as belonging to one of the fine arts, see Lucian, 2nd century AD satirist: 'On Parasites' and especially 'On salaried posts in great houses, or the dependent scholar'. See *The Works of Lucian of Samosata: Complete with Exceptions Specified in the Preface*, trans. H.W. Fowler and F.G. Fowler, 1905. Oxford: Clarendon Press. It is from this that the 'in Praise of flattery' is sometimes said to come.
97. Etienne Michel Bouret (1709-77), the son of a *laquais*, he was a tax farmer (see n. 257) from 1741, and for much of his life immensely rich, lending money to the king, famous in the popular press for his talent for flattery. Diderot owed him favours. See French edition pp. 202-4.
98. French: *Garde des Sceaux*. The names of the holders of the office in this period were: Berryer (1761-62), secretary of state for the navy and lieutenant of police, Diderot knew him; Feydeau de Brou (1763-68); Maupeou (1768-74) who united the office of Keeper of the Seals with that of Chancellor, before being replaced by Miromesnil in both offices. With thanks to Dr Michael Sonnenscher, King's College, Cambridge.
99. In Lacour's portrait, Maupeou is depicted wearing the costume of the Keeper of the Seals (see fig. 56).
100. French: *la gimblette*, the name of a little ring-shaped biscuit. In one version of Fragonard's painting, *la gimblette* obviously refers to the girl's vagina as well as to the biscuit she is offering her dog (see fig. 57).



Fig. 56 Maupeou in the costume of the Keeper of the Seals (18th century), by Pierre Lacour.

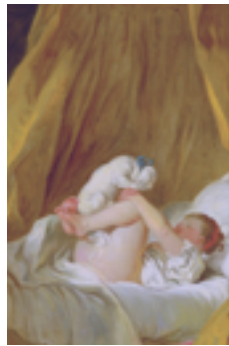


Fig. 57 *La Gimblette* (1770-75), by Jean-Honoré Fragonard.



Fig. 58 A French nobleman wearing the Cross of Saint-Louis (1756), by Jean-Marc Nattier.

101. A military decoration founded by Louis XIV in 1693, the first that could be awarded to non-nobles (see fig. 58).

102. Turenne (1611-75), marshal of France, perhaps the most famous (and talented) French general before Napoleon (see fig. 59). He took part in the Fronde (a small-scale civil war between 1648 and 1653), first on the side of the insurrectionary nobles then on the side of the King.
103. Sébastien Le Prestre de Vauban, general and marshal of France, like Turenne, fighting on both sides in the Fronde (see fig. 60). He is principally known for his system of constructing near-impregnable fortresses. Also for his attempt to relieve the poor, among whom he had lived as an orphaned child. He formulated a method of reforming the French tax system, *Projet d'une dixième royale* [Project for the Royal Tax of a Tenth], 1707.



Fig. 59 Turenne (1837),
by Charles-Philippe Larivière.



Fig. 60 Sébastien Le Prestre de Vauban
(after 1703), by Hyacinthe Rigaud (1649-1743).

104. The Marquise de Tencin (1682-1749) (natural mother of d'Alembert, and a successful novelist), her brother the Cardinal and his secretary, the Abbé Trublet (for whom see above n. 28). A descent into bathos, from great generals to a secretary and cleric, who was an object of scornful fun.
105. Mlle Anne-Marie Botot Dangeville (1714-96), a famous comic actress of the Comédie française (see fig. 62).
106. An accurate account of their relative popularity, it seems – the Comédie française was always full if Clairon was acting that night, see French edition, p. 231.
107. Persius, prologue to his *Satires* (*Choliambes*, tr. Rudd, in *Horace, Saitres and Epistles; Persius, Satires*). The line has been completed here.



Fig. 61 Claudine Guérin
de Tencin (n.d.), artist
unknown.



Fig. 62 Mlle Dangeville
(18th century), by de La
Tour (1704-88).

108. Palissot's first tragedy, taken on at the Comédie française in 1751 through influence, and a failure. The name is mangled, no doubt deliberately: it should be *Zarès*.
109. Antoine Bret (1718-1805), like Baculard, was an acquaintance from Diderot's past, all three formerly the recipients of police attention.
110. Monsaue and Villemorien, the sons-in-law of Bertin, both held highly lucrative offices, the first a *Maître des postes*, the second also a tax farmer (see n. 257). Monsaue's name appears as a member of the *surintendance des Postes*, the group of notables at the top of the system of renting horses for travel and for the letter post. He was responsible for the east of France. The tax farm or *ferme* included others, among them his brother-in-law, Legendre de Villemorien, and Bouret.
111. Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-78), important philosopher, writer and composer; formerly, a close friend of Diderot's - they quarrel definitively in 1757.
112. A pastiche of a line from Molière, *Les Femmes savantes* [*The Learned Ladies*], Act III, sc. 2: 'Nul n'aura de l'esprit, hors nous et nos amis' [None shall have wit, save us and our friends].
113. The satirical play by Palissot, *Les Philosophes*, may have been the first impetus for Diderot's dialogue. Palissot is said to have been given permission in 1760 for it to be represented at the Comédie française as a reward for writing a pamphlet against France's enemy, Frederick II of Prussia (see fig. 64). A fellow, and much better, playwright, Charles Collé (1709-1783), thought that it had actually been ordered by the government. It was acted at the Comédie française in spite of Mlle Clairon's opposition. In it, Rousseau, that defender of natural man, was shown coming on on all fours, munching a lettuce, and Diderot was presented as a confidence trickster. The actress playing the part meant to indicate Mme Geoffrin, a patron of the *philosophes*, actually dressed like her. It was extremely successful in its first run, but even then, the treatment of the *philosophe* Helvétius shocked, because everyone knew the latter had helped Palissot pay his doctor's bills. Its plot is a reworking of Molière's *Les Femmes savantes*.

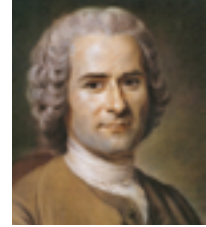


Fig. 63 Jean-Jacques Rousseau (third quarter of the 18th century), by de La Tour.



Fig. 64 Frederick II of Prussia (1781), by Anton Graff.

114. *La Théologie en quenouille* [*Theology in Petticoats*], a play by le père Guillaume-Hyacinthe Bougeant (1690-1743), printed in 1731 but never acted, which attacked the Jansenists.

115. Abbé Jean-Bernard Leblanc (1707-81), a protégé of Madame de Pompadour, who, with the engraver Cochin, accompanied her brother the Marquis de Marigny on the tour of Italy which was to prepare him for his duties as Director of the King's Buildings. She couldn't get Leblanc into the Académie française, but she did obtain for him the post of Historiographer of the King's Buildings. See the story told later by 'HIM'.



Fig. 65 Abbé Jean-Bernard Leblanc (18th century), by de La Tour (1704-88).

116. Abbé Charles Batteux (1713-80). Diderot had already attacked Batteux, in his *Lettre sur les sourds et muets* [*Letter on the Deaf and Dumb*], 1751, for his *Les beaux-arts réduits à un meme principe* [*The Fine Arts Reduced to a Single Principle*], 1746, which is indeed much inferior to his later *Cours de belles lettres* [*Lessons on Literature*], 1765. Batteux is somewhat mysterious: in his relation to Diderot, who seems to have known him, and in his choice of classical texts for translation and commentary.

117. Alexis Piron (1688-1773), poet and playwright. His play *La métromanie* [*Mad about Metre*], 1738, was one of the best comedies of the century.



Fig. 66 Alexis Piron (1775), by Augustin de Saint-Aubin.

118. The Convulsionaries, a group of Jansenists who opposed the papal bull *Unigenitus*, which clamped down on the sect; some of them went into trances in the churchyard of Saint-Médard, in a poor area of Paris. Diderot must have witnessed these, since he lived fairly close by, in the rue de la vieille Estrapade. The Jansenists also claimed miraculous cures. Neither Church nor different governments liked this mixture of poverty and inspired, unorthodox religion, which seemed too close to an insurrectional ideology.



Fig. 67 Claude-Henri de Fusée de Voisenon (1760), by Louis Carrogis de Carmontelle.

