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Vidal, Kathryn Simpson

MASTERS AND SERVANTS IN THE FRENCH NOVEL, 1715-1789

*Rice University*

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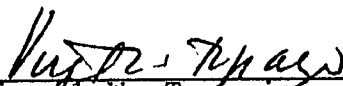
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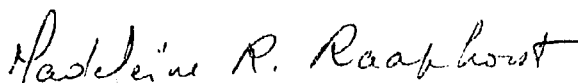
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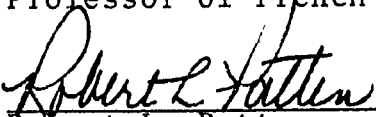
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HOUSTON, TEXAS

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## MASTERS AND SERVANTS IN THE FRENCH NOVEL, 1715-1789

### ABSTRACT

KATHRYN SIMPSON VIDAL

The sudden appearance of a servant-hero in several prominent eighteenth-century French novels represents an evolution away from the limitations placed upon the literary representation of lower-class characters. This phenomenon has often been interpreted either in socio-political terms, as a sign of an emerging spirit of egalitarianism and bourgeois individualism, or in esthetic terms as part of the increased preoccupation with realism in the genre. A close textual reading of works such as Lesage's Gil Blas, Marivaux's Le Paysan parvenu and Diderot's Jacques le fataliste contradicts both of the above affirmations. As servants the heroes of these novels show few links with the reality of the servant's existence, and furthermore these texts eventually accentuate the subservience rather than the freedom of the individual.

The servant had previously functioned essentially as a comic figure, often reduced to stereotype in his inherent inferiority within an upper-class world. Servants, and members of the lower classes in general, were excluded from power and portrayed with a sense of differentiation in mind,

an attitude quite typical of elitist social views which pervade French literature during the Ancien Regime, even in the Age of Enlightenment. The manifestations of such attitudes both before and during the period 1715-1789 are examined here in some detail in order to assess the actual impact of the servant-hero.

In the three novels under consideration, the servant's role as a serious literary personage undergoes an evolution towards greater sophistication and complexity. From the acceptance of servitude found in Gil Blas, the former servant negates it entirely in Le Paysan parvenu, whereas there are hints in Jacques le fataliste that servitude might also offer access to liberation. These novels best exemplify the three levels of meaning associated with the servant and the matter of servitude: a literary level, most closely linked to the conventional and comic role of the valet; a social level, the image of man's interaction in a social environment; and finally a philosophical level, an interrogation into the problem of human freedom.

Each of these novels is also structured around the continual formation and dissolution of the master-servant relationship, both literally and figuratively. Interaction among men is consistently defined between the poles of domination and servitude, on all levels of the social hierarchy. The many parallels with the Hegelian paradigm of Master and Slave are discussed in the light of this explicit thematic attention to servitude.

Finally, the nature of the narrative voice in each novel is also linked to the servitude of the hero. The servant participates more and more actively in the telling of the story, just as the narrator shows an increasing degree of control. However, the servant's struggle for power, like the narrator's quest, remains ultimately unresolved.

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I wish to express my gracious thanks to Professor Virgil W. Topazio, whose unfailing confidence and enthusiasm often sparked my own, and to Professor Madeleine Raaphorst, for her advice and assistance throughout the years. A special word of thanks goes to Professor Robert L. Patten, the very tactful defender of the English language, who, on very short notice, undertook the monumental task of reading my prose.

To my family and so many special friends, thank you for your faith and support.

And finally, merci Robert, "pour notre liberté."

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

		Page
INTRODUCTION . . . . .		1
CHAPTER		
I	THE SERVANT'S IMAGE: LITERARY PERSPECTIVES . . . . .	14
II	<u>GIL BLAS</u> AND THE STEREOTYPE . . . . .	52
III	THE <u>PARVENU</u> AND THE FIGURATIVE DIMENSIONS OF <u>SERVITUDE</u> . . . . .	136
IV	<u>JACQUES LE FATALISTE</u> : NEW DIMENSIONS . . . . .	227
V	CONTEMPORARY CURRENTS: THE CODES OF INFERIORITY . . . . .	304
CONCLUSION . . . . .		336
BIBLIOGRAPHY . . . . .		343

## INTRODUCTION

The novel in France underwent vast changes during the eighteenth century which have attracted increasing critical attention in recent years. General studies such as those of Georges May, English Showalter, Jr. and Henri Coulet<sup>1</sup> amply illustrate the degree of experimentation which occurred during this period, largely because the novel, as a relatively new literary form, remained free of classical restraints. In this time of redefinition, the novel subordinated the vraisemblable in favor of the vrai, thus promoting the movement now generally heralded as the gradual appearance of realism in the genre.<sup>2</sup> Included in this evolution was the tendency to portray in more detail the multiple levels of society, a trend which inspired new themes and new characters. As S.P. Jones states in the introduction to his bibliography of French prose fiction from 1700 to 1750, "no one class of society occupies the entire scene."<sup>3</sup> One of the most effective vehicles for the portrayal of a more complete social universe was the novel of social ascension: its hero experienced a variety of classes and professions in his often spectacular rise to the upper strata of society. Gil Blas, Le Paysan parvenu and La Vie de Marianne are some of the most

celebrated novels which center upon this theme, and their numerous imitators quickly made a literary stereotype of the parvenu during the first half of the century.

Novels such as Gil Blas and Le Paysan parvenu bring to the forefront a new hero, the servant, who had received little attention in the literature of the past. In both of these works, for example, a former servant recounts his life and especially his rise above servitude. Furthermore, the relationship between master and servant forms a central element in the dynamics of the plot and is essential to the hero's self-definition. Personality and character development are oriented towards the concept of the hero's subjugation to another. Servitude thus receives an explicit thematic importance rarely explored before.

Even as a secondary character the servant emerges from the relative anonymity of the seventeenth century and attracts the novelist's attention. Although this was scandalous to certain members of the reading public, especially the critics, the lower classes in general gradually appear in the background, perhaps most notably in works such as Manon Lescaut or in the controversial "scène du cocher" in Marivaux's La Vie de Marianne, which, according to the author, public opinion had deemed "ignoble." Marivaux even felt compelled to justify such a scene in his Avertissement to Part II, insisting that "philosophic" readers "ne seront pas fâchés de voir ce que c'est que l'homme dans un cocher, et



ce que c'est que la femme dans une petite marchande."<sup>4</sup> Similarly, Marianne, the narrator, again criticizes those readers who condemn the inclusion of the lower classes in literary works.<sup>5</sup> Although the importance of their presence must not be overly exaggerated, the attention accorded to such characters added a new dimension to the relationships between the classes as they are depicted in the novel. The amount of controversy generated by the appearance of "le peuple" points to its novelty as a literary subject.

The presence of servants had long been a part of literary convention and tradition, especially in the theater, but they were secondary figures, lacking in depth. Quite naturally, then, the servant in literature had evoked little critical interest, since he was often not much more than a prop or a mouthpiece for his master. In France, with the exception of Molière's celebrated valets and servantes, one finds few servants, before Gil Blas, portrayed as memorable literary characters, whose daily life and experiences are meaningful to the structure of the literary work. This sudden rise to prominence merits further inquiry not only into the factors which may have provoked such an evolution but into the nature of this new literary portrayal of the servant and his relationship with the ruling classes.

At first glance, it seems simple to draw direct causal relationships between a number of social changes and the appearance of members of the lower classes in literature.

For example, the gradual relaxation of the social hierarchy during the end of Louis XIV's reign has been linked to the popularity of the theme of social ascension and the parvenu. Others also denote pre-revolutionary fervor or the rumblings of social upheaval in the added significance granted to the lower classes. Such interpretations usually fail to take into account the complex relationship between society and literature and, in the specific case of the eighteenth-century novel, accord an exaggerated importance to this phenomenon. The Revolution of 1789 often tends to prejudice critical attitudes and prevent a just appreciation of the century which preceded it. Georges May correctly points out that the lower classes still play a relatively small role in the novel of this period.<sup>6</sup> Generally, eighteenth-century social attitudes remain firmly locked in the traditions of the Ancien Régime, as I shall illustrate with some insistence.

Furthermore, close scrutiny of a selection of novels of the period reveals that although servants do tend to play a more prominent role, their characterization is still colored by a number of seventeenth-century stereotypes which emphasize and ridicule their inferiority. The contradiction between the servant of the literary stereotype and the emergence of a servant-hero in the novels of social ascension should dispel further generalizations about the revolutionary spirit of most eighteenth-century novelists, at least as far as their treatment of the lower classes is concerned.

Although in Jacques le fataliste the master's power over his servant is continually questioned, so that Jacques may claim at one point: "vous vous appelleriez mon maître, et . . . c'est moi qui serais le vôtre,"<sup>7</sup> in many a novel servants remain faceless appendages of their masters, ranked with horses as a measure of a person's social stature. "Inclusion in no way ensured favorable treatment, quite to the contrary."<sup>8</sup>

My purpose in this study is then to examine the characterization of servants and their role in a group of eighteenth-century French novels in order to highlight this apparent contradiction between the hero and the stereotype. The servant was chosen as the most common representative of the lower classes in the novel because of his omnipresent role in an upper-class world, which generally remains the central milieu in the novels in question. The relationships between masters and servants will also be examined as a clue to the novel's portrayal of class relationships and class consciousness. The literature of a period often implicitly communicates certain social values of its time; the stereotype of the "inferior" servant operates in this manner. This examination of the literary portrayal of servants shall focus in more detail upon a certain number of these social "codes" and the manner in which they are elaborated and employed in the novel.

One objection to the social orientation of this study should be mentioned here. Both Georges May and English

Showalter, Jr. conclude in their analyses of the evolution of the eighteenth-century novel that this broadening of the social spectrum in the genre was essentially the result of esthetic preoccupations and not a symptom of social factors. May argues that since the novel was attacked by critics on esthetic and moral grounds, novelists responded in kind, countering the charge of "invraisemblance" with an evolution towards greater realism. This was also a reaction to the continuing trend in heroic novels, a vestige of the seventeenth-century tradition. In effect, it was the critics who pushed the novel towards realism.<sup>9</sup> Showalter agrees, stating that the forms and content in the novel depend mainly on literary tradition, not on social, intellectual or political changes. He does admit however that the novel, as the genre most susceptible to change in the eighteenth century, could absorb "quite a lot" of the intellectual movements of the time, and "that the subject matter of the novel roughly parallels social changes is not mere coincidence."<sup>10</sup> The problem lies in determining the relationship between the two.

In spite of the validity of these arguments, which are verifiable at least in the abundant commentaries which so many eighteenth-century novelists used to justify or clarify their works, an investigation of the social perspective seems applicable, although always limited because of the intangibility of its relationship with literature. Still, it seems impossible to conceive of a void between the two in a time

of such preoccupation with social change, especially when one considers the fact that so many novelists were also directly responsible for the wave of new ideas which inundated the century.<sup>11</sup>

Consequently, in the present study I shall avoid drawing ineffective causal relationships and, rather, attempt to demonstrate the manner in which the circulation of a certain set of ideas, attitudes and values are manifested in the novel, whether through innovation or the perpetuation of literary tradition. My emphasis upon novels in which the hero is also a servant is intended to develop the contradictions mentioned above as well as the ensuing technical problems this posed to the novelist who chose such a character in spite of critical opinion. Before approaching specific novels, I will briefly examine the role of the servant in literature before 1715 as an introduction to the limitations placed upon the representation of the personage.

The limiting dates of this study, 1715-1789, naturally are of an arbitrary nature, for the movement of ideas and themes obviously does not respect such rigid temporal limits. Certain factors did determine my choice however. The year 1715, the date of the death of Louis XIV and of the publication of the first parts of Gil Blas, is often accepted as the termination of a transitional period in literature which is more closely tied to the spirit of the seventeenth century.<sup>12</sup> Society during the Regency is characterized by a

new state of flux. Obviously, 1789 begins another even more significant period of upheaval for French society. Even though these dates are not inflexible, their selection can be justified by the fact that most of the major novels of the eighteenth century were indeed written during this period, although some, notably Diderot's Le Neveu de Rameau and Jacques le fataliste, were published later.

My central analysis focuses upon three very distinct treatments of the servant-hero during the eighteenth century: Lesage's Gil Blas, the parvenus of Marivaux and Mouhy, and Diderot's Jacques le fataliste. While steeped in the stereotypes of the past in Gil Blas, the servant-hero is gradually liberated from a conventionally inferior role. Although historical documentation concerning the reality of the master-servant relationship is of interest, I find it preferable to let the texts first speak for themselves. An examination of some of the general eighteenth-century attitudes towards servants and the lower classes is included in a later chapter for the purposes of comparison. Texts by Rousseau and Restif de la Bretonne will also be analyzed in this light.

Gil Blas is characterized by his role as a servant in the most conventional sense; the novel's many other allusions to the comic tradition reinforce these links with the valet of comedy. The plot of Gil Blas is structured around a series of master and servant relationships as the hero moves up in the world, and the theme of the valet's imitation of the

master forms the basis for the development of Gil's character just as it lends itself to social satire. The idea of imitation also obsesses Jacob, Le Paysan parvenu, in his attempt to gain access to a superior social milieu. Like Marianne (La Vie de Marianne) and Jeannette (La Paysanne parvenue), he must however hide his obscure origins and break away from servitude before he can feel acceptable within the elite. Consequently, although some light is shed upon the lower-class world from whence these characters emerged, their own rejection of their origins gives it a negative aura. The servant-hero rather aspires from the outset to the world of those he serves and unequivocally accepts its structures, hierarchy and values. When the former servant then has servants himself, for example, he generally shows no sympathy for their social status, from which he recently emerged. Jacob sees in his new cook only an object to be manipulated and a symbol of his own fortune: "J'y rêvai à ma cuisinière, qu'il ne tenait qu'à moi de faire venir, et que je crois que j'appelai pour la voir . . . ." <sup>13</sup> A subtle, unconscious sense of alienation eventually emerges from the individual's rupture with his original nature as he adds successive disguises to better imitate his superiors.

The servant's function in these novels also evolves from an essentially comic role to a more profound and symbolic one. Subservience is no longer limited to the literal servant; it is a fact of human existence on all levels of the

social hierarchy. "All men have masters," writes Diderot in Jacques le fataliste, a novel which simultaneously deals with the elusive play of forces between master and servant and among men in general, but also between narrator and reader and fiction and reality. Diderot most distinctly breaks away from the traditional characterization of the servant with Jacques, a central voice in this enigmatic novel. He also most explicitly addresses the philosophic dimensions of servitude once he has broken away from the literary convention.

An interesting means of appraising this set of servants is provided by the Hegelian model of Master and Slave, discussed in his Phenomenology of Mind.<sup>14</sup> This structure is cited almost automatically in studies dealing with the servant-hero, but has rarely been utilized methodically as a comparative tool. It proves particularly applicable in these texts in which a social definition (the servant) is intimately linked to the hero's progress towards self-definition. Furthermore, each of these servants also serves as narrator of his or her experiences. Hegel's analysis offers some insight into the often questionable sincerity of this narrative voice.

The analysis of servitude may appear contradictory in a century so often associated with the call for equality of all men. It has become increasingly apparent, however, in the light of recent scholarship, that the concept of "égalité" in the thought of the French Enlightenment was much more



complex than previous, more idealized interpretations have led us to believe. Even the most prominent thinkers of the time, Voltaire and Rousseau, were prone to disregard the theoretical equality of all men when it came to dealing concretely with "le peuple." Other philosophes as well unhesitatingly refer to "la canaille" with disdain, as if they were set apart in a separate world. In most respects, they were. The demands of 1789 emanated predominately from the middle class, eager to gain parity with the nobility and the clergy, but such status was not intended to be extended to all levels of the social spectrum. Such a contradiction between the theory and the practice of an egalitarian model appears to have been acceptable within the framework of the society of the ancien régime, even in its waning years.

More specifically, such disdain or total disregard for the lower classes generally prevails in the literature of the period, and the standards of literary taste dictated fidelity to an image of society patterned after the strict hierarchy of the past. Such an attitude is repeatedly detected in the works of numerous literary commentators, as well as those of diverse journalists, chroniclers, and historians of the period, in spite of the fact that "le peuple" made up over three-fourths of the general population of France.<sup>15</sup> The servant was still "un homme du peuple," and the inherent inferiority of his origins always appears as a factor in the literary representation of the character.

## NOTES - INTRODUCTION

<sup>1</sup>See Georges C. May, Le Dilemme du roman au 18<sup>e</sup> siècle: étude sur les rapports du roman et de la critique, 1715-1761 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1963); English Showalter, Jr., The Evolution of the French Novel, 1641-1782 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972); Henri Coulet, Le Roman jusqu'à la Révolution, Collection U: Lettres Françaises, 2 vols. (New York: McGraw-Hill - Armand Colin, 1967).

<sup>2</sup>See Coulet, pp. 318-320, May, pp. 47-62 and Showalter, p. 348.

<sup>3</sup>A List of French Prose Fiction from 1700-1750 (New York: The H.W. Wilson Company, 1939), xxix.

<sup>4</sup>La Vie de Marianne ou les aventures de Madame la comtesse de xxx, ed. F. Deloffre (Paris: Garnier, 1963), p. 56.

<sup>5</sup>La Vie de Marianne, p. 57.

<sup>6</sup>May, pp. 183-190.

<sup>7</sup>Diderot, Jacques le fataliste in Oeuvres romanesques, ed. Henri Bénac (Paris: Garnier, 1962), p. 666.

<sup>8</sup>Priscilla P. Clark, The Battle of the Bourgeois: The Novel in France, 1789-1848 (Paris: Didier, 1973), p. 32.

<sup>9</sup>May, pp. 16-31, 202 and 247.

<sup>10</sup>Showalter, pp. 349, 351 and 70.

<sup>11</sup>A brief discussion of this problem is included in Ronald C. Rosbottom's "Marivaux and the significance of 'naissance,'" in Jean-Jacques Rousseau et son temps: Politique et Littérature au XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle, ed. Michel Launay (Paris: Nizet, 1969), 73-92, especially pp. 77-84.

<sup>12</sup>See Coulet, p. 288. Gil Blas is widely regarded as the first novel written in the spirit of the eighteenth century. Georges May also uses 1715 as the beginning of his study of the eighteenth-century novel.

<sup>13</sup>Marivaux, Le Paysan parvenu, ed. Robert Mauzi (Paris: 10/18, Union Générale d'Éditions, 1965), p. 296.

<sup>14</sup>Section B. IVa: "Independence and Dependence of Self-Consciousness: Lordship and Bondage," in the translation by J.B. Baillie, 2nd ed. (New York: Macmillan, 1931), pp. 228-239.

<sup>15</sup>See François Furet, "Pour une définition des classes inférieures à l'époque moderne," Annales. Economie. Société. Civilisation. 18 (1963), p. 459.

## CHAPTER I

### THE SERVANT'S IMAGE: LITERARY PERSPECTIVES

"Un laquais en tous lieux passe pour un vaurien,  
Est raillé des méchants, haï des gens de bien."  
(L'Etat de servitude ou misère des domestiques, 1711)<sup>1</sup>

The servant is one of the most common representatives of the lower classes in literature, but, like his counterpart the peasant, he does not appear as a truly individualized character until the seventeenth century. The portrayal of the servant is intertwined with a number of social stereotypes associated with the lower classes in general, most of which generally tend to emphasize their inherent inferiority in spite of their more intimate contact with the ruling class. One of the most obvious generalizations that can be made from the outset is the mere absence of lower-class characters in a number of major works in early French literature, and the diminished role accorded to them when they are included. It seems appropriate briefly to examine this role and the major stages in its evolution prior to the eighteenth century before studying the phenomenon of the servant-hero in greater detail.

Literary works which present a broad portrait of society and the interaction between the classes usually stand out as exceptions in their time. "Realism" in literary history is often indirectly associated with the rare appearance of members of the lower classes. The material aspect of reality, the concrete detail, or the vulgar side of man, are all linked to the socially inferior during the early manifestations of realism. Such an image long served notably for its comic effect in juxtaposition with the idealized and spiritual characteristics appropriated to members of the ruling classes. In his introductory remarks on the evolution of the novel up through the seventeenth century, Henri Coulet notes how these two tendencies reinforced the existing social hierarchy:

Complémentaires, ils s'adressaient la plupart du temps à la classe dirigeante qui trouvait dans l'un une image flatteuse où elle souhaitait se reconnaître, et dans l'autre une image ridicule des classes inférieures qui la justifiait de les dominer.<sup>2</sup>

The lower classes, both urban and rural, are thus rarely included in the aristocratic milieu which dominates in literature before 1700. When these elements of society appear, usually in scenes of people at work or in descriptions of their daily lives and the material reality of their condition, such passages are generally restricted to the background. This is of course understandable within a literary tradition which dealt rarely with the mundane. Chrétien de Troye's "inévitables tisseuses de soie"<sup>3</sup> (for

they are inevitably cited as an example of early realism) in Yvain, ou le chevalier au lion (1170's-1180's) play only a miniscule role in the work as simply another pretext for the hero to demonstrate his prowess. The world of the medieval novels largely remains the world of a single class.<sup>4</sup> According to Coulet's survey of the novel of the Middle Ages, only a very few prose works contain concrete representations of the daily life of a variety of social classes and communicate some sensitivity towards the social relationships of their era. These include the novels of Jean Renart (notably L'Escoufle, 1202) and the fabliaux in vogue from about the middle of the twelfth century to the beginning of the fourteenth (1320).<sup>5</sup> Rabelais' work is also noteworthy in this respect, for in its portrayal of the vast panorama of French society during the Renaissance all of the social classes are included, either at work or in daily life. Rabelais continued the realistic tradition of the fabliaux in a number of scenes which, though brief, accord individualized attention to character and action and do not serve merely to ridicule or parody the lower classes.<sup>6</sup>

In other genres, the lower classes are probably most prominent in the medieval farce, which also embraced a variety of social levels and often dealt with the earthier side of life. As is the case with the fabliaux, the farces addressed a wider, more popular audience, and the "earthy" is generally associated in both genres with the socially

inferior. This trend reappears consistently and will be discussed later in greater detail. The servant first gained stature within the tradition of the farce, which was to influence the evolution of his role especially in seventeenth-century comedy.

In poetry, more materialistic preoccupations appear in the work of Rutebeuf (thirteenth century), in the concrete nature of his allusions to his own daily struggle with poverty and the life of the poor. Villon of course later accomplished this with greater intensity in the development of one of his major themes, the juxtaposition of the grandeur and the misery of man's condition. Otherwise, apart from an occasional reference or a cameo role (such as Clément Marot's valet in his "Epitre au Roi pour avoir esté dérobé," 1531), servants, and the lower classes in general, play very few active roles in the major literary works prior to the seventeenth century.

In the philosophical vein, La Boétie's Discours de la servitude volontaire (1548?) is an astonishing text in that its author even raises the question of servitude, but also because of the modernity of his approach, comparable to Rousseau's Discours sur l'Inégalité or Hegel's use of the Master and Slave figures to illustrate one facet of man's interaction with others. Servitude in La Boétie's thought is treated as an abstraction, however, and consequently the focus is not at all upon the plight of the humble.<sup>7</sup>

Given the relatively static nature of the social hierarchy up until the reign of Louis XIV, and the fact that from a very early time writers generally addressed a reading public limited to the upper strata of society, such a lack of literary interest in the members of the lower classes is hardly surprising. Furthermore, such an attitude was dominant in society as a whole: "Sous l'Ancien Régime, la stratification sociale est fondée sur un ordre naturel et divin, puis historique et rationnel que la société accepte et ne met guère en cause."<sup>8</sup> The inferior social status of a valet or a femme de chambre was accepted unquestioningly and led to no inner conflict or penetrating awareness of class distinctions. Literary tradition simply reinforced the existing view of society, and the absence of members of the lower classes was, from the perspective of a seventeenth-century reader, more "true-to-life" than the truth:

. . . au temps de Mlle de Scudéry ou de Mme de Lafayette une marquise était légitimement plus intéressante et même plus vraie qu'une fille de bourgeois ou de paysans. . . . (D)estinés à l'aristocratie, ces romans idéalisaient la société aristocratique, masquaient l'existence des autres classes, ridiculisaient leurs moeurs, éliminaient les réalités basses, déguisaient les personnages nobles en bergers, en grecs, en romains, en chevaliers d'un autre âge; on ne se mettait à table que pour des festins somptueux, on ne se couchait pas pour dormir, mais pour passer la nuit dans l'angoisse; chaque héros était le plus généreux et le plus brave, chaque héroïne la plus belle qu'on eût jamais vue; aventures, situations,<sup>9</sup> caractères, sentiments, tout était extraordinaire.

By the 1600's, however, the servant begins to emerge more regularly as a distinct literary character, although in the novel he and his social peers met a mixed fate. In the



grandiose "romans héroïques,"<sup>10</sup> servants do occasionally step forward, but only to relate their masters' tales. This was a convention of the genre, and the servant added none of his own perspective to the events he recounted. His life was of no interest to the audience, except as it might have interacted with the adventures of his master. Not a single servant is involved in the action in La Princesse de Clèves, the masterpiece of the classical period.

Literary historians generally note that strains of realism in the seventeenth-century novel appeared in the guise of the roman comique, which was influenced by the picaresque and its emphasis on the material conditions of existence, food, lodging, clothing, money and basic survival in a lower-class world. (The first translation of Don Quixote was published in France between 1614 and 1618, and several other Spanish picaresque novels soon followed.<sup>11</sup>) The three major "comic" novels of the century (also grouped together as "realistic" or "burlesque" novels), Sorel's Histoire comique de Francion (1623-33), Scarron's Roman comique (1651 and 1657; continued by Offray approximately 1663), and the Roman bourgeois by Furetière (1666), include a wider variety of social milieux, yet the role of the lower classes is still largely a pretext for ridicule. Francion is a hero in the picaresque tradition, but he is of noble origin and demonstrates an inherent disdain for le peuple in spite of his increased contact with them.<sup>12</sup> Scarron integrates

representatives of the various classes more effectively into the action primarily through his choice of a troupe of comedians as the focal point of the plot, since the actors themselves were of diverse origins and were in daily contact with both the rich and the poor.<sup>13</sup> The servants, however, are still either complete fools (Ragotin) or are subsequently unmasked as noblemen in disguise, a fact which accounts for their unusually good behavior as servants. Finally, Furetière employs the similar device of setting intrigues derived from the roman héroïque into a lower-class world, here the petite bourgeoisie of Paris, in order to parody the invraisemblance of the former. Again, however, the "real" tends towards the ridiculous, and, as Coulet suggested, this is because the representation of familiar, everyday reality without ridicule was impossible within a seventeenth-century literary context.<sup>14</sup> These seventeenth-century "realists" were also less preoccupied with the esthetic question of literary realism than with a satire of the précieux and héroïque trends and their frequent outlandishness. One extreme, the vulgarity of the lower-class existence, was used to combat the other. In contrast, the general eighteenth-century perspective shifted its notion of the vraisemblable, and this necessitated a certain esthetic effort to "suggérer . . . la diversité et la complexité du réel."<sup>15</sup> The importance of these changes forms part of our central thesis, and shall be explored in more depth in subsequent chapters.

In other seventeenth-century prose genres, the plight of the lower classes is obviously not a major preoccupation. France at this time "was not apparently given to thinking very much at all about those who supplied its material wants by the labour of their hands. The literature of this period holds itself above such preoccupations. . . ." <sup>16</sup> Madame de Sévigné occasionally alludes to problems with her own staff, their wages, and their personal lives, or briefly mentions the hardships of the poor, the workers and the peasants. <sup>17</sup> La Bruyère's striking passage on the peasants has been sufficiently singled out, especially for its stark presentation of the laborers as "animaux farouches." <sup>18</sup> Roland Barthes's interpretation of this text focuses on the manner in which it neutralizes any true social concern: ". . . le peuple n'a . . . qu'une valeur purement fonctionnelle: il reste l'objet d'une charité, dont le sujet seul, qui est l'homme charitable, est appelé à l'existence; pour exercer la pitié, il faut bien un objet pitoyable: le peuple a cette complaisance." <sup>19</sup>

Like Pascal, <sup>20</sup> La Bruyère also questions those who give off an appearance of greatness by the number of their servants and likewise the public which believes in such appearances. <sup>21</sup> Again the servants function as external objects, signs of prosperity which direct attention only to their proprietor.

Otherwise, among the major writers, only La Fontaine is more attentive to the lower classes, and particularly to the

peasantry. In spite of the simplification of character necessary in the fable and the conte, he successfully adds more depth to such figures than is found elsewhere in the seventeenth century, except for the servants of comedy.<sup>22</sup> Several nouvellistes (Donneau de Visé and Préfontaine, for example) do situate their tales among "les petites gens," but in general a comic, burlesque tone prevails, again in the tradition of the fabliau.<sup>23</sup> René Godenne, the specialist in this genre, emphasizes that an aristocratic setting and l'esprit galant are predominant in the nouvelle of both the seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries.<sup>24</sup>

In all of the major tragedies of the seventeenth century the confidants, male and female, appear with regularity as a convention of the genre. Their true social status is often unspecified, and of little importance within the context of classical tragedy. The function of such characters is necessary but passive: only in rare cases, such as Oenone's interventions in Phèdre, does a servant have any impact at all on the action.<sup>25</sup> Usually they fulfill an expository role, recounting action that has taken place either before the curtain opens or behind the scenes. Also, as their title suggests, their presence permits the main characters to reveal themselves without resorting to monologue. The confidant's comments on such revelations are neutral, that is, they generally do not singly influence their masters.<sup>26</sup> It should be noted too that these characters never serve a

domestic, practical role on stage other than their participation in such conversations. This is a result of the bien-séances, which maintained the distance which separate the tragic hero from material reality. Because of the extreme exaltation of their rank, they are effectively freed from the practical, the everyday and the mundane. Such seclusion successfully directs total attention to the inner drama which unfolds in the tragedies.<sup>27</sup> As for le peuple, there are only vague allusions to their presence in some of the discussions of political situations which are an element in the central plot.<sup>28</sup>

Critical attention has largely been directed solely towards the servant's role in seventeenth-century comedy because of their exclusion or anonymity in the other genres. A summary of the conclusions of such studies will be presented here. Changes did occur within the limits of this genre, primarily because the character of the servant had already been exploited to a greater extent. In a tradition dating from Latin and Greek comedy and revived as early as the sixteenth century, the servant played a more active role in the plot, usually aiding young lovers in overcoming obstacles to their union. John Van Eerde also underlines the influence of the Italian Commedia dell'Arte and the Spanish picaro in the evolution of the role's growing "technical importance with regard to plot development."<sup>29</sup> The code of bienséances also operated less stringently in comedy in general, which provided more freedom for innovation.

Statistically, the growth of the role of servants is indisputable. In his detailed study of valets and servantes in 250 seventeenth-century comedies, Jean Emelina offers the most complete analysis of the period and includes information about general trends in the eighteenth century as well.<sup>30</sup> He first demonstrates the servant's omnipresence in the plays: there are an average of three servants per comedy, and only eight works lack any servants at all. From 1610-1700, the number of central roles delegated to servants increased gradually and eventually doubled (20% of the plays written between 1635 and 1651; 30% for the period 1651-73; 45% from 1673 to 1700).<sup>31</sup> Most servants however still fulfill a conventional, functional role similar to that noted in tragedy. They again serve in the exposition and recapitulation of events which preceded the action at hand in at least 75% of the comedies studied. They may also play the role of confidant, thereby providing an internal exposition as in tragedy, and offering commentary on the action, as did the former chorus. Emelina does emphasize that "la fonction la plus constante et la plus caractéristique des serviteurs de théâtre" is that of adjuvant, a term he uses in accordance with E. Souriau's definition as an accomplice, aid or savior.<sup>32</sup> His conclusions go on to underline the servant's increased participation in the action.

Many of the plays in which servants were protagonists were created in order to supply new roles for such highly

popular figures as Turlupin, Philippin, Molière, and the numerous Crispins and Arlequins. They generally perpetuated the traditions of the farce, playing the fourbe with a new twist; the valet often became the director of the action. Such a reversal of roles between master and servant occurred however with the master's complete approval and assistance, and the social order was left undisturbed. In effect, although the servant more frequently takes matters into his own hands, such action is rarely directly profitable to himself, but is meant to aid either his own master or another member of the upper class (usually a son or a daughter of the family). The servant's needs are either secondary or completely effaced before those of his master and he is an agent for others, not for himself.

Also, the fourbe's character has a hint of immorality which successfully neutralizes his claims to power, and an artificially contrived dénouement usually reestablishes order. Emelina concludes that such a dénouement "réconcilie les inconciliables, c'est-à-dire les valeurs sociales et morales incarnées par les puissances bafouées et le prestige inquiétant du fourbe qui a si peu respecté l'autorité paternelle, la sincérité de la parole et l'argent d'autrui."<sup>33</sup> Throughout, "tout rentre dans l'ordre," and the social status of the servant remains unchanged. The first true triumph of servant over master, without the master's acquiescence, does not occur until Turcaret (1709).

The servants in seventeenth-century comedy, and their successors in the eighteenth century, are often viewed as mouthpieces for social criticism because of their unrelenting commentary on the lifestyles of their masters.<sup>34</sup> The memorable maidservants of Molière (Dorine in Tartuffe, Nicole in Le Bourgeois gentilhomme, Toinette in Le Malade imaginaire) impertinently protest against the ridiculous demands of their masters and are often the only voices of common sense in the household. Even those servants more characterized by their stupidity (Alain and Georgette in L'Ecole des femmes, Martine in Les Femmes savantes) are, in their simplicity, often closer to the truth than their eccentric employers. Their criticism, however, is most often directed towards the manners of society or the individual behavior of their masters, especially in matters of love and marriage. There are few concrete references to the political and economic reality of the social hierarchy and to their own place within that hierarchy.<sup>35</sup> The comedies of Molière consistently preach a philosophy of loyalty to one's social class and condemn attempts to change one's social status. Consequently, the social criticism expressed by the servants is limited to the individual and moral levels and does not attack the bases of contemporary society.

Moreover, much of the criticism voiced by the servant is subtly tempered by the negative characterizations associated with the character which reinforce his social



inferiority. Such a portrait is never questioned within the conventions of the genre and of society. By his very nature, the servant cannot rise above his class, and is ridiculed or humiliated for attempting to do so. The servant's "natural" impropriety and indecency are a constant source of comic effect, either by means of his character traits (gluttony, drunkenness, cowardice, laziness are some of the more common examples), or through more obviously theatrical elements, such as outlandish costumes, gestures, and verbal impertinence and stupidity. Such traits precede the servant onto the stage, and he himself also accepts and cultivates the stereotype. Admittedly, comedy requires a certain amount of psychological simplification in all characters, which explains the perpetuation of such a stereotype. Also, the servant's psychological portrait would usually be marginal to the plot in spite of the fact that the presence of the clever valet or servante is often the major impetus to the movement of the action.<sup>36</sup>

The negative connotations sketched above effectively confirm the superiority of the masters and, by extension, that of the ruling classes in general. These are not limited to the theater, however, but are part of an implicit framework of social codes of the time. An extra-literary example, that of Furetière's Dictionnaire Universel and the Dictionnaire de l'Académie Française, illustrates how in common usage the term valet often had a negative impact.<sup>37</sup> "Valet à louer," according to Furetière, not only defines an

unemployed valet, but implies by association that he is lazy ("fainéant"). The Dictionnaire de l'Académie quite succinctly states that "âme de valet" designates "une âme basse," and both dictionaries associate the expression "faire le bon valet" with flattery and officiousness. In addition, the Académie lists such phrases as "valet de carreau: un homme de rien" and "valetaille," again most often used to communicate disdain. The female servant fares better in the two dictionaries, primarily because few expressions are associated with "soubrette" or "servante." A certain inferiority is still present in Furetière's remark that "les galants qui ne peuvent pas réussir auprès des maîtresses, se contentent de la soubrette." The Dictionnaire de l'Académie more directly specifies that the term "soubrette" is used with "mépris."

Examples from the early eighteenth century illustrate the persistence of the theme of inferiority. The opening quotation to this chapter, from L'Etat de servitude ou misère des domestiques, an anonymous text in verse of 1711, laconically describes the prevailing attitude. In a letter to Mme de Graffigny, Turgot reveals a similar disdain: "Je vois partout la première leçon qu'on donne aux enfants, c'est de mépriser les domestiques; les parents regardent cela comme une vertu."<sup>38</sup>

Most of the same stereotypes did carry over into the eighteenth century and the portrait of the servant traced above persisted. Again, it is in comedy that the most

variety is to be found in this respect, because of the greater flexibility of the servant's role. Tragedy remained the domain of aristocratic protagonists with few exceptions, and ancient history was still most frequently employed as subject matter.<sup>39</sup> Even the "bourgeois" hero appeared tardily as a central character in tragedy (for example in Le Siège de Calais, 1765).<sup>40</sup> The confidant's role and function changed little. Similarly, servants generally remain in the background in the drame bourgeois and play a small role. In Sedaine's 28 plays, there are only four male and seven female servants.<sup>41</sup> Diderot's comments in the Entretiens sur le Fils Naturel directly attack any amplification of their role:

. . . je me garderais bien de rendre important sur la scène des êtres qui sont nuls dans la société. Les Daves ont été les pivots de la comédie ancienne, parce qu'ils étaient en effet les moteurs de tous les troubles domestiques. Sont-ce les mœurs qu'on avait il y a deux mille ans, ou les nôtres, qu'il faut imiter? Nos valets de comédie sont toujours plaisants, preuve certaine qu'ils sont froids. Si le poète les laisse dans l'antichambre, où ils doivent être, l'action se passant entre les principaux personnages en sera plus intéressante et plus forte. Molière, qui savait si bien en tirer parti, les a exclus du Tartuffe et du Misanthrope. Ces intrigues de valets et de soubrettes, dont on coupe l'action principale, sont un moyen sûr d'anéantir l'intérêt.<sup>42</sup>

Diderot's rare servants, like Sedaine's, are usually fervently loyal to their masters, for their devotion adds to the integrity of the middle-class milieu represented in this genre.<sup>43</sup> Thus the continued rigidity of the bienséances and the classical tradition in tragedy, and the didactic goals in the drame bourgeois all effectively stifled most experimentation in the representation and the function of servants in the respective genres.

In comedy, John Van Eerde asserts that "the valet functions again, if somewhat less than in the seventeenth century, as an instrument for the portrayal and criticism of contemporary society."<sup>44</sup> One of the more obvious reasons for this shift is that the servant himself often becomes a target of the social satire as well, since his corruption is a reflection of that of the ruling class.<sup>45</sup> The use of the broad term "social satire" must be tempered, however, for one must constantly recall within this context that "no dissatisfaction is expressed in regard to the social system itself."<sup>46</sup>

During the end of the seventeenth century and in the early eighteenth century, we find a transition away from the general loyalty exhibited by Molière's servants, for example, towards the servant with his own self-interest at heart. Such a change in the nature of the master-servant relationship led to a "certain animosity" between the classes portrayed in the comedies, characterized by frequent tirades such as Scapin's in Regnard's La Sérénade (1694):

Il faut avoir la peine d'inventer mille fourberies dont ils [les maîtres] ne savent tout au plus que la moitié, et, avec tout cela, nous sommes les valets et ils sont les maîtres. Cela n'est pas juste. Je prétends à l'avenir, travailler pour mon compte. Ceci fini, je veux devenir maître à mon tour.<sup>47</sup>

Before Frontin's appearance in Turcaret, the cupiditous valet was a common figure in comedy, but his quest for easy money was usually unfulfilled. Crispin, for example, in Lesage's Crispin, rival de son maître (1707), joins forces with another valet, La Branche, in order to scheme his way into a

profitable marriage with his master's bien-aimée. Their plot is foiled by their masters, who ultimately benefit from their conspiracy.<sup>48</sup> Frontin is the first servant to truly triumph over his master (and all concerned), and this remained a rare dénouement in comedy.

The ambiguity inherent in Turcaret and the general pessimism of the play stem from the fact that all classes represented are ridiculed, even the nobility, in their avid search for a fortune at Turcaret's expense. Although Frontin prevails, he has the same ultimate goal as Turcaret, who was the former laquais of the marquis' father. "Voilà le règne de m. Turcaret fini, le mien va commencer," states Frontin at the end of the play. The only honest character involved in the intrigue (Mariane) withdraws from the scene very early in the action. The comedy was not very popular from the outset, possibly because, as most critics agree, its attack is unrelenting and leaves no sympathetic characters. One analyst describes Turcaret as a "microcosme de rapaces."<sup>49</sup> The Frontins and Lisettes and Crispins, clever and cynical, all reappear throughout the first half of the century, but Turcaret represents the apex of their triumph at this very early period.<sup>50</sup>

A pessimistic attitude towards humanity in general is prevalent as well in the plays of Dufresny and Dancourt, who were also producing comedies in the early eighteenth century.<sup>51</sup> Again, the servants are often eloquent in their

criticism of their masters, but once more such criticism is limited to moral and character defects seen in society at large, and is not directed towards the social structures themselves. Love and marriage, money and honor, and the various social attitudes surrounding these particular themes, are the most frequent targets of critical comment on the servant's part. This was a traditional device popularized by Molière, and as the insolent servant became a uniform character in comedy, the effect of his commentary was gradually neutralized.<sup>52</sup>

Marivaux's comedies have been the object of more detailed analysis within the context of the master-slave dialectic and its extension beyond the literal relationships of master and servant to the domain of love, the central question in most of the works. From the point of view of the social hierarchy, however, order is reestablished as before. Master and servant exchange roles in several of the comedies (notably l'Ile des Esclaves and Le Jeu de l'amour et du hasard), but this technique basically leads the protagonists in both plays to moral, and not social, awareness. Marivaux "justifie . . . l'inégalité qui 'lie nécessairement les hommes les uns aux autres'. . . ." <sup>53</sup>

In Le Jeu de l'amour et du hasard, the fact that the two servants are naturally attracted to one another, as is the case with their masters in servants' clothing, eventually serves only to illustrate how "le sang appelle le sang" and

the servant will never fill the shoes of his master. The play ultimately underlines the servant's innate inappropriateness to his master's role. L'Ile des Esclaves, in spite of the plot's potential (a group of rebellious slaves have established a community on an island and force all masters who land there to become slaves to their former slaves), circumvents the question of the master-slave relationship or the abolition of servitude. Frédéric Deloffre does note Marivaux's relative "audacity" for his time in calling the valet and suiivante "slaves" and thus underlining their inferior status. The valet's complaints are also suggestive of his effective alienation in servitude.<sup>54</sup> When the valet and suiivante who find themselves thus liberated are invited to criticize their master and mistress, their criticism is once again chiefly directed towards their character and ridiculous mannerisms (especially in love). As in Le Jeu de l'amour et du hasard, the valet and maidservant parody the language of their masters as they play at being in love, but they cannot sustain the mask. Their attention is immediately directed towards their former masters and at the play's end the four of them make peace with one another. Although the two young masters learn a valuable lesson about themselves, and about the virtue of forgiveness, the two servants have still not achieved any personal self-awareness at all.

In her analysis of the master-slave dialectic in Marivaux's theater, Monique Jutrin studies other works as

well as those in which the servant seemingly directs the action. She concludes that this is only an illusion of power, similar to that of the fourbe previously discussed. Her comparison with the Hegelian discussion of master and slave is appropriate: "Car ce que fait l'esclave, c'est proprement là opération du maître."<sup>55</sup>

Claude Rigault's Les Domestiques dans le théâtre de Marivaux is the most detailed evaluation of the servant's role in the theater of this period.<sup>56</sup> This careful enumeration of the servants' character traits and functions in the plays again leads us to similar conclusions about the inferiority and lack of individualization necessary to the role in order that the servant's comic function prevail. Many of these traits were conventional, derived from the farce, the traditions of the Théâtre Italien, and the comedy of the seventeenth century. In spite of their power in directing the action, most of Marivaux's valets and soubrettes are loyal to the cause of their masters, and serve to lead them to a final avowal of the truth about themselves.

Rigault also emphasizes the importance of the visual element of the theater which is largely lost for the modern reader. The costumes and gestures evoked in this study again appear to reinforce the ridiculous, the comic and the fantastic, especially with respect to the traditional valet roles, of which Arlequin is the best-known example. The mere



appearance of the valet on the stage was a sufficient statement of his difference and his inappropriateness in the world of the masters.<sup>57</sup>

Strains of egalitarianism are occasionally heard in plays produced in the latter part of the century, such as Destouches' L'Homme singulier (1764), Bodard de Tezay's Arlequin, roi dans la lune (1785), and of course, Beaumarchais' Le Mariage de Figaro (written in 1781, produced in 1784). Destouches' hero, Sanspair, tries to convince his valet that they are both of equal status as men, and that although fortune has given them a different station in life, "Un homme en vaut un autre. . . ."<sup>58</sup> Such theorizing is somewhat muted by the fact that Sanspair is intended to be a comic hero, and (as his name implies and like the Misanthrope before him), his "difference" in society is the essential target of ridicule in the play. Arlequin, in Bodard de Tezay's comedy, is the spokesman for proposals of social reform, as he recounts to his master how he would govern as Emperor. All men would be rich and noble, equal socially and politically. His dreams avoid the problem of servitude altogether by simply dismissing its presence. He patterns his new society after the world of the ruling class.

It is not until the appearance of Beaumarchais' Figaro that the servant truly appears as the spokesman for a new conception of society. In Le Barbier de Séville (1775) Figaro already appears as the creative force behind the

action, and he is not portrayed as the typical "valet de comédie."<sup>59</sup> The valet most lucidly expresses a sense of class consciousness and frustration by the social hierarchy in Le Mariage de Figaro, exemplified by the final monologue:

Parce que vous êtes un grand Seigneur, vous vous croyez un grand génie! . . . noblesse, fortune, un rang, des places; tout cela rend si fier! Qu'avez-vous fait pour tant de biens? vous vous êtes donné la peine de naître, et rien de plus. Du reste homme assez ordinaire! tandis que moi, morbleu! perdu dans la foule obscure, il m'a fallu déployer plus de science, et de calculs pour subsister seulement, qu'on n'en a mis depuis cent ans à gouverner toutes les Espagnes. . . . (Act V, scene 3)<sup>60</sup>

The theme of the sheer chance of birth and the social rank it may bring is reinforced sufficiently in the play to propel it to importance as a central motif.<sup>61</sup> Thematically, the question of power relationships is extended beyond the master-servant unit to the male-female relationship as well. "Dans Marceline, dans la Femme, Figaro voit une déshéritée, une victime, comme lui, d'une société, inégalitaire qui maintient dans une 'servitude réelle' ceux qui n'ont pas eu la chance de naître du bon côté."<sup>62</sup> Both the Countess and Suzanne refuse the submission and silence expected of them by the men, and independently prepare their own ruse to trap the Count. Suzanne and Figaro are not ridiculed in their capacity as servants, and they remain at the center of the action. Both characters are more completely drawn in an original variation of the stereotype of the clever and cunning valet and suivante. Their self-interest takes priority for such socially acceptable and honest reasons as fidelity

and marriage, and not for monetary gain or social advancement, bribes which they refuse. Morally, then, they are superior to the nobleman, and in the end it is they who enable him to return to acceptable social behavior. This is of course accomplished with the aid of the countess, who is motivated by her own self-interest as well. In addition, a variety of members of the lower classes are represented and individualized in the course of the complex and meandering plot.<sup>63</sup>

Thematically and formally, Le Mariage de Figaro manifests a subtle destabilization of the representation of the social hierarchy as it questions power structures and shifts the center of interest over to the valet and suivante in a positive manner. Like Turcaret, however, Figaro is a relatively isolated phenomenon, and there were few immediate repercussions in the genre. Furthermore, the hierarchy is not toppled in the play: "Tout finit par des chansons."<sup>64</sup> A thorough study of social stratification in the eighteenth-century theater remains to be undertaken, and these necessarily brief examples offer only a glimpse of general trends with respect to the portrait and the role of the servant. The great majority of the plays continue the traditions and the stereotypes of the preceding century. The servant's inferiority is usually essential to the comedy, whether through juxtaposition of his clear insights with his inferior status or through emphasis upon his inability and unfitness

to rise above it. If the servant often sees through his master's faults, he is usually guilty of the same or worse. Furthermore, in spite of this criticism of the ruling class, servants generally retain the role of adjuvant and continue to aid and support their masters. The ensuing ambiguity of their function (critic and accomplice) has a neutralizing effect upon their commentary which is reinforced, as we have seen, by the constant reappearance of the stereotype.

In addition to the clever valet and his female counterpart, the blundering servant is still relatively common in eighteenth-century comedy, exhibiting many of the same traits associated with his predecessors, usually ignorance, simple-mindedness, naiveté and general grossièreté. Thus, aside from his loyalty, which is frequently doubtful as well, few positive attributes are delegated to the servants; even the clever are dishonest and greedy. This negativity also serves to undermine the servant's role as spokesman for social criticism.

Our rapid overview of the image of the servant in literature necessarily excludes a number of matters of interest, such as the differences between male and female servant roles or the relationships among servants.<sup>65</sup> One might also question which body of literature has been considered here, for many works of truly popular expression, produced by members of the lowest classes as early as the Middle Ages, do exist but are either inaccessible or have completely disappeared.

Michel Ragon, in his Histoire de la littérature prolétarienne en France, cites the negative attitude or ignorance of most literary and critical circles regarding this heterogeneous body of work. His survey includes excerpts from texts which focus directly upon the lot of the peasant, the servant, the laborer and the beggar.<sup>66</sup>

For practical reasons, most of the above summary conclusions were drawn from traditionally recognized major literary works and from critics who took a specific interest in the role of the servant and the lower classes in these texts. It is first of all clearly apparent that this role is generally constrained by social stereotypes and literary conventions, which mutually influence and reinforce one another. A social reality (the parvenu or the dishonest valet, for example) becomes a type, and is eventually integrated into the conventions. Such conventions are most evident in the theater, perhaps because this genre offers the greatest number of examples of the process.

The servant, and the lower classes in general, only receive individualization in literature of the comic (or realistic, or lower) mode. From the examples cited, one notes that these characters accompany what is often defined as the gradual invasion of the "real world" into literary expression. They are often earthy or vulgar, defined as the contrary of all that conforms to the bienséances. Such personages are presented externally, as opaque objects. Rarely

is the servant the target of profound interior analysis of character or emotion. Although occasionally a peasant or servant is representative of "everyman" (La Fontaine), or barriers of class become a metaphor for the poet's clash with society (Villon), figures of the lower class are more likely to be characterized only by their social difference and inacceptability within the ruling social codes. Their presence is quite consistently associated with the introduction of familiar, everyday reality into works of literature. This reality, too, is chiefly represented in the comic mode, and the association between the two is an important element in the appearance of the servant-hero in the eighteenth-century novel, as well as the increased attention offered to the world of the lower class.

It is futile to attempt to determine any direct causal relationships with which to correlate a society and the literary image it produces of itself, but some of the parallels we have pointed out are quite obvious. The reading public was essentially comprised of the upper strata of society well into the eighteenth century, and this class view dominates the literature, as illustrated by such a constantly unflattering image of the lower classes, or by their sheer absence. Secondly, the impetus for the action emanates largely from a member of the ruling class; he is the ultimate subject, the others mere objects. We have demonstrated above how the servant, although he may direct the action, acts rarely on his

own behalf, but in order to grant the desires of his master. In this respect, the literature exemplifies an implicit acceptance of the ruling ideology even when it carries no explicit ideological motivation,<sup>67</sup> and it is this implicit message which we shall further attempt to isolate in the course of this study.

My insistence on the implicit nature of this ideology in the texts considered is important because my thesis in no way intends to conclude that these works were expressly written to convey a particular social message. Many of these servant figures and the stereotypes associated with them had long been a part of literary convention, having thus lost an essential element of their mimetic quality through successive stylization and codification. The clearest example of this process is once again to be found in the theater, where the servant, although he is dressed as such and accomplishes a minimum of gestures which should in a metonymical way be suggestive of his role (bringing chairs, introducing visitors, running errands), has certain distinct dramatic functions which preclude much alteration of the role. The confidant's self-effacement and passivity are necessary to the internal dynamics of the classical tragedy, just as the fourbe's vulgarity and inappropriate behavior are essential to sustain comic effect. An awareness of these conventions is essential to an accurate comprehension of the social nature of the stereotype, so as to avoid constantly reading a message into every aspect of a work.