119. Usually, and plausibly, identified as the Abbé de Voisenon (1708-75). See French edition p. 86, n. 189.

120. Corbi and Moette followed Monnet as directors of the theatres at the Fairs. The Fair theatres were among the principal sites of the development of native French comic opera, see Charlton, *Opera in the Age of Rousseau*.
121. *L'Avant-Coureur* (1760-73), a weekly journal, its first editor Meusnier de Querlon was also a writer of salacious novels.
122. *Les Petites Affiches*, a journal consisting mostly of announcements about the theatre and spectacles.
123. *L'Année littéraire* (1754-76), a journal begun by Elie Fréron, continuing *Lettres sur quelques écrits de ce temps* (1749-54), and continued by his son, Stanislas. Fréron the elder was imprisoned several times for publishing matter which the government didn't wish put about.
124. *L'Observateur littéraire* (1758-61), editor abbé Joseph de La Porte, an acquaintance of Diderot. La Porte defended Diderot's play *Le Fils naturel*, 1757, the subject of much ridicule from the groups around Palissot.
125. *Le Censeur hebdomadaire* (1759-62), started by d'Acquin and Abraham Chaumeix, it was originally anti-*philosophe*; it toned down its later numbers.
126. Abbé de La Porte.
127. Moreau illustrated a lavish dinner of the sort described here in his painting of the inaugural feast held on the 2 September 1771 at Louveciennes [the house of Madame Du Barry, reigning mistress of Louis XV] in the presence of the King.



Fig. 68 Feast given at Louveciennes (1771), by Jean-Michel Moreau.

128. Claude-Joseph Dorat (1734-80), dramatist, poet of 'elegant nothings', producing magnificent editions of his own poems at his own expense on royal occasions; he seems to have plagiarized Diderot. See Manuel Couvreur, 'Diderot et Philidor: le philosophe au chevet d'Ernelinde', *Recherches sur Diderot et sur l'Encyclopédie*, XI, 1991, p. 85.

129. 'I am always sitting like a mighty cock between two balls'.

130. French: *Messer Gaster*, a reference to a character in Rabelais's *Quart Livre* [Fourth Book], 1552.

131. Allusion to Homer's *Iliad*, Book 1.

132. The emblem of Melancholy is sometimes portrayed in a similar way.



Fig. 69 Claude-Joseph Dorat (left) (1764), by Charles Eisen.



Fig. 70 *Melancholia I* (c.1514), by Albrecht Dürer.

133. French: *pacte*, one can wonder whether Diderot isn't referring surreptitiously to Rousseau's *Contrat social*, where the word appears first as the title of Chapter VI.

134. Brun is not identified with certainty. He is possibly the poetaster nicknamed 'Le Brun-Pindare', who certainly was acquainted with Palissot, see his *Lettre de M. Le Brun à l'auteur de la Dunciade* [Letter from M. Le Brun to the Author of the 'Dunciade'] [i.e. Palissot], which was published in *La Dunciade, poème en dix chants* [The Dunciade, A Poem in Ten Cantos], 2 vols. 1771. London.
135. Abbé Rey is not identified with certainty. He is possibly the author of *Considérations philosophiques sur le christianisme*, 1785.
136. Michel-Antoine David, one of the editors in the group who published the *Encyclopédie*. He was a guarantor at the marriage of Diderot's daughter in 1772.
137. See above n. 113.
138. Palissot had indeed persuaded the naïve Poincette that the King of Prussia would nominate him as governor of his children, if he converted to Protestantism. Poincette did so in a ceremony invented and performed by Fréron and Palissot. He seems to have been the butt of a deliberate campaign of practical jokes, both cruel and mocking. He wrote libretti for comic operas, the genre which is one of the main thematic threads of *Rameau's Nephew*.
139. In his play *L'Homme dangereux* [The Dangerous Man], 1770; he added the word to the title in 1778: *Le satirique ou l'homme dangereux* [The Satirist, or the Dangerous Man].
140. The comtesse de la Marck, see n. 49.
141. The French is *espèce*, species. It is the word that caught the attention of Hegel, in his *Phenomenology of Spirit*, no doubt because Goethe had left it in French in his translation into German. Rightly, because one of the unthematized but powerful threads in *Rameau's Nephew* seems to be the question of groups, social or natural. Again and again lists in the dialogue seem to create groups, of characteristics, of trades, even of actions.
142. Rameau's Nephew has turned his patrons into a kind of latinized animal specimen by joining up their names (see fig. 71).
143. The Nephew has appointed himself and his like to be the punishment in this



Fig. 71 Physiognomic heads inspired by a camel (c.1670), by Charles Le Brun.

world of Bertin and his like; the Nephew, like Doctor Bordeu in the third part of *Le Rêve de d'Alembert*, and like a fragment from a manuscript (cited by the Diderot scholar Pierre Hermand, †1916), proposes a kind of naturalistic moral order: if not the law, then nature will punish wrong-doing or excess. The Nephew gives the likes of 'ME' the task of punishing those who have taken advantage of and thus punished the stupidity of the likes of Bertinhus. For 'ME' and his like will paint this chain of predator and predated as they are.

144. 'HIM', like Diderot at various other points in his writings, breaks apart the assimilation between the good and the beautiful. Some philosophers in the eighteenth century, and in many ways the general public, were inclined to treat them as equivalent.
145. See Morris Wachs, 'The identity of the "Renégat d'Avignon" in the *Neveu de Rameau*', *Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century*, 90, 1972, pp. 1747-56. Avignon was in fact a place of relative safety for Jews in eighteenth-century France; the events of this story seem rather to have occurred in Lisbon.
146. Diderot makes a similar claim in *Le Rêve de d'Alembert*, see *Rameau's Nephew and D'Alembert's Dream*, trans. Leonard Tancock, 1966. London: Penguin, pp. 212-13.
147. Here, as in his writing on the art of the actor, Diderot is interested in the relation between acting and exaggerating. See *Paradoxe sur le comédien*, probably completed in c.1772-73.
148. 'Sanbenito', a sort of yellow-coloured tunic favoured by the Inquisition.



Fig. 72 *The Inquisition Trial* (1812-19), by Francisco Goya.

149. French: *Auto-da-fé*; literally 'act of faith'. The execution of heretics by burning was so called, apparently without irony. The last one at Lisbon seems to have taken place in 1739. See the ferocious denunciation by Montesquieu, *De l'esprit*

des lois, book XXV, ch. 13, 'Very humble remonstrance to the inquisitors of Spain and Portugal', which begins: 'A Jewess aged eighteen, burned at Lisbon in the last auto-da-fé', and ends with a condemnation and furious warning 'if someone at future times ever dares say that the European peoples were civilized in the century we are living in, you will be cited to prove that they were barbarous'.

150. Hegel, using Goethe's translation into German of 1805 (see Preface), refers closely in his *Phenomenology of Spirit* to the dialogue from this point on. The extended nature of Hegel's commentary has not been generally recognized – it goes well beyond the passages from Diderot's dialogue that Hegel actually quotes.

151. Egidio Duni (1708-75), was personally known to Diderot, indeed he introduced Goldoni to him, at Goldoni's request. He had been recruited while in Parma to provide an opéra comique, on words by Anseaume, *Le Peintre amoureux de son modèle* [*The Painter in Love with his Model*]. Duni came to Paris for its première at the Saint-Laurent Fair in 1757, and as a result of its success stayed to work on other opéras comiques. Like many Italian composers of opéras comiques Duni had been trained at Naples.



Fig. 73 Egidio Duni (c.1760), by Louis Carrogis de Carmontelle.