The sheer absence of representatives of the lower classes in all but the comic forms of literature should most emphatically be noted. This results directly from the increasing pressure of the bienséances, which effectively excluded serious treatment of a lower class figure. The introduction of a "valet judicieux" onto the scene would have violated classical standards of vraisemblance as well.<sup>68</sup> Thus there was little experimentation with any new means of representation of the lower classes, who continued to be ignored or ridiculed throughout the periods discussed.

The same attitudes and literary conventions with respect to the servant and his social peers prevailed in the eighteenth-century novel as well as in the theater, in spite of the phenomenon of "l'encanaillement du héros de roman" noted by Georges May.<sup>69</sup> Criticism was often aimed at the choice of the servant-hero or a lower-class setting, even in such well-received novels as Gil Blas or La Vie de Marianne. In the Nouvelles littéraires of 1715, a critic remarks: "On se plaint de voir toujours Gil Blas en compagnie de Gueux, de Laquais, et de tout ce qu'il y a de plus vil parmi le Peuple."<sup>70</sup> The "scène du cocher" in Part 2 of La Vie de Marianne is relatively isolated in the novel because of the limited and secondary role assigned to members of the lower classes as Marianne moves very quickly upwards to "le beau monde" and subsequently restricts her vision to that milieu. Still, the scene incited reactions such as this:



Ils vous peignent sans façon les moeurs, et vous rapportent tout au long les élégants entretiens d'un cocher de fiacre, d'une lingère et d'une fille de boutique. Cela les accomode mieux apparamment que les moeurs des personnes de condition et fournit plus à leur esprit. Il ne serait pas impossible de voir bientôt figurer dans quelque nouveau roman un vil savoyard, auquel on ferait décroter quelque lambeau de métaphysique.<sup>71</sup>

Opposition to attempts to portray the popular milieu continued in the name of the bienséances, and "ranged from the intransigent attitude of such as would exclude all but noble characters from the novel, to a greater or lesser acceptance of the lower orders but with reservations against the representation of anything lacking in dignity or that savored of the commonplace, vulgar or base."<sup>72</sup> Such intransigence is mirrored in one anonymous critic's advice in the Correspondance littéraire: "Le quartier de la Halle et de la place Maubert a sans doute ses moeurs, et très marquées même, mais ce ne sont pas les moeurs de la nation. Elles ne méritent donc pas d'être peintes. . . ."<sup>73</sup> Works such as Richardson's Pamela gained favor in spite of the servant heroine, because, as Desfontaines remarked in the Observations sur les écrits modernes:

Les détails de ce Livre sont petits, sans être bas. On n'y entend point le jargon dégoûtant d'un bas Domestique, ou d'un homme de la lie du peuple. Si un Domestique y parle, c'est simplement et raisonnablement car le bon sens est de tous les états et il plaît dans la bouche de quelque personnage que ce soit. . . .<sup>74</sup>

In other words, acceptable behavior and sensible ideas, modeled after those of the ruling classes, granted the servant entry into the novel and the right to speak. Furthermore,

as Vivienne Mylne points out in her study of dialogue in the eighteenth-century novel, "even when a novelist does introduce characters who are uneducated or of humble social rank, he can still, if he chooses, avoid the 'realism' of low or vulgar expressions by transmitting all their remarks in the form of reported or narrated speech."<sup>75</sup>

The above examples suffice to illustrate the critical mood of the period, which, even in an "enlightened" age, tended towards elitism in the choice of literary subject matter. There was much discussion in this vein; the novel, a "new" and evolving genre, was the object of great experimentation at this time. In spite of the advice of Prévost ("Cela est indigne d'un homme bien élevé, et très-dégoûtant dans un Ouvrage") or Desfontaines ("Un Auteur ne doit point s'amuser à contrefaire des gens si peu dignes d'attention"),<sup>76</sup> the servant was granted admission to the literary universe and emerged the hero in several important works of the eighteenth century. This was not accomplished without much manipulation of the stereotypes previously discussed, so that the lower-class figure might acquire acceptability as a serious personage. The chapters which follow address this manipulation and its social implications, in order to ascertain the true nature of this new hero and the purpose of the problem of his servitude, an inevitable accompaniment to the introduction of such a character.

## NOTES - CHAPTER I

<sup>1</sup>As quoted in Claude Rigault, Les Domestiques dans le théâtre de Marivaux (Sherbrooke: Librairie de la cité universitaire, 1968), p. 79.

<sup>2</sup>Le Roman jusqu'à la Révolution (New York: McGraw-Hill; Armand Colin, 1967), I. p. 10.

<sup>3</sup>Coulet, p. 6.

<sup>4</sup>Erich Auerbach, Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature, trans. W.R. Trask (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1953), p. 132.

<sup>5</sup>Coulet, pp. 63-4 and 78.

<sup>6</sup>Coulet, pp. 106-121, especially pp. 116-117.

<sup>7</sup>Le Discours de la servitude volontaire, ed. P. Léonard (Paris: Payot, 1976).

<sup>8</sup>Louis Trénard, "Introduction" au numéro spécial Lumières et Révolution, Dix-huitième siècle, 6 (1974), 17.

<sup>9</sup>Coulet, p. 10.

<sup>10</sup>This term is adopted by Coulet in his discussion.

<sup>11</sup>The theme appears early in the century in minor works such as Théophile de Viau's Fragmens d'une histoire comique, 1623, and Tristan l'Hermite's Le Page disgracié, 1643. Perhaps the only major exception to the trend of the roman comique is the work of Jean-Pierre Camus, which represents the social context and the concrete reality of existence in a serious, moralizing mode. See Coulet, pp. 157-159 on Camus' realism and pp. 186-191 on realism and the picaresque.

<sup>12</sup>Coulet, pp. 191-197.

<sup>13</sup>Coulet, p. 205.

<sup>14</sup>Coulet, p. 276. Also see above, p. 18.

<sup>15</sup>Georges May, Le Dilemme du roman au XVIIIe siècle: Etude sur les rapports du roman et de la critique (1715-1761) (New Haven: Yale University Press; Paris: PUF, 1963), 54.

<sup>16</sup>F.G. Healey, "The Enlightenment view of 'homo faber'," Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century, 25 (1963), 839.

<sup>17</sup>Madame de Sévigné, Correspondance, ed. Roger Duchêne, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 3 vols. (Paris: Gallimard, 1972). Some examples include: Vol. II, p. 100, lettre 425 à M de Coulanges, 11 sept. 1675; pp. 108-110, lettre 430 à mme de Grignan, 24 sept. 1675; pp. 559-61, lettre 615 à mme de Grignan, le 1<sup>er</sup> oct. 1677; pp. 631-33, lettre 661 à Bussy-Rabutin, 12 oct. 1678; Vol. III, pp. 125-27, lettre 877 au Président de Moulceau, le 1<sup>er</sup> mars 1684; pp. 599-60, lettre 1110 à mme de Grignan, 15 mai 1689.

<sup>18</sup>Jean de La Bruyère, Les Caractères ou les mœurs de ce siècle in Oeuvres complètes (Paris: Gallimard, 1951), 333.

<sup>19</sup>"La Bruyère," in Essais critiques (Paris: Seuil, 1964), 228.

<sup>20</sup>Pensées, in Oeuvres complètes, ed. L. Lafuma (Paris: Seuil, 1963), 510-511.

<sup>21</sup>See "Du Mérite Personnel," no. 27, p. 99: "Tu te trompes, Philémon, si avec ce carrosse brillant, ce grand nombre de coquins qui te suivent, et ces six bêtes qui te traînent, tu penses que l'on t'en estime davantage: l'on écarte tout cet attirail qui t'est étranger, pour pénétrer jusques à toi, qui n'est qu'un fat.

Ce n'est pas qu'il faut quelquefois pardonner à celui qui, avec un grand cortège, un habit riche et un magnifique équipage, s'en croit plus de naissance et plus d'esprit: il lit cela dans la contenance et dans les yeux de ceux qui lui parlent."

Other isolated allusions may be found in: "Des Grands," no. 25, p. 256 (on le peuple); "Des Grands," no. 33, p. 258 (on valets); "Des Biens de Fortune," no. 26, p. 83 (on indigence and poverty); and many examples of parvenus (including valets) in "Des Biens de Fortune."

<sup>22</sup>The diversity of the social spectrum in the work of La Fontaine merits further attention.

<sup>23</sup>René Godenne, Histoire de la nouvelle française aux XVII<sup>e</sup> et XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècles (Genève: Droz, 1970), 75-7 and 100-102.

<sup>24</sup>See also his La Nouvelle française (Paris: PUF, 1974).

<sup>25</sup>Especially Act IV, scene 1, but see also II, 5; III, 1 and 8; IV, 6. Racine's comments in his preface to the play are also revelatory in this regard: "J'ai cru que la calomnie avait quelque chose de trop bas et de trop noir pour la mettre dans la bouche d'une princesse qui a d'ailleurs des sentiments si nobles et si vertueux. Cette bassesse m'a paru plus convenable à une nourrice, qui pouvait avoir des inclinations plus serviles, et qui néanmoins n'entreprend cette fausse accusation que pour sauver la vie et l'honneur de sa maîtresse." Théâtre complet, ed. Maurice Rat (Paris: Garnier, 1960), 540-41.

<sup>26</sup>Cf. Jacques Schérer: "le confident est là et il n'est pas là. Il est là s'il faut écouter, donner la réplique, poser quelque question, transmettre une information, avertir ou consoler. Il n'est pas là si on préfère l'oublier." La Dramaturgie classique en France (Paris: Nizet, n.d.), 43.

<sup>27</sup>Auerbach, pp. 374-394.

<sup>28</sup>See M. Baudin, "The People in Seventeenth-Century French Tragedy," Modern Language Notes, 52, 475-81.

<sup>29</sup>"The Historicity of the Valet Role in French Comedy during the Reign of Louis XIV," Romanic Review, 47 (1957), 187.

<sup>30</sup>Les Valets et les servantes dans le théâtre comique en France de 1610 à 1700 (Cannes: Coopérative de l'Enseignement laïque, 1975).

<sup>31</sup>Emelina, p. 170.

<sup>32</sup>See Les Deux cent mille situations dramatiques (Paris: Flammarion, 1950), 104-112 and Emelina, p. 108.

<sup>33</sup>Emelina, pp. 207-210.

<sup>34</sup>See the article previously cited by Van Eerde (note 29) and also his "Aspects of Social Criticism in Eighteenth-Century French Comedy," Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century, 37 (1965), 81-107. Maria Ribaric-Demers also mentions this aspect of the role in Le Valet et la Soubrette de Molière à la Révolution (Paris: Editions Nizet, 1970).

<sup>35</sup>Cf. several of Jean-Paul Sartre's general remarks upon the absence of social consciousness in seventeenth-century literature: "le portrait que l'auteur présente à son lecteur est nécessairement abstrait et complice; s'adressant à une classe parasitaire, il ne saurait montrer l'homme au travail ni, en général, les rapports de l'homme avec la nature extérieure." Or: "l'écrivain ne soupçonne même pas l'importance des facteurs économiques, religieux, métaphysiques et politiques dans la constitution de la personne. . . . [L']image de l'homme classique est purement psychologique parce que le public classique n'a conscience que de sa psychologie." Qu'est-ce que la littérature? (Paris: Gallimard, 1948), pp. 117 and 118-19 respectively.

<sup>36</sup>Emelina, pp. 218-19.

<sup>37</sup>As quoted by Ribaric-Demers, p. 11.

<sup>38</sup>As quoted by Rigault, p. 199.

<sup>39</sup>See H. Carrington Lancaster, Sunset: A History of Parisian Drama in the Last Years of Louis XIV, 1701-1715 (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1945), French Tragedy in the Time of Louis XV and Voltaire: 1715-1774, 2 vols. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1950) and French Tragedy in the Reign of Louis XVI and the Early Years of the French Revolution: 1774-1792 (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1953) and also Max Aghion, Le Théâtre à Paris au XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle (Paris: Librairie de France, n.d.).

<sup>40</sup>Aghion, p. 28.

<sup>41</sup>Ribaric-Demers, p. 191.

<sup>42</sup>"Premier Entretien," in Oeuvres complètes, ed. Assézat, III (Paris: Garnier, 1875), 90.

<sup>43</sup>See also Yves Moraud, "Le Valet bourgeois," La Conquête de la liberté de Scapin à Figaro: Valets, servantes et soubrettes de Molière à Beaumarchais (Paris: PUF, 1981), 131-136.

<sup>44</sup>Van Eerde, "Aspects of Social Criticism . . .," pp. 81-2.

<sup>45</sup>Emelina, pp. 241-42.

<sup>46</sup>Lancaster, Sunset, p. 147.

<sup>47</sup>As quoted by Ribaric-Demers, pp. 57-8. See also p. 60.

<sup>48</sup>Moraud, p. 71.

<sup>49</sup>Moraud, p. 87.

<sup>50</sup>See Lancaster, Sunset, pp. 144-148.

<sup>51</sup>Ribaric-Demers, pp. 69-104 and Lancaster, Sunset, pp. 152-4 and 202-14.

<sup>52</sup>Jean Fabre, "Le Théâtre au XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle," Histoire des Littératures, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, III (Paris: Gallimard, 1958), 806.

<sup>53</sup>Moraud, p. 95.

<sup>54</sup>Introduction to Ile des Esclaves in his edition of Marivaux's Théâtre complet (Paris: Garnier, 1968) as quoted by Monique Jutrin, "Le Théâtre de Marivaux: Une Phénoménologie du coeur," Dix-huitième siècle, 7 (1975), 170.

<sup>55</sup>G.W.F. Hegel, La Phénoménologie de l'esprit, trans. J. Hyppolite, I (Paris: n.p., 1930), 163, as quoted by Jutrin, p. 172.

<sup>56</sup>See note 1.

<sup>57</sup>Rigault, pp. 54-63.

<sup>58</sup>As quoted by Van Eerde, "Aspects of Social Criticism . . .," pp. 90-1.

<sup>59</sup>See Moraud, pp. 139-46. The ensuing discussion follows part of his chapter entitled "Figaro: l'histoire se précipite."

<sup>60</sup>Beaumarchais, La Folle Journée ou le mariage de Figaro in Théâtre et Lettres relatives à son théâtre, ed. Maurice Allem (Paris: NRF, 1934), 353.

<sup>61</sup>The digressive episode, Figaro's discovery of his true mother, and the final vaudeville are also based upon this theme.

<sup>62</sup>Moraud, p. 163.

<sup>63</sup>Even Antonio, the half-drunk gardener, unhesitatingly refuses to permit the Count to fire him.

<sup>64</sup>Moraud, p. 167.

<sup>65</sup>Emelina and Van Eerde both discuss several of these elements.

<sup>66</sup>(Paris: Albin Michel, 1974).

<sup>67</sup>Sartre, pp. 110-23.

<sup>68</sup>Gérard Genette, "Vraisemblance et motivation," Figures, II (Paris: Seuil, 1969), 73.

<sup>69</sup>As discussed in chapter VII of Le Dilemme du roman . . ., pp. 182-203.

<sup>70</sup>Vol. I, p. 248, as quoted by Moses Ratner, Theory and Criticism of the Novel in France from "L'Astrée" to 1750 (New York: De Palma, 1938), 98.

<sup>71</sup>Observations sur les écrits modernes, III, Lettre XL, p. 229 (1736), as quoted by F.C. Green, "Realism in the French Novel in the First Half of the Eighteenth Century," Modern Language Notes, 38 (1923), 322.



<sup>72</sup>Ratner, p. 97.

<sup>73</sup>Correspondance littéraire, II, p. 267 (1753), as quoted by F.C. Green, "Further Evidence of Realism in the French Novel of the Eighteenth Century," Modern Language Notes 40 (1925), 261.

<sup>74</sup>XXIX, p. 211-2, as quoted by Green, "Further Evidence of Realism . . .," p. 259.

<sup>75</sup>"Social Realism in the Dialogue of Eighteenth-Century French Fiction," Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture, 6 (1977), 268.

<sup>76</sup>As quoted by Ratner, p. 98.

## CHAPTER II

### GIL BLAS AND THE STEREOTYPE

L'Histoire de Gil Blas de Santillane<sup>1</sup> transforms the valet de comédie into a hero, narrator of the novel and eventually master of his own fate. This long and meandering text is still most often criticized for its precarious structure and shifting tones, due at least in part to the circumstances of its production, stretched out over almost twenty years. Roger Laufer, whose study of Lesage's complete works is indispensable in any serious appraisal of Gil Blas, forcefully reiterates that the dynamics of the master-servant relationship adequately unify this novel and afford us a thematic perspective upon other masterpieces of the eighteenth century as well:

Le thème des rapports entre valet et maître occupe une position centrale dans l'oeuvre dramatique et romanesque de Lesage. Comme chez Marivaux, Diderot, Rousseau, Beaumarchais, il traduit le statu quo d'avant la Révolution. Bien entendu, dans le cadre d'une société paternaliste, le caractère inéluctable des rapports personnels n'est pas mis en question, mais seulement l'irréversibilité des rôles.<sup>2</sup>

The tale of Gil Blas relates the hero's social ascension almost uniquely in terms of the masters which he serves, and his "education," his discovery of the world, is consistently

filtered through these various masters. Because of the first-person narrator's carefully controlled voice, on the whole completely anchored in the present of the text and oddly devoid of either foresight or hindsight, the reader's perception of the hero is virtually limited to this basic framework of the interaction of master and servant. These preliminary considerations justify a more acute analysis of the workings of this relationship within the text, as a step towards comprehension of its elusive hero.

Critics have also pointed out the moral progression of the hero from innocence to corruption and then conversion and moral rectitude, in an attempt to unify the novel. Most fail to stress however that Gil is rarely autonomous, and changes in his character are, again, dependent upon the constantly shifting social worlds, dominated by the different masters. These influences upon the servant hero are an important aspect of the personage, necessary not so much as a statement about his character, but as a commentary about the elements exterior to him which shape his life. Gil takes on form and consistency only from the outside. Within the format of his memoirs the narrator rarely delves into introspection. The hero is as a vacuum in the opening of the novel; his only attributes are those things he lacks: no social position, no profession, no fortune, and his ignorance and naïveté dominate in the first chapters. Gil is an empty vessel to be filled throughout the pages of the novel.

Knowledge of the world will commence with knowledge of the master, and imitation of the master is a step towards mastery of the world. The repetition of this basic mechanism in the episodes of Gil's life will be closely scrutinized.

This analysis will be specifically directed towards certain generalizations about this novel which fail to take into account these constant pressures from the outside upon the individual. Comments about Gil Blas as an expression of bourgeois individualism corresponding to the rising strength of the middle class<sup>3</sup> avoid the questions of imitation and acceptance of society's values which constantly direct the hero. The latter two concepts much more adequately characterize the spirit of this novel and have not been stressed in a social perspective. The picaresque tradition, the springboard for Lesage's conception of his hero,<sup>4</sup> reflects such a philosophy of acceptance. In his comparative study of the picaresque novel, Robert Alter stresses that the picaroon is not a rebel, "his progress depends upon the stability of the social hierarchy" and "he never begins to imagine a different, more equitable society, nor does he ever consider the possibility of rejecting society."<sup>5</sup> In Gil Blas, the narrator's refusal to take himself seriously is one obvious sign of the absence of a sense of conflict with society, which is represented as a pre-established structure whose values he admits. Our modern preoccupation with the alienation of the individual in society is not explicitly a

factor here, but in the ensuing analysis I shall demonstrate the presence of its symptoms and their effects upon the hero.<sup>6</sup>

Gil Blas also holds greater interest for the modern reader than as a mere series of stylized accounts of actual events and personalities of Lesage's time. Although the eighteenth-century reader was understandably attracted by the clés to the fictional figures, modern critics have too often limited their reading to a similar search for clues to "aspects of contemporary society." This leads to a rather simplistic assessment of Lesage's realism, and seems inevitably to impose reality upon the text rather than to allow the novel to stand alone.<sup>7</sup>

Another central preoccupation in this analysis will be the concrete image of servants relayed by the text. The literary stereotypes of the numerous domestic characters, from the valet and soubrette to the intendant and duègne, often predominate over reality and form the basis for the characters drawn in Gil Blas. The individual is inferior to his social role. Furthermore, the essential matter of the inherent inferiority which the servant figure carries with him continues to operate in the text, most importantly in the case of Gil himself. His estimation of himself is almost nonexistent, thus his self-effacement and acceptance of his secondary status, notwithstanding his good-humored perspective on his plight. As the hero is subservient to his masters, so too the narrator's voice is finally

subservient to the voices which surround him. This corresponds to the formal construction of the novel itself with its multiple digressions, dialogue, and relegation of the hero to the role of passive observer.

The increased attention to exterior reality, especially in physical and geographical description, justifies the classification of Gil Blas as a precursor of the "realist" tradition.<sup>8</sup> The presence of members of many social classes is also considered a mark of realism, but this remark must be tempered by close scrutiny of the manner in which characters are portrayed in the text. For example, although a number of lower-class characters participate in dialogue throughout the novel, their speech is characterized by a "neat correctness" usually undifferentiated from the speech of the members of the upper classes.<sup>9</sup> The picaresque hero cannot truly be an expression of the "voice of the masses" ("la voix du peuple")<sup>10</sup> specifically because his world vision is encoded by social values from above. He generally takes on his status as a literary hero because he has risen above his lowly state and integrated himself into the mainstream of the upper strata. What counts is not his actual life as a servant, a peasant or a beggar, but the movement away from such a life. A realistic focus upon the lower-class hero accepted as such will only appear much later.

These preliminary remarks have oriented the perspectives on Gil Blas used here in an attempt to confirm the

social message previously elucidated throughout the comedy of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (Chapter I). "Tout rentre dans l'ordre," the status quo is accepted and social rules are respected. In spite of the often sharply critical and satirical tone of the novel, only individuals are held up for ridicule, not the social hierarchy itself. The servant-hero is used here because of his multiple functional possibilities, the ease with which he is integrated into all kinds of social groups, and his frequent role as an observer. The concept of servitude is largely expressed then in purely literary terms. The servant is thus abstracted from his own reality in order to serve this central functional role, and this process holds interesting implications for the character of Gil Blas.

#### Servitude as Imitation

The basic theme and structures of servitude are firmly fixed in the text early in the first book of the novel. Gil's relation of his origins is brief and very dry, already a sign of his prompt dismissal of the world of his youth. Although technically members of the petite bourgeoisie, his parents in their poverty are obliged to turn to servitude: "ma mère se mit femme de chambre et mon père écuyer. Comme ils n'avaient pour tout bien que leurs gages, j'aurais couru le risque d'être assez mal élevé, si je n'eusse pas eu dans la ville un oncle chanoine" (p. 497). The narrator is equally

succinct about his education and goal to study at the university. The initial presentation of the hero and narrator is kept to a minimum, except for one remark about his "réputation d'un savant." This economy in the description with respect to the central character is essential to his open nature and the ensuing adaptability which he so constantly practices. From the outset of the narrative, Gil lacks psychological depth. He is a shell, a pawn in the hands of his tale, free to move from adventure to adventure, character to character, social class to social class. Rarely does he cast more than a brief analytical glance upon himself.

The novel opens in the picaresque vein with the hero's entrance into the world as he takes the road to Salamanque alone. Book I relates the hero's déniaissement<sup>11</sup> through his first contacts with society, a warning that appearances may not be trusted. Most of his misfortunes are a result of his ignorance. Already in Chapter I we see the young scholar stopping anyone in the street for a philosophical discussion, and the tone of the entire description of Gil's education suggests that it was less than scholarly. The irony of his reputation as a savant unfolds gradually in Book I with each successive escapade. His sole preoccupations are his money and the basic necessities of life, food, clothing, lodging. Such ignorance, joined with the character's emptiness, make him the perfect object of manipulation and ridicule in the three incidents in which he is duped.



Gil is totally open to the discours of those whom he meets in his journey. The narrator's humorous distance from his hero accentuates the ease with which others sway the naive Gil to their point of view, an essential element of his character further on (examples in Book I include the innkeepers, the maquignon, the parasite, Ambroise de Lamela, don Raphaël and Camille).

Although literally free, the hero is constantly unsuccessful in asserting himself independently. Book I closes with a strong enunciation of the theme of servitude as Fabrice, Gil's boyhood friend, extolls the merits of the valet's life:

Un génie supérieur qui se met en condition ne fait pas son service matériellement comme un nigaud. Il entre dans une maison pour commander plutôt que pour servir. Il commence par étudier son maître. Il se prête à ses défauts, gagne sa confiance, et le mène ensuite par le nez. C'est ainsi que je me suis conduit chez mon administrateur. Je connus d'abord le pèlerin. Je m'aperçus qu'il voulait passer pour un saint personnage. Je feignis d'en être la dupe. Cela ne coûte rien. Je fis plus, je le copiai; et, jouant devant lui le même rôle qu'il fait devant les autres, je trompai le trompeur, et je suis devenu peu à peu son factotum. . . . Parle-moi de l'emploi d'un laquais. C'est un bénéfice simple, qui n'engage à rien. Un maître a-t-il des vices, le génie supérieur qui le sert les flatte, et souvent même les fait tourner à son profit. Un valet vit sans inquiétudes dans une bonne maison. Après avoir bu et mangé tout son soûl, il s'endort tranquillement comme un enfant de famille, sans s'embarrasser du boucher ni du boulanger. (pp. 559-560)

Fabrice's conviction of his own superiority is evident in his repetition of the term "génie supérieur" and verbs such as "commander" and "mener par le nez" which contradict Gil's impressions of servitude. The valet is constantly the subject

in the passage, "mon administrateur," the master, is his object. In spite of such a lofty description of his position as leader of the game, Fabrice is still obliged to take on his master's identity and better it. The master himself is perceived as only playing a role, and the valet's insight into this fact is the key to his success. Fabrice's portrayal of his master is negatively oriented, for he has but "défauts" and "vices," in this case his hypocrisy and bigotry. From the lowly canon to the mighty ministers, all of Gil's successive masters exhibit this same basic characteristic of playing a role for the public. The doctor, the petits-mâîtres, and most transparently the actors, all have an appearance to maintain.

Consequently, this passage is central as it establishes the impetus and the basic structure for Gil's ensuing adventures as servant to a wide range of social types. His role as a valet is necessary to one of the essential precepts of this particular novel, a satire of the eccentricities of social classes and professions ranging over the entire social spectrum. As a servant, Gil gains immediate entry into the homes of a quick succession of masters, and until Book VIII generally stays only long enough to sketch a portrait of each. In this respect the dynamism of the master-servant relationship as initially elaborated by Fabrice serves to satirize the various characters through the servant's comic interpretation of the master. We discover the social roles as Gil Blas plays them in imitation.

With such arguments Fabrice easily dissuades Gil from his aspirations to be a tutor. The role of a tutor entails constant hypocrisy as well but offers little assurance of adequate compensation, while the laquais lives in much less precarious circumstances. He is as tranquil as an "enfant de famille," with no external responsibilities. Fabrice's philosophy is in effect an abdication of personal responsibility ("Cela ne coûte rien," "C'est un bénéfice simple, qui n'engage à rien") and a refusal of independence in spite of his sense of control in his relationship with the master.<sup>12</sup> Motivated as he is by his own self-interest, Fabrice reiterates the credo of the valet of comedy in the early eighteenth century. Other parallels with the comic genre are obvious in this passage, especially the theme of the trompeur trompé dominant in Molière's works. Lesage's debt to his seventeenth century predecessor is further apparent in his sharply drawn portraits of society's eccentrics in action.

Thus is Gil Blas instructed in the ways of the world as he makes the first independent decisions about his life. In choosing to follow Fabrice to the placement service, Gil embarks upon the career which will structure the greater portion of his life as it is recounted in the novel. Fabrice's counsel will be his guide, for better or for worse, during most of this time. As a result, Gil is unable to accept the ultimate responsibility for his decisions and for his life.

Gil's current milieu in Books I and II is largely drawn from the picaresque tradition. It is also interesting to note that by the end of Book I only a handful of characters have been presented in a positive manner. Dishonesty reigns in the world discovered by Gil Blas, populated as it is by the parasite, innkeepers plotting to strip him of his money, bandits, disguised valets and cousins. The available "masters" for Gil enumerated by the gentleman at the placement bureau are obviously the least desirable of the species: a soldier who beats and even cripples his servants, two old women with bizarre needs, and a doctor who experiments on his lackeys. Gil accepts the least of the evils, an elderly canon, recommended by Fabrice because of the possibility of a quick inheritance. Until Gil rises up into the higher social spheres, characters with some dignity in their comportment are rare. In his imitation, he stoops to similarly undignified conduct.

### Degradation

Book II sets the basic structure into motion, still under the auspices of Fabrice, who recommends Gil to his first employer and then reappears occasionally to compare notes with his friend and initiate him into the escapades of a valet. Under his first two masters, the canon and Doctor Sangrado, Gil successfully masters the art of imitation, but is forced to degrade himself physically and mentally in the

process. Always the victim of fate, he eventually finds himself again on the open road and audience to two cheerful fellow travelers, Diego the barber and Zapata the actor.

During Gil's apprenticeship as a valet he witnesses an extreme case of role-reversal. Gil's first master, "le vieux chanoine Sedillo," is a complete invalid, hardly capable of even eating unaided. Gil serves dame Jacinte, the canon's gouvernante, and spends his nights awake at the old man's bedside, bringing him his chamber pot "dix fois par heure" and changing his nightshirt when necessary. Except for his relation of his adventures to Sedillo and Jacinte at the beginning of his service, and his nightly duties, Gil remains a witness to the activity in the household and reports what he learns of the characters rather than participating directly in the action. Dame Jacinte offers an excellent example of the successful servant who has for fifteen years played the game described by Fabrice. Her hypocrisy is clearly alluded to in several instances, and her extreme ardor in her service to the aging canon fools no one but him. She is referred to more than once by the narrator as a "vieille béate," careful to hide her pleasure at Fabrice's flattery behind "un air modeste et les yeux baissés" (p. 564). The old canon tells Gil that he even dismissed his nephew for accusing her of being a "fausse dévote." Gil learns immediately afterwards from the ten-year-old child she calls her "niece" that dame Jacinte has "un bon ami" working

for a similarly aging ecclesiastic, and that both are biding their time, preparing to join together in marriage "les dépouilles de leurs maîtres" (p. 569).

Due to his extreme infirmity, Jacinte evidently has the upper hand in her relationship with her master and easily achieves her goal of a generous inheritance. Gil models his devotion after hers, attracted in spite of his sleepless nights by the "bon legs" that Sedillo was quick to mention. He is conscious, however, of playing a role, admitting that his disgust is only overpowered by his hope: "Je ne laissais pas pourtant de trouver cela très désagréable; et, sans le legs dont je repaissais mon espérance, je me serais bientôt dégoûté de ma condition" (p. 568). Gil is also attentive to dame Jacinte and her "niece," aware that his success is dependent upon hers.

At the canon's death Gil is again left penniless, unpaid for his work, with only the few worm-eaten books which his master willed to him. Dame Jacinte succeeds however with her "pleurs de commande." "Elle venait de jouer son rôle, et de préparer le bonhomme à lui faire beaucoup de bien" (p. 572). Along with her inheritance, she also surreptitiously acquires an ample wardrobe with the aid of her "bon ami."

Her character confirms the wisdom of the advice Gil had received from all sides. The choice of an aging and powerless master is obviously extreme, permitting ample illustration of the servant with complete physical dominion in

the household. Dame Jacinte plays the necessary role to the extreme as well, even bringing the cup to the canon's lips so that he may drink. Her success, however, is still measured by her total self-effacement. Except for her culinary talents, Jacinte's personal attributes are absent behind the mask. Gil is obliged to perform more concretely degrading tasks (the chamber pot and the sweat-soaked shirts), but in spite of the allusions to his disgust, he imitates dame Jacinte and accepts his state in order to satisfy his own self-interest. Neither of them shows any personal feelings towards the old man, who exists for them only as a possible source of income. The dishonesty and hypocrisy played out by all concerned fulfill the negative stereotype of the servant previously described. The use of the figure of the faux dévot in this case and in the example of Fabrice and his master is also emblematic of the popularity of such a stereotype and the ease with which it is integrated into the basic structure of the novel.

As soon as he enters into the canon's service, Gil sheds his second-hand chevalier clothing and dons the habit of his predecessor in the position, a concrete, exterior sign of metamorphosis repeated each time he takes on a new master. The theme of disguise is prevalent in the work as a whole as a corollary to the collection of characters obsessed with appearances. Roger Laufer notes that:

L'habillement occupe avec la nourriture et l'argent une place exceptionnelle dans l'univers lesagien. Cette particularité correspond à une réalité sociale de l'époque pré-industrielle. Habit, robe, soutanelle, livrée, pourpoint sont autant de marques distinctives. Gil Blas quitte et reprend son "habit brodé" ou son "habit d'homme à bonnes fortunes" en changeant de maître ou en cherchant une maîtresse.<sup>13</sup>

The narrator's minute descriptions of his own clothing and that of others reflects the importance of such an external sign of one's fortune and social function. In subsequent episodes, such as his work with Doctor Sangrado or the petit-maître, Gil's actual wearing of his master's clothing is an added sign of his attempt to take on his master's identity.<sup>14</sup>

Gil's second venture into servitude offers him a somewhat greater intellectual challenge, as he is hired by Doctor Sangrado to keep his patient register. Sangrado makes him his student, and with his endearing air - calling him "mon enfant" and "mon ami" - reveals his great medical secrets to him (copious bleedings and the consumption of hot, not boiling, water). Again the ridiculous nature of the role Gil must play for his master is at the core of their relationship: Sangrado insists that Gil partake as well of such bounties of water, as much and as often as possible. Initially, Gil passively believes:

Comme j'aurais eu mauvaise grâce de me montrer indocile en entrant dans la carrière de la médecine, je parus persuadé qu'il avait raison. J'avouerai même que je le crus effectivement. Je continuai donc à boire de l'eau, sur la garantie de Celse. Ou plutôt je commençais à noyer la bile en buvant copieusement de cette liqueur, et quoique de jour en jour je m'en sentisse plus incommode, le préjugé l'emportait sur l'expérience. (p. 577)



As was the case with the canon, Gil Blas must physically accept the consequences of his blind devotion to his master.

Progressively, Gil begins to doubt his employer's theories, but from the moment he dons the doctor's cloak to aid him in his rounds in the poorer neighborhoods, he is Sangrado's most fervent advocate. He comes to blows with another doctor who criticizes his treatment, and later joins Sangrado in his praise of water, now quite conscious however of the role he must play. "Tandis qu'il tenait ce discours éloquent, je pensai plus d'une fois éclater de rire. Je gardai pourtant mon sérieux. Je fis plus; j'entrai dans les sentiments du docteur" (p. 584).

As he and the doctor continue their visits, leaving a string of deaths behind them, Gil twice mentions having felt moved ("ému") at such disaster, and questions Sangrado directly about his methods. His moral reaction goes no deeper in this instance, and only the external menace of a duel persuades him to doff his doctor's coat and take the road. "J'aurais pu, comme lui, m'accoutumer aux injures, si le ciel, pour ôter sans doute aux malades de Valladolid un de leurs fléaux, n'eût fait naître une occasion de me dégoûter de la médecine" (p. 592).

His reaction is indicative of Gil's current moral vacuum. Aside from his own self-preservation, he is open to any and all suggestions of a world view. Other details of his life during this period confirm as well his unquestioning

acceptance of Fabrice's philosophy: as soon as he is on his own in his treatments, he pockets some of the money paid by the doctor's patients, and meets Fabrice for a drink: "Nous demeurâmes longtemps dans ce cabaret, Fabrice et moi; nous y rîmes bien aux dépens de nos maîtres, comme cela se pratique entre valets" (p. 579). He thus effortlessly takes on the stereotypical valet role. Gil's perpetual willingness to embrace the demeaning conduct of another initially shows his imitation as a form of degradation of the individual.

Book III is characterized by an even more rapid succession of masters, each more prosperous than the preceding one, an ascension which continues throughout the novel. Laufer underlines the irony inherent in Gil's progression up the social ladder, which actually constitutes a double movement: "ascension sociale sous le signe de l'ironie; dégradation morale qui pervertit l'intelligence, la volonté et la sensibilité."<sup>15</sup> Gil Blas passes under the tutelage of an anonymous chevalier, the petits-maîtres and the actors, at which point he ultimately refuses to live their life and decides a change of masters is again in store.

### The Lack of Initiative

In general, Gil's comportment with his masters is characterized by a lack of personal initiative and a total transfer of responsibility to the master. He is quickly hired, first by the chevalier, who examines him but briefly

before inviting him to follow. In this initial meeting, Gil is as an object to be inspected, referred to in the third person: "Il n'a qu'à me suivre, ajouta-t-il; je vais l'instruire de ses devoirs" (p. 626). In the succeeding scenes, it is apparent that his role as an object is the essential task demanded by the enigmatic gentleman. Aside from dressing his master in the morning, his only chore is to await the chevalier at the door in the evening.

Gil Blas, having lost some of his former total passivity, feels some misgivings about his situation, in spite of his initial joy at being paid well for doing nothing. His master leaves him on his own for the entire day ("mon ami, me dit-il, ne me suis pas; va-t'en où il te plaira . . .", p. 626), so he has no model. He finds nothing more to do with his freedom than to follow the chevalier. In his suspicion about his master's identity he tries to obtain information about the man, spies on his actions and typically judges him wrongly by appearances alone. When the truth is known, Gil immediately recovers his zeal in his service after seeing his money. Their relationship is abruptly broken off when the master sees Gil accompanying his old acquaintance, the bandit Rolando, now a converted alguazil. In spite of the master's kindly dismissal of Gil, the incident effectively illustrates how little true control he holds over his life and actions as a servant.

This entire incident is quite minor in the movement of the plot, for although it does reintroduce Rolando the former bandit, don Bernard de Castil Blazo, the chevalier, never reappears. The mystery surrounding his identity reaches no dramatic heights nor is the character sketched in the comic vein. His philosophy of moderation is an exception in the motley group of personalities discovered by Gil Blas. He and Gil have a minimal relationship, characterized by silence rather than by self-revelation. Finally, although Gil seemingly takes some initiatives, his conjectures are erroneous and his natural wit fails him when he must justify his acquaintance with Rolando. He has only limited consciousness of his role as an object of show, the necessary sign of a certain standing and prosperity, for he is primarily concerned with his money and avoiding the authorities.

Gil's joy at the six réaux he receives daily from don Bernard de Castil Blazo is reminiscent of his previous dealings with money, even when he had very little. As he sets out from Oviédo, his home, his small fortune is his only preoccupation: "tirant de ma poche mes ducats, je commençai à les compter et recompter dans mon chapeau. Je n'étais pas maître de ma joie. Je n'avais jamais vu tant d'argent. Je ne pouvais me lasser de le regarder et de le manier" (p. 499). Upon receipt of the gift of 1000 ducats from doña Mencia, Gil is awed by such riches, and again is compelled to count them: "je me jetai sur le sac, comme un faucon sur sa proie, et

l'emportai dans ma chambre. Je le déliai sans perdre de temps, et j'y trouvai mille ducats. J'achevais de les compter, quand l'hôte . . . entra" (p. 549). The ruby ring he also received is dismissed as worthless. Only the actual coins impress the hero and continue to incite his admiration throughout his career. In his painstaking analysis of the dominant vocabulary in Gil Blas, Laufer discovered that financial terminology is absent in only 11 of the 133 chapters of the novel, and it appears 55% more frequently than the vocabulary of clothing, the second most important category. Laufer concludes correctly that "l'argent n'apparaît jamais comme réalité économique ni substance mythique: il est un objet."<sup>16</sup> Gil's joy at his various fortunes is forgotten once he turns to other things, and the acquisition or hoarding of money is not a continual obsession, with the exception of the duc de Lerme episode.

The brief reappearance of Rolando which provokes Gil's dismissal from his position with Castil Blazo represents a call to Gil to leave servitude and join in the free life of crime. Rolando's message counterbalances that of Fabrice's apology of the valet's life and resurges intermittently with the introduction of other characters. "[Il] me regarda d'un air fier, et me dit sérieusement: Puisque tu as le coeur assez bas pour préférer ta condition servile à l'honneur d'entrer dans une compagnie de braves gens, je t'abandonne à la bassesse de tes inclinations" (p. 636). Don Raphaël and

Ambroise, the two more elegant thieves whom Gil meets again on the road at the end of Book IV, also call him to join them in a life outside of society's laws and restrictions, dependent only upon themselves and upon fate:

Ambroise et moi nous vous offrons nos services; ils ne sont point à mépriser. Ne nous croyez pas de méchantes gens. Nous n'attaquons, nous n'assassinons personne. Nous ne cherchons seulement qu'à vivre aux dépens d'autrui; et, si voler est une action injuste, la nécessité en corrige l'injustice. Associez-vous avec nous, et vous mènerez une vie errante. . . . Nous sommes accoutumés à la variété des temps, aux alternatives de la fortune. (p. 767)

In his refusal to join his friends in crime, Gil shifts away from the traditional picaresque hero, who remains an outsider in society and leads the sort of free life described above. Even before the narrative itself loses its episodic tendency derived directly from the Spanish picaresque novels (after Book VIII), the hero has refused to remain an outsider and seeks to move within the accepted limits of society.

Scipion, Gil's valet and companion in the last third of the novel, experiences a similar call to freedom in his adventures when a beggar he has helped offers to render him a service in turn. In response to Scipion's request for a domestic position, the beggar recommends instead his own freedom:

Si vous étiez réduit à cette nécessité, reprit-il, cela serait fâcheux pour vous, qui n'êtes pas fait à nos manières; mais, pour peu que vous y fussiez accoutumé, vous préféreriez notre état à la servitude, qui sans contredit est inférieure à la gueuserie. Cependant, puisque vous aimez mieux servir que de mener, comme moi, une vie libre et indépendante, vous aurez un maître incessamment. (p. 1087)

Although Scipion is a slower convert to the honest life, he eventually aspires as well to become a model servant in the example of Gil Blas.

### An Inferior Copy

To return to our hero, Gil is once again hired at face value by don Mathias, a typical petit-maître. Although don Mathias wields the least actual power over Gil, who is much more subservient to the intendant Rodriguez than to his true master, the petit-maître does exert a stronger influence over Gil than his other masters thus far. The satire of this social type is most effectively manipulated by the detailed descriptions of their valets' imitations, rather than by directly setting the masters themselves into action. Simultaneously, the valet takes on another image as the poorer copy of his master, in this case going so far as to take his name and wear his clothes: "à un air de qualité près, c'était la même chose" (p. 645). Gil's ease at continual metamorphosis is demonstrated each time he takes on the livery of a new profession, and is here most apparent in the text:

Il n'y a pas deux heures que tu es avec nous, et te voilà déjà tout autre que tu n'étais. Tu changeras tous les jours à vue d'oeil. (p. 646)

And further on:

Je changeai d'humeur et d'esprit. De sage et posé que j'étais auparavant, je devins vif, étourdi, turlupin. Le valet de don Antonio me fit compliment sur ma métamorphose. . . . (p. 650)

Gil's new comrades instruct him in the art of imitation, and the emphasis in this episode is on the language of this "espèce nouvelle." Gil is first impressed by their dinner-table discussion: "J'avais un extrême plaisir à les entendre" (p. 645). The valets then reveal their secrets:

La crainte de mal parler t'empêche de rien dire au hasard; et toutefois ce n'est qu'en hasardant des discours que mille gens s'érigent aujourd'hui en beaux esprits. Veux-tu briller? tu n'as qu'à te livrer à ta vivacité, et risquer indifféremment tout ce qui pourra te venir à la bouche. Ton étourderie passera pour une noble hardiesse. Quand tu débiteras cent impertinences, pourvu qu'avec cela il t'échappe seulement un bon mot, on oubliera les sottises, on retiendra le trait, et l'on concevra une haute opinion de ton mérite. (p. 646)

As he previously adopted Sangrado's speech and ideas, Gil quickly succeeds at speaking "à tort et à travers" and gains acceptance. It is the valets' precise instructions about the speech habits of the petits-mâîtres that seriously draw out their ridicule.

The reader sees and hears Gil in action when he makes his first attempt at courtship, again following the other valets' advice. Gil's decision to take such an initiative is lackluster on a strictly personal level: "J'avais trop envie d'être un illustre, pour n'écouter pas ce conseil: outre cela, je ne me sentais point de répugnance pour une intrigue amoureuse" (p. 650). In the scenes with the elderly entremetteuse and with Laure, the soubrette in her mistress' clothes, Gil's forcing of the language betrays him to the reader in his twisted attempt at elegance. His insistence upon his pretended rank is a first clue: he repeats that he



is a "jeune seigneur" four times in a two-paragraph dialogue with the old woman. His vocabulary is interspersed with familiar forms of expression: "Foi d'homme de cour! lui répondis-je, elle m'a frappé. Je n'ai jamais rien vu de plus piquant que cette créature-là. Faufilez-nous ensemble ma bonne . . ." (pp. 651-2). Again, with Laure, his attempts at being spiritual are blocked by a tendency to descend back down to the corporal and the vulgar in his metaphors: "vous avez expulsé de mon coeur une duchesse qui commençait à y prendre pied" and "un jeune seigneur aime le changement, et son coeur, est, dit-on, plus difficile à garder que la pistole volante," or "Embarquons-nous comme les matelots . . ." (p. 653). In his gestures, too, he is equally exaggerated and too eager for the satisfaction of his very physical desires. As is the case in Marivaux's comedies, the servant's efforts to ape the motions of courtship fail to attain the desired elegance and thus denounce his impropriety.

The servant's system of class values is patterned after that of his master, in the case of Gil, his comrades, Laure and the other soubrettes. They assume the same elitism in their hierarchy of servants as their upper-class masters maintain in society. None observes the equality of their common state, for they are defined only by the masters they serve. The valets swear never to serve a bourgeois, for example: "faisons serment que nous ne servirons jamais ces gredins-là" (p. 647), and Gil remains faithful to his oath

after the death of don Mathias: "Je ne voulais plus servir que des personnes hors du commun; encore avais-je résolu de bien examiner les postes qu'on m'offrirait. Je ne croyais pas le meilleur trop bon pour moi, tant le valet d'un jeune seigneur me paraissait alors préférable aux autres valets!" (pp. 671-672). He and the others see no contradiction between their own attempts at playing the petit-maître and their subsequent disdain for the bourgeois Gregorio's similar aspirations:

Nous y allâmes aussi, Mogicon et moi, tous deux ravis de trouver une franche lippée, et de contribuer notre part à la ruine du bourgeois. . . . Il affectait en vain de prendre l'allure des petits-maîtres. C'était une très mauvaise copie de ces excellents originaux. Ou, pour mieux dire, un imbécile. . . . (p. 648)

After don Mathias' death, Laure offers Gil a position in her mistress's household, but he hesitatingly protests that this would force him to break his previous oath. Her defense of the "archinobility" of the comédienne is of interest in Laure's constant use of the pronoun "nous" to associate herself with the world of those she serves (p. 673). She, too, disguises herself as her mistress Arsénie, and in the very particular world of the troupe of actors, circulates freely with masters and servants.

Minor details indicate concretely how well Gil Blas has embraced the valet role in his increased attentiveness to his personal gain. He astutely flatters Rodriguez, don Mathias' intendant, the true source of funds in the household.

After his master's death, he carefully arranges his own affairs and takes "par mégarde quelques nippes de [son] maître" (p. 671) before revealing the accident to anyone.

Gregorio Rodriguez, the intendant, is patterned after a common stereotype of the servant who controls completely the financial dealings of the master and assures his own gain in the process. Rodriguez typifies such an intelligent and dishonest servant, and the other intendants who appear, with the exception of Gil Blas himself, are only identifiable by the same stereotype. They are "universellement voleurs."<sup>17</sup> In Rodriguez' case, his master's only desire is to be left in the dark about the state of his finances so long as his pockets are full and the gambling debts paid. Don Mathias and his friends mutually complain of their intendants as "un mal nécessaire" (p. 641). It is thus to Rodriguez that Gil addresses himself for employment, and he is advised to continue in his good graces in order to "profit" from his stay in the household. Rodriguez is "pâle et jaune," continually handling money, and portrayed as a predatory, power-seeking individual in such terms as: "(il) s'est enrichi dans deux maisons ruinées"; "il aime à voir ramper devant lui les autres domestiques" and "si vous êtes assez adroit pour gagner sa confiance, il pourra vous donner quelque petit os à ronger. Il en a tant!" (p. 638).

Later, in the household of comte Galiano, Gil Blas finds a similar situation which he is hired to eradicate

(Book VII, chapters XIV and XV). The intendant, and the maître d'hôtel and the cook as well, are totally involved in consuming the master's goods for their own purposes. The servants in the house live on a level equal to that of their master.

Only the hero is offered the chance to break with the stereotype of avarice and prove his honesty. As don Alphonse's intendant Gil continually describes his actions in contrast to the above portrait. His first task is to return the money stolen from the merchant Samuel Simon. "C'était commencer le métier d'intendant par où l'on devrait le finir" (p. 845). He later describes his duties in detail, still referring back continually to this contrast. His description illustrates how easily an intendant could arrange for his own profit since he administers all of the household finances, including the income from the farms. At least the intendant works in his own self-interest; the "honest" Gil, on the other hand, is again motivated by the image of the master. His outright imitation of those he serves is further reinforced by his apathy towards himself in almost any situation.

#### Further Examples of Passivity

Gil's experiences with the actress Arsénie and her company are marked by his return to passivity as the narrator limits himself to rendering what he sees and hears around

him. Most of this section (Book III, chapters IX-XII) is dominated by dialogue; all of the actors are wonderful talkers, and especially Laure: "Lorsque Laure était en train de parler, et elle y était presque toujours, les paroles ne lui coûtaient rien. Quelle volubilité de langue!" (p. 677). Gil's voice is lost among the others. As always, brief details of his actual work in the household are provided, but although he is officially the économe, he aids the servants in preparing and serving meals and other more lowly tasks. Laure's responsibilities are equally vague; but as an aspiring actress herself, she participates in the action at the theater as well.

Gil's erratic ways finally produce scruples on his part after a short time with the company. One might be tempted to ask about the whereabouts of such scruples during the hero's previous escapades, but the transparency of Lesage the playwright's biting attack upon the weaknesses of certain actors and companies overrides the hero's autonomy here and leads to such ambiguities. In Book III, chapter XII, the narrator describes how quickly he became accustomed to and assumed the actors' ways and opinions, then how just as abruptly their point of view was demystified in his eyes and rejected. Although eventually he displaces his mistrust of their ideas on a moral and personal level (with respect to their vice and his failure to possess Laure completely, who flirts with any and everyone), the first instance of

demystification does not actually occur on a personal level at all. Gil only realizes that the actors are not infallible because the public twice applauds a play which the company disliked. Never does our narrator offer an independent judgment. Gil's version of the incidents suffices. First he unquestionably accepts: "Je m'attachai à me perfectionner le goût; et, pour y parvenir sûrement, j'écoutais avec une avide attention tout ce que disaient les comédiens. S'ils louaient une pièce, je l'estimais. Leur paraissait-elle mauvaise, je la méprisais." After the first error, Gil concludes: "j'aimais mieux penser que le public n'avait pas le sens commun, que de douter de l'infailibilité de la compagnie" (p. 683).

Still, Gil's deception is solely based upon the opinion of the public. When a second time the audience applauds a play disliked by the actors, Gil never interjects his own opinion, but simply accepts the more popular opinion and transfers his value system (esthetic, in this case) from one group to another. His statement, "Je cessai donc de regarder les comédiens comme d'excellents juges, et je devins un juste appréciateur de leur mérite" (p. 683), successfully slides from one register (esthetic) to another (moral - "mérite"), as he then launches an attack upon their immorality:

J'étais choqué de leurs défauts; mais par malheur je trouvai un peu trop à mon gré leur façon de vivre, et je me plongeai dans la débauche. Comment aurais-je pu m'en défendre? Tous les discours que j'entendais parmi eux étaient pernicieux pour la jeunesse, et je ne voyais rien qui ne contribuât à me corrompre. (p. 684)

Gil's pliable nature and ambiguous morality render resistance difficult.