152. Daniel Heartz, who has done so much to give context and interpretation to *Rameau's Nephew*, uses this phrase to underline the swing to a new kind of opera being developed in Paris (see D. Heartz, *Music in European Capitals: The Galant Style 1720-1780*, 2003. New York and London: W.W. Norton and Company; ed. John Rice, *From Garrick to Gluck: Essays on Opera in the Age of Enlightenment*, 2004. New York: Pendragon Press (Opera series no. 1)).
153. Throughout his life, Diderot was interested in the relation between the word and the sense we give it – see, for instance, *Lettre sur les sourds et muets*.
154. There is a real problem of interpretation here. It was precisely Diderot, in *Lettre sur les sourds et muets*, who among European critics insisted most clearly that the arts cannot be aligned, though they can be compared. His work attracted the sustained attention of Gotthold Ephraim Lessing (1729-81) (see *Laocoon, Essay on the Limits of Painting and Poetry*, 1766) and also of Johann Georg

Hamann (1730-88). But one cannot say Diderot's work has received the study it deserves. This also poses the problem: What does this mean for *Rameau's Nephew*? Had Diderot changed his mind? Does it mean that we are no more to follow Rameau's Nephew in his ideas on music, than we are in morals?

155. The Nephew is puzzling here: he seems to refer to Hogarth's 'serpentine line' (Diderot knew *The Analysis of Beauty*. *Written with a View of Fixing the Fluctuating Ideas of Taste*, 1753). And yet Diderot has altered the sense from the logo on the title page, and from Hogarth's actual words. He makes of it a kind of mathematical figure, of a serpentine line approximating but never equal to a straight line.
156. *O terre, reçois mon trésor*: it is possible that Diderot is citing Bertin here. He, together with Anseaume and Marcouville was the author of this *comédie mêlée d'ariettes* (an 'ariette' is a light air which breaks off the thread of the plot to give a character the possibility of expressing a feeling – see n. 193 below). What is more to the purpose is that the libretto is a 'parodie', that is, words written to an already existing score.
157. *Le Maréchal-ferrant*, an opéra comique with libretto by Quétant, performed at the Saint-Laurent Fair in 1761. For excerpts from this work, see: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ROQhQBo8_EA (*Oui, je suis expert*), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L9wuqFTtbyM> (*Brillant dans mon emploi*), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=50B98nuThfc> (*Trio des ânes*). The implication is that art and reality cannot be distinguished. This is something that Diderot develops in a much more subtle way in his dialogue *Le Paradoxe sur le comédien*, which was probably written at more or less the same time, so that once more the question arises of how much faith to put in 'HIS' aesthetics.
158. Pierre-Jean-Baptiste Nougaret, *Art du théâtre, où il est parlé des différents genres de spectacles et de la musique adaptée au théâtre* [*The Art of the Theatre, Where are Discussed Different Kinds of Spectacle, and the Music Which is Adapted for the Theatre*], 2 vols. 1769. Paris: Cailleau, satirically and backhandedly praises the opéra comique for its treatment of the ordinary, especially ordinary trades and professions. The irony in the work has not always been recognized by modern critics. The Nephew appears to be taking quite another approach.

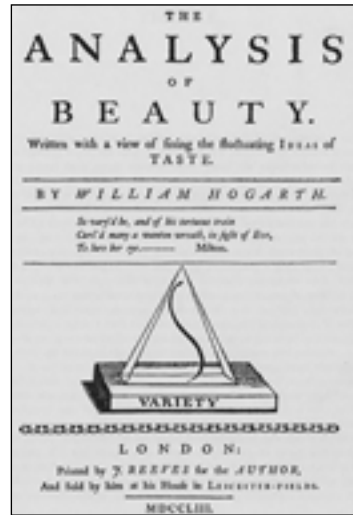


Fig. 74 Frontispiece of William Hogarth, *The Analysis of Beauty* (1753).

159. 'HIM' could have read the same phrase in Diderot's writings, given that the latter quotes the same phrase in the major piece of art criticism, *The Salon of 1767*, in Lewinter, vol. VII, p. 170, but also in a magnificent letter to Grimm about language and the sound of language: 'The quantity of words is limited; that of accents is infinite. Thus it is that each person has his own individual language, and speaks as he feels; it is him, and is only him', Lewinter, vol. VII, p. 799.
160. According to Charles Burney, who knew Diderot, recitative is free of the time signature when the accompanist merely gives the chord for the song; when the recitative is accompanied, it must have a regular tempo (see the article 'Récitatif' in Michel Noiray, *Vocabulaire de la musique de l'Epoque classique*, 2005. Paris: Minerve).
161. The rules of the Académie royale de musique provided that if a modern opera should fail, it should be replaced by one of Lulli's.
162. André Campra (1660-1744), especially known for *Europe galante*, 1679, an opéra-ballet.
163. Philippe Néricault-Destouches (1680-1754, libretto) and Jean-Joseph Mouret (1682-1738, music), collaborated on *Les Amours de Ragonde* [*The Loves of Ragonde*], a comédie-ballet. See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IjhD0hURdOY>.
164. The Nephew is imitating the foundational notes in Rameau's chordal harmony.
165. Giovanni Battista Pergolesi (1710-36), his music made a huge impression in Paris (see fig. 75). His *Stabat Mater* was first sung at the *Concert spirituel* in 1753, and remained in the repertory for a long time.



Giovanni Battista Pergolesi, *Stabat Mater*, extract, transcribed for solo violin by Johan Helmich Roman.



To listen to this piece online scan the QR code
or follow this link: <http://dx.doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0044.10>

More than any other age, transcription played a hugely important role in the eighteenth century, allowing interpreters to make the repertoire their own. Johan Helmich Roman, a descendant of a family of musicians attached to the royal house of Sweden, came to court in 1711, at the age of 17, as a violinist and oboist. He divided his time between his Court duties – he became Deputy Master for the Swedish Royal Chapel in 1721 – and his several journeys in Europe, and strove to make the foreign repertoire known in his native country.

As well as the original works which he wrote down and translated tirelessly in order to make them accessible to his fellow countrymen, he also did a great deal of transcription. Technically very difficult, his reworking of Pergolesi's famous *Stabat Mater* for the solo violin is remarkable proof of his skill in transcription and also of his mastery of the violin.



Fig. 75 Giovanni Battista Pergolesi (n.d.), artist unknown.

166. Pergolesi's *Serva padrona* played a major part in the success enjoyed by the Italian troupe, or *Buffoni*, whose visit to Paris in 1752-53 sparked off a furious public quarrel, the *Querelle des Bouffons*, around the respective value of Italian and French music. See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NsUeywPFegQ>. The *Buffoni* were interpreted as threatening the hegemony of French opera seria. To compare serious and comic opera was to compare the incomparable; however, the Italian works used a music which was indeed very different from the French musical tradition associated with the Académie royale de musique. It emphasized melody and supple musical transitions, whereas French opera seria tended, in the case of Rameau at any rate, towards bold harmonic constructions. This quarrel indicates a real swing in public taste, for in fact this was not the first visit of such a troupe – one had visited in 1746, creating nothing like the storm that erupted in 1752. Rousseau added fuel to the flames by publishing his *Lettre sur la musique française* [*Letter on French Music*] whose last phrase reads: 'the French have no music and are unable to have one; or, if they should ever have one, that's just too bad for them'. Rousseau claimed that this social crisis around opera staved off a political crisis: see Rousseau, 'Confessions', *Œuvres complètes*, vol. I, pp. 384-85. For an assessment of this rather self-regarding claim, see Hertz, ed. Rice, *From Garrick to Gluck*, p. 223.
167. For *Tracollo* see <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u9VpiCjiSSU>.
168. *Tancrède*, 1702, *tragédie en musique* by André Campra (1660-1744). See <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qukSyIvBmUU> (Overture).
169. *Issé*, 1697, *pastorale héroïque* by André Cardinal-Destouches. See <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8D6zoQ2poHM>.
170. *Europe galante*, 1697, *opéra-ballet* by Campra. See <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B58U3fu2oO4&list=PLC61043D2097E3FDE> (entrée *La Turquie*).
171. *Les Indes [galantes]*, 1735, *ballet héroïque* by Rameau. See <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3zegtH-acXE>.

172. *Castor [et Pollux]*, 1737, tragédie lyrique by Rameau. See <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rSKe5WTVR0g&index=10&list=PL2TaO4x8VJQxc4srbA-XHlexb03lAcmWa>.
173. *Les Talents lyriques ou les fêtes de Hébé*, 1739, opéra-ballet by Rameau. See <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w32WVmyzs8U>.
174. *Armide*, 1686, tragédie en musique by Lulli. See <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HWIaanFmhYY> (Overture).
175. Rebel and Francœur, known as the 'petits violons' [little violins], directed the Opéra. Hartz says that they were 'lacklustre' as directors (ed. Rice, *From Garrick to Gluck*); David Charlton (*Opera in the Age of Rousseau*) makes a case for their work being more innovative.



Jean-Féry Rebel, Pieces for the violin, divided into suites by keys, extracts:
First suite in G-sol-ré: Allemande



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or follow this link: <http://dx.doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0044.11>



Jean-Féry Rebel, Pieces for the violin, divided into suites by keys, extracts:
First suite in G-sol-ré: Prelude



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The first of these pieces for the violin by Rebel is a French suite. In a very classical manner it is made up of a prelude, allemande, courante, sarabande, gig in the form of a rondeau, chaconne and a bourrée, also in the form of a rondeau. The suite is written for violin and basso and following the principle of the collection, explores a tonal universe, that of the neighbouring keys of G and D major. The function of the prelude is to introduce this tonal universe, stressing it from the very first bars by the chords of G and D major. The first phrase is then picked up in the key of D major before returning to the principal key after a short development of the principal melodic and rhythmic figures

from the prelude. The allemande is a dance in two with moderate tempo, but one that permits great virtuosity in the playing of the violin over a simple basso continuo; composed of two sections with repeats, it is well balanced between the keys of G and D major.

176.



Fig. 76 Performance of *Athalie* at the Opéra Royal de Versailles (1770), by Jean-Michel Moreau.

177. Duni's opera, staged in 1757 at the Saint-Laurent Fair, was a huge success. For a recreation of the pantomime see http://www.dailymotion.com/video/x101840_acte-pantomime-tire-du-peintre-amoureux-de-son-modele-ballet-pantomime-de-m-ferrere-1782_creation.

178. The Opéra was at the end of a cul-de-sac at the north end of the Palais Royal.

179. See Collé, *Journal et mémoires*, ed. H. Bonhomme, nouvelle édition, 3 vols. 1868. Paris: Firmin Didot, vol. II, p. 33, for July 1755. Collé complains that a comic opera by André Cardinal Destouches and de La Motte has no success when revived because 'Rameau's music, Italian music have changed people's ears'. This was one of the spurs to Hegel's reflection on cultural change in this part of *Rameau's Nephew* – for Diderot clearly discusses the way in which an artistic past is carried over into a different artistic present, and Hegel by his very choice of quotations shows he recognizes the relation of this understanding of cultural change to music.

180. As discussed in n. 166 above, the *Querelle des Bouffons*, 1752, was followed almost immediately by Rousseau's attack on French music for its lack of musicality, owing to its relation to a language, French, naturally unmusical when spoken. Diderot here is more interested in the relation between a nation's music and the sound of its language than in the quality of the sound involved.
181. Other commentators on music make a similar point, see M. Hobson, *The Object of Art*, 1982, 2009. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, Part V. But Diderot's awareness of cycles of historical change here is somewhat different, in that they are put forward as successive not as repetitive. They develop out of a process of opposition. One can see why Hegel was interested – his quotations, with one exception, all come from this section of the dialogue.
182. A satire on the limited number and type of words, which return again and again in the libretti of Rameau's operas. Diderot had already criticized the stereotyped nature of libretti of French opera in *Entretiens sur 'le Fils naturel'*, [Conversations on 'The Natural Son'], 1757.
183. The phrase seems to have been a common refrain in a variety of popular poems. It probably derives ultimately from a popular song or songs.
- 184.



Jean-Joseph Mouret, *Les Amours de Ragonde, ou la soirée de village* [The Loves of Ragonde, subtitled *An Evening in the Village*], extract: Bourrées I-II



To listen to this piece online scan the QR code
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Les Amours de Ragonde is an opera by Jean-Joseph Mouret. This work, which dates from 1714, was rediscovered by Rousseau and Rameau at the beginning of the 1740s. It is a comic opera, written in the manner of a pastiche of the great operas of Lulli, and parodying the music and the manner of speech of peasants. This scene is a concentration of the spirit of the opera: the bourrée, a peasant dance par excellence, is defined both by its catchy rhythm and by its somewhat heavy bass – this last is the village lads' dance, as they come on stage. This dance is composed of two parts, each divided into two phrases, in the manner of a popular song. Each phrase is played a first time by the oboe, and is then taken up by the violins, creating an effect typical of popular music, where one theme is stated first by an instrument or by a voice before being picked up by

the ensemble. The writing of this piece is characteristic of the first years of the eighteenth century, notably in its use of a long sequence at the beginning of the second bourrée, derived from more sophisticated music and sticking out from the rest of the piece, which otherwise stays in a decidedly peasant style.



Jean-Joseph Mouret, *Les Amours de Ragonde, ou la soirée de village* [*The Loves of Ragonde*, subtitled *An Evening in the Village*], extract:

Air: 'Accourez, jeunes garçons' [Come running, young men]



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In fact this extract, from the same opera by Mouret, comes just before the bourrée. In this air, Mathurine calls on the young men to come and 'frolic and laugh'. 'Come running, young men, join in our songs. Come and frolic, come and laugh; let pleasure be your guide and your leader, follow no other lessons, the simple goods we enjoy must suffice for our desires'. The words indicate the tone of the air, simple and playful. The structure of the air is twofold. After a brief introduction emphasizing the key of E major, the first part of the air, which is played twice over, is completed by a second, slower part, starting in the key of A major but coming back to the main key. In the cycle of fifths, the passage from E major to A major provokes the sense of descent, which itself in turn emphasizes the more restrained character of these bars, and permits a more striking return to the original key.

185. *Platée*, a ballet bouffon with music by Rameau, produced as part of the Dauphin's wedding festivities at court in 1745. The opera tells the story of the belief nourished by the queen of the frogs, Platée, that Jupiter the king of the gods is in love with her. See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xbHsmr2YoBI> (production by the Opéra National de Paris, in two parts). The story is thought to refer to the arrival and marriage at court of the Spanish Infanta, who was found to be ugly. If so, one hopes she didn't understand the undercurrent of public mockery in the entertainment created for her wedding to the Dauphin. The Dauphine died soon after her marriage, in childbirth; however, she eventually had the last laugh – the Dauphin became devoted to her and when he died twenty years later, although remarried and with children by his second wife, he asked to be buried beside her.

186. This is the substance of Rousseau's attack on French music: the language is simply unmusical, and has affected even instrumental music.
187. An attack on the plots and the form of French opera seria.
188. However, elsewhere the Nephew, like Diderot in other works, understands the beauty of evil, and they have broken the alignment, common in the eighteenth century, of ethics and aesthetics. Which suggests that 'the true', 'the good' and 'the beautiful' are already stripped of ethical meaning in this passage, and that the Nephew is supplying them as three near-synonyms, to bring in an undercurrent of deliberately off-key religious language (see Jean Fabre's reaction to it, who asks 'if this "trinity" so dear to Diderot is anything other than scholastic verbiage refreshed by a parody in doubtful taste', ed. Fabre, *Le Neveu de Rameau*, p. 222, n. 268). This analogy of cultural and religious change gains purchase a few lines later as a metaphor for how musical styles succeed each other.
189. Hegel quotes this passage (§332) describing cultural change which is both long-prepared and sudden in its effect, like a snake casting its skin.
190. This passage, not quoted by Hegel, seems to point to the structure the German philosopher gives to the development of human culture as a process of opposition and incorporation.
191. Henri Louis Duhamel du Monceau (1700-82), referred to by Diderot as 'le grand', farmer, agronomist, author of *Art du charbonnier*, 1760. He is cited in the *Encyclopédie*. Later (c.1771, i.e. around the time *Rameau's Nephew* was put together) he was involved in a mild dispute with Diderot's friend, Galiani and his brother, about plagiarism (see French edition, p. 118).
192. *L'Île des fous*, an *opéra mêlé d'ariettes* by Duni; ironically enough, Bertin was involved with Anseaume and Marcouville in creating the libretto.



Fig. 77 Henri Louis Duhamel du Monceau (n.d.), by Ambroise Tardieu after François-Hubert Drouais (1727-75).