He successfully extricates himself from the vices of the company in a rare and brief instance of introspection, when he thinks of his family and education and feels remorse: "Ah! misérable, me dis-je à moi-même, est-ce ainsi que tu remplis l'attente de ta famille? N'est-ce pas assez de l'avoir trompée en prenant un autre parti que celui de précepteur? Ta condition servile te doit-elle empêcher de vivre en honnête homme?" (p. 685). This is his first self-conscious admission of his "servile condition," since Fabrice convinced him to espouse it. His acceptance, however, is still firm and unquestioned. His new-found "morality" is short-lived and necessary more for a shift of scenes than for personality development.

#### The Manipulation of Appearances

In his next series of adventures (Book IV), Gil moves through four households in the same rapid manner, a pretext for the telling of stories, a few of his own but chiefly those of others. He continues to adapt easily to each situation by following Fabrice's advice to observe and imitate: "Je m'attachai à connaître le terrain; j'étudiai les inclinations des uns et des autres; puis, réglant ma conduite là-dessus, je ne tardai guère à prévenir en ma faveur mon maître et tous les domestiques" (p. 687). The parallels

between his role in this series of intrigues with that of the valet of comedy are strong, and justified in the text as well.<sup>18</sup> Laufer also points out that the influence of the Spanish comedy is heavily felt here as the source for several of the plots, especially in the episode of Aurore and don Luis.<sup>19</sup> All of these elements drawn from the stage, plus the dominance of disguise and false appearances, perpetuate the models in role-playing Gil has previously experienced, and the theme of the conflict between être and paraître, so central to Gil's own character, is reproduced with great variety in the world around him.

Gil's first master in this section, don Vincent de Guzman, is quickly relegated to the background and suddenly dies, so that the terrain is open for his daughter Aurore's amorous intrigues. Gil first suspects Aurore of having a fancy for him because of the special attention she seems to reserve for him. His reaction is of interest because he still does not esteem himself first as an individual rather than just a servant: "Je crus Aurore fortement éprise de mon mérite, et je ne me regardai plus que comme un de ces heureux domestiques à qui l'amour rend la servitude si douce" (p. 688). The outward signs of his rising self-esteem appear only because of her gaze: "Pour paraître en quelque façon moins indigne du bien que ma bonne fortune me voulait procurer, je commençai d'avoir plus de soin de ma personne que je n'en avais jusqu'alors" (p. 688). When he finds



himself at a loss, ignorant of the appropriate conduct in such a situation, Gil can only refer back to previous models, notably the plays he had seen. He quickly throws himself at Aurore's feet and employs "un ton de déclamateur" before she interrupts him (p. 691). When his bright hopes are rather resoundingly dashed and lightly mocked by Aurore during their midnight rendezvous, he swallows his shame and in his own words, "reasonably" concurs that:

il me convenait mieux d'être le confident de ma maîtresse que son amant. Je songeai même que cela pourrait me mener à quelque chose; que les courtiers d'amour étaient ordinairement bien payés de leurs peines; et je me couchai dans la résolution de faire ce qu'Aurore exigeait de moi. (p. 692).

The prospect of payment consoles Gil and is as always sufficiently convincing. As soon as he receives "une petite bourse qui n'était pas vide" (p. 693) from Aurore, he impatiently leaves to investigate its contents.

As Aurore's agent, Gil enjoys a certain independence and is obliged to take initiatives to advance her affairs. We are literally displaced into the world of comedy in this episode, for the narration leads us directly to such a comparison: "je me dis: Oh! çà, monsieur Gil Blas, vous faites donc le valet dans cette comédie? Eh bien, mon ami, montrez que vous avez assez d'esprit pour remplir un si beau rôle" (p. 727). After successfully inventing a tale for Isabelle, don Luis's ex-mistress, he compliments himself on his acting: "je compris que, si je voulais me mettre dans le génie, je

deviendrais un habile fourbe" (p. 728). The fact that one and all, mistress and servants, are disguised throughout the incident heightens the theatrical element, and the intrigue itself would be worthy of the stage. The same comparison with the theater materializes again further on: "Pour moi, comme il ne fallait pas que Pacheco me vît dans cette maison, et que, semblable aux acteurs qui ne paraissent qu'au dernier acte d'une pièce, je ne devais me montrer que sur la fin de la visite, je sortais aussitôt que j'eus dîné" (p. 733).

Ever since she imagined the ruse to snare don Luis, Aurore has included Gil in her deliberations and sought his approval of her plans. She is obviously pleased with his success, and takes him into her confidence. At one point in the action, Gil is placed on an equal level in the narration, as he participates in the conversation provoked by his tales about Isabelle and the imaginary woman: "Nous continuâmes à nous entretenir des femmes qui ont l'art de se masquer; et le résultat de tous nos discours fut qu'Isabelle demeura dûment atteinte et convaincu d'être une franche coquette" (p. 729). Aurore too includes him in her discourse: "Nous venons d'écarter une rivale qui pouvait nous embarrasser" (p. 730).

Still, Gil's participation is given over entirely to the wishes of Aurore. In the successful dénouement of Aurore's plot, Gil remains essentially a secondary figure, the observer and teller of the tale. After receiving a

generous payment (100 pistoles), he accepts Aurore's suggestion that he take a position as valet to don Luis's elderly uncle, don Gonzale Pacheco. Their interview is brief; upon promise of his fidelity and zeal, Gil is hired. As he aided Aurore in the manipulation of her love affair, here too he is involved in don Gonzale's amorous adventures, a role which presages his position as "Mercure en chef" for royalty while employed by both de Lerme and Olivares. In all of these cases, he accomplishes the most typical of the functions of the literary valet. In this instance, his major responsibility is to deliver messages to don Gonzale's mistress, doña Eufrasia. Gil is sufficiently enlightened by his past adventures to pass judgment upon the ill-matched pair formed by his master, "cette momie vivante," and his young mistress. Such independent thinking will be the cause of his downfall, for in don Gonzale's scale of values, a valet is the last person to be believed. Initially, Gil keeps his ideas to himself:

Je feignis pourtant, par complaisance, d'ajouter foi à tout ce que me dit mon maître. Je fis plus, je vantai le discernement et le bon goût d'Eufrasia. Je fus même assez impudent pour avancer qu'elle ne pouvait avoir de galant plus aimable. Le bon-homme ne sentit point que je lui donnais de l'encensoir par le nez; au contraire, il s'applaudit de mes paroles: tant il est vrai qu'un flatteur peut tout risquer avec les grands! ils se prêtent jusqu'aux flatteries les plus outrées. (pp. 738-739)

As long as Gil continues to reflect back to him the image he wishes to convey, don Gonzale is content with his services.

Gil is pursued by Eufrasia's older servant, Béatrix, who hopes to seduce him in order to gain his cooperation. He pretends to accept the game, and finds himself, as usual, the double of don Gonzale: "Lorsque nous étions auprès de nos princesses, mon maître et moi, cela faisait deux tableaux différents dans le même goût" (p. 743).

Béatrix and Gil discuss their situation as servants at one point, both pleased with the goodness of their present masters as compared to some, "dont le service, en un mot, est un enfer" (p. 741). Their discussion touches upon some of the conditions imposed upon servants in less fortunate situations. Screams, insults, and torment are their lot. Neither Béatrix nor Gil ever question their status as servants, however. Béatrix for example has no scruples where her mistress is concerned: "son dessein était de m'inspirer de l'amour pour me mettre dans les intérêts de sa maîtresse, pour qui elle se sentait si zélée, qu'elle ne s'embarrassait point de ce qu'il lui en coûterait pour la servir" (p. 741).

The evolution in Gil's character through experience is evidenced here by his capacity to read behind the appearances of others. He has enough insight to judge Eufrasia as harshly as he does her servant, and to play their game accordingly. ". . . [P]ar cette contreruse, je trompai les friponnes, qui levèrent enfin le masque" (p. 742). His growing prowess as a teller of tales is not lost on doña Eufrasia ("je lui débitais des fables qu'elle prenait pour

argent comptant," p. 743) and he proves not only that he can no longer be fooled by appearances but that he can successfully use them to trick others. But his seemingly honest stance in defense of his master is actually calculated for his own interest, as the narrator rather reticently but penetratingly reveals:

je me sentais plus de penchant à remplir mon devoir qu'à le trahir. D'ailleurs, Eufrasie ne m'avait rien promis de positif, et cela peut-être était cause qu'elle n'avait pas corrompu ma fidélité. Je me résolus donc à servir don Gonzale avec zèle, et je me persuadai que si j'étais assez heureux pour l'arracher à son idole, je serais mieux payé de cette bonne action, que des mauvaises que je pourrai faire. (p. 743)

It is of note that in these rare moments of reflection Gil's personal decisions are still intimately linked with a master and with the possibilities for profit. His personal system of values exists, for he has a precarious sense of right and wrong, but it constantly succumbs to a financial preoccupation or to the values of his master at the time. The narrator again enters into a more analytical mode as he describes his state of mind during his last day of service to don Gonzale. He describes how truly he has his master's interests at heart in his emotional reaction to Eufrasie's infidelity, mocking himself in afterthought for such simplicity and his belief in honor. "Faire le bon valet" is to no avail in such a world of displaced values, and Gil's attempt to sway his master away from his ridiculous love affair is thwarted. When he refuses the master's vision, he loses his position.

Also, behind such honorable intentions the narrator once more lets slip Gil's attention to his own interest in the affair. Not only had he hoped to rise above the crowd of ordinary valets, but he expected some compensation for such a distinction:

Je me représentais la satisfaction qu'auraient les héritiers naturels de don Gonzale, quand ils apprendraient que leur parent n'était plus le jouet d'une passion si contraire à leurs intérêts. Je me flattais qu'ils m'en tiendraient compte, et qu'enfin j'allais me distinguer des autres valets de chambre qui sont ordinairement plus disposés à maintenir leurs maîtres dans la débauche qu'à les en retirer. (pp. 744-45)

His decision is taken in part because of a better chance at personal profit, and Gil is not truly distinguishable after all from the typical servant, in the sense that he still expects to profit from the situation.

After a short stay in the household of the marquise de Chaves, Gil Blas leaves servitude behind him for a time. The Chaves episode is brief, consisting mainly of impersonal observation and the astute insights of another servant, André Molina, "gouverneur des pages," which form a series of portraits of the Marquise and her various guests. The intelligent servant often plays such a functional role of portraitist because, as an intimate observer of the characters, he can succinctly expose the personalities more economically than if the characters reveal themselves in action. Molina briefly takes over the narration and is the agent of satire in this episode, for Gil Blas, new in the household, has no

prior knowledge of its characters. The "gouverneur des pages" is not a sharply defined figure himself, however.

### Ascension and Abnegation

After succumbing to the Marquise's secretary in a duel over one of the chambermaids, Gil humbly and abruptly leaves, resolved to see the world (Spain), and only return to servitude when his pockets are empty. Gil becomes a passive listener as the structure of the novel breaks open to include the stories of don Alphonse (Book IV, chapter X and Book V, chapter II) and of don Raphaël (Book V, chapter I). Don Raphaël's tale extends over 56 pages, included in a single chapter, a striking contrast from the short chapter structure established since the beginning of the novel and the longest uninterrupted digression in the novel. Both of these digressions retain a structural importance in the novel in spite of the apparent interruption of the hero's own adventures. The tale of don Alphonse introduces the character who as both master and friend represents Gil's ultimate aspirations. Don Raphaël's romanesque adventures are a culmination of the themes introduced in Books I-IV because of his incessant manipulation of appearances and roles, the tricks Gil Blas is attempting to master.<sup>20</sup>

After their tales are told, Gil Blas, don Alphonse, don Raphaël and his perpetual partner Ambroise de Lamela, collaborate in the duping of the merchant Samuel Simon.

During most of this episode, the narrative employs the subject pronoun "nous," and Gil loses his central position until Book VI, chapter II, when he and don Alphonse decide to part company with the bandits. As previously mentioned, Gil refuses the anarchistic freedom of the outlaw for the safer road of servitude. Don Alphonse takes the necessary initiative and is first to enunciate his decision, so Gil becomes a follower once again. His sincerity in this instance is questionable because, while narrating those incidents which he now supposedly regrets, Gil did not reveal any of these interior scruples subsequently divulged to don Alphonse. He can only claim heaven as his witness that his heart was not in his actions at the time. Such swift redemption is not uncommon with the hero.

The relationship between don Alphonse and Gil is the most durable in the novel although it is not the object of much penetrating analysis on the part of the narrator. They meet when Gil virtually saves the life of the young nobleman by alerting him about the search party on his trail, and, both without resources, they remain on equal footing in their relationship until don Alphonse is reinstated in his family, in his rank and in his fortune. Gil nurses him through a serious illness and they have a "feeling" for each other: "comme nous nous sentions véritablement de l'inclination l'un pour l'autre, nous nous jurâmes une éternelle amitié" (p. 843). Their friendship seesaws between equality and the



rappports of master and servant, as seen through Gil's eyes. It is he who feels inferior rather than his friend who imposes his superiority. As Gil cannot overcome the persistent image of himself as the servant, an inferior, he can never feel an equal in their friendship until the last chapters of the novel.

Don Alphonse hires Gil as his intendant when he refuses the comte de Polan's offer to help him make his fortune. Gil is immediately sensitive about the "honor" don Alphonse has bestowed upon him by trusting him ("[il] m'honora de sa confiance," p. 845), when, as such "eternal" friends, such trust would have been expected. In his duties as intendant Gil takes this trust seriously, resisting temptations that would have corrupted others in his position, and finally, through his own devotion to his masters ("Je n'avais en vue que leur intérêt," p. 847) loses his position once again. "J'aime mieux me retirer que de m'exposer par un plus long séjour ici à mettre la division entre deux époux si parfaits" (p. 852). Their interests overpower his own in this case. Gil's amorous adventures with Lorença Séphora are a parody on a lower level of the gallant love affair and subsequent provocation of duel, outraged female and hate. The blunt reality of Séphora's cancer and the nightly visits of the doctor prevent us from taking Gil's love affair very seriously. In love, he can once again only create a poor copy of the master.

The incident illustrates as well the interior hierarchy of servants within a household as they pit one master against the other in order to dominate one another. Don Alphonse is frank with Gil in this instance about Séphora's power of persuasion with his wife Séraphine, although he appears unwilling to succumb to her blackmail. His refusal, "Périssent toutes les duègnes d'Espagne, avant que je consente à l'éloignement d'un garçon que je regarde plutôt comme un frère que comme un domestique!" (p. 851), is sincere in the light of his subsequent generosity to Gil throughout the rest of the novel.

Don Alphonse stands unique in Gil Blas as the one positive character encountered by the hero. He is devoid of faults in the eyes of the narrator, and as the model of the true nobility, of heart and mind as well as of blood, inspires Gil to honorable action, sometimes in spite of himself. He feels some honor in his honesty while returning the money to Samuel Simon, "ce qui n'était pas peu louable dans un jeune homme qui avait fréquenté de grands fripons" (p. 846). He successfully rejects the role of the typical intendant as well, and his description of his activities emphasizes this contrast several times: "j'avais sur les valets un empire despotique: mais, contre l'ordinaire de mes pareils, je n'abusais point de mon pouvoir . . . J'étais un intendant comme on n'en voit point" (pp. 846-847). In a sense, in this literal rejection of the social stereotypes and

their negativity, Gil is actually refusing the literary stereotypes (the picaroon, the intendant) expected in his position. When don Alphonse and his family reappear in Gil's life after his fall from power, their presence will again direct him towards honorable action.

Furthermore, in his emphasis upon the difference between the hero and the typical servant, the narrator draws the character out of the stereotype and the inappropriate behavior it implies, thus rendering him worthy of serious treatment. Although Gil falls back into corruption and dishonor again, he eventually attains a compromise between the conduct expected of him and his personal integrity.

After his separation from don Alphonse, placed at the beginning of Book VII (chapter II), Gil continues to circulate in the heart of high society, as servant to an archbishop, a marquis and a count. He has of course moved up simultaneously in the hierarchy of servants. He serves in more respectable posts as secretary or intendant, and this ascension paves the way for his eventual rise to power as secretary to the prime minister himself in Books VII and IX. Gil is first placed with the archbishop of Grenada through the services of don Fernand de Leyva, don Alphonse's brother. He is now recognized for his intellectual talents, and his rise in fortune will parallel his growing "literacy" within the novel. M.-H. Huet points out that as he moves into the worlds of true power, here, in the church, and later in

political spheres, Gil's responsibilities are essentially involved with writing. He is first only a copyist, asked to imitate passively, and is dismissed when he leaves his role and uses his own judgment with the archbishop. Later, as secretary to the duc de Lerme and the comte d'Olivarès, he plays a more active role in the writing of texts, but is still subservient to the ideology and tastes of his master.<sup>21</sup>

The descriptive passage which opens this episode centers upon the people congregated in the archbishop's apartments and their contrasting reactions to Gil Blas, the unknown servant, and the archbishop, the master. The hero's reflections in this instance again show an astute awareness of the servant's inherent inferiority which he himself often forgets can apply to him as well. Here, appearances dominate in Gil's impressions of the group:

Les laïques avaient presque tous des habits superbes. On les aurait plutôt pris pour des seigneurs que pour des domestiques. Ils étaient fiers et faisaient les hommes de conséquence. Je ne pus m'empêcher de rire en les considérant, et de m'en moquer en moi-même. Parbleu, disais-je, ces gens-ci sont bien heureux de porter le joug de la servitude sans le sentir; car enfin, s'ils le sentaient, il me semble qu'ils auraient des manières moins orgueilleuses. (p. 854)

The contrast between their outward grandeur and their humble status is emphasized in the very next sentence, which focuses first upon a certain "grave et gros personnage," than upon his meager function: to open and close the door. As soon as the archbishop appears, however, all suddenly switch from insolence to respect.

The petty nature of the relationships between servants is further alluded to throughout Gil's stay at the archbishopric in the changing attitudes of Gil's peers towards him once he gains favor with the archbishop. Their initial disdain turns into a warm welcome, and eventually envy and respect: "Ils n'avaient pas honte de faire des bassesses pour captiver ma bienveillance" (p. 860). After his disgrace with the archbishop however, only the elderly Melchior de la Ronda sincerely takes any further interest in Gil's affairs. Even among themselves the servants adopt the master's vision of themselves and conduct themselves accordingly with no consciousness of such alienation of the individual. Gil is also caught up in the game of appearances, and observes his colleagues closely: "Quelle sagesse il y avait dans l'extérieur des ecclésiastiques! Ils me parurent de saints personnages, tant le lieu où j'étais tenait mon esprit en respect! Il ne me vint pas seulement en pensée que c'était de la fausse monnaie . . ." (p. 856). Once Melchior de la Ronda, like Molina in the Marquise de Chaves episode, initiates him into the truth behind the appearances, Gil learns his lesson quickly: "Dès le soir même, en soupant, je me parai comme eux d'un dehors sage. Cela ne coûte rien. Il ne faut pas s'étonner s'il y a tant d'hypocrites" (p. 858).

Gil's carefully guarded countenance and painstaking transcriptions of the archbishop's homilies lead him to great favor with his master because his whole life, his actions,

his flattery and the words he writes, all are turned uniquely towards the master. "Les homélies avaient fait tout mon amusement" (p. 869). His subjection is complete and sincere, if one examines his relation of several of their private encounters. Once Gil is lucky enough to have chosen as his favorites the very passages in the most recent homily which the archbishop preferred as well, his fortune seems assured. When his master enthusiastically names him his confidant, Gil falls to his feet: "je tombai aux pieds de Sa Grandeur, tout pénétré de reconnaissance. J'embrassai de bon coeur ses jambes cagneuses, et je me regardai comme un homme qui est en train de s'enrichir" (p. 859). As the archbishop's confidant, Gil shall be the "dépositaire de [ses] plus secrètes pensées" (p. 859), thus again a passive receptacle, not an initiator of action or thought. After learning the art of turning each situation into a source of vanity for his master, Gil succeeds in gaining favors for his peers. With the exception of the abrupt dénouement, the structure of this episode announces the essential elements of Gil's subsequent relationships with both prime ministers. His astute manner of fitting himself entirely into the model of his masters, an imitation of them but also the reflection of their image, is his key to success. Gil's initiation into the process with the archbishop is interrupted when he shatters the reflection by naively telling the archbishop the truth behind the appearances, that he has lost his eloquence

and is aging. When he no longer reflects back the image the archbishop demands to see, Gil is roughly shoved out of his office and out of his sight.

The character of Melchior de la Ronda, an old valet de chambre in the archbishop's employ, stands out as an exception in this panorama of hypocritical servants. We have already pointed out that his primary function is expository; he reveals to Gil the true character of his colleagues. His honesty and loyalty cause him to hesitate when criticizing his master, however: "il me siérait mal d'éplucher les défauts d'une personne dont je mange le pain" (p. 857). He hesitatingly alerts Gil only to the archbishop's forgetfulness in compensating his servants. De la Ronda retains his respectful resignation to his inferior position in the world up to the end, even after Gil's disgrace for having spoken the truth. He preaches the attitude of the master rather than commiserate with Gil's justifiable anger: "dévorez plutôt votre chagrin. Les hommes du commun doivent toujours respecter les personnes de qualité, quelque sujet qu'ils aient de s'en plaindre . . ." (p. 866).

Apart from Scipion's devotion, which will be discussed later in greater detail, only two other examples of such sincere loyalty to the master and his world appear in the novel. Marcos, the old écuyer in the tale of the apprentice-barber, Diego, is the first to be characterized in this manner. He is conscious of and strictly confines himself to the

social barriers which Diego, loved by his master's wife, would prefer to ignore. Marcos first refuses to arrange a secret rendezvous for them, angrily protesting:

Je ne prétends point, pour satisfaire votre ardeur insensée, contribuer à déshonorer mon maître, à vous perdre de réputation et à me couvrir d'infamie, moi qui ai toujours passé pour un domestique d'une conduite irréprochable. J'aime mieux sortir de votre maison que d'y servir d'une manière si honteuse. (p. 609)

He is later happy to be fired rather than feel obliged through friendship dishonestly to accommodate his mistress and her young lover.

Marcos is obviously being realistic as well in his refusal to conspire against his master, but Pédrille, who aids his former master, captain de Chinchilla, in receiving a royal pension (Book VII, chapter XII), acts out of what is apparently sheer loyalty: "Je préfère à tout l'or du monde le plaisir d'avoir contribué à améliorer la fortune de mon ancien maître" (p. 902). As a successful parvenu himself, Pédrille offers Gil Blas the sole example of such gratitude to a master. This the hero eventually emulates, although for distorted egotistical motifs, when he obtains a governorship for don Alphonse. In most other cases, his fidelity to his employer only endures as long as he wears the livery of his service, and does not make any permanent intrusion into his personal life.

Gil Blas sees Laure again after his dismissal by the archbishop. She is now Estelle, a celebrated actress, and



offers to arrange a position for Gil as secretary to her current lover, the marquis de Marialva. The digression devoted to Laure's adventures since Gil left her renews the message of the freedom of the outlaw previously conveyed by the bandits Rolando and don Raphaël. According to Laure, the world of the theater, like that of the outlaw, operates outside of the restrictions of class and fortune. She repeats the advice of the soubrette who convinced her to try the stage:

N'es-tu pas lasse de te voir soumise aux volontés des autres? De respecter leurs caprices, de t'entendre gronder, en un mot d'être esclave? Que n'embrasses-tu plutôt, à mon exemple, la vie comique? Rien n'est plus convenable aux personnes d'esprit qui manquent de bien et de naissance. C'est un état qui tient un milieu entre la noblesse et la bourgeoisie, une condition libre et affranchie des bienséances les plus incommodes de la société. Nos revenus nous sont payés en espèces par le public qui en possède les fonds. Nous vivons toujours dans la joie et dépensons notre argent comme nous le gagnons. (p. 880)

Laure proposes to share her profits with Gil by passing him off as her brother to Marialva. Her plan is to renew the ruse with each new lover and source of income. But again Gil refuses crime, for he finds it impossible to support the disguise for very long. His quick feelings of guilt appear when the game is obviously outside of the accepted code, as in the theft of Samuel Simon with don Raphaël and Ambroise. He adopts the master's viewpoint, and judges himself quite severely in this case:

Je ne me sentais pas la conscience assez nette pour être content de moi . . . [I]l fallait que je fusse bien

effronté pour vouloir demeurer auprès d'un seigneur dont je payais si mal la confiance. Enfin, après un sévère examen, je tombai d'accord avec moi-même que, si je n'étais pas un fripon, il ne s'en fallait guère.  
(pp. 891-892)

However, in the hope of the fortune prophesied enigmatically by an old monk at the auberge, Gil stays on until he is sure of being discovered. Moreover, he is pleased with his lack of duties ("les gens du marquis étaient d'heureux fainéants," p. 886) and the marquis' outward display of friendship ("il m'épargnait une sujétion que j'aurais quelquefois désagréablement sentie," p. 891).

"Un seigneur vous fera une agréable destinée qui ne sera point sujette au changement" (p. 890). The monk's prophecy is representative of Gil's attitude towards life because it embodies his passivity so well. He is still the object, and action is initiated from above, the superior seigneur. Gil continues to seek after this nobleman who will bring him riches, and never dreams a dream relating only to himself.

When a changed Fabrice reappears in his life, Gil is again offered a chance to choose freedom over servitude and refuses. The message of Fabrice the poet can be aligned with those of Rolando, don Raphaël and Laure as an offer of escape from servitude, for all of these characters directly refer to the inferiority of the servant's condition and vaunt their freedom as an important asset. As Fabrice contentedly shows off his apartment, whose shabbiness is amply valorized

in the text,<sup>22</sup> he explains his reasons for leaving his post in Valladolid: "Mon génie s'élevant peu à peu, comme celui de Plaute, au-dessus de la servitude" (p. 905), he writes a play and leaves for Madrid in order to learn the true literary art. He insists upon the advantages of his freedom: "Tu vois, me dit-il, ma vie libre et indépendante. J'irais, si je voulais, tous les jours manger chez les personnes de qualité; mais, outre que l'amour du travail me retient souvent au logis, je suis un petit Aristippe" (p. 907). It is only progressively that Fabrice is seen to be less free than he believes: he is a slave of language, enmeshed in the current fad of obscurity, cutting words completely from their meanings and devalorizing communication. Secondly, he is still attached to his Mécenas in more subtle and powerful ways than the clearly defined master-servant relationship. Although he calls himself "don" Fabricio, he obeys promptly when he is told that a certain duc de Medina Sidonia wishes to speak with him, and is subsequently seen at the beck and call of the patrons he serves.

### "Le Singe"

Like a marionette, Gil Blas enters a new job and plays the same game. While employed by the count Galiano, Gil is elevated to honorable heights (he is designated "surintendant" for a time), yet finds himself still stooping to the ridiculous and demeaning task of caring for the count's ailing monkey in order to impress his master:

Il fallait que tous les domestiques, et moi principalement, nous fussions toujours sur pied pour être prêts à courir où l'on jugerait à propos de nous envoyer pour le service du singe. . . . Ce qu'il y eut de malheureux pour moi, c'est que j'avais enchéri sur tous les valets pour mieux faire ma cour au seigneur, et je m'étais donné de si grands mouvements pour son Cupidon [le singe], que j'en tombai malade. (p. 920)

One is reminded of Gil's first sleepless nights bringing the chamber pot to the canon.

The monkey incident also echoes the narrator's initial image of the count's crowd of richly dressed servants, "une troupe de singes vêtus à l'espagnole" (p. 913). Furthermore, the immediate association of the monkey with imitation fits well into the dynamics of master and servant as they are generally presented in the novel. As an added insult, the count's devotion to his monkey contrasts sharply with his abrupt abandonment of the fervently loyal Gil Blas.

Gil's enthusiasm as he enters into service for Galiano is undaunted, as always, and he immediately transfers all of his loyalties over to the master, who seeks "un domestique affectionné qui épouse mes intérêts et mette toute son attention à conserver mon bien" (p. 915). Gil is continually proving his zeal, and effectively suppresses the fraud and theft in the household through much energetic vigilance. "Voilà ce que le patron demandait" (p. 918). An entire chapter is devoted to the petty detail of his maneuvers to rectify the household economy. His pride in such accomplishments represents a total alienation of self, for Gil, a stranger to Galiano, objectively owes him nothing yet

wholeheartedly adopts his interests until they dominate his life completely. Book VII, chapter XV thus appropriately closes: "Je demeurai ferme dans la résolution d'être toujours fidèle et zélé. Je ne me démentis point, et j'ose dire qu'en quatre mois, par mon épargne, je fis profit à mon maître de trois mille ducats pour le moins" (p. 919).

Fabrice, however, is critical of his "prouesses d'intendant," and attempts to explain to Gil that he is not operating under the servant's code and "dans les règles." "Sur ma foi, notre ami, continua-t-il, en branlant la tête, vous êtes un vrai gâte-maison, et vous avez bien la mine de servir longtemps, puisque vous n'écorchez pas l'anguille pendant que vous la tenez" (p. 919). Although he reinforces the stereotype of dishonesty with such advice, Fabrice is ineffectively reminding Gil to value his own interest above that of his master, and that such zeal is designed to be only an appearance and not his inner being. His words take on more importance to Gil only when he finds himself left for dead by his master and virtually robbed by his peers. Again zeal and loyalty bring him no material gain, yet he still maintains that "Quoique ma droiture eût été si mal payée chez mon dernier maître, j'avais résolu de la conserver toujours" (p. 928).

Alienation: "La Chose du Duc"

At last Gil rather suddenly and spectacularly rises to the heart of power, as secretary to the duc de Lerme, the king's prime minister. The last five books of the novel relate the promise and pitfalls of the court through Gil's successes and failures in government service. One essential aspect of the atmosphere at court is the manner in which the dynamics of servitude reign even in the upper strata of society. As Gil Blas crawls before his masters, so even the duc de Lerme, who is described as "un homme qui gouverne la monarchie d'Espagne," must kneel before the king's bed every morning, and return twice daily only to see and to be seen by the king. This is not a source of astonishment for any of the characters, for "in Lesage's fictional world, there is no stigma attached to service, because nearly everyone in the social hierarchy is simultaneously master and servant."<sup>23</sup> Although like de Lerme many enjoy a certain individual power, all are intimately dependent on the monarch as its source. The sudden humility of the ecclesiastics before the archbishop of Grenada is also representative of such subservience. The power relationships evident within the higher spheres of society which are generally alluded to in a number of novels of the period parallel the gestures and attitudes of the basic master-servant relationship seen on a lower level here. Basic respect for the existing hierarchy pervades social attitudes on all levels.

The narration of the hero's life at court loses its episodic quality, and the tempo tends towards a "single continuum." For most critics the last five books of the novel constitute a definitive rupture with the basic picaresque novel, not only because of this change in narrative rhythm but because of the more limited subject matter and setting (Gil Blas at court or among the nobility), and the new emphasis placed upon the evolution of the hero's personality once his exterior world ceases its constant change.<sup>24</sup>

In the course of Book VIII, Gil becomes "la chose du duc,"<sup>25</sup> and most of Book IX relates the process by which he rids himself of the stigma. During his ascension to power and simultaneous descent into moral corruption, the narrator's insight into himself and his actions is still somewhat erratic and at times contradictory, because of his obstinate refusal to question the comportment of his master, the source of his corruption as well as his power. For example, he is highly critical of don Rodrigue, the most powerful of the duke's secretaries and Gil's equal (he too had risen from the rank of "simple domestique"), and ridicules his own "indigne démarche" for the man's favors: "Je le saluai en baissant la tête jusqu'à terre, et lui demandai sa protection dans des termes dont je ne puis me souvenir sans honte, tant ils étaient pleins de soumission" (p. 937). On the other hand, his submission to the duke is just as undignified, for he throws himself at his feet several times, willingly

participates in his schemes, accepts de Lerme's mockery of his past and dotes upon the duke's kindnesses as signs of a true friendship between them. Even after his master's betrayal and his imprisonment, Gil never places his fawning behavior in perspective, and renews such devotion to the power figure with Olivarès in Books XI and XII.

This submission begins from the moment Gil's friend Joseph Navarro offers him the now familiar advice: "de paraître tellement attaché à Son Excellence, qu'elle ne doute pas que vous lui soyez entièrement dévoué . . ." (p. 931). The narrator quickly forgets that his devotion was only meant to be an appearance in his subsequent account of his relationship with de Lerme. He retains a most amiable attitude towards his master even after three months of unpaid service, and still is impressed with his every word: "J'eus une assez longue conversation avec Son Excellence dont l'air doux et familier me charmait" (pp. 937-938). Although in reality he is reduced to virtual starvation and selling his clothes to survive, Gil endures his difficulties with a continuing gratitude. When he finally subtly communicates his needs to the duke, he then fears for his position, and regrets his audacity, never once hazarding a direct accusation of his master.

Je devais bien faire réflexion qu'il y a des grand qui n'aiment pas qu'on les prévienne, et qui veulent qu'on reçoive d'eux comme des grâces jusqu'aux moindres choses qu'ils sont obligés de donner. Il eût mieux valu



continuer ma diète sans en rien témoigner au duc et me laisser même mourir de faim pour mettre tout le tort de son côté. (pp. 946-947)

The duke's feigned displeasure afterwards is meant to judge "la vivacité de [son] attachement" (p. 948), and he is satisfied with his servant's quick reaction to his every change of mood. Gil then tremblingly falls down to kiss the duke's feet, dog-like in his blind attachment.

Despite the unmerciful circumstances of his imprisonment and de Lerme's total lack of concern about his fate, Gil continues to have faith in his master: "Je me flattai que Son Excellence ne m'oublierait point" (p. 1012). While Scipion attempts to temper such false hopes, Gil is firmly convinced of his master's loyalty: "Sa bonté m'est connue. Je suis persuadé qu'il compatit à mes peines, et qu'elles se présentent sans cesse à son esprit" (p. 1014). When he must finally admit that he has once again been abandoned, he loses all initiative and succumbs to a near fatal illness. It is only through Scipion's maneuverings that he gains his freedom, a further indication of Gil's difficulty in acting without the spur of a master or higher authority.

Since he is constantly at the duke's feet, Gil Blas easily becomes his confidant, and is thus again the depository for the ideas and actions of another. His role as secretary consists initially in the rewriting of reports and documents concerning the status of the noble families of Spain. Hence his position is one of glorified imitation and

copying, his subject the class which he serves. The duke astutely reserves for Gil the guilt and punishment involved in his intrigues along with these "secrets," for Gil is ultimately imprisoned for his participation in the prince's affair with Sirena/Catalina, not for the riches he amasses from his influence at court. Nonetheless, the narrator never admits that he has been used. He sees only in such "confidences" "de l'argent comptant" and "une pluie d'or" (p. 940). "Je n'examinais point si cela était bon ou mauvais; la qualité du galant étourdissait ma morale" (pp. 942-943).

Because of the increased attention devoted to his life with de Lerme, Gil's submission to his master's will is developed at length throughout Book VIII and is accompanied by the progressive loss of his own personality. Upon receipt of a royal pension, Gil takes on the role of the parvenu, and the narrator is more frank in his analysis of the changes which occur in his personality. He denies his origins and his past:

En un mot, j'étais devenu si fier et vain, que je n'étais plus le fils de mon père et de ma mère. Hélas! pauvre duègne et pauvre écuyer, je ne m'informais pas si vous viviez heureux ou misérables dans les Asturies! je ne songeais pas seulement à vous! La cour a la vertu du fleuve Léthé pour nous faire oublier nos parents et nos amis, quand ils sont dans une mauvaise situation.  
(pp. 977-978)

Gil willingly forgets his obligations to Joseph Navarro, the maître d'hôtel who found him his first position at court:

"Outre que les services qu'il m'avait rendus me pesaient, il me semblait que, dans la passe où j'étais alors à la cour, il ne me convenait plus de fréquenter des maîtres d'hôtels" (p. 965).

Such an obvious rupture with friends and family reinforces the character's further alienation from his moral values and self. Although the hero's flexibility and the narrator's reticence in discussing his own personality make it often difficult throughout the novel to discern many of his distinct character traits, more information is available here through contrast, for the text is continually juxtaposing Gil's present state with his previous "natural" self:

"Avant que je fusse à la cour, j'étais compatissant et charitable de mon naturel; mais on n'a plus là de faiblesse humaine, et j'y devins plus dur qu'un caillou. Je me guéris aussi par conséquent de ma sensibilité pour mes amis" (p. 964). Or again: "L'avarice et l'ambition qui me possédait changèrent entièrement mon humeur. Je perdis toute ma gaieté. Je devins distrait et rêveur, en un mot, un sot animal" (p. 979). Fabrice confirms such changes, as the sole character to have known him all of his life: "Enfin, Gil Blas n'est plus ce même Gil Blas que j'ai connu" (p. 979), but Gil refuses to admit to his metamorphosis. His rupture with Fabrice at this point completes the process of alienation from his former self and his past as Gil continues to amass power and wealth.

When, after his disgrace and the months in prison, Gil reaffirms a certain moral rectitude, abandons his ambitious cravings and returns to himself, the bonds broken are not so easily resealed. Roger Laufer simplifies the matter when he affirms that Gil's illness "a mis un terme à son aliénation."<sup>26</sup> In Book X, chapter II, he finally returns to his parents to ask their forgiveness, but the process of alienation is not halted in spite of Gil's confession of his faults and his desire to mend the wounds of their separation. His father dies upon his arrival, his uncle is senile and child-like, and his mother refuses to accompany him to Lirias, accepting instead an annual payment. The brief glimpses offered of Gil's relationship with his mother do not contribute a positive image of their rapport. Gil seems rather embarrassed by her simplicity:

Elle me fit un ample détail des chagrins qu'elle avait essuyés dans des maisons où elle avait été duègne, et me dit là-dessus une infinité de choses que je n'aurais pas été bien aise que mon secrétaire eût entendues, quoique je n'eusse rien de caché pour lui. Avec tout le respect que je dois à la mémoire de ma mère, la bonne dame était un peu prolixie dans ses récits; elle m'aurait fait grâce des trois quarts de son histoire, si elle en eût supprimé les circonstances inutiles. (p. 1033)

It is thus that money is destined to replace the lost family ties, and this exchange, in the case of the ostentatious funeral Gil provides for his father, only emphasizes its incongruity. The villagers' comments aptly point this out: "Ce ministre fait à la hâte, disait l'un, a de l'argent pour enterrer son père; mais il n'en avait point pour le nourrir.

Il aurait mieux valu, disait l'autre, qu'il eût fait plaisir à son père vivant, que de lui faire tant d'honneur après sa mort" (p. 1036). After the uproar of the funeral, Gil consequently cuts all ties with his birthplace, and ultimately forgets to send the promised payments to his mother. She dies alone during Gil's second try at power in Madrid.

Although Gil Blas is preoccupied with himself and his own advancement ("vanité" and "ambition" are common in the narration), his goals are evidently displaced outside of himself, first of all in his even greater obsession with money, and also in his desire to emulate the duke, his master. Gil basically sells his influence, harvesting a commission from any pensions or profits he obtains for others. After his first attempts, he eagerly multiplies his requests to the duke: "Je me sentais plus avide à mesure que je devenais plus riche . . . Le ministre se prit à rire en me voyant si âpre à la curée. Vive Dieu! ami Gil Blas, me dit-il, comme vous y allez! Vous aimez furieusement à obliger votre prochain" (p. 959). The duke's comment sarcastically points out such displacement of values, for "aimer obliger son prochain," exaggerated by the adverb "furieusement" euphemistically disguises Gil's true desire only for his personal profit in the process. Gil is easily convinced by his valet Scipion to marry the goldsmith's daughter Gabriela because of the sums of money to be gained. The narrator's version of the incident shows him to be more

preoccupied with the negotiations for the dowry and the gold in the father's home than with his fiancée, who receives a brief clause of appreciation:

Gabriela, n'en déplaise à mon secrétaire, ne me parut pas désagréable, soit à cause qu'elle était extrêmement parée, soit que je ne la regardasse qu'au travers de la dot. La bonne maison que celle du seigneur Gabriel! Il y a, je crois, moins d'argent dans les mines du Pérou qu'il n'y en avait dans cette maison-là. (pp. 982-983)

"J'étais toute la journée sur mon théâtre, c'est-à-dire chez le duc; j'y jouais un rôle de seigneur" (p. 943). The theatrical element is again quite literally accentuated in the text, and reiterates Gil's functionally imitative role. Once his fortune is soundly established, Gil Blas feels obliged to show his status ("je crus devoir faire une figure digne d'un confident du premier ministre," p. 960), and details the accessories necessary to his condition. Emulation of the master is his central concern:

Mais ce qui mit le comble à mon orgueil, c'est que le ministre trouva bon que mes gens portassent sa livrée. J'en perdis ce qui me restait de jugement. Je n'étais guère moins fou que les disciples de Porcius Latro, qui, lorsqu'à force d'avoir bu du cumin, ils s'étaient rendus aussi pâles que leur maître, s'imaginaient être aussi savants que lui; peu s'en fallait que je ne me crusse parent du duc de Lerme. Je me mis du moins dans la tête que je passerais pour tel, ou peut-être pour un de ses bâtards, ce qui me flattait infiniment." (p. 960)

The confirmation of his superior position comes only through the eyes of others, which is obvious in Gil's enthusiastic invitation to Fabrice: "Il ne manquait plus à ma vanité que de rendre Fabrice témoin de ma vie fastueuse" (p. 961).

The narrator intervenes occasionally with detached but analytical comments upon his past actions, from which a specific lesson is drawn. For example, he points out the hidden motives of the parvenu behind the expensive funeral Gil insists upon arranging for his father: "Belle leçon, pour les hommes du commun, lesquels, après s'être enrichis hors de leur pays, y veulent retourner pour y faire les gens d'importance" (p. 1037). Most of the time, however, the narrator suppresses such critical appraisal, and it is impossible to determine the extent to which he is aware of the contradiction between Gil's vows to return to a more humble way of life and his continued outward show of importance. In Book X, upon his arrival at Lirias, Gil comports himself with superior airs immediately upon descending from his carriage: "on laissa entrer ma chaise dans une grande cour où je mis pied à terre; puis, m'appuyant pesamment sur Scipion, et faisant le gros dos, je gagnai une salle où je fus à peine arrivé, que sept à huit domestiques parurent" (pp. 1038-1039).

In order to maintain their stature in the presence of the lackeys who serve them, both Scipion and Gil Blas repress a show of their true joy at such good fortune. "Scipion, n'osant devant eux faire éclater la satisfaction intérieure qu'il ressentait, me le témoignait par des regards parlants, et je lui faisais connaître par les miens que j'étais aussi content que lui" (p. 1040). Such a

suppression of one's true feelings in the presence of servants is not uncommon in many novels, but in this instance the comment is a further indication that Gil is consciously filling the role of the master. That same evening, he is careful to speak with the "air of a master" to the lackeys who come to undress him (p. 1041).

Once again during his first day as lord of the chateau Gil denies his own past when he is welcomed by the villagers. He notes that many of them had previously known him as don Alphonse's intendant, but now takes on grave airs, "ne jugeant pas devoir trop me familiariser avec eux" (p. 1041). He can only throw them money as the replacement for his personal sentiments, believing that "ce ne fut pas . . . celle de mes manières qui leur plut le moins" (p. 1041).

#### The Subservient Master

As his fortune mounts, Gil becomes a master in his own right and hires servants to complete the exterior proclamation of his rank. Little mention is ever made of these minor employees throughout the remainder of the novel, with the exception of Bertrand, who drives the carriage during Gil's voyage to Oveido and Lirias, and Joachim, the "dishonest" cook at Lirias.

Once established at Lirias, Gil seems quite content with the meals and the service he initially receives, yet he quickly decides that some of the servants must go, chiefly



because he feels guilty about the expense to the Leyvas family. Scipion is asked to choose among them. Both he and Gil Blas, although both had once themselves been lowly in the servant hierarchy, have a disdainful attitude towards this group of employees: the cook is a "parfait fripon," his assistant a drunkard, the porter, "un brutal." With one exception the lackeys are "de si mauvais sujets, que je ne vous conseillerais pas de les retenir, quand même ils vous faudrait une centaine de valets" (p. 1056). It is also discovered that maître Joachim is Gil's rival for Antonia, and he is fired in spite of his culinary talents. The persistently negative aura which pervades the portrayal of Gil's servants is part of the conventional literary stereotype, but it suggests further contradictions in the hero which do not appear on the surface of the narrative.

These servants play an extremely minor role in the text however, and are basically the necessary signs of Gil's continued prosperity and growing social superiority. Only Scipion, the hero's valet, secretary and confidant, emerges as a durable character in Gil's life and adds a new impetus to the action and the text itself. The many obvious parallels between Scipion and Gil Blas, in their adventures and in their character, as well as Gil's repeated references to Scipion as "un autre moi-même,"<sup>27</sup> justify the appraisal of Scipion as Gil's "double."<sup>28</sup>

The theme of imitation reappears frequently in the interaction of master and servant. Like Gil Blas before him, Scipion takes his models from above: "Scipion, qui me copiait si bien qu'on pouvait dire que la copie approchait fort de l'original, n'en usait pas autrement avec les personnes qui s'adressaient à lui pour le prier de m'engager à les servir" (p. 977). The two share the profits reaped from Gil's influential position, each in the reflection of their superior. Gil lavishly entertains his colleagues, and Scipion has a table open as well:

De son côté, Scipion (car tel maître, tel valet) avait aussi table dans l'office, où il régala à mes dépens les personnes de sa connaissance. Mais outre que j'aimais ce garçon-là, comme il contribuait à me faire gagner du bien, il me paraissait en droit de m'aider à le dépenser. (p. 961)

Structurally, the introduction of Scipion in the narrative just at the point when Gil Blas rises above his status as a typical servant renews the personage of the valet without disturbing the evolution of the central character. Although it has been shown that the mainstream of the novel loses its picaresque qualities, Scipion remains as a last vestige of the genre. This is most evident in his own account of his life, a digression included in the last three chapters of Book X which dominates the narration of Gil's marriage to Antonia (only six pages as compared to 43 for Scipion's story).

Scipion's adventures fit into the traditional patterns of the picaresque genre and roughly parallel Gil's own

experiences, although Scipion, more closely modeled after the Spanish picaro, exhibits less naïveté and more roguishness than his master.<sup>29</sup> He too is adaptable to a variety of masters encountered in his wanderings, and gradually moves upward socially to serve members of the wealthy bourgeoisie, a chevalier, an ecclesiastic and the royal nurse. After his involvement in several thefts, serious reflection leads him to try to change his ways: "Je commençai à combattre mes inclinations furtives, et à vivre en garçon d'honneur" (p. 1096). He is redeemed by his master's assurances that he has become "le modèle d'un parfait domestique" (p. 1110).

Gil Blas appears to be the perfect master as well, and the master and servant work together towards the same ends. Scipion has loyally attached his destiny solely to that of his master, and follows him in his successes and his disgrace. This devotion serves Gil well in a time of need, for Scipion salvages as many of his master's effects as he can after Gil's imprisonment and offers to share his cell and handle his affairs. At this point in the narrative, Scipion and Gil Blas virtually fuse into a double subject, for both participate to an equal extent in the action and in the text until the last book of the novel. First, on a literal level, their joy at being reunited in the prison leads to an embrace in which "Le maître et le secrétaire se confondirent . . ." (p. 1011). Gil offers him half of the remains of his fortune but Scipion asks only to be permitted to stay:

"Votre compagnie m'est plus chère que la liberté" (p. 1013). "Il faut que nous soyons nés l'un et l'autre sous la Balance ou sous les Gémeaux, qui sont, à ce qu'on dit, les deux constellations qui unissent les hommes," admits Gil Blas. He regards Scipion as an equal: "Ainsi plus de subordination entre Gil Blas et son secrétaire, plus de façons entre eux. Ils chambrèrent ensemble, et n'eurent qu'un lit et qu'une table" (p. 1013).

The "nous" as the subject of the narrative appears frequently throughout the period of Gil's exile from court, and the master and servant make their decisions jointly (Book IX, chapter IX and much of Book X). Gil is never seen imposing his will upon Scipion, although the latter continues to "serve" him in the sense of performing perfunctory, concrete duties related to his master's needs and comforts. While Scipion seems less than content with Gil's decision to isolate himself completely at Lirias, he swears his undying allegiance immediately thereafter, never casting off his self-image as the servant: "Quoi! Scipion, ce fidèle serviteur, qui, pour partager vos peines, aurait volontiers passé le reste de ses jours avec vous dans la tour de Ségovie, ne vous accompagnerait qu'à regret dans un séjour qui lui promet mille délices!" (p. 1025).

Scipion's presence in the text offers a variation on first-person narration in the form of a dialogue in which the two speakers basically agree. Scipion's comments and

reactions are incorporated into the text as would be Gil's own, and replace the self-revelation of the narrator. This is of course quite similar to the confidant's role in the theater. The most striking examples of such a process occur during the pair's journey to and arrival at Lirias, in which the plural subject "nous" so often dominates. Scipion's first reactions to the château are quoted, not the narrator's, and it is again Scipion who is the most impatient to visit its rooms: "Scipion, encore plus curieux que moi . . . , m'entraîna de chambre en chambre" (p. 1039). Further on, again Scipion becomes the judge: "Si mon secrétaire avait paru jusque-là fort satisfait de ce qu'il avait vu, il le fut encore davantage quand il vit le jardin" (p. 1040). The secretary's reactions are the pretext for the description which follows. Finally, at the end of the first day, Gil Blas still does not reveal his own feelings, but calls in his servant to have his opinion and discuss changes. The dialogue thus maintained between master and servant reveals the same information while adding variety to what would otherwise be pure outward description or introspection.

Scipion's role in the text is more than that of duplication and reflection of the master, however, for Gil's consistently passive character affords the valet much room for action. He takes on responsibility for many initiatives in this last third of the novel and is allowed added participation in the narrative as well; witness the lengthy digression

devoted to his life story at Gil's wedding. He becomes the initiator of action in Gil's life within the same page that he is hired. Because of his newly-acquired influence with de Lerme, Gil needs "un chien de chasse pour découvrir le gibier, c'est-à-dire un drôle qui eût de l'industrie, et fût propre à déterrer et à m'amener des gens qui auraient des grâces à demander au premier ministre" (p. 949). Scipion rapidly brings in individuals who seek Gil's aid, and is also responsible for discovering Catalina as the new mistress for the prince. On more than one occasion, he quite assuredly advises Gil on the proper course of action to take, and even initiates his wedding plans. Book IX, chapter I is appropriately entitled: "Scipion veut marier Gil Blas . . .," which is sufficiently indicative of the proportion of action attributed to this character.

It is again Scipion who correctly judges his master's sudden "coup de foudre" for Antonia and takes over the conversation for the speechless Gil Blas. "Scipion, qui s'aperçut de mon désordre, prit pour moi la parole, et fit les frais des louanges que je devais à cette aimable personne" (pp. 1057-1058). He also makes the necessary preliminary arrangements prior to Gil's request for Antonia. As far as comportment at court is concerned, Scipion guides Gil handily, especially in his alert advice after the new king is crowned. He successfully convinces Gil that he can once again succeed at court without succumbing to his old vices. In his

discourse Scipion puts himself in the place of the first-person subject for greater effect, but the slip is also revelatory of his tendency to merge with the true subject of the action, Gil Blas:

Pour un homme de votre âge, reprit le fils de la Coscolina, vous êtes bien détaché du monde. A votre place, j'aurais un désir curieux: j'irais à Madrid montrer mon visage au jeune monarque, pour voir s'il me remettrait; c'est un plaisir que je me donnerais. Je t'entends, lui dis-je; tu voudrais que je retournasse à la cour pour y tenter de nouveau la fortune, ou plutôt pour y redevenir un avare et un ambitieux. Pourquoi vos moeurs s'y corrompraient-elles encore? me repartit Scipion. Ayez plus de confiance que vous n'en avez en votre vertu. Je vous réponds de vous-même. (p. 1113)

Still, on a linguistic level, Scipion never appears to forget his status as a servant, and Gil Blas maintains his own rank as master. Gil addresses Scipion in the familiar form; Scipion uses the "vous" throughout. In a number of situations, Scipion continues to refer to himself as a "serviteur" ("Autant, répondit-il, que le peut faire un serviteur qui n'a rien de si cher que la présence de son maître," p. 1055), and the narrator refers to him as "mon valet" or "mon secrétaire." Obviously, their language retains the outward aspect of the traditional master-servant structure in spite of the apparent equality between the two in the actual course of the action. In addition, the inflexibility of the linguistic code is one clue to the absence of any development of the true nature of their relationship and its implications for the hierarchy of power. The instances of role reversal in which the servant dominates

the master are never immediately apparent in the text, and neither Gil Blas nor Scipion show any conflict about the social gulf which separates them.