See French edition, p. 111, n. 233 for further details, and for a relation with Goldoni which deserves investigation. See excerpts at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2LYVuIPgOkU>.

193.

Egidio Duni, *Le Peintre amoureux de son modèle* [*The Painter in Love with his Model*], extract: Arietta: 'Dans le badinage, l'Amour se plaît' [Love is pleased with playfulness]



To listen to this piece online scan the QR code
or follow this link: <http://dx.doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0044.15>

Duni's *Le Peintre amoureux de son modèle*, a comic opera in two acts from 1757, parodies an Italian opera. The painter Alberti and his student Zerbin are both in love with a young girl, Laurette, who loves Zerbin but repels the overtures of Alberti. The arietta *Dans le badinage, l'Amour se plaît* occurs at the beginning of Act II, when Laurette has learned that she is loved by both men, and thus that she may choose between them. 'In playfulness, Love enjoys himself like the child he is. If he ever wins over me, it will be with gaiety. I want to find all the enjoyment of liberty in my enslavement'.

An *arietta* is a light air which breaks off the thread of the plot to give a character the possibility of expressing a feeling. Its very lightness entails great simplicity in form: here, we have a structure: A A', the second part being identical to the first and written around exactly the same text but in a more virtuoso fashion, with more ornamentation. Unlike an aria, there is no further element which might create a contrast with these two parts.

194. *La Plaideuse, ou le procès*, an *opéra comique mêlé d'ariettes*, libretto by Favart, music by Duni, first performed 19 May 1762.

195. More airs from the *Île des fous*. See <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pHVtS8hVRc0>.

196. Airs from Pergolesi's *La Serva padrona*. See <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xfbhdeSSbPo>.

197. Hegel picks these sentences out for quotation. But he is using the Goethe translation, which is not of the same manuscript, the autograph manuscript that we now use. The manuscript used by Goethe has disappeared. I should like here very tentatively to fly the following kite: that the manuscript Goethe

used might just have been supplied not from the group deposited by his daughter in St. Petersburg at his death, as a gift to Catherine the Great, as is usually thought, but by the Princess Golitsyn, who certainly tampered with the trunk in which Diderot's manuscripts had been left for safe keeping with her and her husband in The Hague, while he was in Russia (winter 1773-74). Goethe was certainly in contact with her at various times.

198. French: *Les Petites Maisons*, an asylum founded in 1557 and located in the 6th arrondissement of Paris. The French equivalent of the Bethlem Royal Hospital (Bedlam) in London.

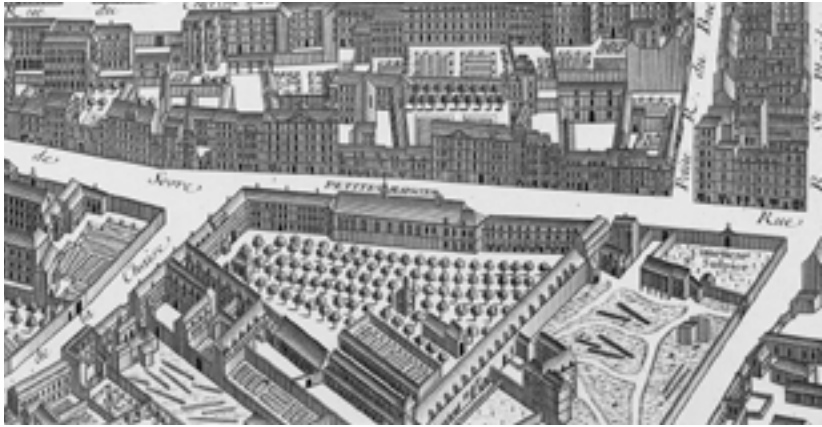


Fig. 78 Les Petites Maisons, detail from the *Plan de Turgot* (1734-39), by Michel-Étienne Turgot.

199. See <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s5hHwuOISu8> for a beautiful and disturbing excerpt.
200. A translation of *Récitatif obligé*, itself a translation of 'recitativo obbligato'. 'The actor is agitated and transported by a passion which does not allow him to say everything; he interrupts himself, stops, holds back, during which time the orchestra speaks for him', Rousseau, '*Récitatif obligé*', in his *Dictionnaire de musique*. Michel Noiray defines it thus: 'it is marked off from a formal air essentially because it allows the music to penetrate deeply into the thought of a character' and makes the telling point that Mozart's Don Giovanni never sings such recitative. ('*Récitatif*', in his *Vocabulaire de la musique*).
201. The last lines of this paragraph are quoted by Hegel while bringing out the kind of mad mixing which, he says, is 'the universal deception of itself and others: and the shamelessness which gives utterance to this deception is just for that reason the greatest truth' (§522).

202. This is close to a passage in Rousseau's *Essai sur l'origine des langues* [*Essay on the Origin of Languages*], where he argues that music can 'paint' everything, even silence: Rousseau, *Œuvres complètes*, vol. V, p. 421. There is no definite date of composition for the *Essai*, although it is certainly connected with the work Rousseau did around his *Discours sur l'origine et les fondements de l'inégalité* [*Discourse on the Origin and Foundations of Inequality*], 1755.
203. *Roland*, 1685, tragédie en musique, music by Lulli, libretto by Quinault, 1685; Act IV, sc. 2.
204. *Castor et Pollux*, 1737, by Rameau, Act II, sc. 2. Diderot has misquoted – the libretto reads 'day'. For the aria see <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rSKe5WTVR0g>.
205. *Le Temple de la gloire*, 1745, by Rameau.
206. Diderot seems here to suggest that grandiose Church music has been left behind in the past, like the setting to music of religious texts. New ones are needed. Diderot had shown an interest in reforming libretti since at least his *Entretiens sur 'Le Fils naturel'*, 1757. Rousseau, in his *Lettre sur la musique française*, spoke against large scale Church music and almost immediately mentioned meeting Terradellas in Venice, who criticized large-scale polyphonic music (Rousseau, *Œuvres complètes*, vol. V, p. 308). Diderot, likewise, has the Nephew mention Terradellas only a few lines later.
207. Johann Adolf Hasse, nicknamed 'The Saxon' (1699–1783), born near Hamburg, but worked in Dresden, Vienna, and Venice. His movement between the north and south of the Alps meant that he was a conduit between Italian and German styles. His very numerous operas are largely neglected now, unjustly for many. Several are online in excerpted form, see for example http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YIz_guxlPdU.



Fig. 79 Johann Adolf Hasse (1740), by Balthasar Denner.



Johann Adolf Hasse, *Cléofide*, extract:

Air: 'Vuoi saper se tu mi piaci?' [Do you want to know if I like you?]



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Cleofide is an opera seria in three acts, first performed at Dresden in 1731. The libretto, taken from Metastasio, centres on the conflicts between the rulers of the Indies after the conquest by Alexander the Great in 325 BC. A *da capo* aria is typical of eighteenth-century opera or oratorio. It has three sections, the second contrasting in key or mood with the first; the third repeats the first, on which the performer is expected to improvise embellishments as he or she plays. This *da capo* aria in D minor has a middle section in F major which is striking for its concerto-like features, made up of a play of questions and answers between voice and orchestra, and by its use of ritornello. In spite of the basso continuo, the discourse is occasionally suddenly interrupted by long silences, to which the characteristic figure of the ritornello responds, namely the ascending three related notes of an anacrusis which regularly punctuate the air. Anacrusis (or upbeat) is the term for an unstressed note or group of notes at the beginning of a phrase of music preparing for the first downbeat of the first bar.

208. Domenech Terradellas (1713-51). A Catalan, he studied music in Naples. He worked in London for a while. His opera *Sesostri* was a considerable success and has been recorded.



Fig. 80 Domenech Terradellas, *L'Avens* (1884), artist unknown.

209. Tommaseo Traetta (1727-79), trained in Naples like many of the Italian composers mentioned in *Rameau's Nephew*. His music may be being rediscovered – a recording of his magnificent, *Antigona*, 1772, is available, and excerpts can be found at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ae0-dxtyyk>. Traetta seems to have been in St. Petersburg at the time of Diderot's visit, since his name, misspelled, is an addition in the margin of the autograph manuscript (see ed. Fabre, *Le neveu de Rameau*, p. 86). One can wonder if they met, or if Diderot heard Traetta's music there.



Fig. 81 Tommaso Traetta (n.d.), artist unknown.

210.



Nicola Antonio Porpora, *Polyphemus*, extract:
Act III, sc. 5: Aria: 'Alto Giove' [Jove on high]



To listen to this piece online scan the QR code
or follow this link: <http://dx.doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0044.17>



Polyphemus is an opera seria composed for the famous castrato singer Farinelli around the figure of the Cyclops, Polyphemus, son of Poseidon and the nymph

Toosa. *Alto Giove* is one of the composer's most famous arias. This air to the glory of Jupiter takes the form of a *da capo* aria with an air in E minor, a middle section in G major, and reprise of the air without transition, the possible embellishments improvised by the soloist. This aria's accompaniment rests on a writing in repeated notes, the four parts opening out towards the deeper tones, in a depressive movement, before starting out on an ascending movement which leads to a progression of cadences. This motif of accompanying takes on the role of a ritornello and punctuates the first and last parts of the air. The middle section, in a major key, is in contrast through its character and its tempo, *andantino*.

15

Nicola Antonio Porpora, *Polyphemus*, extract:

Act III, sc. 5: Recitativo and Aria: 'Senti il fato' [Feel the hand of destiny]



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or follow this link: <http://dx.doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0044.18>



This air, preceded by its recitative, follows the same structure as the preceding. This recitative, by using many modulations, introduces in a very free and natural manner the key of C flat major. This is stressed right from the first bars of the aria by the recurrent motif which is constructed round the two notes which are the poles of this key: E flat and C flat. This allegro is based on a contrast and alternation between these first solemn bars and a rapid and virtuosic movement. Besides the speed of execution of the semiquavers, even demisemiquavers, on the strings, the virtuosity of this air is revealed in the constant utilisation of melisma (several notes, sometimes a good many, on one single syllable), big leaps (sevenths, sometimes even twelfths), with a range of two octaves.

211. Metastasio (pseudonym of Pietro Antonio Domenico Trapassi) (1698-1782), the most important librettist of the eighteenth century, was born in Rome, but spent the most successful part of his career in Vienna. His dramas were set several times over by different composers, including Mozart. He was also considered an excellent poet by his contemporaries.



Fig. 82 Metastasio (19th century), artist unknown.

212. Once more, Diderot's concern with libretti as vectors for the fusing of language and music is clear.
213. Since the work of Daniel Hertz, this 'new style' of music has been identified with the music of the opéra comique, Italian and also French.
214. Rameau claimed to be able to set anything, even the *Gazette d'Hollande*, to music, to Collé's disgust – Collé himself was an excellent comic writer and librettist: Collé, *Journal*, vol. II, pp. 211-12.
215. It has often been remarked that these cut-about phrases resemble bits and pieces of Racine's *Phèdre*. But, and there is a but, Racine's verse is never so disjointed.
216. Diderot has the Nephew wonder here about the relation between the phonic qualities of a language and the sound-scape of the associated music, the point of Rousseau's *Lettre sur la musique française*. The Nephew dates the development of the opéra comique from the arrival of Egidio Duni in 1757; but this seems to have been at the invitation of Anseaume the librettist. That Parma, from where Duni was poached, had a French princess, is probably relevant to understanding his move to Paris. French was *the* diplomatic language at the time; until 1768, Etienne Bonnot de Condillac (1714-80) was tutor to Louis XV's grandchildren in Parma. Duni collaborated with Anseaume, Favart, and later with Diderot's friend, Sedaine. He knew Diderot personally.
217. *Armide*, music by Lulli, libretto by Quinault, Act I, sc. 2.
218. *Les Indes galantes*, Act II, sc. 3. Both this quotation and the preceding are invitations to marriage. Omitting the connection is one of Diderot the writer's most telling characteristics.
219. The Nephew here connects the split between the beautiful and the good to physiology which, for him, is the foundation of character. In this passage, the relation between the Nephew's point of view and a particularly hard, perhaps slightly cynical materialism becomes apparent – a thread that runs through the core of Diderot's sensibility, from the notes to the *Essai sur le mérite et la vertu* [*Essay on Merit and Virtue*], 1745, to *Rameau's Nephew*.
220. French: *espèce*, this is the term picked out by Hegel in §488-89, and left in French in his extended commentary in the section 'Culture and its Realm of Actuality'. He has, it seems to me, almost seized on this word because it offers

two advantages, one possibly social, one intellectual. First, Diderot's work has been honoured by a translation by Germany's foremost poet and intellectual, Goethe. Second, *espèce* as a term of logic, *species*, fits in very well with one of the structures of argument he had inscribed in his *Phenomenology of Spirit*. This is that of the '*besondere*', the particular or special, which in traditional logic mediated between the general, applicable to everything, and the individual, applicable to only one thing.

221. Possibly between Diderot himself and a music master, Bemetzrieder, whom he employed to give music lessons to his talented daughter. Diderot is thought to have had a hand, or more than a hand, in the work by Bemetzrieder, *Leçons de clavecin et principes d'harmonie* [Lessons for the Clavichord and Principles of Harmony], 1771, which is usually treated as a work by Diderot.

222. Samuel von Puffendorf (1583-1645) and Hugo Grotius (1632-94), theorists of Natural Law (see figs. 83 and 84). Diderot is thought to have studied for the law, briefly; he certainly studied mathematics, on his own.



Fig. 83 Samuel von Puffendorf (17th century), by Joachim von Sandrart (1606-88).

223. Another of Diderot's dialogues, entitled *Lui et Moi* [Him and Me], is very brief, but seems to end with a mention of parricide. The attribution to Diderot has been contested; however, the autograph manuscript is in the Fondation Martin Bodmer, Geneva.



Fig. 84 Hugo Grotius (1631), by Michiel Jansz. van Mierevelt.

224. One can wonder whether this remark is not a satirical side-swipe at Rousseau and his *Emile ou de l'éducation*, 1762.

225. 'HIM' is answering something that 'ME' has not expressed in the actual word-flow of the conversation. Does this point to a careless stitching together of different pre-existing elements of text (see Preface)? Or on the contrary is it deliberate, pointing to the fact that the subjectivities behind the speakers 'HIM' and 'ME' are unstable sometimes, and most strikingly at this point? There are related problems in the text of Diderot's novel, *La Religieuse* [The Nun].

226. 'HIM' seems to move here from acoustics to optics (see Diderot's *Leçons de clavecin*, 1771). This passage needs more investigation: by the time he put together *Rameau's Nephew*, Diderot had a long track record of discussing the relation between sound and sight, most notably in *Lettre sur les sourds et muets*.

227. Diderot later wrote a play, *Est-il bon, est-il méchant?* [*Is He Good, Is He Bad?*], based on actual events in his own life. These involve doing good turns, actual ones, by means which approximate to lies. The comedy (which develops *La pièce et le prologue*, distributed in the manuscript journal *La Correspondance littéraire* in 1777) was written over the remaining years of Diderot's life.
228. Diderot, in the *Encyclopédie* article 'Hobbisme', quotes Hobbes, *De Cive*, 1642, preface, while referring to Rousseau's political thought. Another sign that in this part of the dialogue, anyway, there is a kind of reflexion on and writing over of Rousseau's thought.
229. Freud noticed this passage, for obvious reasons (see *Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, XXI, 1931), quoting it in his expert evidence in the trial of Dr Philippe Halsmann, the 'Austrian Dreyfus' case. Halsmann was tried for the murder of his father. Freud used the universality of the complex in his criticism of the prosecutor's case (which had cited Freud but was so evidently anti-Semitic that the verdict was quashed in 1930).
230. Leonardo Leo (1694-1744), studied in Naples. He created an opera *La 'mpeca scoperta* (1723) in Neapolitan dialect. Unlike other composers of the Neapolitan school, he does not seem to have travelled. He wrote serious operas, including *Demofonte*, 1735, but his comic operas were more successful. For an excerpt from his opera *Le nozze di Ercole et Iole*, see <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pfGftqgyuU>.
231. Leonardo Vinci (1690-1730), like Leo, he wrote comic operas in Neapolitan dialect (see fig. 86). In total he is thought to have written about forty operas.