At the end of Book XI and throughout most of Book XII, Scipion fades out as a character once Gil has reestablished a relationship with a new master, the count-duke Olivarès. He is shipped off to make his fortune in the Indies and reappears, rich but still devoted ("Expliquez-vous, mon maître, quelle occupation destinez-vous à votre serviteur?", p. 1175), just before Gil returns definitively to Lirias after Olivarès' disgrace and death. He gladly serves as don Henri's valet de chambre until the latter's fall from favor along with his adoptive father, and, typically dominant, asks to be excluded from such dishonor: "Ce n'est point assez que le valet plaise au maître, il faut en même temps que le maître plaise au valet . . ." (p. 1190). The master and servant return to Lirias together in the final chapters of the novel and merge their families when Gil Blas weds the sister of Scipion's future son-in-law.

With regards to Books XI and XII, Laufer has pointed out the parallels between the plot structure of the Olivarès episode and Gil's experiences with de Lerme in Books VIII and IX.<sup>30</sup> Gil Blas remains submissive, accommodating and pliable to the end with the new prime minister. Once again it is his old friend Navarro who reminds him: "paraissent encore plus dévoué au comte d'Olivarès que vous ne l'étiez



au duc de Lerme . . ." (p. 1124). Gil is set to work writing government papers for Olivarès, and this time is directly involved in the official propaganda intended to consolidate the minister's power. He conforms his thoughts and his style to his master's wishes: "je le fis à la fantaisie de mon maître, . . . écrit avec emphase et farci de métaphores . . ." (p. 1129). Furthermore, having astutely observed his master's great desire to be accepted and loved, he adapts accordingly to this trait:

Je ne me contentais pas de bien faire ce qu'il me commandait, j'exécutais ses ordres avec des démonstrations de zèle qui le ravissaient. J'étudiais son goût en toutes choses pour m'y conformer, et prévenais ses désirs autant qu'il m'était possible. (p. 1134)

After the death of the minister's only daughter, Gil weeps with him, although the narrator admits in the text that his tears were conjured up by his own affliction for Antonia. To his master, however, such a show of grief has the necessary effect, and Gil does not let him think otherwise:

"Monseigneur, je suis trop plein de vos bontés pour ne partager pas toute ma vie vos plaisirs et vos ennuis" (p. 1138).

Gil swiftly becomes the minister's confidant, and consequently much of the Olivarès episode is characterized by Gil's effacement as an active character in the plot. He is more of an observer, especially of his master and his actions. Four of the fourteen chapters in Book XII are uniquely concerned with Olivarès' disgrace and retirement from the court and his problems in coping with his sudden change of fate.

Gil's solicitousness towards the comte-duc during the final days of his life has a sincere ring, since the text never slips into a less serious tone (Book XII, chapter XI). Still, the hero's affirmations of grief and affliction at Olivarès' death can be questioned because he had initially consciously forced himself to conform to the man and his life.

Even when he is serving kings and princes, Gil still finds himself delegated the less noble of tasks as "Mercure en chef" (p. 1168), responsible for locating potential mistresses for royalty. The actual vulgarity of such a task does not appear to Gil until the tragedy of his second attempt, which reunites him briefly with Laure, the soubrette turned actress. The former prince, now king, is enamored of her daughter, Lucrèce, and uses Gil Blas as his scout and agent. The incident leads to the innocent Lucrèce's death of "chagrin" and Laure's retirement into a convent. Gil's brief remarks on his feelings are of note, because although he feels the immorality of the role he plays, he is ultimately pliable in the service of his king and master and takes no responsibility in the matter other than this obedience:

Cependant, si je n'étais point assez vicieux pour m'en acquitter sans remords, je n'avais pas non plus assez de vertu pour refuser de le remplir. J'obéis donc autant plus volontiers au roi que je voyais en même temps que mon obéissance serait agréable au ministre, à qui je ne songeais qu'à plaire." (p. 1168)

The portrayal of Olivarès differs from that of de Lerme in that he is ultimately redeemed in a positive manner through his stoic acceptance of his fate and his fidelity to Gil Blas. This redemption counteracts the more critical view of the men in power acted out earlier in the de Lerme episode, for here Gil does not suffer the consequences of his master's errors. His comportment with Olivarès serves as an illustration of his own noble qualities, proof that he can conduct himself properly within the world of the upper class. This status is confirmed by the lettres de noblesse Olivarès obtains for him. In the novel's conclusion, then, it is the aristocratic model which is maintained as the ideal to which the hero aspires.

Gil's enduring humility prevents him from immediately assuming such an honor, largely because of his total acceptance of the social hierarchy and its apparently rigid barriers. Although since the time of his position with the duc de Lerme he has dealt with members of the nobility and often wielded more power than they, his instinctive reaction in their presence is to fall to his knees in respect and submission. Even with don Alphonse and his family, he is often seen thanking them profusely (p. 1022 and p. 1043) and reminding them of his status as a former valet: "Les valets, leur dis-je, ne se font point annoncer à leurs maîtres; voici un de vos anciens serviteurs qui vient vous rendre ses respects" (p. 1043). It is only after many years of

friendship that Gil hesitantly feels himself an equal in their presence, and this because he had rendered them an important service in redeeming don Alphonse in Olivarès' eyes.

Quel spectacle touchant et glorieux pour moi, de voir les trois personnes du monde qui m'étaient les plus chères m'embrasser à l'envie! . . . Ils me parlaient même comme s'ils eussent parlé à un homme d'une condition égale à la leur. Il semblait qu'ils eussent oublié qu'ils avaient été mes maîtres. (p. 1146)

The final sentence of this passage illustrates the tenacity of the master-servant structure in Gil's conception of himself.

When he receives his own lettres de noblesse and finds himself "don Gil Blas," he disdains their value and refuses to envisage himself as the equal of the upper class:

Votre Excellence sait que je suis fils d'une duègne et d'un écuyer; ce serait, ce me semble, profaner la noblesse que de m'y agréger; et c'est de toutes les grâces que Sa Majesté me peut faire, celle que je mérite et que je désire le moins. . . . Ayant toujours devant les yeux la bassesse de mon origine, cet honneur m'humiliait au lieu de me donner de la vanité. (p. 1176)

Gil does finally use the documents as proof of his acceptability when he requests Dorothee's hand in marriage, although he continues to doubt his own worth in spite of don Juan's "generous" remark: "tout nobles que nous sommes, nous ne dédaignerons pas votre alliance" (p. 1195).

Gil Blas attains an ideal characterized by Laufer as "honorabilité bourgeoise,"<sup>31</sup> crowned by the exterior signs of nobility provided by don Alphonse (the château, furnishings, books and servants), his noble wife, and the lettres de noblesse. His retirement at Lirias is an imitation of the

aristocratic model, perceived as the just reward for the hero's progress towards respectability and noblesse de coeur.<sup>32</sup> In general, the nobility is portrayed in a more positive light than any other social group in the novel, and the rare characters devoid of faults such as don Alphonse and don Juan reinforce this impression.<sup>33</sup> As always, the hero has accepted and aspires towards the model imposed from above, and has no sense of social or individual conflict in the process.

The absence of conflict stems from the fact that the hero, as portrayed by the first-person narrator, has little sense of self as an individual, psychological entity, and the character takes on form through pressures outside of himself, most notably in the guise of the masters. As the servant and the teller of the tale, Gil Blas is the central link which joins this heterogeneous group of characters, but it is each master in turn who shapes the tale to be told, for the servant has no choice but to follow in his footsteps and has little chance or desire to control the situation. The novel which results is essentially the sum of the knowledge Gil has gleaned from life with the masters.

In any analysis of the master-servant relationship a most obvious model to be taken into account is Hegel's dialectic of lordship and bondage in The Phenomenology of Mind.<sup>34</sup> The metaphor of the bondage of the servant to the master is used to illustrate one step in the movement of the self

towards "certainty of self," and knowledge of the truth. Hegel first discusses the process of recognition, the confrontation of two separate "self-consciousnesses." This process is essential, for the self only exists by being recognized by the other. In the course of the confrontation, one consciousness, the Master, is independent, the other, the Slave, is dependent, and the latter's essence is only life or existence for another. The Master's consciousness is one "existing on its own account which is mediated with itself through another consciousness, i.e., through another whose very nature implies that it is bound up with an independent being or with thinghood in general,"<sup>35</sup> The Slave's "unessential consciousness" is controlled by the existence of the Master, and faces annihilation because it is left unrecognized. It is at this point in the dialectic struggle between the two that the Slave must achieve self-existence by directing his consciousness towards the object of his labor: "through labor the bondsman finds himself by himself to have a mind of his own."<sup>36</sup>

The picaresque novel and the novel of social ascension derived from it are both characterized as "literature of experience,"<sup>37</sup> novels about the attainment of knowledge of the world.<sup>38</sup> In Gil Blas, the hero gains knowledge through the structure of the master-servant relationship, which is constantly ruptured and reformed on all social levels. Thus the novel's essential goal, knowledge (or

experience), and its central motif correspond to the Hegelian model. Gil Blas' dependence and refusal to take responsibility for his own existence have been amply illustrated in our discussion, as has his tendency to direct his life towards and imitate his masters. Gil Blas, like the picaresque hero in general, "lacks the strength to impose his will upon a hostile world" and thus adapts to the control of others.<sup>39</sup> The master's existence is filtered through the narrator, and most often dominates in the resulting text as the most powerful force in the hero's life. Examples of the predominance of the master's existence have previously been discussed, but one has only to appraise the difference between the amount of character portrayal devoted to the various masters and that devoted to Gil Blas himself to realize the striking disparity which exists.

Gil Blas exemplifies the dependent Slave of the Hegelian model because of his incapability to take the final step towards self-sufficiency. He cannot cancel the master and never looks at himself as a distinct entity. On a literal level this difficulty is perhaps inherent in the profession of domestic servitude, for the product of the servant's labor is not truly an object, but is an integral part of the master's very existence. The servant can thus not escape the master through his labor, as Hegel suggests. In

the novel, the hero remains a strangely elusive and incomplete character, and one never senses that the narrator "knows" himself.

Still, the alienation and struggle alluded to by Hegel are absent in this work, which produces no enduring sense of conflict between the hero and his masters and the social order in general. The Hegelian dialectic never comes to pass, and Gil Blas is perpetually trapped in the initial "non-existence" of the Slave. There is contradiction without tension, remarks Laufer, who relates this to the "rococo" trends in the early eighteenth century.<sup>40</sup> This discussion has not often touched upon the humor in Gil Blas and the hero's wry but good-natured acceptance of the imperfection of men, including himself. Again, however, one is led to the philosophy of acceptance dominant as well in the portrayal of the social order.

While he finally fits into this order and attains respect and acceptability in the class to which he aspires, Gil Blas loses another world, that of the poor young man and servant he once was. This world, in itself and for itself, is not yet truly worthy of his gaze and has not yet gained literary respectability. It still remains largely a pretext for the comic and the burlesque. The other servants who appear throughout the hero's wanderings conserve a tinge of inferiority and unacceptability or, in the rare cases of the loyal and upright valets, exhibit a subservience



to the master which prevents them from controlling their own fate. In general, then, the basic stereotypes persist, and like numerous other elements of this work, many of them are derived from the conventions and functional roles of comedy.

This link with the valet of comedy is the essential key to the significance of the servant-hero in Gil Blas. The expository and comic functions of the character are perpetually repeated as Gil continues to observe and imitate. Psychological depth and social consciousness are sacrificed to the purely functional role of the valet, with the resulting absence of individuality on the part of the hero. Furthermore, the narrator suffers from a similar effacement, since he often acts as no more than a scribe for the tales of others. The hero's servitude provides a perfect vehicle for the narrator's contact with a multitude of voices and stories.

## NOTES - CHAPTER II

<sup>1</sup>Alain-René Lesage, Histoire de Gil Blas de Santillane in Romanciers du XVIIIe siècle, ed. Etiemble, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade (Paris: Gallimard, 1960), I, 491-1197. All quotations from this edition will be indicated in parentheses in the text.

<sup>2</sup>Lesage ou le métier de romancier (Paris: Gallimard, 1971), 11.

<sup>3</sup>See Félix Brun, "Pour une interprétation sociologique du roman picaresque: Lesage et ses sources espagnoles," in Littérature et Société: Problèmes de méthodologie en sociologie de la littérature (Bruxelles: Editions de l'Institut de Sociologie de l'Université de Bruxelles, 1967), 127-135. See also Robert Alter, Rogue's Progress: Studies in the Picaresque Novel (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1964), 79.

<sup>4</sup>The most complete account of the influences of the Spanish picaresque tradition on Lesage is found in Charles Dédéyan's Lesage et "Gil Blas" (Paris: Société d'Édition d'Enseignement Supérieur, 1965), I, chapters 2 and 10.

<sup>5</sup>pp. 5-6.

<sup>6</sup>See Serge Perottino, "La Notion d'aliénation dans les romans du XVIIIe siècle," in Roman et Lumières au XVIIIe siècle, Colloque du Centre d'études et de recherches marxistes (Paris: Editions sociales, 1970), 350-9.

<sup>7</sup>A large part of Dédéyan's work is devoted to such deciphering of the novel into recognizable characters and events, as is Katharine Whitman Carson's Aspects of Contemporary Society in "Gil Blas," Studies in Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century, 110 (1973). Although Dédéyan devotes an entire chapter to "Les Domestiques," he never once examines the servant as a literary phenomenon, nor does he point out the importance of the master-servant relationship in the

novel. Carson dismisses servants altogether from her study, although they form one of the more numerous social groups in Gil Blas.

Another good example of this distortion is the emphasis placed by both Dédéyan and Carson upon the Mme de Chaves episode, seen as most probably a representation of Mme de Lambert's salon. Both discuss the actual salon in much detail, when in the novel itself it constitutes a very minor episode, only two chapters and eight pages long.

<sup>8</sup>Almost all studies of this novel cite its early realism as one of its most original qualities and redeeming features.

<sup>9</sup>Vivienne Mylne, "Social Realism in the Dialogue of Eighteenth-Century French Fiction," Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture 6 (1977), 270-1.

<sup>10</sup>Brun, p. 129.

<sup>11</sup>The term is employed by Alter, p. 31, as the first stage in the basic structure of the picaresque novel. Bjornson's concept of initiation as part of the characteristic picaresque pattern is similar in The Picaresque Hero in European Fiction (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1974), 7.

<sup>12</sup>Alter notes Gil Blas's irresponsibility (p. 16).

<sup>13</sup>Laufer, p. 249.

<sup>14</sup>See also Marie-Hélène Huet, Le Héros et son double: Essai sur le roman d'ascension sociale au XVIIIe siècle (Paris: Librairie José Corti, 1975), 17-18.

<sup>15</sup>Laufer, p. 311.

<sup>16</sup>Laufer, pp. 292-294.

<sup>17</sup>Dédéyan, II, 384.

<sup>18</sup>See Laufer, p. 315 and Dédéyan, I, pp. 161-2.

<sup>19</sup>Laufer, p. 313.

<sup>20</sup>Laufer, p. 323.

<sup>21</sup>Huet, pp. 23-5.

<sup>22</sup>See Jacques Proust, "Lesage ou le regard intérieur: Recherches sur la place et la fonction de la 'description' dans Gil Blas," in L'Objet et le texte: Pour une poétique de la prose française du XVIIIe siècle, Histoire des Idées et Critique Littéraire, vol. 183 (Genève: Droz, 1980), 88, for a discussion of the signifying value of this description.

<sup>23</sup>Bjornson, 223. See also Dédéyan, II, p. 255.

<sup>24</sup>See Alter, pp. 30-3.

<sup>25</sup>Laufer, p. 348.

<sup>26</sup>Laufer, p. 350.

<sup>27</sup>Notably, pp. 1013 and 1043.

<sup>28</sup>Laufer, pp. 353-4 and Huet, pp. 20-1.

<sup>29</sup>Dédéyan remarks (p. 263) that Scipion's tale is that of "un héros picaresque avec toutes les caractéristiques du genre," and points out the close parallels between his adventures and the earliest Spanish picaresque works.

<sup>30</sup>Laufer, p. 359.

<sup>31</sup>See Laufer, pp. 356-8 for further remarks on this appraisal, which relate Gil's realization of his dreams to Lesage's own growing conservatism and aspirations to such an ideal as he approached old age. Laufer continually suggests links between the spirit of each volume of the novel and the differing perspectives of the author during the twenty years he spent writing Gil Blas.

<sup>32</sup>See Bjornson, p. 16, and also English Showalter, Jr., The Evolution of the French Novel, 1641-1782 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972), 267-8.

<sup>33</sup>Both Carson, p. 50, and Dédéyan, pp. 324-333, arrive at this conclusion after a thorough review of the portrayal of the nobility in Gil Blas.

<sup>34</sup>Ed. and trans. by J.B. Baillie, 2nd ed. (New York: Macmillan, 1931). Most of my discussion follows Section B, IVa: "Independence and Dependence of Self-Consciousness: Lordship and Bondage," pp. 228-239.

<sup>35</sup>Hegel, pp. 234-5.

<sup>36</sup>Hegel, p. 239.

<sup>37</sup>Alter, p. 3.

<sup>38</sup>Showalter, pp. 267-8.

<sup>39</sup>Bjornson, p. 6.

<sup>40</sup>Laufer, p. 20.

### CHAPTER III

#### THE PARVENU AND THE FIGURATIVE DIMENSIONS OF SERVITUDE

Dans un domestique je vois un homme, dans son maître je ne vois que cela non plus; chacun a son métier; l'un sert à table, l'autre au barreau, l'autre ailleurs: tous les hommes servent, et peut-être que celui qu'on appelle valet est le moins valet de la bande. (Marivaux, L'Indigent Philosophe)<sup>1</sup>

Gil Blas is furtive and ubiquitous as a character and as narrator, and his hesitancy in affirming his self-image is linked to his social mobility in the novel. He never rises above the mentality of servitude to acquire individuality. "Gil Blas était valet; il avait délibérément choisi cet état, et cet état à son tour le représentait tout entier."<sup>2</sup> The next novel under consideration, Marivaux's Le Paysan parvenu,<sup>3</sup> is again a memoir-novel of social ascension, but holds little further resemblance to Lesage's work other than this general theme and the technique of first-person narration. Contrary to Gil Blas, the hero and narrator of this work communicates a strong sense of self from the outset, and quite promptly rejects servitude as the means of his ascension. Jacob, as narrator, persistently interrupts

the action with moments of introspection, and the character takes on dimensions which Gil Blas never attains. The latter remains a spectator,<sup>4</sup> faithfully transcribing on a literal level that which takes place around him, and the novel lacks depth as a consequence.

The theme of the parvenu attained a certain popularity during the first half of the eighteenth century, especially after the publication of Marivaux's novel (1734-35), and La Vie de Marianne, his other prose masterpiece.<sup>5</sup> Although Le Paysan parvenu best exemplifies the disintegration of the servant-hero which we shall analyze here, parallels may be drawn between this work and La Vie de Marianne, as well as with the Chevalier de Mouhy's La Paysanne parvenue, perhaps the best imitation of Marivaux's novels.<sup>6</sup> The three treatments of the theme of social ascension vary in tone and style, but all avoid any of the concrete description of the life of the servant found so frequently in Gil Blas. Consequently, most of the comic and burlesque conventions associated with this theme are absent from these works. Only Jacob literally begins his ascension as a servant. The first step in this analysis, then, is an examination of the means by which the lower-class milieu is quite emphatically dissociated from the main characters.

Gil Blas continually leaves himself open to attack, whereas this second generation of eighteenth-century memorialists protect their egos as well as their texts at every

turn. Each narrator attempts to manipulate the reality of his social status through manipulation of language and a constant attitude of self-defense and self-justification. Their memoirs are consequently more complex and convoluted than Gil Blas' open revelations. The reader is regularly reminded of the narrator's presence on a double level: as the hero in the past of the actions being recounted, and as the writer and judge, in the present, of those actions. As intruders in a closed social world, the three must constantly defend their positions and prove their merit to an aggressive elite. Furthermore, and especially in the case of Marivaux's novels, as writers these characters feel compelled to justify the literary worth of their subject matter when it does happen to touch upon the world of the lower classes, for in a parallel sense this material "intrudes" upon the traditionally more elegant setting of most novels. Marianne's fears that "tout ce que je vous ai rapporté n'est qu'un tissu d'aventures bien simples, bien communes, d'aventures dont le caractère paraîtrait bas et trivial à beaucoup de lecteurs, si je les faisais imprimer" (Marianne, p. 57), bring her to question briefly the traditional social limitations on character and subject matter. Nonetheless, she reassures her reader immediately afterwards that "je ne serai pas toujours chez Mme Dutour" (Marianne, p. 58). Both Jacob and Jeannette similarly remind the reader of their more noble perspective.<sup>7</sup>



Remarks such as these are illustrative of the ambivalent social attitudes of the narrators in these novels. On the one hand, their unorthodox origins are an essential impetus to the plot, since the obstacles of naissance and social status confront them in their attempts to function in society. Nevertheless, Jacob, Marianne and Jeannette accept unequivocally the standards to which they must conform. As Georges May concludes, the general trend towards "l'encanaillement du héros de roman" which he discerns in novels from the period 1725-1760 is no indication of a pre-revolutionary fervor of egalitarianism: "On commettrait un grave contre-sens si on interprétait l'ascension d'un Jacob ou d'une Jeannette vers la fortune comme le signe d'une fermentation sociale destinée à aboutir aux cahiers de 1789."<sup>8</sup> On the contrary, the esthetic motivation to discard the "hero" novels of the seventeenth century and introduce characters of low or obscure birth was not accompanied by much social verisimilitude. The social confrontations which occur in the novels cited here are ultimately smoothed over or neutralized by a number of factors, to be discussed in the subsequent analysis.<sup>9</sup>

Thus social emancipation is not an issue in these novels. It is well established from the outset that the narrator has "arrived," and is a member of the elite. The contemporary reader could comfortably enjoy the memoirs of a countess, a marquise or a gentleman of leisure, who now

have a right to exist in "le monde," the only world that counts. In The Novel of Worldliness, Peter Brooks describes the subtle yet powerful role of the elite social milieu in defining an individual's very existence. Up until 1762 and the publication of La Nouvelle Héloïse, a majority of novels take place in such a setting, which is assumed to be common to both author and reader. The novel's interest lies not in the concrete reproduction of this world, but in the hero's social existence, his "self-enactment" within it.<sup>10</sup> The drama of Jacob, Jeannette and Marianne lies in their struggle for recognition by the elite, and their self-concept relies heavily upon such recognition. Their memoirs, an attempt at self-definition, are intimately linked to the search for social "redefinition."

While the parvenu ultimately attains such recognition and acceptance within "le monde," it is not without conflict and confrontation. Many critics see no sense of struggle or alienation in Jacob's tale,<sup>11</sup> and in so doing seem to accept Jacob's reliability as a narrator. Once his sincerity is questioned, the novel may be quite clearly structured around a series of social clashes. The comic tone does not obscure the growing signs of Jacob's alienation within this society. The quest for the self, most evident in this work as well as in La Vie de Marianne because it is most artistically woven into both the spheres of content (attainment of social status) and form (the problem of the narrator), escapes the literal

conflict of master and servant to rise to a metaphorical expression of the problem of servitude, that is, the desire for control and recognition, countered by the fear of domination.

The social environment in which these characters interact is, as depicted by Brooks, one in which mastery of a system of established values and gestures is a primary step towards individual control of one's existence and an ensuing liberty of action.<sup>12</sup> Jacob's ascension most obviously reproduces the hero's conscious attempts at proving his mastery of such a code, and his gnawing awareness of inferiority along the way. In a more subtle manner, both Marianne and Jeannette must weather a series of assaults upon their freedom and prove their worth to society.

La longue lutte de Marianne, c'est l'épreuve de la liberté, et son enjeu se confond avec celui du combat pour la reconnaissance: la victoire sur la servitude grâce au refus de la servilité. A chaque instant Marianne retrouve sa hantise: ne pas devenir le valet d'autrui, ne pas s'avilir, se montrer l'égale de ceux que l'on respecte.

In the article quoted, Jacques d'Hondt examines La Vie de Marianne in the light of the Hegelian dialectic of Master and Slave and concludes: "La grande affaire pour elle, comme pour la Conscience de Soi, c'est de ne pas devenir, en titre ou en fait, un valet (his italics)."<sup>13</sup>

The comparison may be extended to the other two novels in question to gain added insight into the particular social consciousness of the parvenu hero. Our goal in this

analysis is to link the continual textual negation of an inferior social world with this fear of servitude and domination demonstrated by the respective narrators. The struggle for recognition illustrated by Hegel in the conflict of Master and Slave is an essential step towards true knowledge of self and individualization. This model broadly parallels the development of the hero in these novels, and, in a more global sense, a certain eighteenth-century view of the individual in society.

#### Negation of the Inferior

On the surface, Le Paysan parvenu most closely resembles Gil Blas as the autobiographical account of the ascension of an impoverished young man to social success and wealth. Although Marivaux's novel is unfinished, at the end of Part V Jacob is seen under the protection of a young count, a fact suggestive of his continued rise towards the nobility had the novel continued. Furthermore, the narrator alerts us from the outset that he is now a retired country gentleman, writing to fill his leisure time. Jacob's aspirations, like those of Gil Blas, are progressively defined as he proceeds up the social ladder, and are consciously directed towards the superior classes only as he comes into contact with them. Jacob's ascension, however, is not attributable to those he briefly serves, but more directly to the women he encounters, by chance and through luck. While Gil

Blas easily loses sight of his origins in his constant imitation of the master, Jacob perpetually calls to mind his original image. The continual contrast between the peasant-turned-servant and the well-to-do M. de la Vallée becomes a central motif, which is paralleled in the title and also in the mode of narration, as it alternates between Jacob's thoughts during the action being recounted and his later reflections during the composition of his memoirs. The tension arising from this contrast is of an obviously social nature, and stems directly from the hero's efforts to assume social superiority while faced with the inferiority inherent in his original rank.

As mentioned, one of the most important initial elements differentiating Gil Blas from Le Paysan parvenu is the fact that the servant milieu is swiftly dispensed with and left largely unexplored for comic effect. By the middle of Part II, Jacob is no longer literally a servant, and he holds only two domestic positions in the entire novel. Early in the action, Jacob distinguishes himself from the other servants around him. From the moment of his arrival in his seigneur's household, he receives special attention from his mistress, and rarely participates in the activities of the other servants. Gone are the vulgar details of domestic tasks and the camaraderie among servants which prevail in the first two-thirds of Lesage's work.

With the exception of Geneviève, the servants thus receive little of the narrator's attention, for he is most preoccupied with the affairs of his master and mistress. Those we do see are set in sharp contrast to Jacob's promising "physionomie" and frank ingenuity. The old valet seen crying at his master's death is labeled a "vieil ivrogne," and is said to have been "depuis quinze ans le pourvoyeur des plaisirs de son maître qui le payait bien, qu'il volait, disait-on, par-dessus le marché" (Paysan, p. 73). A second valet who appears upon the same occasion is portrayed as "un gros brutal, un de ces valets qui dans une maison ne tiennent jamais à rien qu'à leurs gages et qu'à leurs profits, et pour qui leur maître est toujours un étranger, qui peut mourir, périr, prospérer sans qu'ils s'en soucient; tant tenu, tant payé, et attrape qui peut" (Paysan, p. 74). The narrator goes on to reveal his present system of values in his condemnation of this valet from the master's point of view. He obviously assumes this to be the status of his reader, as the pronoun "on" suggests: "Je le peins ici, quoique cela ne soit pas fort nécessaire: mais du moins, sur le portrait que j'en fais, on peut éviter de prendre des domestiques qui lui ressemblent" (Paysan, p. 74).<sup>14</sup> Jacob, by contrast, loyally offers his services to his widowed mistress while the other servants only demand their wages and pillage what they can in the disorder.

Jacob initially views Geneviève quite favorably, but her character rapidly takes on a negative connotation once she succumbs to her master. Her subsequent dishonesty and moral corruption force her into the stereotype of the femme de chambre, and her naiveté in the handling of the entire affair simply reinforces the reader's sympathy for Jacob as he discards her.

Subsequently, Jacob is at first not loathe to flirtatious banter with Catherine, the Habert sisters' cook, because she supplies him with food and drink and influences the sisters' decision to hire him. When the latter decide to separate and Jacob is assured of his favor with the younger Mlle Habert, he sees Catherine in less favorable eyes. He immediately adopts his new mistress' distrust: "ce devait être ordinairement la plus revêche et la plus brutale créature dont on pût se servir" (Paysan, pp. 110-111).

The narrator here carefully points out the rupture in the nature of his tale once he and Mlle Habert leave together: "c'est d'ici qu'on va voir mes aventures devenir plus nobles et plus importantes, c'est ici où ma fortune commence; serviteur au nom de Jacob, il ne sera plus question que de monsieur de la Vallée . . ." (Paysan, p. 123). The equation of "plus nobles" and "plus importantes" belies for the first time the narrator's original affirmations of the unimportance of one's birth and social standing. These factors prove to be important in his evaluation of others, always with the

exception of his individual case. Consequently, from the moment he becomes M. de la Vallée, Jacob is totally dissociated from the other servants who appear.

There is also a striking absence of concrete signs which would designate Jacob as a servant or a peasant, except for the conventional techniques of language and dress. Jacob's peasant clothing is promptly replaced by his first mistress, who has him properly dressed, but not in livery.<sup>15</sup> In shedding his country clothing, Jacob undergoes a physical as well as a spiritual metamorphosis, after only a few days in Paris: "La joie de me voir en si bonne posture me rendit la physionomie plus vive et y jeta comme un rayon de bonheur à venir . . . [J]e sentis moi-même que j'avais plus d'esprit qu'à l'ordinaire . . ." (Paysan, pp. 50-1). The mistress confirms the transformation: "Ton habit te sied bien; tu n'as plus l'air villageois" (Paysan, p. 51).

Only sparse details are available about the actual tasks Jacob performs, and the narrator offers no insight into his consciousness of the reality of waiting upon others. He feels no sympathy for others in the same position. Rarely does any servant at all have the right to direct dialogue, an indication of their triviality.<sup>16</sup> Except for Geneviève and Catherine, the others exist only as the props of reality in their masters' lives. As in most novels of this period, a femme de chambre may enter appropriately to interrupt a



conversation, or a laquais may announce a guest or deliver a message. They fade into the background, faceless and nameless even to Jacob.<sup>17</sup>

Although servitude gains him entry into "le monde," albeit through the back door, it is an obvious stigma to the narrator, to be shed as quickly as possible. Similarly, Jacob must dissociate himself from the village and his peasantry. He recognizes the social assets of the change that has come over him and hesitates about returning home once his master dies: "Il est vrai que mon séjour à Paris avait effacé beaucoup de l'air rustique que j'y avais apporté; je marchais d'assez bonne grâce; je portais bien ma tête, et je mettais mon chapeau en garçon qui n'était pas un sot." The prospect of sowing and plowing in the village becomes more and more distasteful to the hero after two days spent in the "gargote," for he finds his fellow guests "très grossiers." Quite succinctly he then states: "Ils me dégoûtèrent du village" (Paysan, p. 77).

An even greater disdain for the status of the servant is directly stated by the heroine in La Vie de Marianne:

quoique je n'aie rien, et que je ne sache à qui je suis, il me semble que j'aimerais mieux mourir que d'être chez quelqu'un en qualité de domestique; et si j'avais mon père et ma mère, il y a toute apparence que j'en aurais moi-même, au lieu d'en servir à personne. . . . Puisque je suis obligée de travailler pour vivre, ajoutai-je en sanglotant, je préfère le plus petit métier qu'il y ait, et le plus pénible, pourvu que je sois libre, à l'état dont vous me parlez, quand j'y devrais faire ma fortune. (Marianne, p. 28)

Here we find the most obvious denunciation of the servant's condition, and a model for Marianne's subsequent attempts to remain "free," in control of her destiny.

Valets come and go in the background, as in the Paysan parvenu, only occasionally warranting the attentive eye of the narrator. To be surrounded by servants is an important exterior sign of a person's rank and distinction, and thus are they mentioned in a qualifying phrase in most contexts. Marianne appraises Valville as "un homme de condition" because she sees him "entouré de valets" (Marianne, p. 70). Jacob similarly judges Mme de Ferval, "une femme de condition d'un certain air, qui avait apparemment des valets, un équipage . . ." (Paysan, p. 181).<sup>18</sup>

Those seeking justification for Marianne's nobility also rely upon the same reasoning. Valville defends her status accordingly:

Il est vrai, mademoiselle a été quelques jours chez cette marchande; elle a perdu son père et sa mère depuis l'âge de deux ans; on croit qu'ils étaient étrangers; ils ont été assassinés dans un carrosse de voiture avec nombre de domestiques à eux; c'est un fait constaté; mais on n'a jamais pu savoir qui ils étaient; leur suite a seulement prouvé qu'ils étaient gens de condition, voilà tout. . . . (Marianne, p. 266)

Marianne, like Jacob, painstakingly removes herself from the stigma of the popular milieu in her account of her life. Her distaste for Mme Dutour and her household is everywhere apparent in the negative connotations of her expressions, meant to emphasize her superiority to them. As soon as she meets the woman, she feels repulsion: "Je sentais,

dans la franchise de cette femme-là, quelque chose de grossier qui me rebutait" (Marianne, p. 32). Marianne's yearnings for something better have as yet no concrete object, but from the outset she presents herself as a "natural" participant in "le monde." Leo Spitzer has previously cited numerous examples of Marianne's conviction of this natural calling to an upper-class world and her immediate sense of savoir-faire in such a milieu. Some of the most notable passages follow.<sup>19</sup>

Je ne connaissais personne à Paris, je n'en avais vu que les rues, mais dans ces rues il y avait des personnes de toutes espèces, il y avait des carrosses, et dans ces carrosses un monde qui m'était très nouveau, mais point étranger. Et sans doute, il y avait en moi un goût naturel qui n'attendait que ces objets-là pour s'y prendre, de sorte que, quand je les voyais, c'était comme si j'avais rencontré ce que je cherchais. (Marianne, p. 33, my emphasis)

Once she begins to play the role of an honorable young lady, Marianne feels much more at ease being dressed by a chambermaid than she had ever felt in Mme Dutour's household:

Je me levai entre dix et onze heures du matin; un quart d'heure après entra une femme de chambre qui venait pour m'habiller.

Quelque inusité que fût pour moi le service qu'elle allait me rendre, je m'y prêtais, je pense, d'aussi bonne grâce que s'il m'avait été familier. Il fallait bien soutenir mon rang, et c'était là de ces choses que je saisisais on ne peut pas plus vite; j'avais un goût naturel, ou, si vous voulez, je ne sais quelle vanité délicate qui me les apprenait tout d'un coup, et ma femme de chambre ne me sentit point novice. (Marianne, p. 262, my emphasis)

The constant reiteration of these signs of her "goût naturel" effectively communicates the narrator's common bonds with her reader's world, from which Mme Dutour, servants, and

the people of the street, "la populace," are excluded. The very same social barriers which Marianne seeks to surmount are plainly quite valid for the rest of humanity, lacking, as they are, in the proper "naissance." Thus we return again to an implicit attitude of social exclusion which characterizes the society portrayed here.

It is then rather surprising to find Marianne, as "narrator," questioning the esthetic elitism of those readers who condemn her story because of such figures as Mme Dutour and the cocher:

Donnez-leur l'histoire du coeur humain dans les grandes conditions, ce devient là pour eux un objet important; mais ne leur parlez pas des états médiocres, ils ne veulent voir agir que des seigneurs, des princes, des rois, ou du moins des personnes qui aient fait une grande figure. Il n'y a que cela qui existe pour la noblesse de leur goût. Laissez là le reste des hommes: qu'ils vivent, mais qu'il nen soit pas question. Ils vous diraient volontiers que la nature aurait bien pu se passer de les faire naître, et que les bourgeois la déshonorent. (Marianne, p. 57)

Marivaux has here couched a blunt response to his own critics within his heroine's meandering thoughts on her memoirs. As is often the case with Marivaux, however, the liberal-sounding theory remains empty in practice for "le reste des hommes." Although characters from the "états médiocres" are granted a bit of the limelight, they inevitably remain essentially "mediocre." In La Vie de Marianne the heroine's vision continues to reject them from any positive functions. Immediately after the digression quoted above, she alerts her reader that "je ne serais pas toujours chez Mme Dutour"

(Marianne, p. 58). Henri Coulet's comments upon Marivaux's social vision adequately describe his perspective:

Marivaux regarde les mœurs populaires en étranger . . .  
Montrer "l'homme dans un cocher," "la femme dans une  
petite marchande," c'est rappeler aux hommes et aux  
femmes de l'élite dirigeante que l'homme est par nature  
brutal et grossier, que la femme est par nature coléreuse  
et avare, ce n'est pas réhabiliter la lingère comme  
lingère et le cocher comme cocher.<sup>20</sup>

The servants who subsequently appear either remain anonymous in the accomplishment of mundane tasks, or are distinguished by their unacceptable behavior. Favier, Mlle de Fare's femme de chambre, seems immediately compelled to reveal Mme Dutour's indiscretion to Mme de Fare, then willingly promises her mistress to remain silent when offered a bribe. Mlle Cathos, who accompanies Marianne to the confrontation with Mme de Miran's family, astonishes the heroine with her familiarities in the carriage. Marianne's "indignation" and "disgust" at M. Villot's "pesantes et . . . grossières protestations de tendresse" (Marianne, p. 309) prove once again her natural aversion for the inferior classes. Her reaction seems justified by the man's discourse and humble airs once he is in august company. He represents "le valet qui ne doit qu'obéir, et à qui il n'appartient pas d'avoir de coeur."<sup>21</sup> Marianne, by contrast, dares to face her audience during the confrontation in the ministre's chambers.

Even in the Nun's tale, servants are distinguished by their dishonesty and infidelity.<sup>22</sup> Mme de Miran changes all of her servants at one point so that none will even know of

or gossip about Marianne's former condition. The loyalty of servants is mentioned in the portrait of Mme Dorsin, but meant as a compliment directed only towards her goodness and generosity:

Ses domestiques l'adoraient; ce qu'elle aurait perdu de son bien, ils auraient cru le perdre autant qu'elle; et par la même méprise de leur attachement pour elle, ils s'imaginaient être riches de tout ce qui appartenait à leur maîtresse; ils étaient fâchés de tout ce qui la fâchait, réjouis de tout ce qui la réjouissait. Avait-elle un procès, ils disaient: Nous plaidons. Achetait-elle: Nous achetons. Jugez de tout ce que cela supposait d'aimable dans cette maîtresse, et de tout ce qu'il fallait qu'elle fût pour enchanter, pour apprivoiser jusque-là, comment dirai-je, pour jeter dans de pareilles illusions cette espèce de créatures dont les meilleures ont bien de la peine à nous pardonner leur servitude, nos aises et nos défauts; qui, même en nous servant bien, ne vous aiment ni ne nous haïssent, et avec qui nous pouvons tout au plus nous réconcilier par nos bonnes façons. (Marianne, p. 229)

This passage is striking because of the social barrier which the narrator places between herself and "cette espèce de créatures," the servants, just as Jacob does in his criticism of the "brutal" valet (above, p. 144). Here they are referred to as if they were animals (note the use of the verb "apprivoiser"), not to be included in the narrator's "nous," a further distinction of the bond between writer and reader. The servants function here solely to orient our admiration towards Mme Dorsin. We have here a perfect example of what Roland Barthes denotes as the typical treatment of the inferior classes in literature before the advent of a "political" dimension to realism:

. . . les classes pauvres, qu'aucun regard politique ne vient éclairer, sont ce pur extérieur sans lequel la bourgeoisie et l'aristocratie ne pourraient sentir leur être propre . . . ; les pauvres sont ce à partir de quoi on existe: ils sont la limite constitutive de la clôture. Et naturellement, en tant que pures fonctions, les hommes de l'extérieur n'ont aucune essence. On ne peut leur attribuer aucun de ces caractères qui marque d'une existence pleine les habitants de l'intérieur . . . (his emphasis)<sup>23</sup>

Whereas Jacob does frankly avow his origins in his opening remarks to his memoirs, Jeannette, "la paysanne parvenue," can only painfully admit to such a shameful birth, and thus immediately sets herself at a distance from her class: "Il m'en coûte infiniment d'avouer ma naissance . . . [Q]uoique je fasse, je ne puis m'accoutumer à me ressouvenir que la Marquise de L.V. qui tient aujourd'hui sa place dans le monde est, dans le vrai, Jeannette, fille de Jean B. Bucheron de la Forêt de Fontainebleau" (Paysanne, Vol. I, part 1, pp. 11-12). The rest of the novel is spent erasing the persona of "Jeannette." This distance is carefully accentuated in her text, even before the heroine has any direct contact with the upper class. Like Marianne, she has an instinctive aversion for the lower classes, which in this novel forces Jeannette to repudiate her own family in order to preserve the process of differentiation. She sees in her brother and sister, obliged to work in the fields with their father, the "humeur grossière qu'on contracte dans les viles occupations," for "l'esprit se laisse abattre par la misère . . ." (Paysanne, Vol. I, pt. 1, p. 15). As soon as she sees the king and his hunting party, the village inspires

in her a "dégoût extrême," and the villagers are but "sots" (Paysanne, Vol. I, pt. 1, p. 24). "J'avais le coeur élevé, et je ne pouvais m'accoutumer à être Paysanne" (Paysanne, Vol. I, pt. 1, p. 42).

Jeannette's attempts at social redefinition seem all the more extreme because of the contradictory nature of her "new" identity. As an individual, her "natural" nobility and merit prevail and justify her desire to marry the Marquis de L.V. However, she must always deal with her family, who embody the stigma of the peasant classes. The tragedy of social prejudice is a recurring theme in both the central and sub-plots, yet the heroine-narrator cannot extend this reasoning beyond her own particular case.

Marianne and Jacob consciously but subtly remove themselves from any contact with the laboring class; Jeannette must extricate herself from this association all the more forcefully because she must face her own family incognito throughout the meandering twists of the plot. Mariiaux used a much lighter touch to juxtapose Jacob's new and old social identities (M. de la Vallée/le petit paysan) by placing the contrast in the hero's thoughts; here the family unit functions as a similar reminder to Jeannette, but the results are much more laboriously expressed. When the heroine first sees her parents again after severing all contact with the village, they hardly recognize her: "ce n'est plus Jeannette, c'est une Dame . . ." (Paysanne, Vol. I, pt. 2,



p. 251). The refrain, "ce n'est plus Jeannette," recurs as a *lietmotif* in the novel, marking the distance the heroine feels between her true, noble self and the peasant girl she would prefer to eliminate.<sup>24</sup> When she meets her family again, she is always disguised and using an assumed name. Although she rents a room in their home, a haven from her persecutors, never does she reveal her identity and thus return to their level by association.

Furthermore, when Jeannette discovers that her own servant, Barbe, is actually her aunt, she keeps the fact to herself and continues to appraise the woman only in her status as a servant, and not as an individual in her own right. She is characterized by traits typical of servants: incessant chatter, and the simplicity and sheer stupidity of her discourse and actions. Jeannette's generalized remarks about Barbe mirror Marianne's distant consideration for "cette espèce de créatures," those who serve: "Il est bon de ne point être haut avec ceux qui nous servent, l'humanité nous y convie, mais il est dangereux aussi, avec ces sortes de gens, d'être trop familier, ils se formalisent aussitôt que vous reprenez le dessus qui vous convient, et vous mettent dans le cas ou de souffrir leurs impertinences, ou de les renvoyer . . ." (*Paysanne*, Vol. III, pt. 10, p. 122). The haughty, impersonal tone is reinforced by the neutral remarks "il est bon" and "il est dangereux," and again the pronoun "nous" immediately places the narrator in the camp

of those who are served. She reinforces her power in the final half of her statement, "vous reprenez le dessus qui vous convient," and with the idea of dismissing the *impertinent* servant.

Except for Barbe, servants attract little of the narrator's attention, unless, as expected, it is to recount their treacherous ways. Their role in the novel is minimal, with the exception of Forçan, the elder Marquis' *écuyer*, "politique, fourbe et de mauvaise foi" (*Paysanne*, Vol. III, pt. 10, p. 94), who turns the Marquis against Jeannette. Here, the dishonest servant conventionally serves as a secondary impetus in order to redirect the course of the action centered around the major characters. Marianne's fortunes are similarly reversed by the revelations of Favier (Mlle de Fare's chambermaid) after Mme Dutour's outburst of affection.

Admittedly, treason and dishonesty are not limited to the lower-class characters, for members of the nobility also plot to betray Jeannette and her lover.<sup>25</sup> In this instance, however, the villains are seen to repent and recompense their victims for their former cruelty. Servants have no such hope for rehabilitation.

The techniques of dissociation thus are quite similar in the three novels. Each narrator is compelled to point out his rupture with the socially inferior classes at an early point in the text, then goes on to reiterate his or her

"difference" throughout the memoirs, as if fearful that the stigma will remain. This distance is established either directly, through reassuring reminders to the reader of a more noble perspective, or through the general and conventional tendency simply to disregard the existence of the working class, if at all possible. Finally, one finds in each novel blunt examples of the narrators' total adoption of the "master's" role in their general advice about how one should deal with such "creatures" as servants.

#### Fabrication of the Mask

It does not suffice that the parvenu negate his origins; much of the drama involved in these novels is wrapped up in the hero's fabrication of a new social identity which should permit him to function in society. Jacob especially is acutely alert to the power of the mask and its effect upon others, because of his sensitivity to the distance separating him from the members of the wealthy bourgeoisie and the nobility with whom he eventually associates. The tension between Jacob, "le petit paysan," and M. de la Vallée, is largely concealed to the outside world by his proper manipulation of social signs (dress, speech, and comportment), but erupts constantly in the hero's moments of introspection. In the light of the novel as a whole, the introductory remarks to his memoirs paradoxically reveal that his origins are an obsessive source of humiliation to him.

Jeannette's shame at the outset of her story more accurately sums up Jacob's actual feelings. His insistence upon apprehending the disdain of others does not, in fact, prevent him from accepting it and feeling inferior as a result.

The narrator's frank admission of his origins on the first page of the novel, and his affirmation that "je ne l'ai jamais dissimulée à qui me l'a demandée" (Paysan, p. 41), are both consistently contradicted throughout the rest of the novel. He even embroiders a more elaborate portrait of his family for the younger Mlle Habert, the last character actually to know him as a servant. Once freed from those who know his past, Jacob more consciously disguises himself. In the carriage to Versailles, he purposely remains silent during most of the conversation: "je m'observai beaucoup sur mon langage, et tâchai de ne rien dire qui sentît le fils de fermier de campagne . . ." (Paysan, p. 236). He perfects a repertoire of ambiguous expressions which reveal little actual information but sufficiently suggest a social status in conformity with his audience. For M. Bono, whom he wishes to impress, he becomes "le fils d'un honnête homme qui demeure à la campagne" (Paysan, p. 263). The narrator's justification of such an ellipsis of the word "paysan" is weak, and shall further weaken, thus contradicting his earlier vows of honesty. "[L]es synonymes ne sont pas défendus, et tant que j'en ai trouvé là-dessus, je les ai pris; mais ma vanité n'a jamais passé ces bornes-là; et j'aurais dit tout

net: Je suis le fils d'un paysan, si le mot de fils d'un homme à la campagne ne m'était pas venu" (Paysan, p. 263). Such comments place the narrator's reliability into doubt.

The process is repeated when Jacob encounters Dorsan. He is brief and subtle, so that his language will not betray him: "D'abord, je le remerciai, cela va sans dire; mais brièvement . . . Quand on manque d'éducation, il n'y paraît jamais tant que lorsqu'on veut en montrer" (Paysan, p. 313). Immediately conscious in this scene of his inferiority in the relationship, Jacob still blurs the reality of his origins, in order to manipulate the linguistic code in his favor:

Mon nom est La Vallée, lui dis-je; vous êtes un homme de qualité, et moi je ne suis pas grand monsieur; mon père demeure à la campagne où est tout son bien, et d'où je ne fais presque que d'arriver, dans l'intention de me pousser et de devenir quelque chose, comme font tous les jeunes gens de province et de ma sorte. (Paysan, p. 313)

All of the ambiguous terms ("la campagne," "son bien," "devenir quelque chose," "les jeunes gens . . . de ma sorte") are willfully meant to be interpreted in a positive manner by the listener who already assumes that Jacob is of acceptable social caliber. Again the compulsion to justify his terminology ("et dans ce que je disais là, on voit que je n'étais que discret et point menteur") suggests that the narrator senses his own dissimulation but will not face it.

These examples also denote the care with which Jacob dissimulates evidence of his social origins in his speech. His manipulation of the social act of dialogue is again

consciously intended to influence his listener. This is of course an impressive weapon in the process of disguise, one of the central themes of the novel. The initial "franchise" and naïveté which so impressed the city-dwellers also become a self-conscious pose in Jacob's conquest of others, as soon as they serve to communicate the opposite of his intentions. The ingenuity of the peasant serves him well in attracting Geneviève and subsequently tricking her into believing what is soon a feigned candidness. The stereotypical signs of rustic speech, reduced to a "pardi" or a "mardi" interspersed here and there, fade out quickly.

The narrator is even more frank about his exploitation of language with Mlle Habert, as he manipulates the truth in his favor. He downplays his new-found "usage du monde" from the moment he meets her, and plays upon his humble origins: "N'était-ce pas là un récit bien avantageux à lui faire? Et je le fis de mon mieux, d'une manière naïve, et comme on dit la vérité" (*Paysan*, p. 81, my italics). Jacob carefully reminds the reader, however, that this is now a mask:

Jusqu'ici donc mes discours avaient toujours eu une petite tournure champêtre; mais il y avait plus d'un mois que je m'en corrigeais assez bien, quand je voulais y prendre garde, et je n'avais conservé cette tournure avec Mlle Habert que parce qu'elle me réussissait auprès d'elle, et que je lui avais dit tout ce qui m'avait plu à la faveur de ce langage rustique; mais il est certain que je parlais meilleur français quand je voulais. J'avais déjà acquis assez d'usage pour cela, et je crus devoir m'appliquer à parler mieux qu'à l'ordinaire. (*Paysan*, p. 124)

If Jacob so successfully plays upon his "franchise" with the characters, is he not, as narrator, susceptible to the same ambiguity? May one not suspect further dissimulation on his part, in spite of his affirmations of sincerity?<sup>26</sup> The "usage du monde" in which Jacob takes such pride is largely a lesson in duplicity and exploitation.<sup>27</sup> Jacob's first experiences in the home of his first master teach him the necessity of disguising his true sentiments and of avoiding the domination of others for his own self-preservation. Furthermore, both his master and mistress perpetuate deceptive appearances as a way of life, and the master, a parvenu himself, sees no shame in this:

. . . vous voyez les personnes qui viennent me voir, ce sont tous gens de considération, qui sont riches, qui ont de grands équipages.

Savez-vous bien que parmi eux il y en a quelques-uns qu'il n'est pas nécessaire de nommer, et qui ne doivent leur fortune qu'à un mariage qu'ils ont fait avec des Genevièves? (Paysan, p. 65)

Jacob attempts to maneuver with ease in this universe of double meanings and signs. It is thus of vital importance that he refute his lowly condition as a valet. When confronted by the président on that account, Jacob insists upon the brevity of that arrangement, "je ne l'ai été qu'un moment par rencontre" (Paysan, p. 167), and adeptly alters the meaning of "serviteur" to a more respectable level, that of his devotion to Mlle Habert: "je suis fort son serviteur, son ami, et son prétendu, et puis c'est tout" (Paysan, p. 167). The play on words is intended to eradicate the past with a

simple shift in meaning. Just as he manipulated definitions of the term paysan, Jacob attempts here to erase the social stigma associated with the designation of serviteur.<sup>28</sup>

If Jacob successfully masks his origins and former profession, why then is the figure of the valet of interest in the novel? Why did Marivaux choose such a hero? Jacob rarely exhibits the stereotypical behavior of a valet, in contrast to Gil Blas, who is trapped within the stereotype. He does however constantly refer introspectively to this image of his former self and thus never rids himself of his obsession with disguising the signs of his inferiority. In a novel populated by characters wearing a variety of social disguises, Jacob is the central example of the conflicts involved in such dissimulation. The matter of his social status operates on an interior level in the novel, as a reminder of the mask he wears and a major motif in his moments of introspection. It thematically denounces his dissimulation, as the chevalier literally reveals that M. de la Vallée is only Jacob, the valet. Even this new name, M. de la Vallée, sarcastically reminds the reader of Jacob's peasant links to the land, vallée,<sup>29</sup> and is also a homonym of valet.

With regards to the mechanics of the plot, Jacob's peasant origins and past profession characterize him as an intruder in the world he penetrates, and this intrusion provokes the unmasking of the personages playing around him. "Unlike Lesage's Gil Blas, Marivaux's Jacob is an actor as



well as a spectator. He not only moves through society, he also influences it."<sup>30</sup> Before going on to describe the novel's plot structure in terms of social confrontation, I shall first analyze the elements of Jacob's social mask, and the further contradictions it implies.

Jacob's social metamorphosis is affirmed by four essential factors.<sup>31</sup> The two most obvious are his name change and the acquisition of clothing suggestive of his new-found rank of "bon bourgeois de Paris." His previous costume had sufficed to bridge the gap between valet and provincial bourgeois, but now that he must earnestly "parvenir," Mlle Habert initiates the purchase of a more suitable set of clothing. The accessories Jacob requests are signs of his desire to appear to confirm his title in the eyes of others. The sword and the dressing gown, at first seemingly unnecessary articles of clothing, add comic depth in their showiness. The hero frankly admits that the sword is only destined to render "M. de la Vallée à forfait; il n'y a rien qui relève tant la taille, et puis, avec cela, tous les honnêtes gens sont vos pareils" (Paysan, p. 207). Jacob instinctively understands "man's reliance on external appearances as an indication of truth" and uses it to his advantage. Ronald Rosbottom points out the sword's subsequent symbolic importance as a sign of Jacob's social acceptability in the two incidents in which he actually takes one into his hands. In

the first, he is immediately a suspect and imprisoned; in the second, he saves D'Orsan and steps up the social ladder.<sup>32</sup>

Jacob is equally captivated by the red silk lining of his new suit, again a showy accessory of no obvious practical value. "Cette soie rouge me flatta; une doublure de soie, quel plaisir et quelle magnificence pour un paysan! . . . [L]e coeur me battait sous la soie; on en vient au prix" (Paysan, p. 209). After all transactions are completed, the red silk is still the detail uppermost in his mind: "avant le dîner j'eus la joie de voir Jacob métamorphosé en cavalier, avec la doublure de soie, avec le galant bord d'argent au chapeau, et l'ajustement d'une chevelure qui me descendait jusqu'à la ceinture . . ." (Paysan, p. 210). The three pages devoted to the dressing of Jacob stand out in a novel rarely preoccupied with vestimentary detail and emphasize the importance of the scene.

The narrator's subsequent musings upon the importance of clothing as a social sign lead him to some further contradictions, which underline its purely exterior function. For Jacob, conscious of his inferiority, beauty is easily hidden beneath the clothes of a boor:

Qu'est-ce que c'est qu'un beau garçon sous des habits grossiers? il est bien enterré là-dessous; nos yeux sont si dupes à cet égard-là! S'aperçut-on même qu'il est beau, quel mérite cela a-t-il? On dirait volontiers: Do quoi se mêle-t-il; il lui appartient bien! (Paysan, p. 210)

When Jacob subsequently meets M. d'Orville, he is struck by the natural nobility of the man despite his illness and

impoverished surroundings. The relationship of clothing to the man is totally reversed:

. . . ces choses-là se sentent; il en est de ce que je dis là-dessus comme d'un homme d'une certaine condition à qui vous donneriez un habit de paysan; en faites-vous un paysan pour cela? Non, vous voyez qu'il n'en porte que l'habit; sa personne est vêtue, et point habillée, pour ainsi dire; il y a des attitudes, des mouvements et des gestes dans cette personne, qui font qu'elle est étrangère au vêtement qui la couvre. (Paysan, p. 303)

Jacob willingly excuses d'Orville for appearances that he would disdain in another, less noble figure.

The third element in Jacob's metamorphosis is language, which, as has been previously noted, he consciously controls and modifies in order to alter his identity and often the truth as well.<sup>33</sup> The narrator's version of the sudden transformation of his discourse from a "tournure champêtre" to a "meilleur français" lacks verisimilitude and the transition itself is rather abrupt in the text.<sup>34</sup> Rather than stylistically rendering the change in dialogue, the narrator repeatedly brings it to the reader's attention in numerous passages such as this: "Ce discours, quoique fort simple, n'était plus d'un paysan, comme vous voyez; on n'y sentait plus le jeune homme de village, mais seulement le jeune homme naïf et bon" (Paysan, p. 256). Language and clothing must also complement each other to maintain the social disguise: "Il faut prendre garde à vous, Monsieur de la Vallée, et tâcher de parler bon français; vous êtes vêtu en enfant de famille, soutenez l'honneur du justaucorps, et que votre entretien réponde à votre figure, qui est passable" (Paysan, p. 310).

The final group of exterior signs of the change in Jacob is composed of the women he attracts, from Genevieve to Mme d'Orville. Each female figure offers attention and progressively greater social prestige from which he can move upwards to the next level. Jacob's amorous adventures loosely parallel the ranks in the social hierarchy,<sup>35</sup> and, as he progresses, Jacob derives great personal vanity from his successive conquests. While the actual consummation of each particular affair is lacking except in the case of Mlle Habert, that is of no consequence here, for Jacob thinks not of possessing the woman herself, but of winning her money, rank and/or influence. The exchange of money or influence for Jacob's favors will be discussed later in further detail. Several examples suffice to illustrate the manner in which Jacob seems to absorb the social status of women.

His reflections persistently center upon the economic value and rank of each:

. . . il y avait grande apparence que Mlle Habert m'aimait, elle était encore assez aimable, elle était riche pour moi, elle jouissait bien de quatre mille livres de rente et au delà, et j'apercevais un avenir très riant et très prochain; ce qui devait réjouir l'âme d'un paysan de mon âge, qui presque au sortir de la charrue pouvait sauter tout d'un coup au rang honorable de bon bourgeois de Paris; en un mot j'étais à la veille d'avoir pignon sur rue et de vivre de mes rentes. . . .  
(Paysan, pp. 124-5)

In the last sentence, significantly enough, Mlle Habert's income has suddenly become, for Jacob, "mes rentes." With Mme de Ferval, Jacob is even more blatantly attracted by the

prestige of her rank. The passage which follows is quoted in its entirety to illustrate how completely exterior social signals replace any conventional notions of love:

Ce que je sentais pour elle ne pouvait guère s'appeler de l'amour, car je n'aurais pas pris garde à elle, si elle n'avait pas pris garde à moi; et de ses attentions même, je ne m'en serais point soucié, si elle n'avait pas été une personne de distinction.

Ce n'était donc point elle que j'aimais; c'était son rang, qui était très grand par rapport à moi.

Je voyais une femme de condition d'un certain air, qui avait apparemment des valets, un équipage, et qui me trouvait aimable; qui me permettait de lui baiser la main, et qui ne voulait pas qu'on le sût; une femme enfin qui nous tirait, mon orgueil et moi, du néant où nous étions encore; car avant ce temps-là m'étais-je estimé quelque chose: avais-je senti ce que c'était qu'amour-propre?

Il est vrai que j'allais épouser Mlle Habert; mais c'était une petite bourgeoise qui avait débuté par me dire que j'étais autant qu'elle, qui ne m'avait pas donné le temps de m'enorgueillir de sa conquête, et qu'à son bien près, je regardais comme mon égale.

N'avais-je pas été son cousin? Le moyen, après cela, de voir une distance sensible entre elle et moi?

Mais ici elle était énorme, je ne la pouvais pas mesurer, je me perdais en y songeant; cependant c'était de cette distance-là qu'on venait à moi, ou que je me trouvais tout d'un coup porté jusqu'à une personne qui n'aurait pas seulement dû savoir si j'étais au monde. Oh! voyez s'il n'y avait pas là de quoi me tourner la tête, de quoi me donner des mouvements approchant de ceux de l'amour? (Paysan, pp. 181-2)<sup>36</sup>

We find here the substitution of social values for the expected attractions of a woman, as well as a precise rendition of Jacob's own vision of his metamorphosis. He can now unhesitatingly become Mlle Habert's equal, and very innocently reminds the reader, "n'avais-je pas été son cousin?" as if this relationship were actually true. Gone is his original surprise (similar, at first, to that described here) when Mlle Habert deigns to consider him as an

appropriate spouse. Jacob sees himself transformed socially, and thus finds self-esteem, through the attentions of these women. He explicitly depends upon each to establish his new social identity. Each offers him a connection with a superior class, and, directly or indirectly, initiates the process of his ascension.

Through Mmes de Ferval and de Fécour, the two women of higher rank, Jacob equally attains a sense of control of the now "familiar" world of the petite bourgeoisie. In the scene directly following his tête-à-tête with them, the narrator is careful to detail his impact upon the dinner guests (Mme de la Vallée, the two witnesses, Mme d'Alain and Agathe). He is constantly at the center of the scene, and always superlative: "Mon éloge faisait toujours le refrain de la conversation, éloge qu'on tâchait même de tourner le plus poliment qu'on le pouvait: de sorte que je sentis que les manières avaient augmenté de considération pour moi" (Paysan, p. 233).<sup>37</sup> He is acutely sensitive to the linguistic code, not just the message transmitted ("mon éloge"), but the care of expression, which implies greater (social) esteem. The two women give him a sense of such superiority over the group that he feels changed,<sup>38</sup> quite frankly "tout autre," and reflects to himself: "Ce sont là de bonnes gens qui ne sont pas de ma force, mais avec qui il faut que je m'accommode pour le présent" (Paysan, pp. 233-4).

In an inverse movement, each woman is cast aside like a used mask when Jacob encounters and attracts her social superior. Geneviève is loved less once Jacob's naive and brazen country ways are the object of his mistress' attentions: "depuis l'instant où je m'étais aperçu que je n'avais pas déplus à madame même, mon inclination pour cette fille baissa de vivacité, son coeur ne me parut plus une conquête si importante, et je n'estimai plus tant l'honneur d'être souffert d'elle" (Paysan, pp. 52-3).

Once Jacob is exposed to a higher social sphere and encounters Mme de Ferval at the président's interrogation, Mlle Habert is merely a "petite bourgeoise." She abruptly leaves his thoughts and soon virtually disappears from the text as well.<sup>39</sup> He dismisses her as soon as she fulfills his needs (the suit, etc.) the day after his wedding. The new clothes are destined for other eyes: "Ma femme croyait me faire ressouvenir de cette Mme de Ferval, mais je l'en aurais fait ressouvenir elle-même, si elle l'avait oubliée; je mourais d'envie qu'elle me vît fait comme j'étais. Oh! comme je vais lui plaire, disais-je en moi-même, ce sera bien autre chose que ces jours passés" (Paysan, pp. 211-2).

The only two remaining references to his wife are brief, as Jacob further reduces his feelings towards her to a sense of gratitude ("reconnaissance"). To the narrator, his life with her is a closed chapter, no longer of interest to his tale:

C'est pour la dernière fois que je fais ces sortes de détails: . . . de ma façon de vivre avec Mme de la Vallée, je n'en dirai plus mot; on est suffisamment instruit de son caractère, et des ses tendresses pour moi. . . . Qu'on s'imagine donc de ma part toutes les attentions possibles pour elle; qu'on suppose entre nous le ménage le plus doux et le plus tranquille; tel sera le nôtre; et je ne ferai plus mention d'elle que dans les choses où par hasard elle se trouvera mêlée. (Paysan, pp. 295-6)<sup>40</sup>

The paragraph continues with the surprising evocation of Mme de la Vallée's imminent death and Jacob's ensuing "douleur."<sup>41</sup>

A parallel procedure is perceptible in the sudden illness which befalls Mme de Fécour just several days after Jacob meets her. Then she was characterized by her "embonpoint," "vigueur," and "un air de santé robuste" (Paysan, p. 224). Upon his impromptu visit to her home he finds her apparently awaiting the last rites. Although we learn no more of her fate and Jacob insensitively inquires no further, this illness effectively neutralizes her in the narrative and for Jacob's present needs.<sup>42</sup> She has served her purpose by aiding the protagonist in stepping up the social ladder to the world of high finance; no longer does she warrant his opportunistic gaze.

Finally, when Jacob meets Mme d'Orville, a noblewoman, even Mme de Ferval appears less tempting:

. . . j'étais pourtant très fâché de ce qu'on avait troublé mon entretien avec Mme de Ferval; . . . Non pas que j'eusse de la tendresse pour elle, je n'en avais jamais eu, quoiqu'il m'eût semblé que j'en avais; je me suis expliqué là-dessus. Ce jour-là je ne m'étais pas



senti fort empressé en venant au faubourg: la rencontre de cette jeune femme à Versailles avait extrêmement diminué de mon ardeur pour le rendez-vous. (Paysan, p. 277)

The novel's abrupt end offers no clues to Mme d'Orville's further significance to Jacob. Women most evidently contribute to the hero's self-confidence in society and provide him with an additional support in his ascension. Their financial contributions are equally at issue here, and these transactions prove to be a delicate point in critical interpretation of Jacob's character. His overt protestations of sincerity are meant to justify and diminish the impact of the actual exchange of money, especially in the instance when he accepts Geneviève's offer:

Peut-être fis-je mal en prenant l'argent de Geneviève; ce n'était pas, je pense, en agir dans toutes les règles de l'honneur; car enfin, j'entretenais cette fille dans l'idée que je l'aimais, et je la trompais; je ne l'aimais plus, elle me plaisait pourtant toujours, mais rien qu'aux yeux, et plus au coeur.

D'ailleurs, cet argent qu'elle m'offrait n'était pas chrétien, je ne l'ignorais pas, et c'était participer au petit désordre de conduite en vertu duquel il avait été acquis; c'était du moins engager Geneviève à continuer d'en acquérir au même prix: mais je ne savais pas encore faire des réflexions si délicates, mes principes de probité étaient encore fort courts; et il y apparence que Dieu me pardonna ce gain, car j'en fis un très bon usage; il me profita beaucoup; j'en appris à écrire et l'arithmétique, avec quoi, en partie, je suis parvenu dans la suite. (Paysan, p. 59)

Subsequently, he cannot prevent himself from privately savoring Mlle Habert's "quatre à cinq mille livres de rente" in his musings, in spite of his mask of devotion: "ce n'est point pour l'amour de toutes ces provisions-là que mon coeur se transporta" (Paysan, p. 134). And again, with Mme de

Ferval, he accepts a generous sum of money: "ce n'est pas la peine d'acheter mon coeur, il est tout payé, puisque je vous le donne pour rien, à quoi bon cet argent? à la fin, dis-je, je pris" (Paysan, p. 223). It is only when he makes contact with the nobility (Mme d'Orville) that he truly gives of himself.<sup>43</sup>

The effective "purchase" of Jacob's favors further devalues the nature of his relationship with women and illustrates once again their function in the molding of the hero's social mask. His escapades thus take on an additional dimension other than his "apprenticeship" in the ways of love and pleasure.<sup>44</sup>

Marianne and Jeannette: Le Triomphe du Coeur

Jacob's ascension proceeds by his open, public utilization of the exterior signs of his fabricated social identity. Marianne and Jeannette both depend much more heavily upon the interior, hidden traits of virtue and "la noblesse du coeur" as the stimulus to their acceptance by the nobility. M. -H. Huet's comments about Jeannette are valid for Marianne as well: their memoirs depict an "ascension sociale fondée sur l'amour et la sincérité du coeur."<sup>45</sup> Marianne's version of her first experience of love with Valville further illustrates its ennobling powers in the eyes of the lover:

Il y a de certaines infortunes qui embellissent la beauté même, qui lui prêtent de la majesté. Vous avez alors, avec vos grâces, celles que votre histoire, faite comme un roman, vous donne encore. Et ne vous embarrassez pas d'ignorer ce que vous êtes née; laissez travailler les chimères de l'amour là-dessus; elles sauront bien vous faire un rang distingué, et tirer bon parti des ténèbres qui cacheront votre naissance. (Marianne, pp. 80-1, my emphasis)

The construction of a social mask is thus a minor theme, for the respective heroines receive almost instant recognition from the elite, and, as was demonstrated above, feel quite assured that this is deserved.<sup>46</sup> Furthermore, both Jeannette and Marianne more often seek refuge and protection (especially in convents) than public display. This desire to hide is especially true in La Paysanne parvenue, for Jeannette moves upwards socially through constant flight and disguise of her true identity.<sup>47</sup> Marianne's predicament, her lack of any past at all, produces more ambiguity in its social ramifications.

Both heroines show sensitivity to the social impact of exterior signs in a number of seemingly minor details, especially concerning dress and comportment. In order to convince the reader that they "belong," however, not much mention is made of their transformation as they merge with the elite. Jacob was much more conscious of this process. Language, for example, poses no problem for either of the women; we hold the texts of noblewomen whose tone and style never betray their former state. Jeannette's case seems most improbable, since all of the other characters from her

village speak in a rustic, naïve mode accentuated with popular expressions (Colin, Barbe, Jeannette's parents).<sup>48</sup>

Jeannette's illiteracy poses a slight problem, but, as in Jacob's case, this is swiftly and briefly effaced. Much more emphasis is placed upon her apprenticeship in the language of love, as she learns to decipher the unspoken messages read in the eyes of the young Marquis de L.V.

Names in both novels become social signifiers.

Marianne does not hide behind pseudonyms, but feels a predictable shame when she is reduced to the use of her first and only name:

il [Valville] se retranchait à savoir mon nom, qu'il n'était pas naturel de lui cacher, mais que je ne pouvais pas lui dire, puisque je ne le savais pas moi-même, à moins que je ne prisse celui de Marianne; et prendre ce nom-là, c'était presque déclarer Mme Dutour et sa boutique, ou faire soupçonner quelque chose d'approchant. (Marianne, p. 79)

Eventually, Marianne's lack of a name further ennobles her in the eyes of her beholders, as it bears witness to the hardships of her fate. One of the nuns defends her status accordingly:

Y a-t-il rien de honteux dans les malheurs qui vous sont arrivés, et qui font que vos parents vous ont perdue? Il faudrait être un bien mauvais esprit pour abuser de cela contre vous, surtout avec une fille aussi bien née que vous l'êtes, et qui ne peut assurément venir que de très bon lieu. Si on juge de la condition des gens par l'opinion que leurs façons nous en donnent, telle ici qui se croit plus que vous ne risque rien à vous regarder comme son égale en naissance, et serait trop heureuse d'être votre égale en bon caractère. (Marianne, p. 236)

Jeannette depends much more heavily upon names to hide her in the multiple twists of the plot. Not only do her

pseudonyms suppress the peasant within, but they conceal her presence from the various enemies who assault her virtue. They also signal her gradual promotion from one social level to the next.<sup>49</sup>

In both cases, a gift offered early in the action enables Marianne and Jeannette to escape further association with the inferior levels of society. The clothing which M. de Climac purchases for Marianne brings her the recognition she seeks, for it not only attracts Valville, but Mme de Miran as well. Marianne is well aware of its importance and its effect:

Mon affliction, qui lui parut extrême, la toucha; ma jeunesse, ma bonne façon, peut-être aussi ma parure, l'attendrissent pour moi; quand je parle de parure, c'est que cela n'y nuit pas.

Il est bon en pareille occasion de plaire un peu aux yeux, ils vous recommandent au coeur. Êtes-vous malheureux et mal vêtu? ou vous échappez aux meilleurs coeurs du monde, ou ils ne prennent pour vous qu'un intérêt fort tiède; vous n'avez pas l'attrait qui gagne leur vanité, et rien ne nous aide tant à être généreux envers les gens, rien ne nous fait tant goûter l'honneur et le plaisir de l'être, que de leur voir un air distingué. (*Marianne*, p. 146)

"Vanity" dictated Marianne's decision to keep the clothing in spite of her scruples about Climac's intentions,<sup>50</sup> and the same "vanity" motivates Jeannette, who receives most of her possessions from the men who love her. The attraction of material objects, chiefly furniture and clothing, prevent her from giving up the social status which they symbolize in spite of the continual threats to her honor.<sup>51</sup> Once established as "une Dame," she cannot bear

the thought of losing these objects and returning to the village as a simple "paysanne." Her instinct to hide in a convent is much more noble-sounding and befitting to her assumed role.

Still, these concrete factors play a less significant role in the adjustment of a social identity. Jacob suppresses his true story before others, so that he may more freely manipulate these exterior signs and create a "new" M. de la Vallée. For Marianne and Jeannette, paradoxically enough, it is the truth which constitutes their ultimate nobility. The elder Marquis de L.V. confers upon Jeannette "le sang des rois": "J'élève jusqu'aux nuës ceux qui se dégagent du limon grossier de la bassesse dont ils sortent . . . (Pay-sanne, Vol. III, pt. 11, p. 32). In her case, "ce sort extraordinaire qu'est le sien, en la distinguant de ses compagnes, lui confère déjà une distinction particulière, une sorte d'anoblissement."<sup>52</sup> Marianne's distinction is further enhanced through the telling of her story. Each of her witnesses is filled with greater respect and admiration once Marianne divulges her dubious origins. Furthermore, the eyes of the lover (Valville or the Marquis de L.V.) consecrate the heroine's pretensions to a higher rank through a chance meeting very early in the action. In short, Marianne and Jeannette do not face the actual struggle to "parvenir"; their battle is to maintain a status which they feel they deserve because of a natural calling. Thus their

consciousness of a social mask is limited and often non-existent when compared to Jacob's continued obsession with his public image.

### Social Confrontation

The preceding discussion takes us far from the original image of the servant. The elimination of exterior traces of an inferior status does not, however, permit Jacob, Jeannette, or even Marianne to merge smoothly with "le monde." Each aspires to the class of the masters, but the aggressive acquisition of control over one's destiny which these aspirations necessitate is not as simple as the mere juggling of appearances.<sup>53</sup> Again Jacob's case best highlights the social elements in such a struggle as well as the hero's inner conflicts as he loses all contact with his origins. The novel continually converges upon scenes of social confrontation, in which Jacob's inferior birth is inevitably an issue. His acute consciousness of his image leads him to two basic modes of behavior. First, he attracts the desires of women by a seemingly frank admission of his peasant stock and naïveté in the ways of the world. Second, he gradually feels subservience and impotence before the male characters, although with them he strives to conceal the truth. He ultimately falls back into the reflexes of the valet at the novel's abrupt end. In either case, Jacob's identity is devalORIZED by his antics before society. He is incapable of

fully coming to terms with himself because of the pressures of his social metamorphosis, and he remains a character in limbo, neither sustaining the master's role nor attaining a consciousness of his servitude.

Figurez-vous ce que c'est qu'un jeune rustre comme moi, qui, dans le seul espace de deux jours, est devenu le mari d'une fille riche, et l'amant de deux femmes de condition. Après cela mon changement de décoration dans mes habits, car tout y fait; ce titre de monsieur dont je m'étais vu honoré, moi qu'on appelait Jacob dix ou douze jours auparavant. . . . Aussi étais-je dans un tourbillon de vanité si flatteuse, je me trouvais quelque chose de si rare, je n'avais point encore goûté si délicatement le plaisir de vivre, et depuis ce jour-là je devins méconnaissable, tant j'acquis d'éducation et d'expérience. (Paysan, pp. 232-3)

Thus armed with an arsenal of social disguises, Jacob confronts various social milieux with an unequal degree of success. Such confrontations form the basic armature of the novel as the stimulus for Jacob's movement among the classes. His dispute with his original master is the first in a series of clashes in which he provokes typical figures of authority (the master, the priest, the président and the financier). In each instance, Jacob is engaged in direct dialogue with another male speaker. Each of these scenes represents a moment of crisis in Jacob's life in which he must prove himself to a socially superior adversary. By making an "honorable" choice, under the circumstances, Jacob initially affirms a certain superiority and is usually rewarded in the process. He equally succeeds in unmasking the



hypocrisy of his accusers during the course of the dialogue. Consequently, while reinforcing his own social mask, Jacob unmasks the figures surrounding him.

Just freshly arrived from the village, the hero is frank in his refusal of the master's offer of a life of ease and outward respectability with Geneviève. While the master avoids the central issue, Jacob immediately broaches the matter of the exchange of riches for cuckoldry: "est-ce que les pauvres hommes aiment à être cocus?" (Paysan, p. 65). The peasant's franchise denounces the master's respectable airs, and he progressively drops his paternalistic tone to reveal his true disdain for Jacob: "Songera-t-on à votre honneur? S'imaginer-t-on seulement que vous en ayez un, benêt que vous êtes?" (Paysan, p. 65). Other insults and threats follow. The master, a parvenu himself, then hints at the doubtful foundations of the class he represents.<sup>54</sup>

The master's death resolves this first conflict smoothly, and Jacob escapes the ruined household, unscathed in the eyes of the world. The tale of his honorable conduct serves him well in impressing the younger Mlle Habert as he accompanies her to her home, and finds in her his reward.

The second confrontation with a figure of authority, the directeur de conscience M. Doucin, follows quickly upon the first. After provoking the separation of the Habert sisters with his insinuations about the young valet, Doucin faces Jacob in the kitchen in order to convince him personally

to leave on his own volition. Since the hero overheard the priest's true opinions of him and his suspicions, he uses his privileged point of view to dismantle the latter's disguised motives.

Again Jacob is blunt. He reveals that he knows the truth and rapidly retorts with the major arguments made against him to the sisters upstairs. This repetition, now in a clear language which parodies the priest's meandering rhetoric, renders the man finally speechless: "cette cadette fait l'opiniâtre, c'est mauvais signe, elle me voudrait trop de bien, et il faut qu'elle n'ait de l'amitié qu'envers son directeur, pour le salut de sa conscience et pour le contentement de la vôtre." The priest can only protest incomprehension: "Je ne sais ce que cela signifie . . .," or "Qu'est-ce que c'est donc que ce langage?" (Paysan, p. 108). His silence throughout Jacob's diatribe only emphasizes his incapacity to express the truth with clarity. Again, Jacob's subsequent reward is Mlle Habert, but this time equality with her and marriage.

The third confrontation takes place in the home of the président, identified only as "un des premiers magistrats de Paris," who has been designated the official spokesman for the elder Mlle Habert. In spite of his quickly diminishing interest in the case, evidenced by his hidden smiles and "badinage," the judge remains the representative of power to whom Jacob must address his defense. The other witnesses to

the scene, the judge's wife, a "petit-maître d'église," and Mme de Ferval, a fellow dévôte, were initially invited by Mlle Habert as members of the respectable bourgeoisie to support her case. Here Jacob must directly defend his social worth, especially when confronted with the accusations of Mlle Habert, who quickly interrupts the président to plead her own case. Her near-hysterical interventions, joined with the growing amusement of the spectators, render the scene a comic version of the more emotionally charged situation in La Vie de Marianne where the heroine faces Valville's family and social clan. Jacob easily triumphs over his accuser, again by very bluntly pointing out the inconsistencies inherent in the social mask of the well-to-do roturier: "ce n'est donc que d'une boutique que vous valez mieux que moi" (Paysan, p. 172). He provokes the very dévôte Mlle Habert to blurt out her bigoted version of Christian charity: "Je sais bien que nous sommes tous égaux devant Dieu, mais devant les hommes ce n'est pas de même, et Dieu veut qu'on ait égard aux coutumes établies parmi eux, il nous défend de nous déshonorer, et les hommes diront que ma soeur a épousé un gredin . . ." (Paysan, p. 169).

Most importantly, Jacob's situation is the source of dissolution of this group, whose members were called upon here to prevent Jacob from surmounting their barriers. Each of the witnesses present progressively shows more and more sympathy to his cause, especially, of course, Mme de Ferval,

whose "signifying" glances are correctly interpreted by Jacob. She will be his reward after this victory, and her influence is to draw him upwards to the next social sphere. As in the first two confrontations, Jacob is self-assured here in his denunciation of the mechanics of class segregation. Most of his attack is oriented towards the verbal signs of social status, such as the tutoiement which inherently confirms his lowliness.<sup>55</sup> Just as he manipulates the meaning of the term serviteur,<sup>56</sup> he persistently turns the insults against him towards the elder Mlle Habert and her family, as a concrete example of the emptiness of her pretensions to honorable status. His monologue is characterized by the juxtaposition of terms meant to equate his condition with hers, and he concludes with one of his typically long, repetitive sentences, which here implicitly emphasizes this equality:

. . . cette rue, c'est que tout le monde y passe; j'y passais, elle y passait, et il vaut autant se rencontrer là qu'ailleurs, quand on a à se rencontrer quelque part. . . . Nous causons par les chemins; je lui apprends mon nom, mon surnom, mes moyens, je lui détaille ma famille; elle me dit: La nôtre est de même étoffe; moi je m'en réjouis; elle dit qu'elle en est bien aise; je lui repars, elle me repart; je la loue, elle me le rend. Vous me paraissez bon garçon. Vous, mademoiselle, la meilleure de Paris. Je suis content, lui dis-je. Moi contente. (Paysan, pp. 172-3)

In spite of its comic undertones, the scene marks Jacob's successful destruction of another barrier in his aggressive refusal to abide by accepted social structures. As Michèle Hirsch notes: "La hiérarchie n'est pas acceptée, mais activement réduite. . . ." <sup>57</sup>

In general, the pretensions of the lesser members of the middle class, shop-keepers and small rentiers, are another traditional source of scorn in novels of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Marivaux is no exception, as his portrayal of characters such as the Habert sisters and Mme d'Alain (as well as Mme Dutour in La Vie de Marianne) suggests. Jacob had, in fact, already faced similar segregational tendencies the previous evening in another comically revealing session with the bourgeoisie. When Mme d'Alain reveals the truth about Jacob to the company assembled for the wedding party, the grocer's remarks about "les gens de sa sorte" provoke Jacob's rage and, again, blunt ridicule: "Eh! mais vous, monsieur, qui parlez des gens de votre sorte, lui dis-je, de quelle sorte êtes-vous donc? Le coeur me dit que je vous vaudrais bien, hormis que j'ai mes cheveux, et vous ceux des autres" (Paysan, p. 150). Jacob's exclamations are the voice of instinct ("le coeur me dit"), again designed to unmask appearances, which in the merchant's case were intended to signify his importance.<sup>58</sup> Most significant of all is the fact that his new-found formality ("cela ne se peut pas") and social vanity are aligned in sharp contrast to his obvious preference for the food over class distinctions, again revealing his inappropriateness to the role he wishes to play.<sup>59</sup> Jacob thus once again instigates the rupture of the social mask during this brief appearance of the bourgeois group.

A fourth episode of confrontation occurs at Versailles, when Jacob manifests a natural superiority of "sentiment" over the wealthy and influential financier, M. de Fécour. In contrast to the preceding scenes, Jacob is quite acutely aware of his inferiority as he stands before M. de Fécour and his colleagues, "dont pas un n'avait une mine capable de me réconforter" (Paysan, p. 249). As in the carriage to Versailles, where he finds himself in the company of men of a higher social rank, Jacob remains silent for the most part, suddenly devoid of his bold verbal facility.<sup>60</sup> When he does speak, it is only to heap further ridicule upon himself: "M. de Fécour entendit tout ce que je lui dis sans jeter les yeux sur moi. . . . [S]on peu d'attention me laissait dans une posture qui était risible, et dont je ne savais pas comment me remettre" (Paysan, p. 249). His satisfaction at knowing "un peu d'arithmétique" is only the source of more scorn.

Jacob suddenly feels himself subservient to the will of others. The narration emphasizes his discomfort, "un spectacle de mince valeur" before such august company.<sup>61</sup> As before, he can only draw self-esteem from the sympathetic presence of a female figure, this time Mme d'Orville. With her unexpected entrance, Jacob is finally offered the opportunity to rise above the others through his superiority "du coeur." He is immediately struck by her dignity, and understands her "language"; he reads the "si doux reproche" in

her eyes and responds accordingly: "Eh! non, madame, lui répondis-je dans le même langage, si elle m'entendit" (Paysan, p. 253). At last he can take control of the situation, and interrupts M. de Fécour to refuse the position offered to him. His simple morality, "je serais bien aise qu'on en usât envers moi comme j'en use envers lui" (Paysan, p. 253), is lost on the financier, who takes Jacob's generosity as an affront: "l'exemple l'étonna sans lui plaire, et . . . il trouva mauvais que je me donnasse les airs d'être plus sensible que lui" (Paysan, p. 254). Jacob's action denounces the cold cruelty of the financier and his peers, and once again places the hero in an advantageous situation. Although in de Fécour's social sphere Jacob has committed an affront, he is redeemed on a higher level by such natural "noblesse de coeur." His promise of reward is swift but left unfulfilled by the novel's abrupt end.<sup>62</sup>

With the male members of the nobility, however, Jacob inevitably finds less sympathy as the novel progresses. He feels himself unmasked, and descends again to the valet role as if by reflex. The homonym Vallée/valet takes on its full irony in these later scenes. The incident in which the chevalier interrupts his tête-à-tête with Mme de Ferval is comparable to the last scene of the novel set at the Comédie. When the chevalier recognizes him as "Jacob," the hero is suddenly passive and immobile, thrust back inopportunely into the servant class. His prior vanity disappears before the nobleman's eyes:

je n'avais plus de contenance, et en vrai benêt je saluais cet homme à chaque mot qu'il m'adressait; tantôt je tirais un pied, tantôt j'inclinais la tête, et ne savais plus ce que je faisais, j'étais démonté. Cette assommante époque de notre connaissance, son tutoiement, ce passage subit de l'état d'un homme en bonne fortune où il m'avait pris, à l'état de Jacob où il me remettait, tout cela m'avait renversé. (Paysan, p. 273)

Jacob becomes an automaton, and, as in the last scene of the novel, loses control of himself and the situation at hand. As the object of the other's gaze, he accepts his appraisal implicitly and plays out the role of the inferior: "De mon côté, je ne savais que dire; ce nom de Jacob, qu'il m'avait rappelé, me tenait en respect . . ." (Paysan, p. 274). Taking Mme de Ferval's cue, he excuses himself from the room. His frustration finally explodes in a brief but impotent burst of rage which only provokes the gentleman's derision.

In the final scene, Jacob's mask dissolves completely when he is faced with a crowd of male figures, again, we assume, members of the nobility. Although just prior to his entrance into the Comédie Jacob basked in feelings "de joie, de gloire, de fortune, de mondanité" (Paysan, p. 311), he is reduced to the motions of the servant and the ensuing mockery of the spectators. The setting is of vital importance for the Comédie is quite often the arena of the affirmation of one's social standing in "le monde."<sup>63</sup> The hero finds himself suddenly thrust into a foreign land: "Les airs et les façons de ce pays-là me confondirent et m'épouvantèrent" (Paysan, p. 314). Rudely conscious of his inferiority, Jacob is again rendered speechless, and, marionnetteliike,



reaffirms his disgrace by repeatedly bowing to d'Orsan's friends. His clothing, previously a source of such vanity, is only an additional source of shame: "Il fallait pourtant répondre, avec mon petit habit de soie et ma petite propreté bourgeoise, dont je ne faisais plus d'estime depuis que je voyais tant d'habits magnifiques autour de moi. Mais que répondre?" (Paysan, p. 315). Jacob's respectful "je suis votre serviteur" reassumes its literal meaning as he humiliates himself before the nobility.

The narrator's precise rendition of his feelings in this situation reveal, as in the chevalier episode, his sudden and total lack of self-confidence and control. Incapable of action, he is reduced to a mere object. Normally so verbose, he has nothing to say. There is a distinct rupture with his previously successful manipulation of appearances for his own profit; here the mask dissolves and he feels the others penetrating to the truth:

Aussi, de ma contenance, je n'en parlerai pas, attendu que je n'en avais point, à moins qu'on ne dise que n'en point avoir est en avoir une. Il ne tint pourtant pas à moi de m'en donner une autre; mais je crois que je n'en pus jamais venir à bout, non plus que d'avoir un visage qui ne parût ni déplacé ni honteux; car, pour étonné, je me serais consolé que le mien n'eût paru que cela, ce n'aurait été que signe que je n'avais jamais été à la Comédie, et il n'y aurait pas eu grand mal; mais c'était une confusion secrète de me trouver là, un certain sentiment de mon indignité qui m'empêchait d'y être hardiment, et que j'aurais bien voulu qu'on ne vît pas dans ma physionomie, et qu'on n'en voyait que mieux, parce que je m'efforçais de le cacher.

Mes yeux m'embarrassaient, je ne savais sur qui les arrêter; je n'osais prendre la liberté de regarder les autres, de peur qu'on ne démêlât dans mon peu d'assurance que ce n'était pas à moi à avoir l'honneur d'être avec

de si honnêtes gens, et que j'étais une figure de contrebande; car je ne sache rien qui signifie mieux ce que je veux dire que cette expression qui n'est pas trop noble. (Paysan, p. 314)

In this passage, Jacob immediately senses the resurgence of a social indignity which impinges upon his freedom to interact with "de si honnêtes gens." Not only is he suddenly mute, but he no longer dares even to raise his eyes upon such company. The all-important "regard," his other powerful weapon with women, is stifled. He feels unworthy of the recognition so vital to his mask, and without it his self-concept quite obviously disintegrates. Finally, the narrator significantly closes the passage with an admittedly "not very noble" metaphor, further underlining his sense of inadequacy with the notion of "contrebande," which evokes his false pretensions in mingling with these men.

The hero's comportment among the elite reaffirms his conviction of their innate superiority, his claims to the contrary notwithstanding. Jacob "porte sur son existence passée la même condamnation que les nobles, et revendique pour lui une dignité égale à la leur."<sup>64</sup> His self-esteem drops to its lowest level, in this, the last scene of Marivaux's text. In effect, the central problem of social inferiority is rather typically acted out on a burlesque note, instead of receiving a more dramatic treatment. The social impasse in which the hero is placed neutralizes the message that naissance is not the only measure of nobility. When recognized as an inferior, Jacob acts the part accordingly.

While Jacob is left with his mask demolished at the Comédie, Marianne and Jeannette maintain their dignity in scenes of social confrontation. They surmount with apparent ease the barriers that paralyze Jacob at the end, again because of their "natural" inclination towards the elite. Still, the problem of their rank and identity also leads them to conflict and even peril (especially in Jeannette's adventures) as they maneuver in public situations. As previously mentioned, however, they receive protection and refuge as they discover the risks of tampering with one's exterior image and using a false identity. La Paysanne parvenue is most obviously constructed around successive movements of flight and hiding, with only briefly interspersed moments of contact with society.<sup>65</sup> The process of recognition is simplified through the immediate contact with the lover, who, through his own nobility, sustains the respective heroines' pretensions. Marianne and Jeannette must thereafter only maintain their virtue and "noblesse de coeur" as the ultimate proof of their true rank. The ministre thus confers nobility upon Marianne after her testimony: "La noblesse de vos parents est incertaine, mais celle de votre coeur est incontestable, et je la préférerais, s'il fallait opter" (Marianne, p. 337).

Jacob envisages society as a terrain to be conquered; for Marianne and Jeannette it appears fraught with danger to a woman devoid of rank. Female characters regularly provide

each of them with support and protection. The threats of society are often embodied by the male characters and their attempts at seduction. Jeannette's time is thus spent thwarting the efforts of most of the men she encounters, who assume that she is corruptible because of her peasantry. Two of the shorter digressions, the stories of Charlotte (Vol. I, part 1) and Marianne (Vol. I, part 2), develop the theme of the lower-class maiden seduced and rejected by the noble lover.<sup>66</sup> Jeannette's steadfast virtue thus once again differentiates her from her peers, and provides continual proof of her virtue. The two men who respectfully accept her refusals, Saint-Fal and the elder Marquis, reiterate this motif at regular intervals.<sup>67</sup> In the end, depth of character is lost in this repeated conflict of seduction and refusal.

Marianne, too, must face the risks of seduction with M. de Climal, but the encounter is successfully used in the text to develop the complexity of the choices offered the heroine. Her amour-propre is first wounded by outright charity, and we have seen her adamant refusal of employment as a servant. Highly conscious of the dangers of a relationship based upon such dependency, Marianne is also much more aware of the social power of the man, and the exchange of her virtue for the material signs of status, a semblance of a social identity, is momentarily tempting. Jeannette simply ignores this aspect of her situation, and takes the gifts

of men, innocent of their implications. Marianne's analysis shows the ambiguity behind her own protestations of innocence:

Il était pourtant vrai que M. de Climal était amoureux de moi; mais je savais bien aussi que je ne voulais rien faire de son amour; et si, malgré cet amour que je connaissais, j'avais reçu ses présents, c'était par un petit raisonnement que mes besoins et ma vanité m'avaient dicté, et qui n'avait rien pris sur la pureté de mes intentions. Mon raisonnement était sans doute une erreur, mais non pas un crime. . . . (Marianne, p. 45)

The incident is doubly effective as a denunciation of Climal's own social mask of charity and devotion, although it is clear that Marianne, too, is juggling appearances. Once she no longer needs the clothing and the financial support, she can easily return everything, and her own hypocrisy is forgotten in the moral resolution of the affair, Climal's repentance and confession. At his deathbed, Marianne hears only praise for her "sagesse" (Marianne, pp. 246-247).

In public situations, Jeannette receives confirmation of the worth she hopes to display and feels confidence in her image. Again, the true ambiguity of her situation is never developed: her aspirations weaken the hierarchy, but she accepts this hierarchy unequivocally. Her respect before the King, seen on five occasions, is indicative in this light. His appearance at the outset of the novel instigates the heroine's affair with the Marquis de L.V. Subsequently, he is present in most of Jeannette's appearances in "public," when she is seen at her window, the royal mass, or the

Comédie, and confirms the recognition and acceptance of her new identity. For her, this is sufficient to abolish "la paysanne."

Marianne also senses some recognition of her implicit worth as she faces the general public, in the church scene, or simply in the streets of Paris.<sup>68</sup> The comparison with Jeannette again illustrates how de Mouhy simplifies or annihilates the social problem of the parvenue, whereas Marivaux at least raises the issue, without, admittedly, bringing it to a satisfactory resolution. Like Jacob, Marianne must directly face a series of direct denunciations of her condition, from Climal, Mme Dutour, and the pensionnaire at the convent. These accusations are centralized in the scene in the ministre's home. Her response, tears, elevates her above the grimaces and mechanical antics of Jacob, and a sympathetic figure (Valville, Tervire or Mme de Miran) quickly verbalizes her defense, while Jacob is left alone.

The confrontation with the ministre is exemplary in this regard. The family, social order, and political authority are consolidated in the character of the ministre. Marianne must finally directly face these forces if the barriers established by "les usages et les maximes du monde" are to be broken down. Mme de Miran most aptly describes her predicament:

Hélas! cependant que vous manque-t-il? Ce n'est ni la beauté, ni les grâces, ni la vertu, ni le bel esprit, ni l'excellent coeur; et voilà pourtant tout ce qu'il y a de plus rare, de plus précieux; voilà les vraies richesses

d'une femme dans le mariage, et vous les avez à profusion: mais vous n'avez pas vingt mille livres de rentes, on ne ferait aucune alliance en vous épousant; on ne connaît point vos parents, qui nous feraient peut-être beaucoup d'honneur; et les hommes, qui sont sots, qui pensent mal, et à qui pourtant je dois compte de mes actions là-dessus, ne pardonnent point aux disgrâces dont vous souffrez, et qu'ils appellent des défauts.

La raison vous choisirait, la folie des usages vous rejette. (Marianne, p. 184)

These, then, are the "faults" of which Marianne is accused in this central scene. The parallels between this tableau and Jacob's appearance before the président are obvious.<sup>69</sup> Both characters succeed in transforming the accusations against them into a condemnation of their accusers and the rules they are enforcing. This is achieved as they seemingly acquiesce to the code:

Marianne: Le monde me dédaigne, il me rejette; nous ne changerons pas le monde, et il faut s'accorder à ce qu'il veut. Vous dites qu'il est injuste; ce n'est pas à moi à en dire autant, j'y gagnerais trop. . . . (Marianne, p. 336)

Jacob (complaining of the tutoiement): Ce n'est pas que je m'en plaigne, monsieur le Président, il n'y a rien à dire, c'est la coutume de vous autres grands messieurs; toi, c'est ma part et celle-là du pauvre monde; voilà comme on le mène: pourquoi pauvre monde est-il? ce n'est pas votre faute. . . . (Paysan, p. 171)

Still, Marianne's best defense before this group is supplied by Mme de Miran, who, rather than transgressing the barriers, simply renders them more flexible. She aims to prove that all signs indicate Marianne was born a "demoiselle,"<sup>70</sup> and thus to abolish the problem rather than actually uproot this system of values. Consequently, Marianne's comportment confirms her nobility for the family group, and leads to her

triumph: "Adieu, la petite aventurière; vous n'êtes encore qu'une fille de condition, nous dit-on; mais vous n'en demeurerez pas là, et nous serons bien heureuses, si au premier jour vous ne vous trouvez pas une princesse" (Marianne, p. 338).

Assimilation thus seems possible for Marianne, but the marriage to Valville never takes place. The same denunciations of Marianne's past reappear with Mlle Varthon as the pretext for Valville's infidelity:

. . . votre histoire a éclaté; ces petits articles ont été sus de tout le monde, et tout le monde n'est pas Valville, n'est pas Mme de Miran; les gens qui pensent bien sont rares. Cette marchande de linge chez qui vous avez été en boutique; ce bon religieux qui a été vous chercher du secours chez un parent de Valville; ce couvent où vous avez été vous présenter pour être reçue par charité; cette aventure de la marchande qui vous reconnut chez une dame appelée Mme de Fare; votre enlèvement d'ici, votre apparition chez le ministre en si grande compagnie; ce petit commis qu'on vous destinait à la place de Valville, et cent autres choses qui font, à la vérité, qu'on loue votre caractère, qui prouvent qu'il n'y a point de fille plus estimable que vous, mais qui sont humiliantes, qui vous rabaissent, quoique injustement, et qu'il est cruel qu'on sache à cause de la vanité qu'on a dans le monde. . . . (Marianne, p. 391)

Although Marianne feels such predictions of Valville's shame are fabricated by Mlle Varthon, she cannot remain insensitive to the humiliation they cause. With Mme de Miran, she herself uses these same arguments of society's pressures in order to break off the marriage with Valville (Marianne, pp. 409-11). Here again her ultimate purpose is to hide Valville's infidelity from his mother, but the fear of society's condemnation remains a preoccupation even in the



officier's dignified proposal of marriage and a secure social position (Marianne, pp. 423-4). It is in this sense that the heroine remains an intruder up to the end of her story, never totally assimilated, and unable to accept the stability offered her. The existing text provides no further clues as to the resolution of such an impasse.

### Alienation

The novels examined here manifest an undercurrent of tension in the progressive steps of the parvenu's contacts with successive levels of society. Certain representations of the misuse of social authority and position are denounced in the process, but a hierarchy and an elite remain firmly fixed in place and are recognized as such by the aspiring parvenu. He does not fight the social order itself; he fights for inclusion within it. Imitation and mask-wearing were seen to be basic stratagems in this struggle. As was the case for Gil Blas, these changes in the hero bring up the problem of the main character's self-concept as he experiments with a new identity. Alienation is never consciously expressed as such in the novels under consideration, but it becomes a fundamental issue in an analysis of the hero's ultimate success in fitting into his social environment.<sup>71</sup> On the surface, the novel of social ascension proclaims the worth of the individual regardless of rank and origins, yet

in action the characters seem unsure of themselves and their essence until they find security in a social definition.

Le Paysan parvenu is the most clearly elaborated illustration of this dilemma. Jacob regularly envisions "le petit paysan" within in order to reorient himself during moments of reflection. The peasant's world had an aura of authenticity which he lost from the moment he became a valet in the city and imitated the models of duplicity he saw in his first master and mistress.<sup>72</sup> The return to this "real" part of himself is stabilizing, but more and more we see a hero split in two. As he attains each progressive social plateau, Jacob uses this "petit paysan" to measure the social difference traveled and evoke his own pride and vanity. The novel's final scenes most clearly enact Jacob's inner turmoil and confusion in a social context and prefigure the ultimate shattering of the character. In effect, although on the one hand the action progresses as an exterior confirmation of the hero's "natural" calling to a more noble situation, these moments of introspection which punctuate the steps of Jacob's ascension reveal a personage who never quite arrives at a consistent self-image. Society returns to impose shame on his past, in spite of his previous attempts at sincerity.<sup>73</sup> The public figure cannot efface the private self, which is still necessary for its authenticity.

Near the end of Part V Jacob is seen in a rare moment at home one morning alone, thus "savoring" his new rank and

good fortune. This scene best illustrates how the hero literally splits in two in order to fathom his situation fully, a process indicative of alienation and confirmed by his attempt to conceal it. As the narrator explains: "c'était en me regardant comme Jacob que j'étais si délicieusement étonné de me voir dans cet équipage; c'était de Jacob que M. de la Vallée empruntait toute sa joie. Ce moment-là n'était si doux qu'à cause du petit paysan" (Paysan, p. 296). The same message is here thrice repeated with an alternation in the nouns and pronouns je/me/Jacob/M. de la Vallée/petit paysan. This process underlines the constant fluctuation of the hero's self-image, a motif mirrored as well by the alternation between narrator and hero of the narration, again varying forms of the self. The changing social concept of self is characteristic of such novels of social ascension.

This duality is further emphasized stylistically in this particular episode by the hero's curious manner of observing himself in action, as if he were an autonomous object. The narrator regularly diverges from a pure first-person narrative to refer to himself in the third person.<sup>74</sup>

. . . je restai le lendemain toute la matinée chez moi; je ne m'y ennuyai pas; je m'y délectai dans le plaisir de me trouver tout à coup un maître de maison; j'y savourai ma fortune, j'y goûtai mes aises; je me regardai dans mon appartement, j'y marchai, je m'y assis, j'y souris à mes meubles; j'y rêvai à ma cuisinière, qu'il ne tenait qu'à moi de faire venir, et que je crois que j'appelai pour la voir; enfin j'y contemplai ma robe de chambre et mes pantoufles; et je vous assure que ce ne furent pas là les deux articles qui me touchèrent le moins; de combien de petits bonheurs l'homme du monde est-il entouré et qu'il ne sent point, parce qu'il est né avec eux! (Paysan, p. 296, my emphasis)

Jacob's self-contemplation is centered around the concrete signs of his leisure, which culminate in the final, generalized maxim concerning "l'homme du monde" and such "petits bonheurs" as these, "mes aises," "mes meubles," "ma cuisinière," "ma robe de chambre," "mes pantoufles." The non-utilitarian nature of the items of clothing has previously been discussed, and they fit in well with the furniture and the cook as the outward signs of the man of leisure. The remark about the cook also stands out in its utter lack of empathy for the individual in his service, who only merits such a comment as proof of his power over her comings and goings.

The "joy" which Jacob feels in such moments has its source in his past lowly condition, but "[c]ette idée-là n'était bonne que chez moi, qui en faisais intérieurement la source de ma joie; mais il n'était pas nécessaire que les autres entrassent si avant dans le secret de mes plaisirs, ni sussent de quoi je les composais" (Paysan, p. 297). In the eyes of others, Jacob must not exist, an idea which again contradicts the narrator's initial affirmation of his frank acceptance of his origins and their implications. For the others, for the outside world, he concludes the scene in question by taking up a book, "je ne sais quel livre sérieux que je n'entendais pas trop, que je ne me souciais pas trop d'entendre, et auquel je ne m'amusais que pour imiter la

contenance d'un honnête homme chez soi" (Paysan, p. 297).

He then departs to meet an even higher destiny, the rescue of young comte d'Orsan.