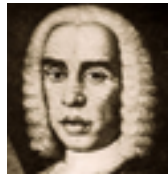


Fig. 85 Leonardo Leo (n.d.), artist unknown.



Fig. 86 Leonardo Vinci (n.d.), by Vincenzo Volpe (1855-1929).

16

Leonardo Vinci, Twelve solos for a German flute or violin with a thorough bass for the harpsichord or cello, extract: Sonata II: Sicilienne and Allegro



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or follow this link: <http://dx.doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0044.19>



Leonardo Vinci succeeded Alessandro Scarlatti at the Naples Royal Chapel. He was a typical representative of the new generation of Italian composers of opera

seria, and had great influence on the generations that succeeded him. He was admired for the tender and sorrowful expression of his compositions. Besides a large number of lyric works, he also left some instrumental pieces, published in 1748 in an anthology entitled *Twelve solos by Vinci and other Italian authors*. This sonata exhibits all the simplicity of melody and the flexibility of rhythm which characterized his opera airs, that song which, so Marmontel said, presents the ear with something like a thought completely rendered in music, and thus reveals the deep mystery of melody.

17

Leonardo Vinci, *Elpidia*, extract:

Air: 'Barbara, mi schernisci' [Cruel woman, you scorn me]



To listen to this piece online scan the QR code
or follow this link: <http://dx.doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0044.20>

This air, originally written for a castrato singer, offers several characteristics of the opera seria genre: its sombre tonality contrasts with the comic operas from which some of our earlier extracts were taken. This feature is accentuated by the slow tempo and the dotted rhythms; likewise, its form is that of a *da capo* aria, with an air composed out of a theme, a modulating development and a long cadence, succeeded by a part which is in contrast through its key and the use of chromaticism, and which precedes a reprise of the air, this last staying identical though it can be freely ornamented by the interpreter. As was usual in this genre of opera, the air was created specifically for the castrato singer who was to interpret the role at its first performance in 1725.

232. It seems true that Rameau's reputation suffered a much longer and more complete eclipse than other later composers. Yet the *Correspondance littéraire* of October 1778 says of a performance of *Castor and Pollux*: 'people hardly clap; yet everyone rushes to go and the sixteenth performance is as crowded as the first', ed. Maurice Tournieux, vol. XII, p. 173.

233. See above n. 115.

234. Madame de Pompadour (1721-64), the official mistress of Louis XV from 1745; she was intelligent, educated and for a long time very powerful. The nature of her connection to the *philosophes* is not clear – she is portrayed, for instance, in one portrait by Boucher, with a large volume of the *Encyclopédie* beside her;



Fig. 87 Mme de Pompadour (1756), by François Boucher.

there are allusions in Diderot's writings of the 1740s which suggest some kind of perhaps only imaginary acquaintance.

235. *L'Enfant d'Arlequin perdu et retrouvé*, possibly identical with a play by Goldoni, performed at the Comédie italienne in 1761. Mentioned in the *Dictionnaire dramatique contenant l'histoire des théâtres...* by the Abbé de La Porte, vol. I, p. 431 (see <https://archive.org/details/dictionnairedram01lapo>).
236. The statue of Memnon, so called by early Greek tourists to Egypt, one of a pair to the honour of the Pharaoh Amenophis III. After an earthquake in 27 BC one of the statues began to emit strange sounds; the Emperor Septimius Severus most unromantically had the damage repaired in 199 AD. See <http://www.victorianweb.org/authors/carlyle/signs/memnon.html>.



Fig. 88 The Colossi of Memnon (2011), by Marc Ryckaert.

237. Rinaldo da Capua (1705?-80?), who is now obscure, despite receiving the approbation of Charles Burney. His *La Zingara* was performed during the *Querelle des Bouffons* by Bambini's company (19 June 1753), and reworked with a libretto by Favart for the Italians and then the Saint-Laurent Fair (source: Bibliothèque nationale de France, catalogue). His work may have recycled others' music, and certainly his was rekitted with different libretti.
238. Giuseppe Tartini (1692-1770), a famous virtuoso who is said to have established the modern style of bowing. He wrote sonatas, including the famous 'Devil's trill'. He mainly lived in Padua, but did work in Prague for a couple of years. See <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DkFI5mwbAqQ>.



Fig. 89 Giuseppe Tartini (n.d.), artist unknown.

239.

18 

Pietro Locatelli, Six sonatas for three parts, two violins, or two flutes, and bass with a harpsichord, extract:
Sonata op. V no. 2: 1st Movement: Largo-Andante



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These six sonatas for three parts, which constitute Locatelli's opus V, date from 1746. This extract from the second sonata makes up the first movement, in the key of E minor. It is preceded by an introduction marked largo, and characterized by slowly repeated chords, followed by heavy silences. The whole exposition of the sonata, where the flute and the violin parts supersede each other and then play together over a basso continuo, leads from the key of E minor to the related key of G major, in a movement completely typical of the original sonata form. Then comes a development that leads to a restatement of the theme in the key of E minor. What is particular to this sonata is its writing as a trio with two principal instruments (here a flute and a violin, the composer leaving the choice of which instruments to the interpreters) and a basso continuo – a group that allows a great variety in the combination of different voices, which sometimes respond to each other, sometimes double each other, for example at the interval of a third, and sometimes accompany each other.

240. In Greek mythology, the Danaides, daughters of the King Danaeus were condemned to fill a leaking tub, as punishment for the murder of their husbands.
241. It seems likely that Diderot heard this story from an acquaintance, Isaac de Pinto, whom he had met in Paris, and whom he saw again in Holland. Lewinter implies that the story is told about Pinto, of whom Diderot certainly relates that he had been fined two hundred ducats for 'libertinage vague des hommes mariés' [vague promiscuity of married men], Lewinter, vol. XI, p. 388. Pinto himself was an economist of considerable importance (his work has been more sympathetically studied recently). See *Traité de la circulation et du crédit* [*Treatise on the Circulation of Money and on Credit*], 1771. Amsterdam: Marc-Michel Rey. There is a manuscript in the University of London library. He may have

influenced Diderot in his understanding of probability: 'Lettre à M.D. sur le jeu des cartes' [Letter to Mr D. on Playing Card Games].

242. Lulli was the son of a Florentine miller.

243. An allusion to Montaigne, *Essays*, Book II, chapter 17, 'De la présomption' [On Presumption].

244. René Antoine Ferchault de Réaumur (1683-1757), a scientist, important for his study of the measurement of temperature (the 'Réaumur' scale) and of insects: *Mémoires pour servir à l'histoire des insectes*, 6 vols., with 267 plates, 1734-42. Amsterdam: P. Mortier. It is this work that Diderot is referring to, and the reference drives home one of the inexplicit themes of Diderot's text, that of classification. Réaumur and Diderot were enemies from the beginning of Diderot's career.

245. Jean-Georges Noverre (1727-1810), in many ways the founder of modern European ballet. He was influenced by Diderot's ideas on pantomime, and developed ballets around Diderot's two published plays, insisting in his *Lettres sur la danse et sur les ballets* [Letters on Dancing and on Ballets], 1760, that ballets needed content. But Diderot is at this point in the dialogue once more interested in classification, here of movement, the 'positions'.

246. Ferdinando Galiani (1728-87), a Neapolitan economist who between 1759 and 1769 was secretary to the Neapolitan embassy in Paris. His most important economic work for the period was his *Dialogues sur le commerce des blés* [Dialogues on the Commerce in Wheat].



Fig. 90 René Antoine Ferchault de Réaumur (n.d.), artist unknown.



Fig. 91 Jean-Georges Noverre (18th century), by Barthélémy Joseph Fulcran Roger after Jean Urbain Guérin (1760-1836).



Fig. 92 Ferdinando Galiani (18th century), artist unknown.

247. One of the most important characters in *commedia dell'arte*, Pantalone is a metaphorical representation of money (see fig. 93).

248. In Greek mythology the satyrs were the companions of Pan and Dionysus, and were usually depicted with goat-like features (see fig. 94).



Fig. 94 Attic red-figure plate featuring a Satyr (520-500 BC), by Epiktetos.