He thus readjusts his mask, and M. de la Vallée leaves Jacob behind once again:

Tout M. de la Vallée que j'étais, moi qui n'avais jamais eu d'autre voiture que mes jambes, ou que ma charrette, quand j'avais mené à Paris le vin du seigneur de notre village, je n'avais pas assurément besoin d'un carrosse pour aller chez cette dame, et je ne songeais pas non plus à en prendre; mais un fiacre qui m'arrêta sur une place que je traversais me tenta: Avez-vous affaire de moi, mon gentilhomme? me dit-il.

Ma foi, mon gentilhomme me gagna, et je lui dis: Approche. (Paysan, p. 298)

It is not out of true need that he accepts the coachman's invitation, but out of the sudden realization that any "gentilhomme" should be driven to his destination. In order to confirm the image he sees in the coachman's eyes, Jacob must take the carriage. This suddenly acquired aura of nobility is confirmed in action moments later as Jacob rushes to the aid of the unknown young man (d'Orsan) defending himself against three assailants. The narration carefully emphasizes the distinctions between d'Orsan and Jacob on the one hand and the others involved in the scene. D'Orsan is "ce brave jeune homme," while his attackers are characterized by "leur lâcheté," "l'indignité de leur action," and their obvious inferiority in combat (Paysan, p. 299). Jacob is the only witness to react to the scene, the others, "le peuple," "crie, fait du tintamarre, mais ne secourt point:

il y avait autour des combattants un cercle de canailles qui s'augmentait à tous moments, et qui les suivait . . . ." (Paysan, p. 298). Jacob, on the other hand, "vole comme un lion au secours du jeune homme en lui criant: Courage, Monsieur, courage!" (Paysan, p. 299), although by his own admission he has never used the sword he requested only for appearances. He then battles with "ardeur," and his action incites the crowd to pursue the three men with their own homemade arms.

After the battle Jacob finds himself surrounded by the curious eyes of the crowd, including Mme d'Orville, and the narrator stops the action once again to analyze the effects of their regards. Jacob's self-image again shifts, and he totally loses sight of the socially inferior peasant and valet to accept the image reflected in the eyes of others. Again the verbs of seeing are vital, as is the pose:

Oh! c'est ici où je me sentis un peu glorieux, un peu superbe, et où mon coeur s'enfla du courage que je venais de montrer et de la noble posture où je me trouvais. Tout distrait que je devais être par ce qui se passait encore, je ne laissai pas que d'avoir quelques moments de recueillement où je me considérais avec cette épée à la main, et avec mon chapeau enfoncé en mauvais garçon; car je devinais l'air que j'avais, et cela se sent; on se voit dans son amour-propre, pour ainsi dire; et je vous avoue qu'en l'état où je me supposais, je m'estimai digne de quelques égards, et que je me regardais moi-même moins familièrement et avec plus de distinction qu'à l'ordinaire; je n'étais plus ce petit polisson surpris de son bonheur, et qui trouvait tant de disproportion entre son aventure et lui. Ma foi! j'étais un homme de mérite, à qui la fortune commençait à rendre justice. (Paysan, p. 300, my emphasis)

The reflexive verbs again reveal the hero's self-contemplation, but the most interesting elements in this moment of introspection are the mechanics of the transformation of the hidden, secret double, Jacob, from "ce petit polisson" to "un homme de mérite." One ultimately senses a note of disdain for this former self he found so inferior and unworthy, an obvious reflection of prevailing social attitudes. Such pride in his newly acquired merit finally gives Jacob the opportunity to view himself in a positive manner ("je me regardais moi-même moins familièrement et avec plus de distinction qu'à l'ordinaire"), but represents another step away from his original nature. His self-respect comes only with a renunciation of Jacob and his social stigma. This, as we have seen, is denied the hero in the final scene.

Jacob's personal predicament parallels the technical impasse which the character of the servant-hero poses for the eighteenth-century novelist. Marivaux's originality lies in his attempt to render the universal nature of such a hero, but this "experiment" does not succeed.<sup>75</sup> Once stripped of the stereotypes and conventions associated with the servant, the hero becomes acceptable, but has no other essence.<sup>76</sup> Jacob's efforts to maintain his sincerity, and thus retain his past, prove fruitless in the final analysis. His constant imitation of his superiors renders him a

signifiant devoid of signifié, for the exterior shell must suppress his interior self.<sup>77</sup>

Marianne and Jeannette illustrate variations upon the same impasse. De Mouhy neutralizes the problem by diverting attention from Jeannette as a character to the increasingly incredible obstacles of the romanesque plot. (The heroine must hide, incognito, in her own parents' home, and then is forced to accept marriage with her lover's father.) Jeannette never displays interior rupture or a conscious sense of alienation in her instinctive adoption of the discourse, manners and social perspective of the upper class. In contrast to her aunt, Barbe, who finds Paris "un enfer," and yearns for her native village, Jeannette regrets the capital and finds her home, Barbe's paradise, is but "(un) village . . . chétif et misérable" (Paysanne, Vol. III, pt. 11, p. 67). She acquires an acceptable personality by erasing the peasant and censoring her past, but this past still haunts her in the guise of her family - Barbe and her parents. Just when the elder Marquis has admitted he knows her true identity yet recognizes her true "noblesse," Jeannette's refusal to reveal her identity to her parents is the ultimate manifestation of such censorship. Her only gesture towards them is an offer of money (Paysanne, Vol. III, pt. 10, pp. 15-17) to alleviate their poverty. Her personal bonds are further devalued by such an exchange. It is only at her



moment of triumph and acceptance into the elite through marriage to the Marquis, that she deigns to admit all to them.

The constant fluctuation of Jeannette's pseudonyms and the mishaps which befall her are further signs of the character's inability to come to terms with her identity. In spite of her affirmations of a "natural" inclination towards the elite, these pseudonyms and the status they confer upon her are imposed by outsiders, especially her male suitors. Her active decisions concerning her own fate are rare. Jeannette is also incapable of resolving her dilemmas alone when her alias provokes a crisis of mistaken identity (the Comtesse des Roches episodes, Paysanne, Vol. III, pt. 9, p. 39 and pt. 11, pp. 1-15). Significantly enough, these problems also reach a climax in the last third of the novel, just as Jeannette is "recognized" by her lover's father and disguises herself from her family. In this sense at least, the distracting péripéties of the plot do parallel the heroine's "identity crisis": once severed from her origins she cannot independently deal with the personalities she must assume in the upper-class world.

The orphan, totally devoid of social definition, embodies alienation in a manner similar to the lower-class hero. Each must acquire an acceptable identity to gain entrance into "le monde," then constantly justify and defend himself within this milieu. Marianne's initial sense of estrangement in society stems not from her actual past, but

from her lack of firm origins. She intently feels "l'effroi d'être étrangère à tous les hommes, de ne voir la source de mon sang nulle part" (Marianne, p. 46).<sup>78</sup> She experiences the shame of being ostracized when Mme Dutour tells all in the de Fare household: "et je montai la larme à l'oeil dans le carrosse de Valville, renvoyée, pour ainsi dire, avec moquerie d'une maison où l'on m'avait reçu la veille avec tant d'acceueil" (Marianne, p. 278).

Marianne does feel welcomed by a true elite, a society of "honnêtes hommes," exemplified by Mme Dorsin, the ministre, and the officier who proposes marriage at the end of Part 8. During her first experience in such a milieu, Marianne has no sense of being an outsider:

Quelque novice et quelque ignorante que je fusse en cette occasion-ci, comme l'avait dit Mme de Miran, j'étais née pour avoir du goût, et je sentis bien en effet avec quelles gens je dînais. . . . [I]l n'y avait rien ici qui ressemblât à ce que j'avais pensé, rien qui dût embarrasser mon esprit ni ma future, rien qui me fît craindre de parler, rien au contraire qui n'encourageât ma petite raison à oser se familiariser avec la leur. . . . (Marianne, pp. 211-213)

As most critics have noted, Marianne instinctively knows the rules in such a situation.<sup>79</sup>

As in Jeannette's case, however, the process of recognition and acceptance originates with the love of the nobleman (Valville), and it is his passion which confirms Marianne's "titre de noblesse."<sup>80</sup> When his passion dies, Marianne is disillusioned with "le monde." Appearances can no longer be trusted, as the Valville/Varthon episode

illustrates. In retrospect, Marianne the narrator seems to have accepted this deception: "Je vous récite ici des faits qui vont comme il plaît à l'instabilité des choses humaines, et non pas des aventures d'imagination qui vont comme on veut" (Marianne, p. 376). She, too, has learned the art of simulating a social disguise, and at times her sincerity and generosity seem forced:

Je venais de m'épuiser en générosité, il n'y avait rien que je n'eusse dit pour détourner Valville de m'aimer; mais s'il plaisait à Mme de Miran de vouloir bien qu'il m'aimât, . . ., je n'avais qu'à me taire; ce n'était pas à moi à lui dire: Madame, prenez garde à ce que vous faites. Cet excès de désintéressement de ma part n'aurait été ni naturel ni raisonnable.  
(Marianne, p. 200)

. . . Valville, à trois heures après midi, me demanda. On vint me le dire, et c'était me donner la liberté d'aller lui parler; cependant je n'en usai pas. Je l'aimais, et mille fois plus que je ne l'avais encore aimé; j'avais une extrême envie de le voir, une extrême curiosité de savoir s'il n'avait rien de nouveau à m'apprendre sur notre amour, et malgré cela je me retins; je refusai de l'aller trouver, afin que si Mme de Miran le savait, elle m'en estimât davantage; ainsi mon refus n'était qu'une ruse. (Marianne, p. 201)

She is also, like Jacob, acutely aware of the eyes of others, and verifies that the desired effect has been obtained, even in the midst of tears:

Ici, à travers les larmes que je versais, j'aperçus plusieurs personnes de la compagnie qui détournait la tête pour s'essuyer les yeux. (Marianne, p. 335)

Il me releva sur-le-champ, d'un air qui témoignait que mon action le surprenait agréablement et l'attendrissait; je m'aperçus aussi qu'elle plaisait à toute la compagnie.  
(Marianne, p. 337)<sup>81</sup>

She ultimately finds herself consciously becoming the social "Marianne," so lauded for her sincerity but, paradoxically, no longer sincere:

Eh quoi! avec de la vertu, avec de la raison, avec un caractère et des sentiments qu'on estime, avec ma jeunesse et les agréments qu'on dit que j'ai, j'aurais la lâcheté de périr d'une douleur qu'on croira peut-être intéressée, et qui entretiendra encore la vanité d'un homme qui en use si indignement!

Cette dernière réflexion releva mon courage; elle avait quelque chose de noble qui m'y attacha, et qui m'inspira des résolutions qui me tranquillisèrent. Je m'arrangeai sur la manière dont j'en agirais avec Valville, dont je parlerais à Mme de Miran dans cette occurrence.

En un mot, je me proposai une conduite qui était fière, modeste, décente, digne de cette Marianne dont on faisait tant de cas; enfin une conduite qui, à mon gré, servirait bien mieux à me faire regretter de Valville, s'il lui restait du coeur, que toutes les larmes que j'aurais pu répandre, qui souvent nous dégradent aux yeux même de l'amant que nous pleurons, et qui peuvent jeter du moins un air de disgrâce sur nos charmes.

De sorte qu'enthousiasmée moi-même de mon petit plan généreux, je m'assoupis insensiblement et ne me réveillai qu'assez tard. . . . (Marianne, p. 386)

At this point the heroine recedes from active participation, through her illness and stoicism, then thoughts of renunciation. She eventually disappears as the narrator as well, giving up the final parts of her memoirs to the Nun's Tale, which also furthers the message of distrust of society.<sup>82</sup> Marianne is left at the brink of a choice between two new identities. The process of total social assimilation is left unfinished, not only because of social barriers, but because Marianne's own values are left in limbo. While society has acclaimed her "sincerite," she finds social success

apparently founded upon mere appearances. Society has conquered her, once she too dons the mask imposed from without.<sup>83</sup>

#### The Figurative Expression of Servitude

Servitude is not only a phase of human history, it is in principle a condition of the development and maintenance of the consciousness of self as a fact of experience.<sup>84</sup>

The parvenu implicitly begins as an outsider. This always gives the novel of social ascension its initial impetus, the individual's desire for recognition from a new, and superior, social milieu. The choice of a lower-class hero thus organizes the basic plot structure, and, thematically, symbolizes a growing sense of estrangement and tension between the individual and society which emerges in the eighteenth-century novel. "Bâtards, orphelins, enfants abandonnés, filles sans naissance, garçons déshérités en sont si souvent les héros parce qu'ils symbolisent avec force la situation du bourgeois devant la société constituée: il doit comme eux s'y tailler une place de haute lutte."<sup>85</sup> It has been demonstrated that the class of origin is ultimately a sign devoid of much versimilitude which functions as an exterior indication of the distance between the hero and the acceptable social environment to which he aspires. Jacob comes to our attention when he leaves his birthplace and the village; he is progressively stripped of his origins so that he may become the hero of a "serious" novel. All associations

with the realistic details of a lower-class world are minimized and then obviously repressed. Such repression was of course esthetically imperative for the novelist on the grounds of the bienséances,<sup>86</sup> but, in the novels under discussion, it becomes characteristic of each of these mémorialistes in their rise to the upper strata of society. They must suppress any hint of their true origins and all association with any inferior elements. Jacob, Jeannette and Marianne waste no words on their former lives; they demand and retain attention in their virtuality, in what they become. Thus each narrator carefully emphasizes that he has arrived at a superior status at the time he commences his memoirs.

The literal enactment of a master-servant relationship is demolished because the stereotype of the servant does not function adequately as a hero. (One might only cite in passing the technical flaws of *Gil Blas*.) He exists here in name only. The fear and repression of the idea of servitude which results in the text suggest a metaphorical function for the roles of master and servant (or Slave, in the Hegelian sense) in the novels under scrutiny. The interaction of Master and Slave serves as a model for the fight for a full sense of self (self-consciousness), or the "self-enactment" described by Brooks. The literal servant is replaced by the dependent self, he who recognizes the Master and his world, but has not attained the right to such an existence through the recognition of others. "It is the

Master that is the essential reality for Slavery."<sup>87</sup> The Slave is evolution: "There is nothing fixed in him. He is ready for change; in his very being, he is change, transcendence, transformation, 'education'; he is historical becoming at his origin, in his essence, in his very existence."<sup>88</sup> The parvenu protagonist embodies this sense of change and virtuality; he cannot, however, within the novel's limits, fully represent this.

The struggle for recognition results in the scenes of confrontation which so obviously structure Jacob's ascension. In each instance, he must overthrow prevailing opinion of his "unessential" status (for example, as servant or peasant)<sup>89</sup> in order to be appraised as an independent individual. These same instances of confrontation reappear regularly in La Vie de Marianne and La Paysanne parvenue, although they take on a more moral tone since the respective heroines' essence (and claim to an individual, autonomous existence) is inevitably linked to their infallible virtue.<sup>90</sup> In all three instances, forces in society take on a menacing dimension as they threaten to dominate the individual and reduce him to his former, dependent state. Human relationships, even love, persistently converge upon the pattern of domination and subservience.<sup>91</sup> In Jacob's case love is degraded when tinged with the idea of the purchase of the loved one. This association is also made in Tervire's consoling remarks to Marianne:

Eh! mon Dieu, mademoiselle, est-ce qu'il n'y a plus d'hommes sur la terre, et de plus aimables que lui, d'aussi riches, de plus riches même, de plus grande distinction, qui vous aimeront davantage, et parmi lesquels il y en aura quelqu'un que vous aimerez plus que vous n'avez aimé l'autre? (Marianne, p. 382)

In such an atmosphere, each of the characters experiences the fear of the dissolution of self common to the state of the Slave, and the symptoms of such dissolution are often present.

Success in the society depicted in these novels is dependent upon the mastery of a pre-established code of external signs and comportment.<sup>92</sup> Jacob and Marianne are especially conscious of the power over others which proper manipulation of this code can bring. Their rise, seen in the growing esteem of others, is linked to their increased adeptness at using the proper signs. "(L)e valet emprunte le langage et les manières de l'homme libre, pour mieux l'emporter."<sup>93</sup> In each novel, there is at least one distinct example of the hero's passage from dependence to independence in his relationship with another. Jacob quickly dominates Mlle Habert; Marianne parries M. de Climal's attacks and triumphs; Jeannette, the weakest of the trio, does at least impose her needs and desires upon Saint-Fal. They successfully shift from their initial position as the object of desire to that of the active, desiring subject. Jacob's experience with women is most revealing in this regard.<sup>94</sup>



Such brief triumphs are deceptive and do not lead to the total independence and self-enactment of the main character. The narrator's initial affirmations are the only confirmation of his ultimate social success. Marivaux's unfinished novels leave the process incomplete and Jacob and Marianne once again unsure of their place in the world of the masters. Jeannette simply fades away in her passive acceptance of her final tribulations, and the successful resolution of her drama is anticlimactic.

Again, the peculiar technical problems which the lower-class hero poses for the novelist provide reasons for such inconclusiveness. Such a character cannot ever come to terms with his total existence because such material is excluded from the novel by requirements of taste and convention. Like the Hegelian Slave, he undergoes negation of the "slavish I" in the confrontation with society.<sup>95</sup> As the writer of his memoirs, he is restricted to a vision emanating from above, the perspective of the upper class. From the outset, this denies him the sincerity to which he pretends. Furthermore, in aspiring to a superior social level, he takes on the exterior accessories of the role, but an interior void remains because of the effacement of the socially inferior consciousness. The last scenes of Le Paysan parvenu best illustrate the emptiness which Jacob experiences in this final conflict. Unlike Hegel's Slave, he does not, in the novel, surpass this state so again we find an incomplete dialectic. Jacob does

not represent "la revanche des valets"<sup>96</sup> because none of the structures of the master's world have changed. In his case, he obviously becomes the valet once more in spirit when confronted with the superior consciousness. Jacob's fate parallels the hesitant first steps of a spirit of individualism still relatively submerged beneath the constraints of the existing social hierarchy.

A remark made by Marianne the narrator in the midst of her portrait of Mme Dorsin provides a further enlightening clue to the general model of social interaction within this hierarchy. With rare exceptions (Mme Dorsin, for example), the relationships between individuals are caught up in the power struggle suggested by the master-servant relationship.

Allez dans quelque maison du monde que ce soit; voyez-y des personnes de différentes conditions, ou de différents états; supposez-y un militaire, un financier, un homme de robe, un ecclésiastique, un habile homme dans les arts qui n'a que son talent pour toute distinction, un savant qui n'a que sa science: ils ont beau être ensemble, tous réunis qu'ils sont, ils ne se mêlent point, jamais ils ne se confondent; ce sont toujours des étrangers les uns pour les autres, et comme gens de différentes nations; toujours des gens mal assortis, qui se servent mutuellement de spectacle.

Vous y verrez aussi une subordination sotte et gênante, que l'orgueil cavalier ou le maintien imposant des uns, et la crainte de s'émanciper dans les autres, y conservent entre eux.

L'un interroge hardiment, l'autre avec poids et gravité; l'autre attend pour parler qu'on lui parle.

Celui-ci décide, et ne sait ce qu'il dit; celui-là a raison, et n'ose le dire; aucun d'entre eux ne perd de vue ce qu'il est, et y ajuste ses discours et sa contenance; quelle misère! (Marianne, pp. 225-6)

Marianne must live in the imperfect world rather than in the ideal egalitarian salon of Mme Dorsin.<sup>97</sup> This is the

same world denounced by Tervire in the Nun's story, where surface appearances and the conventions of rank and naissance take precedence over the truths of human nature. The struggle for power is an inevitable element in social interaction; it has not, as yet, truly appeared in terms of a class conflict in spite of the central role of the parvenu hero or heroine. The negation of the verifiable signs of servitude does not erase its stigma; the fears of domination emerge nevertheless on the social level in the depiction of the respective protagonists' attempts to mingle with "le monde."

### NOTES - CHAPTER III

<sup>1</sup>6ème feuille, Oeuvres complètes de M. de Marivaux, Paris, chez la Veuve Duchesne, 1781, vo. IX, p. 510. Quoted by Lionel Gossman, "Literature and Society in the Early Enlightenment: The Case of Marivaux," Modern Language Notes, 82 (1967), 312.

<sup>2</sup>Marie-Hélène Huet, Le Héros et son double: Essai sur le roman d'ascension sociale au XVIIIe siècle (Paris: Corti, 1975), p. 32.

<sup>3</sup>Le Paysan parvenu, ed. Robert Mauzi (Paris: 10/18, Union Générale d'Editions, 1965). This is the only edition available which follows F. Deloffre's Garnier edition, considered the most accurate because it reproduces Marivaux's original text of 1734-35. All subsequent references to this edition will be made in parentheses in the text, preceded by the notation Paysan.

<sup>4</sup>Ronald C. Rosbottom, Marivaux's Novels: Theme and Function in Early Eighteenth-Century Narrative (Rutherford-Madison-Teaneck: Farleigh Dickinson University Press, 1974), pp. 179-80.

<sup>5</sup>A quick examination of S.P. Jones, A List of French Prose Fiction from 1700-50 (New York: Wilson, 1939) attests to this fact, if only through the number of novels which include the word parvenu in the title.

<sup>6</sup>La Vie de Marianne was published from 1731 to 1742, La Paysanne parvenue in 1736-37. All subsequent page references to these novels will be made in parentheses in the text, from the following editions: La Vie de Marianne ou les aventures de Madame la comtesse de xxx, ed. F. Deloffre (Paris: Garnier, 1963), notes as Marianne, and La Paysanne parvenue ou les mémoires de la marquise de L.V., 2nd ed., 3 vols. (Paris: Prault fils, 1736 and La Haye: chez Neaulme, 1737), noted as Paysanne.

<sup>7</sup>Jacob seems almost impatient to arrive at this point: "Il me tarde d'en venir à de plus grands événements: ainsi passons vite à notre nouvelle maison" (Paysan, p. 123). On the same page, his meaning becomes quite clear: "Nous voilà à l'autre maison; et c'est d'ici qu'on va voir mes aventures devenir plus nobles et plus importantes. . . ." Jeannette excuses herself from the beginning of her narrative for such lowly beginnings, and announces better things. Her ultimate success "imprègne le discours," as M. -H. Huet astutely notes (p. 57).

<sup>8</sup>Le Dilemme du roman au dix-huitième siècle: étude sur les rapports du roman et de la critique, 1715-1761 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1963), chapter VII, pp. 182-203 and p. 190.

<sup>9</sup>Both R. Rosbottom, in "Marivaux and the significance of 'naissance,'" in Jean-Jacques Rousseau et son temps: Politique et Littérature au XVIIIe siècle, ed. Michel Launay (Paris: A. -G. Nizet, 1969), pp. 73-92, and G. May exaggerate the originality of Marivaux's use of the lower-class hero without examining how he muffles true class contact.

<sup>10</sup>Peter Brooks, The Novel of Worldliness: Crébillon, Marivaux, Laclos, Stendhal (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969), chapter II and especially pp. 89-90.

<sup>11</sup>Robert Mauzi, for example, in the introduction to his edition of Le Paysan parvenu ("Marivaux romancier," pp. 7-35), affirms that "on ne peut pas dire qu'entre Jacob et le monde, il y ait la moindre lutte, ni même un affrontement sérieux" (p. 13).

<sup>12</sup>Brooks, pp. 4 and 29.

<sup>13</sup>"Hegel et Marivaux," Europe 44 (nov.-dec. 1966), pp. 327 and 330.

<sup>14</sup>The further comment, "Quoique cela ne soit pas fort nécessaire," reinforces one's impression that the narrator insists upon his dominant role.

<sup>15</sup>This detail is important only in that he is wearing this, his only suit, when he meets Mlle Habert and subsequently passes himself off as M. de la Vallée. The clothes betray no associations with the peasant or the servant.

<sup>16</sup>Vivienne Mylne, "Social Realism in the Dialogue of Eighteenth-Century French Fiction," Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture 6 (1977), 265-84, discusses the relative rarity of direct dialogue by lower-class characters in the novel.

<sup>17</sup>The prime example of such a blatantly blind attitude is found in one of Jacob's later musings upon his fortunate state as "maître de maison": "j'y rêvai à ma cuisinière, qu'il ne tenait qu'à moi de faire venir, et que je crois que j'appelai pour la voir. . . ." (p. 296). See pp. 197-99 for further discussion of this passage.

<sup>18</sup>Henri Coulet, in Marivaux romancier: Essai sur l'esprit et le coeur dans les romans de Marivaux (Paris: Armand Colin, 1975), pp. 425-430, p. 469 and p. 475, accurately notes that concrete description of the aristocratic setting is virtually non-existent in Marivaux's novels, as compared to the greater detail accorded to the bourgeois milieu (the Habert sisters' apartment, for example). The enumeration of servants, however, is usually present.

<sup>19</sup>These passages are quoted in "A Propos de la Vie de Marianne (Lettre à M. Georges Poulet)," Romanic Review 44 (1953), 110-12.

<sup>20</sup>Coulet, Marivaux, pp. 472-4.

<sup>21</sup>Michèle Hirsch, "Le Roman expérimental de Marivaux," Revue des sciences humaines 39 (1974), 112.

<sup>22</sup>The concierge at the château, charged with the care of the young Tervire, takes for her own children all that is destined for Tervire. Later, she sees her grandmother dying, "mal servie par les domestiques, qui la regardaient comme une femme morte" (Marianne, p. 443). Only Villot, the former faithful to her grandfather's memory, takes her in after her grandmother's death.

<sup>23</sup>"La Bruyère," in Essais critiques (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1964), p. 228.

<sup>24</sup>See Huet, p. 63.

<sup>25</sup>The same holds true for Saint-Agnès and Melicourt, whose liaison also represents an apparent threat to the social order.

<sup>26</sup>Some readers seem to believe Jacob is sincere. Coulet, Marivaux, for example, discusses the narrator's "lucidité ironique" (pp. 198-9) and his way of admitting even those moments where he has fooled himself (see also p. 493). Erita B. Hill, in "Sincerity and Self-awareness in the Paysan parvenu," Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century 88 (1972) 735-48, also draws conclusions about the narrator's lack of hypocrisy. Somehow, it seems that Jacob "doth protest too much" about his own sincerity to be completely believable. Marianne's sincerity is equally questionable at several points. See Patrick Brady, "Other-Portrayal and Self-Betrayal in Manon Lescaut and La Vie de Marianne," Romantic Review 64 (1973), 99-110.

<sup>27</sup>See Lester G. Crocker, "Portrait de l'homme dans le Paysan parvenu," Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century 87 (1972), 253-276.

<sup>28</sup>Hirsch, pp. 119-20.

<sup>29</sup>Huet, p. 34.

<sup>30</sup>Rosbottom, Marivaux's Novels, pp. 179-80.

<sup>31</sup>See Huet, chapter II, "Le Paysan et le parvenu," pp. 31-52, for a similar discussion of Jacob's "instruments de conquête" in his assault upon society. Huet, however, does not include the status of the women Jacob wins in her analysis of Jacob's social ascension.

<sup>32</sup>Rosbottom, Marivaux's Novels, pp. 204-5.

<sup>33</sup>For example, in his seduction of Mlle Habert, quoted above, p. 160.

<sup>34</sup>See Philip R. Stewart, Imitation and Illusion in the French Memoir-Novel, 1700-50 (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1969), pp. 293-6, for further comments upon the examples of Jacob's peasant speech; and V. Mylne, "Social Realism," for conclusions about the limited realism of such dialogue, here and in other novels of the period.

<sup>35</sup>The only exception is the mistress which Jacob serves upon his arrival in Paris. Otherwise, Jacob progresses from the lower class up to the nobility: Geneviève - the servant; Mlle Habert - the bourgeoise; Mme de Ferval - the haute

bourgeoisie; Mme de Fécour - the financial milieu; Mme d'Orville - poor, but established nobility.

<sup>36</sup>This passage is also another fitting example of the narrator's clever manner of convincing the reader (and himself, no doubt). Much of Marivaux's art resides in such gracious shifts of meaning which distract attention from the matter at hand. The verb "aimer" here glides from one object to another. The narrator first apprehends the reader's doubts and faithfully admits: "de vous dire que je l'aimais, je ne crois pas non plus," then directs our attention to Mme de Ferval's rank and distinction, her principal attractions. These are what he loves, and thus justify his "mouvements approchant ceux de l'amour." After such a lengthy digression, however, he concludes succinctly: "je l'aimais donc," with no sense of contradiction. He himself appears to have been convinced in the process of writing just as the reader is meant to be.

<sup>37</sup>The narrator's descriptions of his superlative conduct are all merely suggested (in a manner typical of Marivaux) through phrases that soften his vanity: "je ne saurai vous dire," "je dirais presque," "je ne sais quel air"; these are interspersed with the adverbial "si" common to such a tone: "si caressant," "si aimable," "si léger," "si galant," "si charmant."

<sup>38</sup>"Et il fallait bien que ce fût mon entretien avec ces deux dames qui me valait cela, et que j'en eusse rapporté je ne sais quel air plus distingué que je l'avais d'ordinaire" (Paysan, p. 233).

<sup>39</sup>She is no longer the stated recipient of Jacob's "love." After their wedding, the narrator elaborates upon the uniqueness of Mlle Habert's love for him ("Pour aimer comme elle, il faut avoir été trente ans dévote. . . . - Paysan, p. 205), but not once in this passage does he mention a single feeling or reaction towards her.

<sup>40</sup>The narrator's self-conscious remarks about what he will and will not write about, as in the paragraph cited here, are of further interest because of their explicit mention of a conscious choice as to which elements of reality are worthy of narration. In general, the eighteenth-century novelist was more susceptible to such commentary about the material he finds before him to be narrated. This follows the conventions found frequently in seventeenth-century "burlesque" or comic novels such as Le Roman comique and in



Marivaux's own early novels, as a parody of the myriads of details crammed into descriptions in the popular "romans galants et précieux." Such passages also offer a commentary upon the limits of the "realism" the narrator actually has at his disposal. In this case, it is not only Mlle Habert who is no longer of interest as a character or social force, but, as the narrator states, "ma façon de vivre avec Mme de la Vallée," which is dismissed as well. The narrator shows a distinct preference for dialogue, portraiture and character analysis over the relation of objects, places or actions in any more than broad descriptive strokes; thus such an affirmation suggests that this portion of Jacob's reality was judged unworthy of attention. In an earlier instance, the narrator shows the same elliptic tendency as he comments for example on his stay in prison: "Notre secrétaire revint, et nous dit que je sortais le lendemain. Passons à ce lendemain, tout ce détail de prison est triste" (Paysan, p. 199). In a final example, while describing his return home from prison, the narrator again seems impatient with the detail of Mme d'Alain's incessant questions and his marriage arrangements. He effectively side-steps what he considers the uninteresting trivia of his day, but feels obliged to bring this to the reader's attention, as if he were an accomplice in the choice: "tous ces menus récits m'ennuient moi-même; sautons-les, et supposons que le soir est venu . . ." (Paysan, p. 205). Coulet (Marivaux romancier, p. 425) also discusses these consciously calculated omissions.

<sup>41</sup>It is interesting that the author of the continuation of the novel was so unimpressed with the character that she never even reappears; he has her quietly fall ill and die while Jacob is in the provinces courting the nobility.

<sup>42</sup>This is one of the few glaring contradictions of the text. Jacob had earlier indicated that he was to know this woman better later in his life: "ce ne fut pas alors que je connus Mme de Fécour comme je la peins ici, car je n'eus pas dans ce temps une assez grande liaison avec elle, mais je la retrouvai quelques années après, et la vis assez pour la connaître" (Paysan, p. 226).

<sup>43</sup>Hirsch, p. 111, also points out that Jacob is equally generous when he comes to d'Orsan's aid, with no forethought of profit of any sort.

<sup>44</sup>See for example, Coulet, Marivaux, pp. 190-2.

<sup>45</sup>p. 54.

<sup>46</sup>Further examples abound. Marianne immediately senses Mme de Miran's goodness when she offers aid, and it reflects back upon the heroine: "Pour moi, je fus au fait; les gens qui ont eux-mêmes un peu de noblesse de coeur se connaissent en égards de cette espèce . . ." (Marianne, pp. 154-5). Jeannette is more direct: "J'avais le coeur élevé, et je ne pouvais m'accoutumer à être Paysanne" (Paysanne, Vol. I, pt. 1, p. 42)

<sup>47</sup>Huet, p. 55.

<sup>48</sup>See Mylne, "Social Realism." This quickly fades out of the narrative.

<sup>49</sup>Huet, p. 57.

<sup>50</sup>"Il était pourtant vrai que M. de Climal était amoureux de moi; mais je savais bien aussi que je ne voulais rien faire de son amour; et si, malgré cet amour que je connaissais, j'avais reçu de ses présents, c'était par un petit raisonnement que mes besoins et ma vanité m'avaient dicté, et qui n'avait rien pris sur la pureté de mes intentions" (Marianne, p. 45). See below, pp. 190-91.

<sup>51</sup>For example, one suddenly finds a detailed inventory of the contents of her apartment at Versailles, all donated by Saint-Fal. Such abundance leads her to forget her troubles for a time (Paysanne, Vol. II, pt. 6, p. 106). This passage is significant because such detail devoted to objects is very rare in the novel.

<sup>52</sup>Huet, p. 57.

<sup>53</sup>See below, pp. 211-12.

<sup>54</sup>As was previously noted (above, p. 161), even among his acquaintances, "gens de considération," "il y en a quelques-uns qu'il n'est pas nécessaire de nommer, et qui ne doivent leur fortune qu'à un mariage qu'ils ont fait avec des Genevièves" (Paysan, p. 65).

<sup>55</sup>"Voilà, par exemple, Mlle Habert l'aînée, monsieur le Président; si vous lui disiez comme à moi, toi par-ci, toi par-là, qui es-tu? qui n'es-tu pas? elle ne manquerait pas de trouver cela bien étrange; elle dirait: Monsieur, vous me traitez mal; et vous penseriez en vous-même: Elle

a raison; c'est mademoiselle qu'il faut dire; aussi faites-vous; mademoiselle ici, mademoiselle là, toujours honnêtement mademoiselle et à moi toujours tu et toi. Ce n'est pas que je m'en plaigne, monsieur le Président, il n'y a rien à dire, c'est la coutume de vous autres grands messieurs; toi, c'est ma part et celle-là du pauvre monde; voilà comme on le mène: pourquoi pauvre monde est-il? ce n'est pas votre faute, et ce que j'en dis n'est que pour faire une comparaison. C'est que mademoiselle, à qui ce serait mal fait de dire: Que veux-tu? n'est presque pourtant pas plus mademoiselle que je suis monsieur, c'est ma foi la même chose" (Paysan, p. 171).

<sup>56</sup>See above, pp. 161-62.

<sup>57</sup>p. 109.

<sup>58</sup>An entire paragraph is devoted to the man's clothing and airs.

<sup>59</sup>As he and the others (who feel compelled to follow) get up indignantly to leave, "on avait apporté les premiers plats de notre souper, qu'ils trouvaient de fort bonne mine; et je le voyais bien à leur façon de les regarder" (Paysan, pp. 153-4).

<sup>60</sup>He neutrally acquiesces to the general opinion, choosing to appear attentive in order to mask his inferiority. Even the narrator remains silent in this episode during the digressions devoted to the plaideur's tale and the officer's critique of the author's book. Jacob disappears from the text for about ten pages, and only intervenes once when asked why he is going to Versailles.

<sup>61</sup>M. de Fécour's feigned unawareness is reinforced in contrast by "le regard" of the other men: "C'étaient de ces figures, non pas magnifiques, mais opulentes, devant qui la mienne était si ravalée, malgré ma petite doublure de soie! Tous gens d'ailleurs d'un certain âge, pendant que je n'avais que dix-huit ans, ce qui n'était pas un article si indifférent qu'on le croirait; car si vous aviez vu de quel air ils m'observaient, vous auriez jugé que ma jeunesse était encore un motif de confusion pour moi.

A qui en veut ce polisson-là avec sa lettre? semblaient-ils me dire par leurs regards libres, hardis, et pleins d'une curiosité sans façon.

De sorte que j'étais là comme un spectacle de mince valeur, qui leur fournissait un moment de distraction, et qu'ils s'amusaient à mépriser en passant" (Paysan, pp. 249-50).

This sense of inferiority dominates as Jacob is appraised by the wealthy: "Figurez-vous la contenance que je devais tenir," "je n'étais rien," "si peu de chose," etc.

<sup>62</sup>M. Bono, a witness to the scene, offers to aid Jacob as well as Mme d'Orville. Jacob takes on dignity in the eyes of the women as well, for his good deed alters his image: "Plus je regarde monsieur, disait le mère, et plus je lui trouve une physionomie digne de ce qu'il a fait chez M. de Fécour" (Paysan, p. 256).

<sup>63</sup>Rosbottom, Marivaux's Novels, p. 210.

<sup>64</sup>Hirsch, p. 112.

<sup>65</sup>See Huet, p. 55 and above, p. 173-74.

<sup>66</sup>In contrast, the longer sub-plot concerning Saint-Agnès only treats this theme on the surface, for Saint-Agnès is really a noblewoman and her love for Melicourt is sanctioned by society at the end when her true rank is recognized.

<sup>67</sup>Saint-Fal assures her that her fine sentiments make one forget her origins (Paysanne, Vol. II, pt. 5, pp. 9-17 and pt. 6, pp. 94-5) and declares "la naissance est l'effet d'un pur hasard." Similarly, the Marquis affirms that naissance is the "caprice du hasard" and her virtue elevates her to royal rank (Paysanne, Vol. III, pt. 9, p. 102 and pt. 11, p. 32). Likewise, none of the women in Jacob's life have second thoughts about Jacob's origins.

<sup>68</sup>See for example pp. 60-63 and pp. 133-135, where, in spite of her feelings of solitude and despair, she carefully notes the reactions of the people on the street.

<sup>69</sup>A few of these parallels include: the immediate attention and respect both characters command upon entering the house; the witnesses are carefully enumerated and represent family and class authority; the "judge" designated to decide their fate is portrayed in depth as a man of justice, humanity and goodness of heart.

<sup>70</sup>"...[j]e puis vous assurer que, par son bon esprit, par les qualités de l'âme, et par la noblesse des procédés, elle est demoiselle autant qu'aucune fille, de quelque rang qu'elle soit, puisse l'être. Oh! vous m'avouerez que cela impose, du moins c'est ainsi que j'en juge; et que ce je vous dis là, elle ne le doit ni à l'usage du monde, ni à l'éducation qu'elle a eue, et qui a été fort simple: il faut que cela soit dans le sang; et voilà à mon gré l'essentiel" (Marianne, p. 329). Both Valville and Tervire use a similar rationale in defending Marianne against her accusers.

<sup>71</sup>See Serge Perottino, "La Notion d'aliénation dans les romans du XVIIIe siècle," in Roman et Lumières au XVIIIe siècle, 1968 Colloque du Centre d'Etudes et de Recherches Marxistes (Paris: Editions sociales, 1970), especially pp. 352 and 357 for a discussion of Marivaux's novels and alienation.

<sup>72</sup>See Huet, pp. 40-45.

<sup>73</sup>Hirsch, p. 112.

<sup>74</sup>This loss of the pure first-person point of view is also evident in the growing predominance of dialogue in this and other memoir-novels. Both Huet, pp. 45-47 and Coulet, Marivaux, Appendix II, discuss this phenomenon in Le Paysan parvenu.

<sup>75</sup>Hirsch, p. 104, adopts the notion of Le Paysan parvenu as a "roman expérimental" which was introduced by J. Fabre, "Marivaux," Histoire générale des Littératures, Pléiade, III, p. 692.

<sup>76</sup>Cf. Hirsch, p. 124.

<sup>77</sup>See Jean Parrish, "Illusion et réalité dans les romans de Marivaux," Modern Language Notes 80 (1965), 304.

<sup>78</sup>Her sense of solitude also appears as she ventures into the city; "Plus je voyais de monde et de mouvement dans cette prodigieuse ville de Paris, plus j'y trouvais de silence et de solitude pour moi: une forêt m'aurait paru moins déserte, je m'y serais sentie moins seule, moins égarée. De cette forêt, j'aurais pu m'en tirer; mais comment sortir du désert où je me trouvais? Tout l'univers en était un pour moi, puisque je n'y tenais par aucun lien à personne" (Marianne, p. 134).

<sup>79</sup>English Showalter, Jr., The Evolution of the French Novel, 1641-1782 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972), p. 290. See also Brooks, chapter III.

<sup>80</sup>Parrish, p. 304.

<sup>81</sup>See Rosbottom, Marivaux's Novels, p. 142.

<sup>82</sup>Cf. Coulet, Marivaux, p. 239 and Showalter, p. 297.

<sup>83</sup>Cf. Showalter, p. 290 and Rosbottom, Marivaux's Novels, pp. 167-8.

<sup>84</sup>J.B. Baillie, trans., The Phenomenology of Mind, by G.W.F. Hegel, 2nd ed. (New York: Macmillan, 1931), p. 228.

<sup>85</sup>Coulet, Marivaux, p. 50. See also Showalter, chapter V, "The Individual Against Society in the Eighteenth-Century French Novel," pp. 262-347. Obviously, this theme appears even more predominantly in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

<sup>86</sup>Judging from the critics' shocked attitude before such a conventionally constructed episode as the "scène du cocher," only a minimal amount of local color appeared acceptable for public standards. F. Deloffre, in the introduction to his edition to *La Vie de Marianne*, cites one of the scene's most vocal critics: "La querelle de la lingère avec le cocher de fiacre a paru peu digne d'un esprit aussi élevé, et aussi délicat qu'est celui de M. de Marivaux. Son pinceau ne s'est pas exercé ici sur la belle nature: les vils et indignes objets ne se présentent que trop souvent devant nos yeux malgré nous; ils ne nous apprennent autre chose, sinon que le peuple est fort sot: qui en doute? L'auteur dans son Avertissement a cru que cet endroit avait quelque besoin d'être justifié d'avance: il y a des gens, dit-il, qui croient au-dessous d'eux de jeter un regard sur ce que l'opinion a traité d'ignoble; mais ceux qui sont un peu plus philosophes, qui sont un peu moins dupes des distinctions que l'orgueil a mises dans les choses de ce monde, ces gens-là ne seront pas fâchés de voir ce que c'est que l'Homme dans un cocher, et ce que c'est que la Femme dans une petite marchande.

Ce n'est ni l'opinion, ni l'orgueil qui font qu'il y a des choses ignobles; c'est la nature et la raison. Il y a une vraie noblesse, et une vraie bassesse, indépendante de

l'opinion et de l'orgueil. La vile populace a les sentiments bas, parce qu'elle a une basse éducation. C'est par là qu'elle est ignoble. Qui pourrait souffrir sur le théâtre les mauvais quolibets d'un homme ou d'une femme de la lie du peuple, et leurs injures grossières? Cela est indigne d'un homme bien élevé, et dégoûtant dans un ouvrage. D'ailleurs, comment l'auteur nous fait-il voir 'ce que c'est que l'homme dans un cocher,' et 'ce que c'est que la femme dans une marchande'? On voit deux personnes qui se querellent maussadement, et c'est tout" (Desfontaines, Le Pour et le Contre, no. XXX, vol. II, pp. 344-348). The quotation is found on pp. LXVII-LXIX of the Introduction.

<sup>87</sup>G.W.F. Hegel, "Autonomy and Dependence of Self-Consciousness: Mastery and Slavery," Section A, Chapter IV of the Phenomenology of Spirit, in Alexandre Kojève, Introduction to the Reading of Hegel: Lectures on the "Phenomenology of Spirit", trans. James H. Nichols, Jr., ed. Allan Bloom (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1980), p. 21.

<sup>88</sup>Kojève, Introduction to the Reading of Hegel, p. 22.

<sup>89</sup>Hegel, as cited by Kojève, pp. 18-19.

<sup>90</sup>D'Hondt, p. 327. Rosbottom, in Marivaux's Novels, labels Marianne's clashes as "moral fencing matches" (p. 102). His analysis of both novels (chapters 3-5), like many others, is punctuated by allusions to attacks, victories, domination and superiority, even in love. Such an outlook obviously reinforces our discussion.

<sup>91</sup>See Crocker's conclusions. He also uses a term associated with the attack, "la joute pour dominer," p. 268.

<sup>92</sup>See above, p. 141.

<sup>93</sup>D'Hondt, p. 336.

<sup>94</sup>Jean Parrish points out this aspect of the male-female relationship in Marivaux: "Dans une société qui assujétit la femme à l'homme, Marivaux le souligne dans le Spectateur français, la seule relation possible entre les sexes est celle de maître et d'objet possédé" (p. 303). He concludes that both "Marianne et Jacob se vendent donc tous deux . . ." (p. 305). Robert Mauzi also notes the risks Jacob takes as the object of desire, "immédiatement accueilli et . . . consommé" (p. 12).

<sup>95</sup>Hegel, cited by Kojève, p. 21.

<sup>96</sup>As D'Hondt concludes, p. 330.

<sup>97</sup>The passage continues with an evocation of such an ideal: "Il n'était point question de rangs ni d'états chez elle; personne ne s'y souvenait du plus ou du moins d'importance qu'il avait; c'était des hommes qui parlaient à des hommes, entre qui seulement les meilleures raisons, l'emportaient sur les plus faibles; rien que cela.

Ou si vous voulez que je vous dise un grand mot, c'était comme des intelligences d'une égale dignité, sinon d'une force égale, qui avaient tout uniment commerce ensemble; des intelligences entre lesquelles il ne s'agissait plus des titres que le hasard leur avait donné ici-bas, et qui ne croyaient pas que leurs fonctions fortuites dussent plus humilier les unes qu'enorgueillir les autres. Voilà comme on l'entendait chez Mme Dorsin; voilà ce qu'on devenait avec elle, par l'impression qu'on recevait de cette façon de penser raisonnable et philosophe que je vous ai dit qu'elle avait, et qui faisait que tout le monde était philosophe aussi" (Marianne, pp. 226-7).



## CHAPTER IV

### JACQUES LE FATALISTE: NEW DIMENSIONS

"Il faut se méfier des valets; les maîtres n'ont point de pires ennemis. . . ."<sup>1</sup>

The hôtesse at the inn in Jacques le fataliste et son maître makes this enigmatic remark just before she commences the tale of Mme de la Pommeraye. It is enigmatic in that it seems unrelated to her preceding statements, and has no apparent links to the story she is about to tell. Jacques feels obliged to defend his profession, and briefly quarrels with both the master and the hôtesse. Characteristically in this novel, the argument is left unresolved and the statement remains, challenging the reader to infuse it with some meaning. Although one finds few immediate answers on the literal level, the hôtesse's warning subtly foreshadows the master's gradual realization of his loss of power over Jacques, and, in light of the text as a whole, provides an additional interrogation into the variations on the themes of domination and servitude which highlight Jacques le fataliste. Thus it seems an appropriate point of departure into this analysis of the implications of Jacques's counter-enigma:

"Jacques mène son maître. Nous serons les premiers dont on l'aura dit; mais on le répétera de mille autres qui valent mieux que vous et moi" (p. 665).

It is obvious from the outset that master and servant take on new and unexpected roles in Diderot's novel. Jacques and his master, the heroes of an unspecified journey, are stripped of most of the trappings of an exterior reality which would define one as master, the other as his servant. While Jacques does occasionally assume the traditional tasks of servitude, he is largely a valet in name only, and not in action. One of the focal points of this polyphonic novel is the conversation between the master and Jacques; the actual account of their activities is relegated to a minor position. "That they [Jacques and the master] have a physical existence is undeniable, but what details Diderot includes of this sort in reference to the two protagonists are minimized or off-hand."<sup>2</sup> Their relationship is predominantly played out in the exchange of words, and much of Jacques's service consists of speech, the telling of a tale, according to his master's fantasy: "Qu'importe, pourvu que tu parles et que j'écoute? ne sont-ce pas là les deux points importants?" (p. 530). G.J. Brogyanyi rightly concludes that "[i]t is primarily in his capacity as story-teller that Jacques plays the servant."<sup>3</sup> Other critics insist even further upon the very literary nature of the duo, minimizing or negating the social

dimensions of their relationship. M. -H. Huet thus differentiates Jacques and his master from the traditional master-servant couple:

Alors que le rapport maître-serviteur reste, dans les romans plus traditionnels, un rapport commercial, une obligation momentanée, il est ici un lien nécessaire dont Diderot souligne maintes fois l'importance: 'Jacques et son maître ne sont bons qu'ensemble et ne valent rien séparés.'<sup>4</sup>

According to her analysis, their mutual dependence is more a result of "literary design" than "sociological realism."<sup>5</sup>

Ironically enough, and perhaps typically in the case of Diderot, the fact that most of the traditional manifestations of servitude are absent does not mean that the matter is ignored. On the contrary, by liberating the characters from the conventional mold, Diderot succeeds in effectively exploring the matter of servitude as a part of human experience. As its title suggests, the relationship between Jacques and his master retains a central role in this novel, and forms the core of a philosophical and political statement about the nature of individual liberty.

Like most of the other events in Jacques, the story of the master and the valet remains half-told, lacking in the expected progression from beginning to satisfying conclusion in which each is relegated to a final position from which judgments might be made. Unlike Gil Blas or Jacob, Jacques does not actively seek social ascension; his desire for liberty does not manifest itself in quantitative, materialistic terms of wealth and social status. In fact, these

factors do not provide much motivation for any of the characters involved. Nobility, roturiers and the peasantry mingle as they appear in the various narratives which make up the novel, and while there exists some social tension, no particular emphasis is placed upon class struggle within the framework of the plot. One gleans a brisk portrait of each level of the social hierarchy, for there are undeniably social signs at work here, but neither Jacques nor his master is ever explicitly a spokesman for his respective class. Instead, we must eventually turn from direct social clues, imbued with the "realism" discerned by critics, to the linguistic level. The dialogue between Jacques and his master enacts a more subtle struggle for power: both try to control the course of their "life stories" as they simultaneously discuss the degree of control man can claim in this respect.

Jacques le fataliste diverges in the extreme from the novels previously discussed. We have moved from the generally "unconscious" narrator in Gil Blas and the very self-conscious narrators of Le Paysan parvenu and La Vie de Marianne to a narrator here so aware of his task that he literally steps in and out of his novel at his pleasure. The particular form chosen in the previous instances has proven to be related to the servant-hero's role in the story told, and Diderot's novel is no exception. Jacques's growing awareness of his own power, even as a servant, accompanies

the narrator's exploration of his omniscience. There is a certain subversion on the part of both which will be explored at greater length in our conclusion.

As the narrator in Jacques so often reminds his errant reader, he who speaks controls the story and has unlimited power over its telling. So Jacques, at first pressed on by his master to tell his story, becomes progressively obsessed with control, or in this case continuing his tale, as he faces multiple interruptions. "The narrative situation always consists of a greater or lesser psychological struggle for the upper hand."<sup>6</sup> Jacques le fataliste is a novel about storytelling; the narrator's constant interventions remind us of this at almost every page. The master-servant relationship forms an essential link between the ever-present dilemma of the storyteller and the problem of man's freedom posed by the discussion of fatalism which also reappears with regularity. The choice of master and servant as spokesmen in such a text is surely not arbitrary, and its implications with respect to both themes are numerous. Furthermore, this central pair forms a model for the many interdependent couples which appear in the course of the narrative. Their function as a unifying force in the text seems indisputable. The following brief overview of major critical appraisal of the novel shows the problematic nature of their relationship and of the interpretation of their role in the text.

From all points of view, Jacques and his master form an essential component in the novel. Their presence is never forgotten for long, in spite of the narrator's repeated interruptions and the longer tales of Mme de la Pommeraye and the Père Hudson. J. Robert Loy's outline of the action of the novel bears witness to this fact. He finds it essential that the reader first understand Jacques and his master "as any two human specimens wandering through existence."<sup>7</sup> Many critics approach the couple as a variation upon the Cervantic model, and see in Jacques and the master a deliberate reworking of the itinerant couple in Don Quixote.<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, the picaresque tradition is obviously present in the choice of the unspecified voyage of master and servant as a central framework in the novel. Their travels, and the lengthy stop at the inn, provide contact with a similar variety of social classes and give rise to the typically picaresque activity of long digressions and the telling of stories.<sup>9</sup> Jacques, the servant, attains status as a character in his own right within this model, and the social flexibility which reigns in this particular form creates a fertile setting for the scramble for power which eventually occurs.