Fig. 93 Pantalone (1550), artist unknown.

249. Nicolas Bonnard's late-seventeenth century drawing illustrates the type of robes that Diderot refers to here.



Fig. 95 Abbé en Sotane, from *Recueil des modes de la cour* (c.1678-93).

250. Abbé Gauchat, *Analyse et réfutation de divers écrits modernes contre la religion* [*Analysis and Refutation of Different Modern Writings against Religion*], 19 vols. 1756-63. Paris: Claude Herissant. The Bishop of Orléans seems to have been a key dispenser of Church patronage (see ed. Henri Coulet, *Diderot: le Neveu de Rameau*, 1989. Vol. XII of *Œuvres complètes*, ed. Dieckmann, Proust, Varloot. Paris: Hermann).

251. French: *Contrôleur general*, the office was, according to Marcel Marion, more or less equivalent to that of prime minister, given the condition of the state's finances under the last three Bourbon kings (*Dictionnaire des institutions de la France au XVII^e et XVIII^e siècles*, 1923. Paris: Auguste Picard). Bertin held this office from 1759-63 (i.e. through much of the Seven Years War). Bouret went bankrupt for the last time in 1777, the day before his death (a suicide was rumoured). For their careers and characters see the French edition.
252. See Diderot: 'I [Diderot] don't like acorns or animal lairs or hollow oak trees [he is thinking of the picture of the life of early man that Rousseau has given]. I would like a carriage, a comfortable apartment, fine linen, a perfumed prostitute, and I would put up easily with all the rest of the curses of our civilized state', to l'Abbé Le Monnier, on about 15 September 1755, in *Rousseau: Correspondance complète*, ed. R.A. Leigh, vol. III, letter 322.
253. The figure of Diogenes the cynic bears a complex role among the *philosophes*, see the French edition, pp. 154-55. He also appears at the beginning of Diderot's dialogue, suggesting a more careful construction of the dialogue than is often admitted.
254. Pericles, 5th century BC, was a general and statesman. Lais and Phryne were Greek courtesans. Phryne, fabulously wealthy, made the wonderful offer to the Thebans of rebuilding their city walls, if they would inscribe on them: 'destroyed by Alexander, restored by Phryne the courtesan' (*Encyclopædia Britannica*).



Fig. 96 Bust of Pericles (c.430 BC), artist unknown.



Fig. 97 *The Concert* (1774), by Antoine Jean Duclos.

255.

256. This well known illustration of an afternoon concert is believed to show the child prodigy that was Mozart being exhibited at a social gathering. HIM is proposing a sexually orientated showing off of his wife's talents during a concert he will be giving at a party no doubt later in the day and less sedate. See note 72 for a famous holder of private concerts in his salon.



Fig. 98 *Le Thé à l'anglaise* (1764), by Michel Barthélemy Ollivier.

257. In 1726, after the financial crisis of the 'Law System', named after the Scot John Law – who founded a national bank in France using paper money, which collapsed, ruining many – a more stable monetary system allowing the collection of taxes by a system of 'farming', was set up for the rest of the Ancien Régime.

Every six years the lease of the collection of taxes was passed, or rather sold, to a group of financiers, known as 'Fermiers généraux', or 'La Ferme'. They were 40 in number, and they acquired their positions as tax collectors not only from the group itself, but also from the group financing the whole, and backing it with the huge sums of money needed to buy the position. The interest paid them for this was known as the 'croupe', that is, the 'backside'; in Diderot's text, it seems clear that there is some connection here, perhaps merely a pun. Louis XV was himself a 'croupier'. See 'Croupe', in Marion, *Dictionnaire des institutions de la France*, n. 234.

- 258.

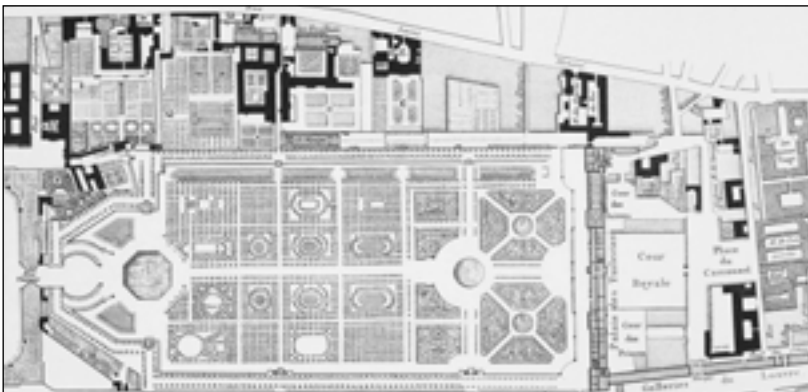


Fig. 99 *Jardin et Palais de Tuileries* (1770).

259. Pierre Chartier, in his edition of the *Neveu de Rameau*, 2002. Paris: Livre de Poche, has explained this joke: the dog's bowl upside-down has the shape of a clerical cap, *la calotte*.

260. Antoine Dauvergne (1713-97), a composer of opera seria – though it isn't clear which one might be referred to here; but also of *Les Troqueurs* [*The Wife Swappers*], often called the first French opéra comique, and performed with huge success at the Saint-Laurent Fair in July 1753. It is interesting that no mention of it is made in Diderot's text. Rousseau disliked it because, one suspects, it successfully brought together Italian-type music and a French libretto (by Jean Joseph Vadé (1720-57), an important deviser of libretti for opéras comiques and a writer of one act comedies, some in the *genre poissard*, that is using the dialect of the lowest classes in Paris). This contradicted his theory about the relation of a national language to a national music. Diderot, like Rousseau in his *Lettre sur la musique française*, ends with a reference to Dauvergne, but to his opera seria.



Fig. 100 Mlle Lionnois in Dauvergne's *Polyxène* (1763), by Louis René Boquet.

261. 'We put up with our forebears, each one of us', with this Latin quotation from Virgil (*Aeneid*, VI, 743), Diderot brings up the 'anxiety of influence' that seems to run lightly throughout the text. When he quotes it elsewhere, in his *Salon* of 1767, he adds 'says the madman Rameau', Lewinter, vol. VII, p. 205.

262. Etienne de Canaye (1694-1782), celebrated for his learning and his impish sense of humour. Diderot in his *Satire première* (Lewinter, vol. X, pp. 273-86) recounts an evening at the Opéra in the company of Canaye, and Fougere de Monbron (?-1761), a care-for-nothing and writer of cynical works (*Le cosmopolite ou le citoyen du monde* [*The Cosmopolitan or the Citizen of the World*], 1750) and mildly licentious novels (*Le canapé couleur de feu* [*The Flame-Coloured Sofa*], 1741; *Margot la ravaudeuse* [*Margot the Mender*], 1750).

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Denis Diderot's *Rameau's Nephew*

A Multi-Media Edition

Marian Hobson, Kate E. Tunstall,
Caroline Warman and Pascal Duc

In a famous Parisian chess café, a down-and-out, HIM, accosts a former acquaintance, ME, who has made good, more or less. They talk about chess, about genius, about good and evil, about music, they gossip about the society in which they move, one of extreme inequality, of corruption, of envy, and about the circle of hangers-on in which the down-and-out abides. The down-and-out from time to time is possessed with movements almost like spasms, in which he imitates, he gestures, he rants. And towards half past five, when the warning bell of the Opera sounds, they part, going their separate ways.

Probably completed in 1772-73, Denis Diderot's *Rameau's Nephew* fascinated Goethe, Hegel, Engels and Freud in turn, achieving a literary-philosophical status that no other work by Diderot shares. This interactive, multi-media edition offers a brand new translation of Diderot's famous dialogue, and it also gives the reader much more. Portraits and biographies of the numerous individuals mentioned in the text, from minor actresses to senior government officials, enable the reader to see the people Diderot describes, and provide a window onto the complex social and political context that forms the backdrop to the dialogue. Links to musical pieces specially selected by Pascal Duc and performed by students of the Conservatoire national supérieur de musique et de danse de Paris, illuminate the wider musical context of the work, enlarging it far beyond its now widely understood relation to opéra comique.

Cover image: Charles-Germain de Saint-Aubin, *Qu'importe*, c.1740-c.1775

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