Usually, Jacques and his master are viewed in opposition to one another, and many critics assign to each a "meaning." Jean Fabre distinguishes Jacques as "la raison pratique" and his master as "la raison cartésienne."<sup>10</sup>

Daniel Mornet opts for two opposing views of determinism: "Le Maître défend la liberté et la responsabilité; Jacques tient pour le fatalisme."<sup>11</sup> R. Laufer similarly views the master as the voice of liberty which attempts to refute Jacques's determinism, but he does also affirm the contradictory nature of both characters.<sup>12</sup> On the other hand, E. Simon judges the master as a conventional fictional hero, and Jacques as the affirmation of freedom from such convention.<sup>13</sup> The master is Jacques's puppet, the "automate," and is essentially governed by his servant. Alice Green characterizes them as "two . . . disembodied minds,"<sup>14</sup> and attributes their relative lack of physical reality in the text to their function as representatives of ideas. There is a distinct tendency to reduce them to the flat, two-dimensional figures of the philosophical tale à la Voltaire, and see Jacques as merely a spokesman for "fatalism" just as Candide is for "optimism." Without assigning to each a specific role, Lester G. Crocker, in his interpretation of the novel as an "expérience morale," again underlines the two characters' representative function in a clash of ideas.<sup>15</sup> Such interpretations are all viable, particularly since the novel's focus is not oriented towards character development.

Clearly, it is this initial impression that the main characters are but "de simples fantoches, sans épaisseur humaine véritable"<sup>16</sup> which leaves them open to such a variety

of significations. Jacques, especially, is in continual metamorphosis:

Tantôt il semble n'être qu'une marionnette sans consistance, un pantin sans vie, ou un pur symbole, . . .; tantôt il prend une singulière épaisseur humaine et devient un personnage de chair et d'os, très vivant, très présent. . . .<sup>17</sup>

He thus assumes a dizzying multiplicity of roles along the way:

A nous en tenir à la seule personne de Jacques, n'est-il pas simultanément un valet, un paysan déchu, un Jacques, le disciple de Spinoza, un philosophe comparé à Socrate, le philosophe en face des pouvoirs, le parlement en face du Roi, l'apôtre de la dive gourde et le disciple de Rabelais, etc.<sup>18</sup>

Consequently, with regards to the actual content of the novel, it seems prudent to recall J. Robert Loy's conclusion that

both Jacques and his Master are real for the very reason that they seem outwardly paradoxical, and this is not surprising in an author whose reasoning is known for its paradoxical turn, nor out of keeping with the very novel whose primary implication is that there exists no Absolute.<sup>19</sup>

More recently, critics tend to downplay the subject matter of Jacques in an attempt to better elucidate the novel's unique construction, and see Jacques and his master as a "dyade itinérant,"<sup>20</sup> a mobile structure which continually generates verbal exchange. It is their dialogue, more than their actual physical journey, which brings them into contact with diverse situations in which each always takes a stand. The emphasis placed upon the polemic relationship between the two tends to efface the novel's social dimension.<sup>21</sup> The attraction Jacques le fataliste continues to



hold for critics using the linguistic approach is quite justified, however, for the strange story of Jacques and the master is also a "novel about the novel."<sup>22</sup> Diderot strips away the illusions of realism which were the matter for much experimentation in the eighteenth century.<sup>23</sup> His text obviously lends itself to interrogations into the problems of narration and the formal construction of the novel.

For our purposes here a more concrete point of departure is in order, that is, a return to the original, literal roles of the master and Jacques, his valet. It has often been pointed out that Jacques le fataliste contains "une pensée qui aboutit à la dialectique du Maître et de l'Esclave,"<sup>24</sup> yet the means by which this is accomplished within the text have not been explored. A pure Hegelian dialectical approach proves insufficient in dealing with the novel as a whole, for it defies such a limited framework in its heterogeneous composition. As is the case with a number of Diderot's works, one must inevitably accept J. Chouillet's affirmation that "(1)'espoir d'une synthèse brillante qui engloberait tous les aspects du roman doit être relégué au magasin des mirages de la littérature."<sup>25</sup> Nevertheless, the Master-Slave paradigm I have dealt with in the previous chapters is again fruitful in detecting certain facets of the relationship between Jacques and le maître. This is my chief intention here, although commentary shall be extended to other aspects of the work when appropriate.

One essential detail that distinguishes this work from the novels previously examined is that Jacques remains a servant from beginning to end. He admits to his servitude more directly than any of the other servant-heroes and it becomes a matter openly discussed during the course of the novel. This is one theme that appears to link the various dimensions of the novel. Roger Laufer hints at this relationship and suggests one of the focal points of this analysis: "l'idée féconde de Diderot consiste à avoir lié condition sociale et condition métaphysique, puis d'en avoir dégagé la contradiction externe et interne."<sup>26</sup> The play of forces inherent in the clash of master and servant is simultaneously presented on the social, philosophical and narrative levels.<sup>27</sup> Freedom, a common theme in Diderot's works, is here presented through its antithesis, the subordination of one human being to another.

#### The Distortion of Conventions

That Jacques and his master are originals cannot be denied. However, each character is drawn with distinct links to the conventional roles of master and servant. I shall first examine the means by which vestiges of the conventional stereotypes are transformed in the construction of this new master-servant duo. The title, Jacques le fataliste et son maitre, is a first indication of the novelty of the couple. It is the servant who receives first billing, a name

and an epithet, whereas the master is relegated to the subtitle "et son maître" and remains anonymous. The passages devoted to characterization of the master further emphasize his blander qualities and, like his initial anonymity, strip him of individuality by classifying him as "une espèce":

Si . . . vous prenez le parti de faire compagnie à son [Jacques's] maître, vous serez poli, mais très ennuyé; vous ne connaissez pas encore cette espèce-là. Il a peu d'idées dans la tête; s'il lui arrive de dire quelque chose de sensé, c'est de réminiscence ou d'inspiration. Il a des yeux comme vous et moi, mais on ne sait la plupart du temps s'il regarde. Il ne dort pas, il ne veille pas non plus; il se laisse exister; c'est sa fonction habituelle. L'automate allait devant lui. . . . (p. 515)

The dull, static nature of such an existence is suggested here, and thus attention is transferred to the more dynamic Jacques. In addition, the master "ne savait que devenir sans sa montre, sans sa tabatière et sans Jacques: c'étaient les trois grandes ressources de sa vie . . ." (p. 516).

This emphasis upon his automatic reflexes is made quite clear and recurs so frequently as to become comic: "Puis voilà Jacques qui sanglote et qui pleure de plus belle; et son maître qui prend sa prise de tabac, et qui regarde à sa montre l'heure qu'il est" (p. 529). And again (the master admonishes Jacques to continue): "Non, non; prenons une prise de tabac, voyons l'heure qu'il est et poursuis" (p. 532). The same actions are performed in sequence upon at least ten other occasions in the novel.<sup>28</sup>

The master is fashioned after the conventional hero of comedy,<sup>29</sup> buffeted about by the circumstances of his

existence but incapable of controlling these forces. His multiple falls and misfortunes during the voyage exaggerate his weak nature and this is further drawn out in the master's account of his own "love story," in which he is continually manipulated by others.

Il [le maître] est un monde d'ennui et d'inutilité. Jamais, d'ailleurs, la vanité de ses activités n'est aussi patente que dans ses amours. Entre le chevalier de Saint-Ouin et Agathe la fausse innocente, son temps se passe en futilités, à dilapider la fortune paternelle.  
 . . . 30

These character traits will take on added significance in the master's particular relationship with Jacques. At this point it is important to note that so much emphasis is placed upon the conventional nature of the character as to distort the image of the traditional master. For once, it is he who appears quite obviously trapped in a stereotype, rather than the servant Jacques.

In keeping with the picaresque tradition, Jacques has served under a variety of masters, whom he recalls in a single paragraph:

. . . mais si les souhaits que j'ai faits pour sa [a former master, Desglands'] prospérité n'ont pas été remplis, ce n'est pas faute d'avoir été sincère. C'est lui qui me donna au commandeur de La Boulaye, qui périt en passant à Malte; c'est le commandeur de La Boulaye qui me donna à son frère aîné le capitaine, qui est peut-être mort à présent de la fistule; c'est ce capitaine qui me donna à son frère le plus jeune, l'avocat général de Toulouse, qui devint fou, et que la famille fit enfermer. C'est M. Pascal, avocat général de Toulouse, qui me donna au comte de Tourville, qui aime mieux laisser croître sa barbe sous un habit de capucin que d'exposer sa vie; c'est le comte de Tourville qui me donna à la marquise du Belloy, qui s'est sauvée à Londres avec un étranger; c'est la marquise du Belloy qui me donna à un de ses cousins, qui s'est ruiné avec les

femmes et qui a passé aux îles; c'est ce cousin-là qui me recommanda à un M. Hérissant, usurier de profession, qui faisait valoir l'argent de M. de Rusai, docteur de Sorbonne, qui me fit entrer chez Mlle Isselin, que vous entreteniez, et qui me plaça chez vous, à qui je devrai un morceau de pain sur mes vieux jours, car vous me l'avez promis si je vous restais attaché. . . . (pp. 657-8)

It is actually unusual that Jacques's dependent role is not particularly minimized in this passage since this is not the case in the novel as a whole. Here the verb "donner" of which he is consistently the object implies his lack of control in the successive transactions. However, it is most significant that he does not relate each and every tale on his list. One has only to imagine what Gil Blas could have done with such a diverse group of anecdotes to realize that here Jacques is essential, and not his former masters.

Furthermore, his subsequent comments show how he refuses to fit the mold:

Le Maître

Mais, Jacques, tu as parcouru bien des maisons en assez peu de temps.

Jacques

Il est vrai; on m'a renvoyé quelquefois.

Le Maître

Pourquoi?

Jacques

C'est que je suis né bavard, et que tous ces gens-là voulaient qu'on se tût. Ce n'était pas comme vous, qui me remerciez demain si je me taisais. J'avais tout juste le vice qui vous convenait. (p. 658)

Likewise, as a literary character, Jacques is not silent, but recounts himself, not his masters and his imitation of them. The incident is thus freed from its traditional function of reinforcing the secondary status of the valet whose chief interest is the masters he has served. The list of masters serves another, more unifying purpose as a further example of the factors which direct and control man's existence.

This passage hints that speech is Jacques's foremost act of independence and liberation. The novel subtly supplies us with this important key to Jacques's difference in several important passages. Jacques himself credits his penchant for speaking to his twelve years of imposed silence in his grandparents' house, where verbal exchange was limited to the sale of hats and the reading of the Bible:

Jacques prétendit que le silence lui était malsain; qu'il était un animal jaseur; et que le principal avantage de sa condition, celui qui le touchait le plus, c'était la liberté de se dédommager des douze années de baïllon qu'il avait passées chez son grand-père, à qui Dieu fasse miséricorde. (p. 654)

Earlier, Jacques had explained the whole story, which is highly significant:

Ils étaient brocanteurs. Mon grand-père Jason eut plusieurs enfants. Toute la famille était sérieuse; ils se levaient, ils s'habillaient, ils allaient à leurs affaires; ils revenaient, ils dînaient, ils retournaient sans avoir dit un mot. Le soir, ils se jetaient sur des chaises; la mère et les filles filaient, cousaient, tricotaient sans mot dire; les garçons se reposaient; le père lisait l'Ancien Testament.

Le Maître

Et toi, que faisais-tu?

Jacques

Je courais dans la chambre avec un bâillon.

Le Maître

Avec un bâillon!

Jacques

Oui, avec un bâillon; et c'est à ce maudit bâillon que je dois la rage de parler. La semaine se passait quelquefois sans qu'on eût ouvert la bouche dans la maison des Jason. Pendant toute sa vie, qui fut longue, ma grand-mère n'avait dit que chapeaux à vendre, et mon grand-père, qu'on voyait dans les inventaires, droit, les mains sous sa redingote, n'avait dit qu'un sou. (p. 606)

Outside of the comic possibilities of the image of Jacques running gagged around the household and the irony of a mute family named Jason (jasons - "let's talk"), this description emphasizes silence as a form of repression. The only words spoken by the grandparents, "chapeaux à vendre" and "un sou," imply a total acceptance of their state and stagnation within it, as the emblem of and the bare minimum necessary to their profession as brocanteurs. They use words uniquely to make a sale, in the purest sense of their exchange value. Free speech, words for their own sake, would bring disruption or variety, thus Jacques's gag. Secondly, Jacques's origins in such a puzzling household illuminate his contradictory condition. Although speaking is a mark of his liberation and gives him power over his own reality, it

also remains the emblem of his servitude, for his master continually commands him to continue his tale.

Jacques bears distinct traces of the valet of traditional comedy. These are again often put to an original function and not employed as static signals of the servant's inherent inferiority. One of the most obvious examples of such rerouting of signs is Jacques's drinking. Previously the drunkard servant provided comic effect and his inebriation emphasized his impropriety. Here however the allusions to Rabelais and the digression upon the more modern "frères de la gourde" (pp. 716-7) which accompany the action accentuate the inspirational qualities of "la gourde" above and beyond any of Jacques's faults. His evenings of drinking, during the two longer tales of Mme de la Pommeraye and Père Hudson, are shared by the others, including his master. The narrator also unabashedly participates in Jacques's penchant for the "gourde sacrée,"<sup>31</sup> and thus a certain camaraderie is implicit in this sequence, rather than a sense of differentiation.

One's general impression is that Jacques and his master actually maintain a fairly equitable relationship as far as their concrete day-to-day activities are concerned: the narrator remarks upon their "intimité" and the friendship they share (p. 508). With only one exception,<sup>32</sup> they eat and sleep together, and converse with ease, although the master occasionally shifts from "tu" to "vous" as the style



and subject matter shift.<sup>33</sup> Their intimacy goes beyond the activities of the trip itself to their mutual identification and empathy for the other within the tale being told. Here emerges one of the more obvious parallels between Jacques and his master and the narrator and the reader. The master, as is usually the case, has the most extreme reaction of this sort as he listens to Jacques's account of his mugging:

Jacques

. . . Mon maître, qu'avez-vous? Vous serrez les dents, vous vous agitez comme si vous étiez en présence d'un ennemi.

Le Maître

J'y suis, en effet; j'ai l'épée à la main; je fonds sur tes voleurs et je te venge. (p. 572)<sup>34</sup>

In spite of this apparent equality, both Jacques and his master display several of the automatic behavioral traits associated with the conventional master-servant couple, especially in moments of disagreement. By the third page of the novel, the master suddenly begins to beat Jacques:

La nuit les surprit au milieu des champs; les voilà fourvoyés. Voilà le maître dans une colère terrible et tombant à grands coups de fouet sur son valet, et le pauvre diable disant à chaque coup: "Celui-là était apparemment encore écrit là-haut. . . ." (p. 495)

Frequent beatings are obviously associated with the farcical tradition, which the master, as a conventional "hero," would seek to prolong.<sup>35</sup>

The matter of beating reappears shortly afterwards, again when the master's inattention and sleep cause him misfortune which he blames on Jacques. Having sent the valet to recuperate his (the master's) watch and money, the master menacingly insults the servant in an expected, stereotypical manner: "'Le bourreau! le chien! le coquin! où est-il? que fait-il? Faut-il tant de temps pour reprendre une bourse et une montre? Je le rouerai de coups; oh! cela est certain; je le rouerai de coups'" (p. 516). His dependence upon his servant is revealed in such frustrated rage. Astonishingly enough, however, Jacques bluntly refuses the beating which seems imminent: "'Tout doux, monsieur, je ne suis pas d'humeur aujourd'hui à me laisser assommer; je recevrai le premier coup, mais je jure qu'au second je pique des deux et vous laisse là . . .'" (p. 521). The servant's previous acquiescence disappears here; Jacques feels no lingering attachment to the master to justify accepting such treatment. The character manifests a certain independence in one of the first instances of outright refusal.

The farce is also commonly the scene of role reversal between master and servant, when comic effect is drawn from the prospect of the valet's manipulation of his master. Jacques's master is overtly helpless in this vein, and allows Jacques to make the decisions for him. In the following scene his horse has just been stolen:

- Mon cheval! mon pauvre cheval!
- Quand vous continueriez vos lamentations jusqu'à demain, il n'en sera ni plus ni moins.
- Qu'allons-nous faire?
- Je vais vous prendre en croupe, ou, si vous l'aimez mieux, nous quitterons nos bottes, nous les attacherons sur la selle de mon cheval, et nous poursuivrons notre route à pied.
- Mon cheval! mon pauvre cheval! (p. 521)

In another instance, the master, faced with a dilemma, instantly inquires of Jacques: "'Jacques, que ferons-nous?' Jacques répondit: 'Nous déjeunerons d'abord avec notre hôtesse, ce qui nous avisera.'" (pp. 653-4). Upon more than one occasion the master is hopelessly incapable of action when Jacques is absent.<sup>36</sup>

Jacques's reflexes seem to fall far short of those of a typical servant. When the master falls from his horse, for example, he makes no move to help (p. 508). When Jacques does fulfill the expected role of servant, seeing to his master's personal needs and handling practical matters of the trip, the emphasis is not upon the servile nature of such activity, but upon the degree of initiative Jacques takes. The overall effect is to complement the fact which eventually emerges that it is Jacques who takes and keeps control. Rarely does the master even command the servant, except to request that the story continue. As previously stated, Jacques's chief responsibility is to speak, and this is the only service the master demands with regularity. No longer does the servant operate in the background, serving only his master's interests and focusing the action upon him; the

narrator himself explicitly abandons the latter in order to attend to Jacques's affairs. Through a subtle manipulation of the farcical atmosphere, Jacques emerges liberated from the stereotype with a life and story of his own.

Many of the other characters and situations in Jacques are also obviously drawn with conventional literary devices in mind which normally function as signifiers of social status. A master quite naturally beats his valet; the valet automatically sees to his needs. In this novel, however, such devices are distorted so as to neutralize their normal implications and also to underline their artificiality. The initial beating is unexpected and unjustified, but then Jacques continues his story as if nothing had happened. His refusal of the next beating and the master's acquiescence point out the absurdity of both scenes. Similarly, Jacques seems to wait on the master when he pleases, as if he had a choice in the matter. The expected behavior of the servant would minimize the character's force. The other lower-class characters likewise transcend their conventional subservience by escaping the "typical." A short digression is in order here to clarify the treatment of other characters of lower condition. Their portraits complement the individuality accorded to Jacques.

As in the other novels discussed, some of the servants do play a minimal role and their presence merely serves as the realistic detail necessary to the execution of certain

scenes, such as Desglands' valet, who fetches Jacques to the chateau, and the servants at the inn, who constantly interrupt the hôtesse's tale. They are also a source of information, as is the case when the hôtesse learns the story of the marquis d'Arcis through her servants.<sup>37</sup> Other minor figures function as the dishonest perpetrators of misfortunes which befall the central characters, such as the lieutenant general's valet and his servant, Javotte, or, even in one of the digressions, Gousse's servant, "une coquine très rusée," (p. 576) who betrays him and has him sent to prison. Finally, and most importantly, a handful of servants and peasants receive a brief moment in the spotlight and emerge as well-rounded characters regardless of their economic status.

In all cases, the language of these characters is tastefully correct and undistinguished by any outstanding denotations of class. In effect, the "expressive eloquence of socially inferior characters" has been analyzed in some detail.<sup>38</sup> Their language and remarks fit their personalities, but do not necessarily reflect social position.<sup>39</sup> The narrator appears sensitive to the reader's expectations of stylistic appropriateness and cleverly justifies some of the apparent incongruity, in the hôtesse's case, for example, when she admits she was educated at Saint-Cyr. He also simply mocks such expectations, as when he admits he has put such words as "engastrimute" and "hydrophobe" into Jacques's mouth.<sup>40</sup> This mocking attitude has a double implication.

First, truly realistic dialogue is ultimately impossible in the novel since there is always an author putting words into characters' mouths. Also, considerations of class were secondary in the fabrication of the dialogue, contrary to the norm, which was that lower-class characters automatically lost the right to serious speech in the novel by virtue of their inappropriate manner of speaking. The sacrifice of such "realism" affords them a greater measure of attention. That which is said takes on an importance denied the words of a character speaking in a typically ignorant fashion. The lower-class characters also become dignified spokesmen for their experiences without succumbing to pathos.

The incidents surrounding Jacques's arrival at the home of the peasants after being wounded are an excellent example. Although a comic tone is maintained throughout the passage, it is not produced at the peasants' expense, but is rather derived from the situation of the various characters (the discussion of the three surgeons, and Jacques's eavesdropping on the husband and wife in bed). In the course of the scene, attention is even briefly focused upon the rigors of the peasant's plight:

L'année est mauvaise; à peine pouvons-nous suffire à nos besoins et aux besoins de nos enfants. Le grain est d'une cherté! Point de vin! Encore si l'on trouvait à travailler; mais les riches se retranchent; les pauvres gens ne font rien; pour une journée qu'on emploie, on en perd quatre. Personne ne paye ce qu'il doit; les créanciers sont d'une âpreté qui désespère: et voilà le moment que tu prends pour retirer ici un inconnu. . . .  
(p. 510)

Eventually the master begins to mock the above scene, but Jacques's commentary refutes his sarcasm:

Le Maître

Rien ne peuple comme les gueux.

Jacques

Un enfant de plus n'est rien pour eux, c'est la charité qui les nourrit. Et puis c'est le seul plaisir qui ne coûte rien; on se console pendant la nuit, sans frais, des calamités du jour. . . . Cependant les réflexions de cet homme n'en étaient pas moins justes. (p. 511)

Jacques Smietanski enumerates in detail the instances in which the peasants emerge in Jacques le fataliste, and some of his conclusions complement my thesis that the lower-class world is here accorded a rather unconventional treatment with respect to eighteenth-century norms.<sup>41</sup> The characters are believable, neither idealized in their simplicity nor condemned for their imperfections.

[L]e tableau du monde paysan dans Jacques le Fataliste est loin d'être idyllique. Si les couleurs sont sombres, c'est que la réalité elle-même était désolante. Diderot n'a pas enjolivé cette réalité, il en a présenté plusieurs facettes en des scènes rapides, disséminées dans tout son livre. De ces scènes, de ces allusions sort une image vivante et vraie de la campagne française.<sup>42</sup>

Roger Laufer also points out the effect of "quotidienneté" which emerges from these sketches.<sup>43</sup>

While Smietanski insists rather too heavily upon the popular dimensions of Diderot's novel, it is true that "[u]ne des originalités de Jacques le Fataliste est d'être envahi par toute une série de personnages populaires qui évoquent la vie des masses laborieuses."<sup>44</sup> The "realism"

and truthfulness which Smietanski constantly seeks in such scenes are actually secondary, since Diderot, more than most of his contemporaries, was quite clearly aware of the elusiveness of the real. The chief innovation here is the escape from convention in the fabrication of such literary portraits. Furthermore, they challenge the status quo and the system to a certain degree, rather than acquiescing to the hierarchy.

One may conclude that the narrator's explicit refusal of literary convention, and, specifically, the conventions of the novel ("ceci n'est pas un roman" is a common refrain), leads to such distortion and negation of the stereotypes associated with the social status of the characters. Although the background characters are presented in terms of the same liberalization of the techniques of social portraiture, it is especially in Jacques's case that the conventional servant is unmasked as just an artifice with no pretensions of depicting reality. Jacques's servitude is a necessary impetus to the machinery of the novel, but his actual conduct as a valet is of dwindling importance.

#### Dependence, Domination and Servitude

The master's specificity as the master of Jacques is sketchy and barely credible, and obviously the master-servant structure holds much greater interest outside of the question of their reality. These characters are not meant



to be mimetic constructions based upon actual occurrences or "what could have been." Both are very "literary," that is, they carry traces of the numerous master-servant couples of tradition even as they attain uniqueness. Also, their symbiotic relationship and the struggle for power within it have a symbolic function as the central image for the themes of dependence, domination and servitude which permeate Jacques le fataliste. These are but variations upon the explicit questions about determinism and free will which are the focal point of Jacques's discussion with his master.

Laufer's comment about the links between "social" and "metaphysical" condition becomes clear in this light.<sup>45</sup> The term "master" is most often used in the general sense of "control" or "mastery" during the course of the dialogue. Jacques continually protests that his lack of true freedom prevents him from acting as he would always wish; having a literal master also removes him from moral responsibility:

Et quand je serais devenu amoureux d'elle, qu'est-ce qu'il y aurait à dire? Est-ce qu'on est maître de devenir ou de ne pas devenir amoureux? Et quand on l'est, est-on maître, d'agir comme si on ne l'était pas? Si cela eût été écrit là-haut, tout ce que vous vous disposez à me dire, je me le serais dit; je me serais souffleté; je me serais cogné la tête contre le mur; je me serais arraché les cheveux: il n'en aurait été ni plus ni moins, et mon bienfaiteur eût été cocu. (p. 498, my emphasis)

Or, as Jacques also reminds his master: "Mais si vous êtes et si vous avez toujours été le maître de vouloir, que ne voulez-vous à présent aimer une guenon; et que n'avez-vous cessé d'aimer Agathe toutes les fois que vous l'avez voulu?"

(p. 758-9, again my italics). The term "master" is thus employed in discussing the elusive control man seeks over his life. "Etre maître" implies a state of total responsibility which man abdicates. "Avoir un maître" is the more appropriate sign of the dependent state of the human condition:

Jacques suivait son maître comme vous le vôtre; son maître suivait le sien comme Jacques le suivait. - Mais, qui était le maître du maître de Jacques? - Bon, est-ce qu'on manque de maître dans ce monde? Le maître de Jacques en avait cent pour un, comme vous. Mais parmi tant de maîtres du maître de Jacques, il fallait qu'il n'y en eût pas un bon; car d'un jour à l'autre il en changeait. - Il était homme. (pp. 537-8)

The master then becomes a necessary appendage to Jacques, for no man is ever truly free.<sup>46</sup>

The ensuing dependence is twofold: men are enslaved to habits and objects, like the master, or their existence is intertwined with that of another being, as is the case with Jacques's captain. Many of the digressions relate tales of such dependence. Like Marivaux, Diderot sees man as a social creature, and constantly poses questions about his conduct in relation to others. Critics often link the various anecdotes and tales as variations on the theme of "l'inconséquence du jugement public de nos actions particulières,"<sup>47</sup> the dichotomy between one's individual motivation and the public interpretation of one's behavior. As a consequence, social relationships are seen in an added dimension, and usually overturn superficial appearances and traditional roles. The phenomenon of domination and subservience is highlighted at some point in almost all of these relationships. Again,

Jacques and the master are the prime example of such a technique, but the other characters may be variously grouped according to their dependence upon or domination of another. This occurs on numerous levels within the novel, whether it be in power struggles situated in the diverse narratives, in the constant dependence of the listener upon the narrators of the tales, or in the global relationship of the main narrator and his reader.

Lester G. Crocker remarks that "[t]he full extent of Diderot's obsession with the idea of domination and subservience in human relations, in which the more powerful will, genius, or vital force overmaster the weaker, has not . . . been sufficiently realized."<sup>48</sup> He briefly explores the means by which Mme de la Pommeraye and the Père Hudson obtain satisfaction through total control and manipulation of a situation and the personages involved. Both characters obtain revenge by mastering the personalities of others, rendering them, in effect, mere marionettes. Furthermore, they accurately predict the reflexes and reactions of their adversaries.

On a smaller scale, and with a less conscious sense of purpose on the part of the participants, the same manipulation of reactions and resulting domination reoccurs in the shorter digressions and interruptions. One example is a scene at the inn in which the hôte at first adamantly refuses to lend money to the compère. The same scene has obviously

taken place many times in the past, for the hôtesse knowingly gestures to Jacques and the master not to intervene, and the innkeeper himself mentions that this has happened "dix fois" (p. 590). Consequently, because of his predictable emotional reactions, the seemingly powerful figure (the innkeeper, who first threatens to seize the compère's property) becomes dependent upon his debtor:

L'Hôte

Moi, un homme dur! Je ne le suis point: je ne le fus jamais; et tu le sais bien.

Le Compère

Je ne suis plus en état de nourrir ma fille ni mon garçon; ma fille servira, mon garçon s'engagera.

L'Hôte

Et c'est moi qui en serais la cause! Cela ne sera pas. Tu es un cruel homme; tant que je vivrai tu seras mon supplice. Ça, voyons ce qu'il te faut. (p. 591)

When the compère then refuses any aid at all, it is the innkeeper who must plead with him to accept the money:

Cependant sa femme faisait des efforts inutiles; le paysan, qui avait de l'âme, ne voulait rien accepter et se faisait tenir à quatre. L'hôte, les larmes aux yeux, s'adressait à Jacques et à son maître, et leur disait: "Messieurs, tâchez de le fléchir . . ." Jacques et son maître se mêlèrent de la partie; tous à la fois conjuraient le paysan. . . . Si l'on a jamais vu un homme confondu d'un refus, transporté qu'on voulût bien accepter son argent, c'était cet hôte, il embrassait sa femme, il embrassait son compère, il embrassait Jacques et son maître, il criait: Qu'on aille bien vite chasser de chez lui ces exécrables huissiers. (pp. 591-2)

A similar example is found in the tale of Jacques's captain and his comrade, who cannot avoid the cycle of "la sympathie, ou l'antipathie la plus forte . . ." (p. 549). "A peine furent-ils séparés, qu'ils sentirent le besoin qu'ils avaient l'un de l'autre; ils tombèrent dans une mélancolie profonde" (p. 551). The narrator uses the anecdote as the point of departure for a generalized commentary on the duel as only one form of man's need to establish superiority over another:

Et qu'est-ce qui empêcherait de croire que nos deux militaires avaient été engagés dans ces combats journaliers et périlleux par le seul désir de trouver le côté faible de son rival et d'obtenir la supériorité sur lui? Les duels se répètent dans la société sous toutes sortes de formes, entre des prêtres, entre des magistrats, entre des littérateurs, entre des philosophes; chaque état a sa lance et ses chevaliers, et nos assemblées les plus respectables, les plus amusantes, ne sont que de petits tournois où quelquefois on porte des livrées de l'amour dans le fond de son coeur, sinon sur l'épaule. Plus il y a d'assistants, plus la joute est vive; la présence de femmes y pousse la chaleur et l'opiniâtreté à toute outrance, et la honte d'avoir succombé devant elles ne s'oublie guère. (p. 557, my emphasis)

Just as Marivaux's novels also suggested,<sup>49</sup> men are seen here locked in a "fencing match" for domination, unable to coexist upon equal terms. The ceaseless banter between Jacques and his master becomes more comprehensible in this light.

The master's tale of his own love affair equally illustrates the manipulation of one man by another. In this case, the master himself becomes the puppet of his "friend" the chevalier, who paradoxically retains the master's confidence by reassuring him of his (the master's) superiority in the

situation: "et faute de mieux, j'ai accepté le rôle de subalterne auquel tu m'as réduit" (p. 736). The master then unhesitatingly enters into the chevalier's plots, and finds himself eventually charged with the care for Agathe's son by the chevalier.

Madame de la Pommeraye and, indirectly, the Père Hudson similarly feign subordination of their will in their manipulation of the individuals who menace them. Madame de la Pommeraye agrees to aid the marquis in meeting Mlle d'Aisnon, and she tells him of his power over her: "Il faut que vous ayez conservé un terrible empire sur moi; cela m'effraye" (p. 632). She demonstrates to him how much this costs her, and charges him with "un étrange abus" of their friendship (pp. 634-5). Part of the Père Hudson's plot to bring about Richard's disgrace includes having one of his young mistresses accuse him: "en pleurant, sanglotant, vous arrachant les cheveux, racontez-leur toute notre histoire, et la racontez de la manière la plus propre à inspirer de la commisération pour vous, de l'horreur pour moi" (p. 676). Like the chevalier, but on a grander scale, these two individuals effectively play at being duped and losing the upper hand in order to inspire a predictable confidence in their enemies so as to leave them even more open to easy manipulation. The episodes reduce human relationships to duels for superiority, which are accentuated in each case by the total control of behavior which is established.<sup>50</sup> Furthermore, might

one not compare the narrator's own power over his characters which is manifested explicitly on more than one occasion?

Other sets of symbols reinforce the theme of dependency as the lot of man, most notably the dog and the horse. The image of horse and rider is an adroit reconstruction of the master-servant couple, and the incident of the hangman's horse powerfully condenses the same contradictions. Horses appear as creatures of habit solely devoted to their masters, or, like the "automate," unable to function outside an established routine. As Jacques comments when he sees the peasant trying in vain to put a horse to work: "Pauvre diable, touche, touche tant que tu voudras: il a pris son pli, et tu useras plus d'une mèche à ton fouet, avant que d'inspirer à ce maraud-là un peu de véritable dignité et quelque goût pour le travail . . ." (p. 760). However, the horse is also in control of the rider's (master's) destiny, and he thus becomes the dependent object of the horse's apparent whims. So Jacques loses control of the hangman's horse and powerlessly is led to the gallows, then to a concussion at the hangman's house. Herein lies one parallel with the proverbial "Jacques mène son maître" (p. 665).

Such an interpretation is complemented by Jacques's own equation of himself with the horse and his refusal to pull the plow:

Je devine que ce sot, orgueilleux, fainéant animal est un habitant de la ville, qui, fier de son premier état de cheval de selle, méprise la charrue; et pour vous

dire tout, en un mot, que c'est votre cheval, le symbole de Jacques que voilà, et de tant d'autres lâches coquins comme lui, qui ont quitté les campagnes pour venir porter la livrée dans la capitale et qui aimeraient mieux mendier leur pain dans les rues, ou mourir de faim, que de retourner à l'agriculture, le plus utile et le plus honorable des métiers. (p. 760)<sup>51</sup>

The dog's significance in the same thematic vein is developed as explicitly as is the case for the horse:

Jacques demanda à son maître s'il n'avait pas remarqué que, quelle que fût la misère des petites gens, n'ayant pas de pain pour eux, ils avaient tous des chiens; s'il n'avait pas remarqué que ces chiens, étant tous instruits à faire des tours, à marcher à deux pattes, à danser, à rapporter, à sauter pour le roi, pour la reine, à faire le mort, cette éducation les avait rendus les plus malheureuses bêtes du monde. D'où il conclut que tout homme voulait commander à un autre; et que l'animal se trouvant dans la société immédiatement au-dessous de la classe des derniers citoyens commandés par toutes les autres classes, ils prenaient un animal pour commander aussi à quelqu'un. Eh bien! dit Jacques, chacun a son chien. Le ministre est le chien du roi, le premier commis est le chien du ministre, la femme est le chien du mari, ou le mari le chien de la femme; Favori est le chien de celle-ci, et Thibaud est le chien de l'homme du coin. Lorsque mon maître me fait parler quand je voudrais me taire, ce qui, à la vérité, m'arrive rarement, continua Jacques; lorsqu'il me fait taire quand je voudrais parler, ce qui est très difficile; lorsqu'il me demande l'histoire de mes amours et que j'aimerais mieux causer d'autre chose; lorsque j'ai commencé l'histoire de mes amours, et qu'il m'interrompt; que suis-je autre chose que son chien? les hommes faibles sont les chiens des hommes fermes. (pp. 667-8)

Jacques's commentary is a reminder of man's penchant for domination and, again using himself as an example, he transforms the master-servant/dog relationship into a metaphor for the human condition. Such obvious passages as these illustrate the recurrence of the theme of servitude in the novel and establish a framework for a more detailed interpretation of Jacques and his master.



In the case of the dog and the horse, no resolution is proposed to the problem of this will to dominate and the ensuing necessity of servitude. Neither do Jacques and his master arrive at a comfortable position as they joust for control. The animal images rather reinforce the inevitability of the dependency inherent in man's relationships with others. Again, Diderot's originality is here to have found the means to delve into the theme of servitude without succumbing to stereotypes, didacticism or pathos. He also brings the matter clearly out in the open. His consistent preoccupation with the dilemma of subordination, among men in general or, more specifically, of the artist and philosopher to a political master, reappears elsewhere in a number of his works.

#### The Struggle for Power and the Power of Narration

Most recent critics emphasize that Jacques is most essentially a novel about storytelling and the narrative relationships which are established between speaker and listener each time a tale is told. The principal characters are all storytellers, and the presence of a major narrator is well-established from the outset in his incessant dialogue with the reader, the "vous" of the first paragraph: "Comment s'étaient-ils rencontrés? Par hasard, comme tout le monde. Comment s'appelaient-ils? Que vous importe?" (p. 493).

Remarkably, each narrative relationship also contains a dimension of this same struggle for power and domination over another which is included in the tales which are told. An interesting study by G.J. Brogyanyi explores the dimensions of the storyteller's power as played out in Jacques, thus adding yet another manifestation of the play of forces between men in society which constantly resurfaces in this text.<sup>52</sup> Some of his conclusions are summarized below.

Each of the "narrating characters" (Jacques, the master, the hôtesse and the marquis d'Arcis) is equally defined by his social position and his manner of narration. Jacques, the most obviously inferior of the group, falls prey to constant interruptions, and is the only one who does not ever finish his story. The hôtesse, a woman of higher birth than her current occupation would indicate,<sup>53</sup> silences all interruptions, even those of the persistent Jacques. The marquis imposes his tale easily upon the others and narrates for his own pleasure, not at their command. The master, however, must continually jockey for control as Jacques manifests some rebellion against the role of passive listener.<sup>54</sup> Jacques's interruptions spoil the pleasure of telling the tale, and he even participates in the story, suggesting details to which the master acquiesces:

#### Le Maître

Mon père mourut dans ces entrefaites. J'acquittai les lettres de change, et je sortis de ma retraite, où, pour l'honneur du chevalier et de son amie,

j'avouerais qu'ils me tinrent assez fidèle compagnie.

Jacques

Et vous voilà tout aussi féru qu'auparavant du chevalier et de votre belle; votre belle vous tenant la dragée plus haute que jamais.

Le Maître

Et pourquoi cela, Jacques?

Jacques

Pourquoi? C'est que maître de votre personne et possesseur d'une fortune honnête, il fallait faire de vous un sot complet, un mari.

Le Maître

Ma foi, je crois que c'était leur projet; mais il ne leur réussit pas. (p. 729)

The master must eventually threaten to stop his tale in order to have peace from his valet (p. 737). Their enigmatic narrative relationship mirrors their puzzling social relationship. On more than one occasion, the narrator explicitly links the two levels.

As Brogyanyi suggests, the characters in Jacques "reveal their essence by the way they tell and listen to stories."<sup>55</sup> Jacques's story, the framework of the novel, is at once his means of emancipation and the sign of his servility. We have seen how Jacques's role as servant is largely limited to his story-telling, for the continuation of his tale is the command most often made by the master. On the other hand, story-telling is quite obviously a role which

carries power; the primary narrator is continually taunting the lecteur with this fact:

Vous voyez, lecteur, combien je suis obligeant; il ne tiendrait qu'à moi de donner un coup de fouet aux chevaux qui traînent le carrosse drapé de noir, d'assembler, à la porte du gîte prochain, Jacques, son maître, les gardes des Fermes ou les cavaliers de maréchaussée avec le reste de leur cortège; d'interrompre l'histoire du capitaine de Jacques et de vous impatienter à mon aise. . . . (p. 551)

The narrator often intervenes in this manner in order to scatter the potential directions the narrative might take throughout his text, and each suggestion, although denied, carries a bit of the reader's imagination with it. He, like Jacques before the master, possesses the "truth," the story, and can divulge or withhold it as he wishes.

Jacques feels the liberating effect of speech, and exploits it, for the pleasures of story-telling form a sort of mastery of a situation:

Avez-vous oublié que Jacques aimait à parler, et surtout à parler de lui; manie générale des gens de son état; manie qui les tire de leur abjection, qui les place dans la tribune, et qui les transforme tout à coup en personnages intéressants? . . . Il [le peuple] va chercher en Grève une scène qu'il puisse raconter à son retour dans le faubourg; celle-là ou une autre, cela lui est indifférent, pourvu qu'il fasse un rôle, qu'il rassemble ses voisins, et qu'il s'en fasse écouter. (pp. 669-70)

Not only does story-telling make him the center of attention, but narration gives him a certain control over his audience. Both Jacques and the primary narrator are sparing of their tales,<sup>56</sup> and the master, like the reader, is left with an unfinished story at the end of the novel. Jacques would be displaced from his central position if he arrived at a

conclusion; he would, within the confines of the novel, disappear.<sup>57</sup> The narrator becomes Jacques's accomplice as he pretends to know no more than the servant and refuses to deliver a satisfactory conclusion:

Et moi, je m'arrête, parce que je vous ai dit de ces deux personnages tout ce que j'en sais. - Et les amours de Jacques? Jacques a dit cent fois qu'il était écrit là-haut qu'il n'en finirait pas l'histoire, et je vois que Jacques avait raison. Je vois, lecteur, que cela vous fâche; eh bien, reprenez son récit où il l'a laissé, et continuez-le à votre fantaisie. . . . (p. 777)

Brogyany hints at the links between the narrator-listener relationship and that of master and slave:

Once social differences are forgotten and the narrative compact prevails, the combatants are roughly on an equal footing, and each takes his turn at being either a dominating narrator or a rebelling listener. Storytelling thus becomes the double-edged weapon of a psychological and verbal master-slave struggle.<sup>58</sup>

The implications of this statement are not developed, however, and the acceptability of such a premise requires a more thorough analysis of the transfer of power between Jacques and his master through such a "narrative compact" and a direct comparison of this compact with the power struggle of master and slave. According to the Hegelian concepts adopted thus far, this struggle then appears as a metaphor for the self's quest for self-knowledge and control of one's essence when faced with another consciousness. Hegel's Slave emerges triumphant from this fight by acquiring the self-knowledge requisite to such control. Upon closer examination, the incessant dialogue between Jacques and the master does contain elements of a similar struggle, although

it lacks the clear progression which Hegel proposes. Nevertheless, the superposition of the latter structure over the couple formed by the master and Jacques provides an added dimension to the structures of domination and servitude previously elucidated. While one immediately senses these similarities between Jacques le fataliste and Hegel's discussion of master and slave, a closer textual analysis is necessary.

Each time that Jacques speaks he reveals more about himself than just the subject matter of his tale. His power grows as he assumes more control over his narration, whether it be in the way he speaks, in his reasons for speaking, or in the content of his words. The novel's opening immediately portrays speech as the sign of Jacques's domination and of his subjugation. There is an initial evocation of the master's silence, "[l]e maître ne disait rien," and then of Jacques's repetition of his captain's words, the *lietmotif* for the theme of fatalism in the novel: "Jacques disait que son capitaine disait que tout ce qui nous arrive de bien et de mal ici-bas était écrit là-haut" (p. 493). At the outset Jacques has the active role as the speaker, but he is simply transmitting the words and philosophy of another, not an original idea emanating from himself. He further uses another of the captain's clichés to launch into the enigmatic introduction to his tale: "Mon capitaine ajoutait que chaque balle qui partait d'un fusil avait son billet" (p. 493).<sup>59</sup> Jacques then finally commences the story of his "amours,"

which correspond to a sketchy sort of initiation into adult life, from his departure from the family to battle experience and the discovery of love: "Dieu sait les bonnes et mauvaises aventures amenées par ce coup de feu. Elles se tiennent ni plus ni moins que les chaînons d'une gourmette. Sans ce coup de feu, par exemple, je crois que je n'aurais été amoureux de ma vie, ni boiteux" (p. 494). This tale, in all of its digressions, is our (the reader's) only insight into precise details about Jacques's past, but more significantly it offers him the means of reviewing his life and assuming the essence of his existence through the telling of the tale. The decision to begin the narrative is not, however, made at his own initiative, but is the result of chance and the master's desire:

Jacques

C'est que cela ne pouvait être dit ni plus tôt  
ni plus tard.

Le Maître

Et le moment d'apprendre ces amours est-il  
venu?

Jacques

Qui le sait?

Le Maître

A tout hasard, commence toujours . . . (p. 494)

Thus, Jacques shows no real power as he commences his tale, but simply obeys.

Likewise, his first attempts at a narrative are halting and he is denied much independence in his story-telling. First, the master falls asleep, then beats him, then interrupts him with doubts about the true pain of his wound. From the beginning the primary narrator interrupts Jacques's tale just as the master does, often to the point of taking over the servant's story. For example, the "je" in the following quotation is the narrator's: "Lorsque j'entendis l'hôte s'écrier de sa femme . . ." (p. 507). The peasant subsequently becomes "mon paysan," one of his own creations. Jacques then advances more smoothly until he again must stop to defend his captain's philosophy. In the ensuing discussion we see a Jacques who begins to ask questions, but still can go no farther than the lesson dictated to him from a superior:

Ce que vous m'objectez là m'a plus d'une fois chiffonné la cervelle; mais avec tout cela, malgré que j'en aie, j'en reviens toujours au mot de mon capitaine: Tout ce qui nous arrive de bien et de mal ici-bas est écrit là-haut. Savez-vous, monsieur, quelque moyen d'effacer cette écriture? Puis-je n'être pas moi? Et étant moi, puis-je faire autrement que moi? Puis-je être moi et un autre? Et depuis que je suis au monde, y a-t-il eu un seul instant où cela n'ait été vrai? Prêchez tant qu'il vous plaira, vos raisons seront peut-être bonnes; mais s'il est écrit en moi ou là-haut que je les trouverai mauvaises, que voulez-vous que j'y fasse? (pp. 498-9)

"Puis-je n'être pas moi?" asks Jacques. The questions about liberty and free will which this and a number of other discussions raise in the novel form a logical background to the spectacle of Jacques engaged in constant dialogue with a master and ever under his will. In these preliminary stages



of his tale, Jacques always delegates responsibility back to this "écriture" and the fatalistic response, "il était écrit là-haut," just as the servant acts for the master through no individual initiative or responsibility.<sup>60</sup> Jacques is still a follower: "Nous croyons conduire le destin; mais c'est toujours lui qui nous mène; et le destin, pour Jacques, était tout ce qui le touchait ou l'approchait, son cheval, son maître, un moins, un chien, une femme, un mulet, une corneille" (p. 520). At this point Jacques is still devoid of an adequate sense of self; this "moi" of which he speaks is that prerecorded in the "grand rouleau" over which he states he has no control. His fatalism also initially implies resignation to servitude: "Le fatalisme est la philosophie de l'homme qui ne peut échapper à sa condition servile: elle lui convient, car elle le justifie."<sup>61</sup>

Jacques's inconsistencies are myriad; suddenly he does take control of the situation at the inn where he and his master are treated indignantly by the band of thieves. He coolly locks them in their room in spite of the master's fears, and calmly leaves the inn the next morning (pp. 500-2). Jacques again takes an obvious initiative unrequested by his master when he returns to their lodgings to get their money and the master's watch. Once he leaves the master, Jacques sees much action and defends his rights and property; the master sleeps. He is however incapable of following through on the consequences of such action, and refuses to draw a

conclusion which would imply his own freedom: "C'est que, faute de savoir ce qui est écrit là-haut, on ne sait ni ce qu'on veut ni ce qu'on fait, et qu'on suit sa fantaisie qu'on appelle raison, ou sa raison qui n'est souvent qu'une dangereuse fantaisie qui tourne tantôt bien, tantôt mal" (p. 503).

Here it is as if even Jacques's words refuse to make a stand; the above affirmation really says very little, and the reader comes away with many choices, but no sense of meaning: "ce qu'on veut"/"ce qu'on fait"; "sa fantaisie"/"sa raison"; "tantôt bien"/"tantôt mal." Jacques elsewhere indulges in such refusals to interpret or signify, and perhaps the best example of such a phenomenon is this extended tale of his "amours," which only briefly arrives at its goal and still lacks a conclusion. Obviously, this narrative device is repeated on a wider scale by the primary narrator himself.

The contrast between Jacques's active nature and the master's passivity is clearly marked, in spite of Jacques's enigmas, and suggests a first important parallel with the master and slave struggle described by Hegel. The master is the "automate," incapable of personal initiative other than to command Jacques to continue his story. "Il ne dort pas, il ne veille pas non plus; il se laisse exister: c'est sa fonction habituelle" (p. 515). So, too, the Hegelian Master is pure existence, a consciousness whose essential nature is

to be for itself.<sup>62</sup> He is not, like the Slave, tied up in the world of objects, but is a consciousness "existing on its own account which is mediated with itself through another consciousness, i.e., through an other whose very nature implies that it is bound up within an independent being or with thinghood in general."<sup>63</sup> It is Jacques who is preoccupied with their material possessions, and thus he protects them in the incidents mentioned above. These elements of his bondage, however, also grant him some control over his existence, and are a means of defying the "grand rouleau." The master, a being made up of pure desire (his extreme dependency upon his watch, his snuff pouch and Jacques attest to this), has acquired such an addiction to the fulfillment of such desire that he cannot act under new circumstances. He sleeps, or remains silent, to avoid the "danger" of responsibility: ". . . il n'y a du danger que pour ceux qui parlent; et je me tais" (p. 564).

In the course of their often interminable discussions on human existence, Jacques and his master resolve little, but a certain equality is established between them as it becomes obvious that neither can impose his reasoning upon the other. At times, their voices are indistinguishable in the narrative, and all meaning is again stifled by such repetition:

Et les voilà embarqués dans une querelle interminable sur les femmes; l'un prétendant qu'elles étaient bonnes, l'autre méchantes: et ils avaient tous deux

raison; l'un sottes, l'autre pleines d'esprit: et ils avaient tous deux raison; l'un fausses, l'autre vraies: et ils avaient tous deux raison; l'un avares, l'autre libérales: et ils avaient tous deux raison; l'un belles, l'autre laides: et ils avaient tous deux raison; l'un bavardes, l'autre discrètes; l'un franches, l'autre dissimulées; l'un ignorantes, l'autre éclairées; l'un sages, l'autre libertines; l'un folles, l'autre sensées, l'un grandes, l'autre petites: et ils avaient tous deux raison. (p. 513)

A symbiotic relationship is established between the two protagonists as the cycle of telling and interrupting becomes the norm of their voyage. Jacques manifests his own power as a story-teller just as the master continues to attempt to direct his narrative. It is difficult to determine which of the two is the more dominant, for though the master continues to command that the story continue, he also reverses roles with Jacques after his accident. The following passage reinforces the intimacy noted between the two and shows the master more solicitous than the servant:

A peine Jacques fut-il couché, qu'il s'endormit profondément. Son maître passa la nuit à son chevet, lui tâtant le pouls et humectant sans cesse sa compresse avec de l'eau vulnérable. Jacques le surprit à son réveil dans cette fonction, et lui dit: Que faites-vous là?

Le Maître

Je te veille. Tu es mon serviteur, quand je suis malade ou bien portant; mais je suis le tien quand tu te portes mal.

Jacques

Je suis bien aise de savoir que vous êtes humain; ce n'est pas trop la qualité des maîtres envers leurs valets. (p. 559)

This instance of role reversal clearly enacts the paradoxical impasse of Hegel's Master, who cannot maintain a truly independent consciousness of self because the Slave's "unessential consciousness" is also the "object which embodies the truth of his certainty of himself."<sup>64</sup> As they mutually gaze upon one another, the master literally becomes the servant, indirectly admitting to his dependence upon Jacques. Jacques in turn envisages him as "humain," and no longer the master.

Within the dialogue, too, the master assumes Jacques's role and begins to relate anecdotes himself (the death of Socrates and the tale of the broken rings). He does also continue to impose certain directions upon Jacques's tale:

Le Maître

. . . [M]ais quand tu parleras, tu veux apparemment être écouté?

Jacques

Cela va sans dire.

Le Maître

Eh bien! en conscience, je ne saurais te répondre, tant que cet inintelligible propos me chiffonnera la cervelle. Tire-moi de là, je t'en prie. (p. 542)

Then again, Jacques takes revenge upon his master's request for a digression by supplying a further interruption, the story of M. Le Pelletier. He can also choose to remain silent (p. 547).

This entire sequence is punctuated by frequent attempts on the part of both to manifest their power in the narration.

The master expresses impatience with Jacques's leisurely manner of narration and demands that he summarize:

Et tu crois que je passerai trois mois dans la maison du docteur avant que d'avoir entendu le premier mot de tes amours? Ah! Jacques, cela ne se peut. Fais-moi grâce, je te prie, et de la description de la maison, et du caractère du docteur, et de l'humeur de la doctoresse, et des progrès de ta guérison; saute, saute par-dessus tout cela. Au fait! allons au fait! (pp. 568-9)

Yet Jacques counterattacks with another subtle show of his own power. After arousing his master's curiosity with the suggestion of mysterious circumstances which concern him personally, he can insist upon telling the story as he wishes. In this manner he successfully entraps his listener so completely within his tale that the master ultimately totally identifies with the action.<sup>65</sup>

Neither of the two protagonists definitively gains the upper hand in this give-and-take of power. The complex problem of the power of the act of narration itself is also acted out in the primary narrator's sustained presence in the text. The narrator's derision in his taunting manner towards the reader would imply his sense of his own superiority and control within his text, yet he must continually respond to this reader's questions and criticism. A clear progression in the development of these "narrative relationships" is difficult to ascertain, due to the paradox of the speaker's continued obligations to his listener and to "reality" which impede upon his control of the story. This simultaneous power and dependence coincides with the actuality of

Jacques's status as a servant, for narration is always his commanded task and his liberation.

On the moral front, however, it is Jacques, and not the master, who indulges in introspection and attempts to reconcile his comportment with his philosophy. Once more the master's significant immobility should be singled out here. Jacques's freedom would emanate from a true fatalism, which here he seems to judge impossible:

J'ai cent fois essayé . . . [d]e me moquer de tout. Ah! si j'avais pu y réussir!

Le Maître

A quoi cela t'aurait-il servi?

Jacques

A me délivrer de souci, à n'avoir plus besoin de rien, à me rendre parfaitement maître de moi, à me trouver aussi bien la tête contre une borne, au coin de la rue, que sur un bon oreiller. Tel je suis quelquefois; mais le diable est que cela ne dure pas, et que dur et ferme comme un rocher dans les grandes occasions, il arrive souvent qu'une petite contradiction, une bagatelle me déferre; c'est à se donner des soufflets. J'y ai renoncé; j'ai pris le parti d'être comme je suis; et j'ai vu, en y pensant un peu, que cela revenait presque au même, en ajoutant: Qu'importe comme on soit? C'est une autre résignation plus facile et plus commode. (pp. 573-4)

The question previously stated in a negative mode, "Puis-je n'être pas moi?" becomes a positive attempt at self-affirmation: "J'ai pris le parti d'être comme je suis." Jacques here assumes his individuality as the sole measure of his fatalism, rather than forcing himself into the mold of total philosophic resignation. He affirms himself as a

being of contradictions, and hence he embodies movement and change. The master does not even attempt such an analysis. It is the Slave, according to Hegel, who finally faces the master and "becomes aware of himself as factually and objectively self-existent."<sup>66</sup> Also the Hegelian Slave is a being of evolution, "historical becoming at his origin, in his essence, in his very existence."<sup>67</sup> In a subsequent passage, Jacques again verbalizes his own contradictions, but also his essential humanity, as he prays in spite of his fatalism:

Je prie à tout hasard; et quoi qu'il m'advînt, je ne m'en réjouirais ni m'en plaindrais, si je me possédais; mais c'est que je suis inconséquent et violent, que j'oublie mes principes ou les leçons de mon capitaine et que je ris et pleure comme un sot. (p. 656)

Jacques's tale is progressively dislodged from its position as the primordial preoccupation of his master during the novel's central sequence, which is dominated by the longer digressions by the hôtesse and the marquis d'Arcis (Mme de Pommeraye and Pere Hudson episodes). Jacques, no longer the story-teller, must affirm his existence by other means, notably contradictions and interruptions: "C'est que j'aime à parler aussi" (p. 593). He counteracts the hôtesse's attempts to begin her story at least eight times, and adds his commentary at regular intervals. She silences him somewhat with repeated offers of champagne. Eventually, as the tale of Mme de la Pommeraye continues, all of their voices are equally silenced, or they equally participate in the commentary upon the story. Even the primary narrator



tempers his interventions during the course of both anecdotes. The superhuman figures of Mme de la Pommeraye and the Père Hudson unfurl their revenge and mastery of others undisturbed.

The lessons learned through the encounters at the inn force the matter of domination out in the open for Jacques and his master. It is interesting in terms of the structure of the novel that the central struggle between the two is placed in the middle of these two anecdotes. Although its pretext is initially comical ("Tu descendras. - Je ne descendrai pas," p. 661), the entire scene becomes the locus of the explicit shift of power from the master to Jacques which shall characterize the rest of the novel (pp. 659-665). The master, suddenly aware of his weakness, attempts to regain control while Jacques, testing the limits of his freedom, affirms his own sense of power. Furthermore, the lower-class servant-hero of convention, "un Jacques," here defends his right to a three-dimensional role. The master becomes the desperate spokesman for a class previously unaware that its power was waning, while Jacques announces his own dignity and claims that he shall take and hold this power.

The struggle ensues when the master provokes his servant with an unusually aggressive denigration of Jacques's value, for he is surprised that Denise, a servant at Desglands' château, would opt for a man of his lowly class: "La coquine! préférer un Jacques!" (p. 659). The use of the

indefinite article and the popular term Jacques attributed to the peasantry removes a sense of individuality, which Jacques must promptly reinstate: "un Jacques, monsieur, est un homme comme un autre. . . . C'est quelquefois mieux qu'un autre" (p. 659). The master then repeatedly attempts to put him in his place: "souvenez-vous que vous n'êtes et que vous ne serez jamais qu'un Jacques. . . . Si j'ai fait la sottise de vous tirer de votre place, je saurai bien vous y remettre" (pp. 659-60). To each new command Jacques objects, reviewing the freedoms which he had previously acquired, while the master verbally reinstates new rules and attempts, through words, to transform the relationship into the desired superior-inferior model he believed had continued to exist. Trapped in the status quo of the automatic fulfillment of his desires, he had been blind to the disintegration of his powers. By simple desire, again, he hopes to regain control:

Jacques

. . . Comment, monsieur, après m'avoir accoutumé pendant dix ans à vivre de pair à compagnon . . .

Le Maître

Il me plaît que cela cesse.

Jacques

Après avoir souffert toutes mes impertinences . . .

Le Maître

Je n'en veux plus souffrir.

## Jacques

Après m'avoir fait asseoir à table à côté de vous, m'avoir appelé votre ami . . .

## Le Maître

Vous ne savez pas ce que c'est que le nom d'ami donné par un supérieur à son subalterne. (p. 660)

The master's attempts to control the meaning of "le nom d'ami" and thus to control their narrative and social relationship is struck down by Jacques's retort, which destroys his verbal prowess: "tous vos ordres ne sont que des clous à soufflet, s'ils n'ont été ratifiés par Jacques . . ." (p. 661). He further emphasizes his point by reiterating what others say: "[T]out le monde dit Jacques et son maître." Suddenly Jacques becomes a proper name and it is the master who remains not only anonymous, but an object of possession, "son maître."

A shouting match ensues, which is stopped only by the hôtesse's intervention. The allusions to the quarrel between the king and Parliament which the narrator points out in the hôtesse's declarations do not intrude upon a more literal interpretation of the struggle between master and servant. On the contrary, the explicit historical reference only reinforces the socio-political dimensions of this scene. The old manifestations of absolute power are "reduced to a series of hollow claims recognized as such both by [themselves] and [their] class adversary."<sup>68</sup>

Thomas M. Kavanagh's approach to this quarrel in terms of the linguistic concepts of "performative" and "constative" discourse is a useful analytical tool.<sup>69</sup> Briefly, the content of performative discourse is made to exist by the act of enunciating it (his example is the statement, "I declare war"), while constative discourse "refers to a state of being existing outside and independent of its particular articulation."<sup>70</sup> In the course of the scene, the confrontation of the opposed constatives of the master and Jacques makes it necessary to resort to the performative (the "tu descendras"/"Je ne descendrai pas" passage), but the only result is these "two equally infelicitous performatives."<sup>71</sup> Reality and meaning no longer figure in the verbal exchange. Even the hôtesse's peace terms avoid "factuality" and are obligingly vague:

Et je défends qu'il soit jamais question entre eux de cette affaire, et que la prérogative de maître et de serviteur soit agitée à l'avenir. Voulons que l'un ordonne et que l'autre obéisse, chacun de son mieux; et qu'il soit laissé, entre ce que l'un peut et ce que l'autre doit, la même obscurité que ci-devant. (p. 663)

Since she names neither of the two, the "l'un" and "l'autre" do not necessarily refer to the master and Jacques respectively. The actual situation, social titles and roles, are thus totally blurred, leaving the two protagonists free to redefine their positions.

It is then Jacques, of course, who infuses new meaning into the terms "master" and "servant" so that each shall be

seen to be the opposite of what it appears. He takes control of the conversation, initiates the new rules and enforces them as he wishes. A number of his comments again mirror the evolution of Hegel's Slave, most notably his passage from an "unessential" to an "essential" consciousness. So Jacques senses his indispensable role: ". . . il est écrit là-haut que je vous suis essentiel, et que je sens, que je sais que vous ne pouvez pas vous passer de moi, j'abuserai de ces avantages toutes et quantes fois que l'occasion s'en présentera" (p. 664, my emphasis). Furthermore, his provocative dialogue continually revolves around such a cancellation of the master's reality as master:

Stipulons: 2<sup>o</sup> qu'attendu qu'il est aussi impossible à Jacques de ne pas connaître son ascendant et sa force sur son maître, qu'à son maître de méconnaître sa faiblesse et de se dépouiller de son indulgence, il faut que Jacques soit insolent, et que, pour la paix, son maître ne s'en aperçoive pas. . . . Il fut arrêté que vous auriez les titres, et que j'aurais la chose. . . . Toutes nos querelles ne sont venues jusqu'à présent que parce que nous ne nous étions pas encore bien dit, vous, que vous vous appelleriez mon maître, et que c'est moi qui serais le vôtre. (pp. 665-6)

According to Hegel as well, bondage will reveal itself as the opposite of what it immediately is, and so the master abdicates the dominant position by succumbing to the recognition of his servant.<sup>72</sup> In the eyes of the servant he finds only the chains he himself had created, whereas the servant finds emancipation in the independence of the master. The entire scene is an effective dramatization of the paradoxical play of forces which Hegel seized upon some forty

years later. Jacques's commentary equally dwells upon the generality of their predicament when he suggests that it follows a natural "law" which the master cannot escape:

[C]ela s'est fait de tous les temps, se fait aujourd'hui, et se fera tant que le monde durera. Croyez-vous que les autres n'aient pas cherché comme vous à se soustraire à ce décret, et que vous serez plus habile qu'eux? Défaites-vous de cette idée, et soumettez-vous à la loi d'un besoin dont il n'est pas en votre pouvoir de vous affranchir. (pp. 664-5)

Jacques retains the upper hand as the being of change: "un Jacques n'est point un homme comme les autres" (p. 659), whereas the master is eternally fixed in the impasse: "un maître est un maître" (p. 662). The rest of the novel constitutes an elaboration of these new, and now explicit, terms.

As has previously been suggested, Jacques's narration also embodies both his servitude and his means to freedom. In the last segment of the novel, in which he and the master recommence their journey alone, speech is seen increasingly as an instrument of liberation. In the series of shorter tales converging around Jacques's past and his amorous intrigues as a young peasant, the master intervenes briefly from time to time, but is rebuked by Jacques for vainly attempting to guess at the action:

Le Maître

Mais tu fus déniaisé, je gage, par quelque vieille impudique de ton village?

Jacques

Ne gagez pas, vous perdriez.

Le Maître

Ce fut par la servante de ton curé?

Jacques

Ne gagez pas, vous perdriez encore.

Le Maître

Ce fut donc par sa nièce?

Jacques

Sa nièce crevait d'humeur et de dévotion, deux qualités qui vont fort bien ensemble, mais qui ne me vont pas.

Le Maître

Pour cette fois, je crois que j'y suis.

Jacques

Moi, je n'en crois rien.

Le Maître

Un jour de foire ou de marché . . .

Jacques

Ce n'était ni un jour de foire, ni un jour de marché.

Le Maître

Tu allas à la ville.

Jacques

Je n'allai point à la ville.

Le Maître

Et il était écrit là-haut que tu rencontrerais dans un taverne quelqu'une de ces créatures obligeantes; que tu t'enivrerai . . .

Jacques

J'étais à jeun; et ce qui était écrit là-haut, c'est qu'à l'heure qu'il est vous vous épuiseriez en fausses conjectures; et que vous gagneriez un défaut dont vous m'avez corrigé, la fureur de deviner, et toujours de travers. (pp. 690-1)<sup>73</sup>

Jacques governs the telling of the tales, and entices his master into wanting to hear more.<sup>74</sup> After hearing the story, the master, like Jacques, must laugh every time he thinks of it, and thus Jacques controls his reactions:

Jacques

De quoi riez-vous?

Le Maître

De ce qui me fera rire, comme toi, toutes les fois que je me rappellerai le petit prêtre au bout de la fourche du mari. (p. 713)

In an inverse movement, Jacques's silence, caused by his sore throat, emancipates him from his commanded task of telling the story of his "loves," and further emphasizes the master's dependency upon the servant. Without Jacques, the master becomes the automaton once more, "réduit . . . à sa montre et à sa tabatière; indigence qui l'afflige autant que vous" (p. 717). Furthermore, his silence gives him power as the sole proprietor of his tale, and, as the open-ended finish of the novel suggests, leaves him open to evolution. The master's own tale of his love affair is quite the antithesis of such freedom to change.

Left to his own amusement, the master sees no other course of action than to imitate Jacques and commence the



narration of his "amours." Although Jacques acquired recognition from the master through his story, the master can only reenact the same impasse as he presents himself before his servant. Not only does he imitate Jacques in his choice of subject matter, but in the course of his story his conduct is manipulated by others. Jacques intervenes often and aggressively, to the point of even taking over part of the telling, in spite of the master's protests. Previously, when the master had interrupted Jacques with questions, it was due to his ignorance and curiosity. Jacques, however, manifests more power by correctly predicting the events the master seeks to recount:

Le Maître

Mon père mourut dans ces entrefaites. J'acquittai les lettres de change, et je sortis de ma retraite, où, pour l'honneur du chevalier et de mon amie, j'avouerai qu'ils me tinrent assez fidèle compagnie.

Jacques

Et vous voilà tout aussi féru qu'auparavant du chevalier et de votre belle; votre belle vous tenant la dragée plus haute que jamais.

Le Maître

Et pourquoi cela, Jacques?

Jacques

Pour quoi? C'est que maître de votre personne et possesseur d'une fortune honnête. il fallait faire de vous un sot complet, un mari.

Le Maître

Ma foi, je crois que c'était leur projet; mais il ne leur réussit pas. (p. 729)<sup>75</sup>

In a last gasp of power, the master menacingly chides Jacques for his interventions, and threatens to cease the story, but again the servant correctly predicts his actions: "D'accord; mais avec tout cela vous regarderez à votre montre l'heure qu'il est, vous prendrez votre prise de tabac, votre humeur cessera, et vous continuerez votre récit" (p. 738).

Several other examples continue to emphasize the degree of control Jacques has attained in this relationship as the two reach the "end" of their journey. Even when he merely abstains from speaking, he succeeds in determining the nature and the direction of the dialogue. He gives in to the master's whims only to re-establish control immediately:

Le Maître

Tu me démontreras celui-ci?

Jacques

Si vous y consentez.

Le Maître

J'y consens.

Jacques

Cela se fera, et parlons d'autre chose. (p. 759)

Here Jacques appears to doubly acquiesce by asking permission to carry out something the master has already requested, but then changes the subject abruptly without fulfilling the commanded task.

In a cyclical manner, the novel returns in the final pages to a scene in which the master falls from his horse,

insults Jacques, and once more attempts to beat him.

Jacques's triumph appears complete as he manipulates his master as he pleases:

Ils descendent de cheval, Jacques le premier, et se présentant avec célérité à la botte de son maître, qui n'eut pas plus tôt posé le pied sur l'étrier que les courroies se détachent et que mon cavalier, renversé en arrière, allait s'étendre rudement par terre si son valet ne l'eût reçu entre ses bras.

Le Maître

Eh bien! Jacques, voilà comme tu me soignes! Que s'en est-il fallu que je ne me sois enfoncé un côté, cassé le bras, fendu la tête, peut-être tué?

Jacques

Le grand malheur!

Le Maître

Que dis-tu, maroufle? Attends, attends, je vais t'apprendre à parler . . .

Et le maître, après avoir fait faire au cordon de son fouet deux tours sur le poignet, de poursuivre Jacques, et Jacques de tourner autour du cheval en éclatant de rire; et son maître de jurer, de sacrer, d'écumer de rage, et de tourner aussi autour du cheval en vomissant contre Jacques un torrent d'invectives; et cette course de durer jusqu'à ce que tous deux, traversés de sueur et épuisés de fatigue, s'arrêtèrent l'un d'un côté du cheval, l'autre de l'autre, Jacques haletant et continuant de rire; son maître haletant et lui lançant des regards de fureur. Ils commençaient à reprendre haleine, lorsque Jacques dit à son maître: Monsieur mon maître en conviendra-t-il à présent?

Le Maître

Et de quoi veux-tu que je convienne, chien, coquin, infâme, sinon que tu es le plus méchant de tous les valets, et que je suis le plus malheureux de tous les maîtres?

Jacques

N'est-il pas évidemment démontré que nous agissons la plupart du temps sans vouloir? Là, mettez la main sur la conscience: de tout ce que vous avez dit ou fait depuis une demi-heure, en avez-vous rien voulu? N'avez-vous pas été ma marionnette, et n'auriez-vous pas continué d'être mon polichinelle pendant un mois, si je me l'étais proposé?

Le Maître

Quoi! c'était un jeu?

Jacques

Un jeu.

Le Maître

Et tu t'attendais à la rupture des courroies?

Jacques

Je l'avais préparée.

Le Maître

Et c'était le fil d'archal que tu attachais au-dessus de ma tête pour me démener à ta fantaisie?

Jacques

A merveille!

Le Maître

Et ta réponse impertinente était préméditée?

Jacques

Préméditée.

Le Maître

Tu es un dangereux vaurien. (pp. 774-5)

Quite unconventionally, but strikingly for our purposes here, the master loses all dignity and it is he, not the servant, who assumes the farcical role in falling unceremoniously

from his horse. The servant maintains the upper hand in the ensuing chase, laughing at his master's impotent rage. Although he purports to demonstrate the insufficiency of the concept of free will, Jacques is the force which controls and manipulates the master, not "destiny" or the "grand rouleau." He proves his point, but also demonstrates the power of the slave. The master, freed of all contact with the objects of his desire, has effectively lost mastery of his destiny.

Roger Laufer finds that the novel progresses towards a return to the status quo, with the master returned to an elevated position. "Jacques, le maître de son maître, découvre le mal et la grandeur et redevient Jacques, le valet de son maître."<sup>76</sup> The above scene, and the sheer inconclusiveness of Jacques's story refute such an interpretation. The master's destiny is accomplished, closed; Jacques finds himself incapable of arriving at a conclusion:

Tout s'y oppose, Premièrement le peu de chemin qui nous reste à faire; secondement, l'oubli de l'endroit où j'en étais; troisièmement, un diable de pressentiment que j'ai là . . . que cette histoire ne doit pas finir; que ce récit nous portera malheur, et que je ne l'aurai pas sitôt repris qu'il sera interrompu par une catastrophe heureuse ou malheureuse.  
(p. 768)

The ubiquitous narrator-turned-editor can only offer the reader three "possibilités" about Jacques's destiny. Could not the "catastrophe" to which Jacques alludes be the ultimate explicit reversal of roles which would deprive the master of his title?<sup>77</sup>

Jacques, like the master's bastard son, is the dynamic, disruptive element in the static, controlled, aristocratic view of the world which the master embodies. The latter destines his son for a manual profession, to keep him in his place: "J'en ferai un bon tourneur ou un bon horloger. Il se mariera; il aura des enfants qui tourneront à perpétuité des bâtons de chaise dans ce monde." Jacques, however, hints at revolution:

Qui sait le rôle que ce petit bâtard jouera dans le monde? Qui sait s'il n'est pas né pour le bonheur ou le bouleversement d'un empire? . . . Mais pourquoi ne sortirait-il pas un Cromwell de la boutique d'un tourneur? Celui qui fit couper la tête à son roi, n'était-il pas sorti de la boutique d'un brasseur? (p. 768)

The master of course refuses to pursue the discussion, and cuts Jacques off abruptly: "Laissons cela."<sup>78</sup>

#### Jacques, the Narrator and Diderot

Such "hints" as these, however, do not make of Jacques le fataliste a pre-revolutionary manifesto. Jacques's odyssey leads him to no specific situation or place and he, like the reader, is left with a sense of doubt. Although upon many occasions the novel converges upon the dialectical clash between master and servant, one cannot force it into an Hegelian mold. Jacques appears to gain the upper hand, but the reader does not witness his conclusive triumph. Furthermore, one could never convincingly affirm that Jacques is essentially a novel about the nature of servitude. The many parallels made with Hegel's ideas do, however,

demonstrate that Diderot too regarded servitude as a structure inherent in the relationships among men. The questions of power and freedom reappear with striking regularity in the text to remind us of this. He also insisted upon the dynamic, reversible nature of this model and obviously chose the servant over the master to embody this element of change.

Jacques le fataliste is also a novel about the novel, and the intrusive primary narrator carries on an insistent interrogation into the illusions of the genre. How does Jacques, the servant, fit into his scheme? Are there links between the questions raised about the novel and the theme of servitude which characterizes social relationships on all levels? The numerous similarities between the narrator and Jacques are the clue to an integration of the two structures.

On one level, Jacques is a character created by this narrator, and he is thus subject to his creator's whims in the text, metaphorically represented by the "great scroll" to which Jacques so often refers.<sup>79</sup> The narrator continually blurs this relationship, and rather regards Jacques as a participant in the elaboration of the novel. He mentions conversations with him, and refers to him as a direct source for much of the content. He insists that he knows no more of Jacques's love story than Jacques himself chooses to tell. In this sense he plays the role of Jacques's accomplice,<sup>80</sup> Within the dialogue with his master, Jacques also displays traits similar to those of this narrator: both feel their

power as sole owners of the "truth" and sometimes flaunt it aggressively.<sup>81</sup> The note of derision in the narrator's commentary addressed to his reader mirrors Jacques's repeated attempts to frustrate his master's pleasure as listener.

The relationships between the narrator and the reader, on one hand, and the master and Jacques, on the other, are characterized by a verbal exchange. He who knows the "story" can not only dominate his audience by choosing what to tell and when to tell it, he may also control the subject matter of the tale because of the power of language over the real.<sup>82</sup> Jacques echoes the narrator's mocking reminders that the novel can never be the mimetic mirror it claims to be:

Le Maître

Ne sois ni fade panégyriste, ni censeur amer;  
dis la chose comme elle est.

Jacques

Cela n'est pas aisé. N'a-t-on pas son caractère, son intérêt, son goût, ses passions, d'après quoi l'on exagère ou l'on atténue? Dis la chose comme elle est!... Cela n'arrive peut-être pas deux fois en un jour dans toute une grande ville. Et celui qui vous écoute est-il mieux disposé que celui qui parle? Non. (p. 544)

Here Jacques also mentions the listener's own power in any narrative relationship and therein lies the paradoxical and reversible nature of any verbal exchange. Just as Jacques embodies both master and servant, the narrator claims control but is subject to the reader's reception of his text. His preoccupation with the reader's requests and criticism



is also a sign of his subordination to the latter. The mere fact that he inserts this reader into the text shows his need for an audience:

Le geste, le fait du récit, établit un lien social qui se situe au niveau de la relation de narrateur à auditeur, et non au niveau des choses racontées; car ce geste du récit fait du récitant un être dépendant de son public. Le narrateur anonyme de Jacques le Fataliste suscite incessamment un lecteur, un auditeur imaginaire; Jacques ne peut se passer de son maître; non qu'il ait des besoins financiers, il a plutôt besoin de quelqu'un qui l'écoute.<sup>83</sup>

Diderot's penchant for paradox in general is indisputable, but the specific phenomenon of the interchange between master and slave reappears often in his work as a metaphor which links the concept of freedom to the problematic role of the artist/philosopher in society. M. Riffaterre underlines Diderot's predilection for the anecdote of Diogenes Laerce, the philosopher-slave who offers himself up for sale as master to the highest bidder. The image serves as "l'antithèse entre le mal social de la servitude et la liberté intérieure, triomphe individuel."<sup>84</sup> In his essay on Seneca as well, Diderot examines the complexity of the philosopher's role as mentor and subject with respect to the tyrant Nero.<sup>85</sup> The simultaneous enslavement and liberation of the thinker who is favored by the despot again resembles Jacques's precarious predicament. Diderot resorts to his own experiences with Catherine the Great of Russia to illustrate the contradictions: "Je me suis trouvé l'âme d'un homme libre dans la contrée qu'on appelle des esclaves, et

l'âme d'un esclave dans la contrée qu'on appelle des hommes libres."<sup>86</sup> In the same essay, he continually produces concrete examples of the slave's manifestations of his dignity and liberty before the master, yet simultaneously warns the free man about the illusions of liberty: "Un des plus grands vices, à mon avis, de notre éducation, soit publique, soit domestique, c'est de nous inspirer un si violent amour de la vie, de si grandes frayeurs de la mort, qu'on ne voit plus que des esclaves troublés au moindre choc qui menace leur chaîne."<sup>87</sup> He warns against the resulting mechanical subordination of creativity:

La contrainte des gouvernements despotiques rétrécit l'esprit sans qu'on s'en aperçoive: machinalement on s'interdit une certaine classe d'idées fortes, comme on s'éloigne d'un obstacle qui nous blesserait; et lorsqu'on s'est accoutumé à cette marche pusillanime et circonspécté, on revient difficilement à une marche audacieuse et franche.<sup>88</sup>

Rameau's Nephew equally exhibits the same contradictory freedom in servitude, and strikes out aggressively at this state of affairs. His case illustrates the destructive results the obligation to serve can potentially work upon the creative mind. Lui senses his power over the masters he serves:

Il faut que je les désennuie, c'est la condition, mais il faut que je m'amuse quelquefois. Au milieu de cet imbroglio il me passa par la tête une pensée funeste, une pensée qui me donna de la morgue, une pensée qui m'inspira de la fierté et de l'insolence; c'est qu'on ne pouvait se passer de moi, que j'étais un homme essentiel.<sup>89</sup>

Moi exhorts him to capitalize upon this and, like Jacques, "se faire une ressource indépendante de la servitude,"<sup>90</sup> but the Nephew demonstrates his own loss of personal integrity as the price of the satisfaction of his personal needs. The master-servant structure also functions here as a microcosm of society as a whole, which is depicted pantomiming the dance of servitude:

Quiconque a besoin d'un autre est indigent et prend une position. Le roi prend une position devant sa maîtresse et devant Dieu; il fait son pas de pantomime. Le ministre fait le pas de courtisan, de flatteur, de valet ou de gueux devant son roi. La foule des ambitieux dans vos positions, en cent manières plus viles les unes que les autres, devant le ministre. L'abbé de condition, en rabat et en manteau long, au moins une fois la semaine, devant le dépositaire de la feuille des bénéfices. Ma foi, ce que vous appelez la pantomime des gueux est le grand branle de la terre. . . .<sup>91</sup>

Michel Butor's provocative analysis of the persistence of this theme in Diderot's work suggests that Diderot is constantly "exorcising" the phantom of the servant because it is emblematic of the eighteenth-century writer's dilemma and his own particular situation.<sup>92</sup> Once again, like Jacques and the primary narrator in the novel, the author's function is simultaneously a sign of his servitude and the tool for his liberation. Butor uses the example of the Encyclopédie in Diderot's case, and further elaborates:

L'écrivain [du dix-huitième siècle], le conteur est un domestique qui parle trop bien. Ce trop bien parler fait sa puissance, car, comme les esclaves antiques instruits dans les sciences et les lettres, il fait la gloire et les délices de ses maîtres, mais cela le met aussi dans un perpétuel péril, car il aura toujours

tendance à dire ce qui ne plairait pas à ceux-ci; c'est pour pouvoir finalement le dire qu'il doit assumer sa condition de valet. . . .<sup>93</sup>

In Jacques le fataliste, Jacques, and the other lower-class characters also "speak too well," and this technique serves to question not only their social inferiority but the esthetic conventions which normally reinforce that status and "keep them in their place." They also do not function simply to convey the realistic touches so often associated with them, for the novel itself continually throws realism and the nature of the "real" into question. This preoccupation with the conventional limits set upon what language can convey provides the liberating force behind both the social and the esthetic dimensions of Jacques le fataliste.<sup>94</sup> When a literary work sets itself up for questioning in this manner, it also subtly shakes the structures in the society which it must represent, however indirectly or imperfectly. Jacques le fataliste contains traces of such subversion and its challenges to the dominant ideology of its time are centered around Jacques himself and his accomplice, the narrator. The two merge as shadows and creations of Diderot, who, if only in his refusal to bring the novel to a satisfactory conclusion, refuses to play the rules of the game of literature.

## NOTES - CHAPTER IV

<sup>1</sup>Denis Diderot, Jacques le fataliste et son maître in Oeuvres romanesques, ed. H. Bénac (Paris: Garnier, 1962), 594. This edition was chosen for its accessibility, and all subsequent page references to the novel will be made in the text.

<sup>2</sup>Alice G. Green, "Diderot's Fictional Worlds," Diderot Studies 1 (1949), 8. This minimal physical existence coincides with the general absence of any great attention to the physical setting in the novel, with a few notable exceptions. See for example Georges May, Quatre visages de Denis Diderot (n.p.: Boivin, 1951), 186-7.

<sup>3</sup>"The Functions of Narration in Diderot's Jacques le fataliste," Modern Language Notes 89 (May, 1974), 552.

<sup>4</sup>Le Héros et son double: Essai sur le roman d'ascension sociale au XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle (Paris: Corti, 1975), 108-9.

<sup>5</sup>Huet, p. 109, does admit that the social side is not neglected in the novel, but does not elaborate.

<sup>6</sup>Brogyanyi, p. 553.

<sup>7</sup>Diderot's Determined Fatalist: A Critical Appreciation of "Jacques le fataliste" (New York: King's Crown Press, 1950), 60-67.

<sup>8</sup>Loy, p. 83; Laufer, p. 519; Ernest Simon, "Fatalism, the Hobby Horse and the Esthetics of the Novel," Diderot Studies 16, 275; and also Leo Spitzer, Linguistics and Literary History: Essays in Stylistics (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1948), p. 189, note 42. This comparison, along with the numerous other allusions to novels and the matter of writing the novel (Tristram Shandy, of course, is the most obvious), makes of Jacques le fataliste a meeting-ground for the voices of novels and adds a further dimension to the text and its two wanderers.

<sup>9</sup>Huet, 109.

<sup>10</sup>"Allégorie et symbolisme dans Jacques le fataliste," Europäische Aufklärung: Herbert Dieckmann zum 60. Geburtstag, ed. Hugo Friedrich und Fritz Schalk (München: Wilhelm Funk Verlag, 1967), 69-70.

<sup>11</sup>Diderot, L'Homme et l'oeuvre (n.p.: Boivin, 1941), 140.

<sup>12</sup>Laufer, p. 521.

<sup>13</sup>Simon, p. 273.

<sup>14</sup>Green, p. 8. Compare Thomas M. Kavanagh, The Vacant Mirror: A Study of Mimesis through Diderot's "Jacques le fataliste", Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century 104 (1973), 42: Jacques and the master are "like a disembodied mouth and ear."

<sup>15</sup>"Jacques le fataliste, an 'expérience morale,'" Diderot Studies 3, 73-99.

<sup>16</sup>Jacques Smietanski, Le Réalisme dans "Jacques le Fataliste" (Paris: Nizet, 1965), 138.

<sup>17</sup>Smietanski, pp. 16-17.

<sup>18</sup>Maurice Roelens, "Jacques le fataliste et la critique contemporaine," Dix-huitième siècle 5 (1973), 123, note 1.

<sup>19</sup>Loy, p. 86.

<sup>20</sup>François Van Laere, "Jacques le fataliste: un problème de cohérence structurelle," in Studies in the Eighteenth Century III, ed. R.F. Brissenden and J.C. Eade (Toronto and Buffalo: Toronto University Press, 1976), 102-3.

<sup>21</sup>For example Henri Coulet, Le Roman jusqu'à la Révolution, I (New York: McGraw-Hill; Armand Colin, 1967), 511, and also Huet, 109-10.

<sup>22</sup>Two of the most provocative studies are the work by Kavanagh cited above (note 14) and an article by Simone Lecointre and Jean Le Galliot, "Pour une lecture de Jacques le fataliste," Littérature 4 (déc., 1971), 22-30.

<sup>23</sup>There are direct, mocking references to Prévost and Mme Riccoboni, for example, and, as mentioned above, the narrator calls upon the voices of many other literary texts to participate in the novel, in allusions to Montaigne, Molière, Dante, Goldoni, Du Laurens, Rousseau, Voltaire, etc.

<sup>24</sup>Yvon Belaval, "Nouvelles recherches sur Diderot II," Critique 14 (April, 1956), 313. Cf. Lecointre and Le Galliot: "Jacques le valet est maître de son maître, matérialiste conséquent et pourtant maître de lui-même. Son maître est à la fois maître et valet, simultanément spiritualiste et automate. Il ne s'agit pas seulement d'une inversion du rapport exclusif maître-valet posé dans le programme, par laquelle une thématique serait signifiée, très proche de la dialectique hégélienne du maître et de l'esclave." (p. 25)

<sup>25</sup>"Etat présent des études sur Diderot," L'Information littéraire 31 (mai-juin, 1979), 112.

<sup>26</sup>p. 521.

<sup>27</sup>See Brogyanyi, p. 555.

<sup>28</sup>Pp. 535, 597, 619, 654, 684, 715, 730, 738, 755 and 769.

<sup>29</sup>Simon, p. 273.

<sup>30</sup>Smietanski, p. 91. See also Loy, p. 85, who sees the master as "a gentleman whose extinction is forestalled only by the efforts of a Jacques."

<sup>31</sup>As all good story-tellers should, he seems to imply.

<sup>32</sup>p. 682.

<sup>33</sup>Notably pp. 512, 538-40, 547-9, 562-3, 594, 640, 660 and 751.

<sup>34</sup>The master has a similar reaction on the next page:

En cet endroit, le maître jeta ses bras autour du cou de son valet, en s'écriant: Mon pauvre Jacques, que vas-tu faire? Que vas-tu devenir? Ta position m'effraye.

Jacques

Mon maître, rassurez-vous, me voilà.

Le Maître

Je n'y pensais pas; j'étais à demain, à côté de toi, chez le docteur, au moment où tu t'éveilles, et où l'on vient te demander de l'argent. (p. 573)

Jacques himself falls into the same trap of embracing the illusions of the narrative:

Mais tenez, monsieur, je persiste, c'est un gueux, c'est un fieffé gueux. Je ne sais plus comment ceci finira; j'ai peur qu'il ne vous trompe encore en vous détrompant. Tirez-moi, tirez-vous bien vite vous-même de cette auberge et de la compagnie de cet homme-là... (p. 742, my italics)

<sup>35</sup>Again the links with the farce, and Molière, are pertinent. See also Smietanski, pp. 60-61.

<sup>36</sup>For example, p. 578, the scene at the inn in which Jacques tests his master's patience as he chats with the hôtesse.

<sup>37</sup>"... [I]l ne me manque pas un mot de toute leur affaire. Elle est plaisante, et si vous n'étiez pas plus pressé de vous coucher que moi, je vous la raconterais tout comme leur domestique l'a dite à ma servante, qui s'est trouvée être sa payse, qui l'a redite à mon mari, qui me l'a redite." (p. 582)

<sup>38</sup>D.J. Adams, "Style and social ideas in Jacques le fataliste," Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century 124 (1974), 232. The most notable examples are the compère, Bigre and son, the village characters Jacques remembers from his youth.

<sup>39</sup>Adams, pp. 232-6.



<sup>40</sup>Pp. 717 and 762-3, respectively.

<sup>41</sup>Smietanski, pp. 80-90.

<sup>42</sup>Smietanski, pp. 89-90.

<sup>43</sup>P. 520. Most other studies of Diderot's realism in Jacques le fataliste often associated with the presence of the common people, and their economic circumstances, see Roger Kempf, Diderot et le roman: ou le démon de la présence (Paris: Seuil, 1964), 134-6 and 140.

<sup>44</sup>Smietanski, p. 100.

<sup>45</sup>See p. 236 and note 26.

<sup>46</sup>This is of course another interesting parallel with Hegel's concept of the Master.

<sup>47</sup>This theme is also found in Diderot's short stories, and is the title of one of them.

<sup>48</sup>"Jacques le fataliste, an 'expérience morale,'" Diderot Studies 3 (1961), 90.

<sup>49</sup>See above, Chapter III, 207-210.

<sup>50</sup>Mme de la Pommeraye entirely dictates the conduct of Mlle d'Aison and her mother; the Père Hudson has equal control of his mistress, and, indirectly, of Richard and his colleague.

<sup>51</sup>This comment is also of interest in that it dwells upon the very real social problem at that time of the emigration from the country to the city, the many peasants forced to seek work as servants and the plight of the unemployed. Jacques's critical tone deplores the situation. The fear of being forced off the land also appears in the compère's remarks, and he evokes the possibility of sending his son to beg in the city.

<sup>52</sup>See note 3.

<sup>53</sup>"Sachez seulement que j'ai été élevée à Saint-Cyr, où j'ai peu lu l'Evangile et beaucoup de romans. De l'abbaye royale à l'auberge que je tiens il y a loin." (p. 620)

<sup>54</sup>Most often between pp. 719-50.

<sup>55</sup>p. 559.

<sup>56</sup>Brogyanyi, p. 556.

<sup>57</sup>Kavanagh, p. 41.

<sup>58</sup>Brogyanyi, p. 555.

<sup>59</sup>Herein also lies another link between Jacques and the primary narrator, for these are not his words either, but the stock refrain of determinism and then a paraphrase from Tristram Shandy.

<sup>60</sup>Of course, one might make the case of Jacques as a character subject to the whims of the author, from whom originates this "écriture," the novel. See Van Laere, p. 100, and p. 289.

<sup>61</sup>Laufer, p. 522.

<sup>62</sup>The Phenomenology of Mind, trans. J.B. Baillie, 2nd ed. (New York: Macmillan, 1931), 234.

<sup>63</sup>Hegel, pp. 234-5.

<sup>64</sup>Hegel, p. 236.

<sup>65</sup>See above, p. 243.

<sup>66</sup>Hegel, p. 239.

<sup>67</sup>See Chapter III, p. 209 and note 88.

<sup>68</sup>Kavanagh, p. 123.

<sup>69</sup>See chapter X of The Vacant Mirror, "Performative and constative discourse," pp. 123-132.

<sup>70</sup>Kavanagh, pp. 124-5.

<sup>71</sup>Kavanagh, pp. 125-7, goes on to discuss how this situation is theoretically infinite, in that it establishes a stasis no longer linked to reality. Only a new factor, the hôtesse's "absolute performative," can abolish this deadlock.

<sup>72</sup>Hegel, p. 237.

<sup>73</sup>Another example is found on p. 693.

<sup>74</sup>For example, pp. 709-10, when Jacques suddenly laughs out of context and then introduces a new character, the village vicar, knowing full well that the master will demand an explanation.

<sup>75</sup>See also pp. 727-8 for another more complex example of the same phenomenon. Jacques's interventions in this entire sequence can be organized as follows: he guesses right - pp. 719, 722, 725, 726; discusses the events - pp. 729, 736, 742, 746; adds events - pp. 725, 750; wants another story - pp. 747-8.

<sup>76</sup>Pp. 521-2, 530-4 and 518, respectively.

<sup>77</sup>"Heureuse" for Jacques and "malheureuse" for the master.

<sup>78</sup>Cf. Loy, p. 82, who fails to arrive at any definitive explanation of this passage.

<sup>79</sup>Van Laere, p. 100.

<sup>80</sup>See p. 263.

<sup>81</sup>On the power and aggression of the narrator, see Robert Mauzi, "La Parodie romanesque dans Jacques le fataliste," Diderot Studies 6 (1964), 103 and 118.

<sup>82</sup>Kavanagh, p. 83.

<sup>83</sup>Huet, p. 122.

<sup>84</sup>"Diderot et le philosophe esclave: De Diogène Laërce à Victor Hugo," Diderot Studies 3 (1961), 353.

<sup>85</sup>Essai sur les règnes de Claude et de Néron et sur la vie et les écrits de Sénèque pour servir d'introduction à la lecture de ce philosophe (1778-1782) in Oeuvres complètes, ed. Assézat, III (Paris: Garnier, 1875), 1-407.

<sup>86</sup>Essai sur les règnes de Claude et de Néron, p. 219.

<sup>87</sup>Essai sur les règnes de Claude et de Néron, p. 189.

<sup>88</sup>Essai sur les règnes de Claude et de Néron, p. 219. This aspect is analyzed in great detail by Joseph L. Waldauer, Society and the Freedom of Creative Man in Diderot's Thought, Diderot Studies 5 (1964).

<sup>89</sup>Denis Diderot, Le Neveu de Rameau, in Oeuvres romanesques, ed. H. Bénac (Paris: Garnier, 1962), 451.

<sup>90</sup>Neveu, p. 433.

<sup>91</sup>Neveu, p. 487.

<sup>92</sup>"Diderot le fataliste et ses maîtres II," Critique 22 (juillet 1966), 619-641.

<sup>93</sup>Butor, p. 625.

<sup>94</sup>In a particularly long and aggressive digression, the primary narrator lashes out at censorship and demonstrates the relativity of what is, or is not obscene. He thus directly addresses the problem of language and its power to suppress reality in an "acceptable" literary work and denounces such hypocrisy: "mais permettez-moi que je dise f..tre; je vous passe l'action, passez-moi le mot. Vous prononcez hardiment, tuer, voler, trahir, et l'autre vous ne l'oseriez qu'entre les dents! Est-ce que moins vous exhalez de ces prétendues impuretés en paroles, plus il vous en reste dans la pensée? Et que vous a fait l'action génitale, si naturelle, si nécessaire et si juste, pour en exclure le signe de vos entretiens, et pour imaginer que votre bouche, vos yeux et vos oreilles en seraient souillés? Il est bon que les expressions les moins usitées, les moins écrites, les mieux tuées soient les mieux suées et les plus généralement connues; aussi cela est; aussi le mot futuo n'est-il pas moins familier que le mot pain; nul âge ne l'ignore, nul idiome n'en est privé: il a mille synonymes dans toutes les

langués, il s'imprime en chacune sans être exprimé, sans voix, sans figure, et le sexe qui le fait le plus, a usage de le taire le plus." (pp. 714-5)

## CHAPTER V

### CONTEMPORARY CURRENTS: THE CODES OF INFERIORITY

From the foregoing analyses one might already offer a number of conclusions about the potential of the servant-hero as a character in the serious novel as well as about the technical problems posed by his presence. The novels in question are generally considered masterpieces of the period, but the increasing complexity of the servant's role analyzed here still cannot be judged exemplary of the eighteenth century. The production of novels grew astonishingly at this time, and the great variety of trends and subject matter in these texts prevents global generalization.<sup>1</sup> The evolution of the servant-hero was but one novelty among many which appeared in such an age of experimentation. As a consequence, it is appropriate here to consider briefly the literary and social significance of the servant on a wider scale in order to place this analysis in a proper perspective. The novels studied all address in some way the exclusion of the lower classes from the literary sphere; it is this concept of exclusion which continues to dominate social attitudes as they are presented in the literature and in a great majority of other eighteenth-century writings. Such

an attitude partially explains the enigmatic nature of the servant-hero when he does appear. It also looms large as another nuance of the common association of the Age of the Enlightenment with humanitarian and egalitarian preoccupations.

A number of recent studies of the meanings associated with the word "peuple" in eighteenth-century thought point out the problem in perspective arising when one attempts to define the general nature of the attitude towards the lower classes.<sup>2</sup> Historians and literary critics alike concur that there does exist a rising preoccupation with the common people as a factor in the socio-economic whole. They emerge as a "clear, albeit stereotyped, social object worthy of study and concern."<sup>3</sup> Thus while greater attention was drawn to the lot of the masses, the stereotypes and objectification of the seventeenth century generally persisted. The treatises and essays that have been analyzed continually approach the problem from above and at a distance, and propose to shuffle people around like objects with great disregard for the individual.<sup>4</sup> These texts are characterized by one critic as a "litany of scorn," and while they invite sympathy and charity for the underprivileged, this attitude is intended to reflect back upon the giver.<sup>5</sup> The parallels with La Bruyère's attitude towards "les animaux farouches" are obvious, and show that little has really changed.<sup>6</sup>

Because the literature of the eighteenth century stands out as a literature preoccupied with social problems, and

since a number of the predominant literary figures (Montesquieu, Voltaire, Rousseau and Diderot) were also writing about social and political questions, this comparison of explicit attitudes towards a specific class with their literary manifestations is particularly appropriate. Their manner of addressing the concept of the common people, who still composed over three-fourths of the population, is illustrative of that of the intellectual and political elite as a whole. "Le peuple" takes on diverse connotations, usually according to the writer's intentions. In more abstract works dealing with political systems, the term is used to designate the entire nation, and most particularly the people as a force united against an adversary of some sort (tyrant, enemy nation, etc.). Rousseau's Contrat social uses the term in this fashion, for example.<sup>7</sup> Usually, however, the word more specifically applies to those outside of the elite. The Encyclopédie defines "peuple" as those who live by manual labor and possess no property of their own.<sup>8</sup> Most of the writers keep their distance from this group, which often takes on an additional menacing aura, illustrated in the term "la canaille," the multitude in its misery and ignorance.<sup>9</sup> In spite of their republican ideals, the philosophes and political writers generally felt that the masses should be excluded from the administration of the state, which thus would be reserved solely to property owners. "Mably n'a que mépris pour le peuple, 'cette lie de l'humanité . . .



destinée à servir de lest au vaisseau de la société' et d'Holbach, si radical à d'autres égards, est persuadé que 'c'est la propriété qui fait le citoyen.'"<sup>10</sup> Even Rousseau, who tended to idealize "le peuple" more than his contemporaries, expressed a certain disdain for them upon more than one occasion (see below).

The top of the social hierarchy during this period was in a state of flux as the nobility struggled to retain some of its dwindling powers and privileges and the landed bourgeoisie claimed liberties and powers of its own, some of which its members had already exercised since the reign of Louis XIV. A redefinition of the elite occurred in which this bourgeoisie was included, although not particularly through the ennobling of the upper middle class, which remained rare.<sup>11</sup> Still, there persisted a distinct breach between these groups and the inferior classes, and the calls for "equality" and "liberty" generally did not extend to them. The anonymous masses were perceived as a disruptive element because of their ignorance: "Ne réclamons jamais contre cette inégalité qui fut toujours nécessaire," states d'Holbach, because "la populace imbécile . . . privée de lumière et de bon sens peut à chaque instant devenir l'instrument et le complice des démagogues turbulents qui voudraient troubler la société."<sup>12</sup> Voltaire echoes this relativism: "Nous sommes tous également hommes, mais non membres égaux de la société."<sup>13</sup>

One of the most concrete examples of this intention to exclude the lower classes from the redistribution of power and rights is found in the discussion of educational reforms. On the one hand, "the proponents of educational reform were convinced that in order to improve society and renovate the state they would have to remake men's minds."<sup>14</sup> Upon further examination, such idealism is seen to give way to a number of misgivings about the social mobility even a basic education would produce, particularly with respect to the manual laborers. There were fears that education "would create in peasants and artisans a distaste for those tasks which were painful but essential to society," and that they would no longer "know their place."<sup>15</sup> James Leith offers a number of examples of such a contradiction to the ideal and concludes:

. . . in le siècle éclairé, . . . it was difficult to oppose mass education. A few spoke out openly against too much education for the lower classes. Many more revealed their misgivings by their silences and omissions. Others designed plans for schools which reflected the existing hierarchical social structure. And some who appeared to be champions of popular education proposed an extremely limited curriculum for ordinary primary schools and provided for very little progression into higher institutions. . . . Misgivings affected all social groups, but viewpoints varied. . . . Often men who were very progressive in advocating state control and curriculum reform proved very conservative in their reluctance to shake the existing social order.<sup>16</sup>

Voltaire, for one, felt that the education of the multitude would breed such discontent, and concluded one letter rather disdainfully:

J'entends par peuple la populace qui n'a que ses bras pour vivre. Je doute que cet ordre de citoyens ait

jamais le temps ou la capacité de s'instruire, ils mourraient de faim avant de devenir philosophes, il me paraît essentiel qu'il y ait des gueux ignorants.<sup>17</sup>

Rousseau's Emile is the son of a rich man, and "le peuple" appears in this text simply as a tool in the instruction of Emile and Sophie. "Le pauvre n'a pas besoin d'éducation; celle de son état est forcée; il n'en saurait avoir d'autre."<sup>18</sup>

Admittedly, these examples are cited out of context and should not be interpreted as the final statement upon the matter by any of the writers concerned. Neither Voltaire, Diderot nor Rousseau composed a definitive doctrine illustrating their views towards the masses, and their attitudes varied from idealism to blunt practicality according to the circumstances.<sup>19</sup> On the other hand, the tendencies towards exclusion dominate in most cases, and are exemplary of a world view incapable of honestly appraising the common man as an individual in his own right. Several additional examples from the three "greats" of the century are illustrative in this respect.

On the one hand, an idyllic rural life was enviable in its simplicity and purity. Because of his own personal experiences and growing aversion for "la société," Rousseau often tended to idealize the lot of the peasant, in his view the closest to man's "natural" state. His egalitarian views reflect his confidence that true sovereignty of the people was ultimately necessary.<sup>20</sup> A number of passages in Emile,

La Nouvelle Héloïse and the two Discours exalt the self-sufficient agricultural existence. Both Voltaire and Diderot also glorify this state on occasion; Voltaire especially saw the laborer's role as essential to progress and the gradual improvement in the quality of life for all.<sup>21</sup>

For this reason again, however, the working class should maintain its status for the present, and only progressive "enlightenment," in the future, should alter its condition. Voltaire judged the poorer classes essential to the proper functioning of modern society: "[L]e manoeuvre, l'ouvrier, doit être réduit au nécessaire pour travailler: telle est la nature de l'homme."<sup>22</sup> Flexibility was an alternative uniquely for the wealthier social groups. In the present, Voltaire, Diderot, and even Rousseau feared and distrusted the multitude. "L'homme peuple est le plus sot et le plus méchant des hommes," wrote Diderot.<sup>23</sup> And Rousseau: "Dans la plupart des Etats les troubles internes viennent d'une populace abrutie et stupide, échauffée d'abord par d'insupportables vexations, puis ameutée en secret par des brouillons adroits, revêtus de quelque autorité qu'ils veulent entendre."<sup>24</sup> Voltaire's documentation for his historical works reputedly led him to "la conclusion désolante que les masses populaires sont la proie facile de la superstition et du fanatisme, mais aussi qu'elles sont capables des atrocités les plus révoltantes et des crimes les plus inhumains."<sup>25</sup>

It must be remembered that such very aggressive criticism was intended to accentuate the horrors of ignorance and superstition, a state of mind which the philosophes sought to abolish through their work. Still, a practical evaluation of their attitude leads inevitably once again to their unquestionable sense of difference with regards to the man of the people.

Texts relating specifically to domestic servants show a similar barrier between the classes in spite of their increased and often intimate contact with each other. "[L]a hiérarchie des classes semble avoir dû maintenir une barrière infranchissable entre ceux qui servaient et ceux qui étaient servis."<sup>26</sup> This is not astonishing given their numbers and the fact that most were of peasant origins:

Domestic servants made up a large proportion, sometimes a tenth or more, of the population of most towns in Ancien-Régime France. And a majority of them - sixty to ninety percent in most cases that we know of - were sons and daughters of the countryside, destitute peasants whom penury or tradition had driven out of the countryside to seek work in town.<sup>27</sup>

There was also concern and vehement criticism when those who failed to find a stable situation would swell the ranks of beggars in the cities.<sup>28</sup> The peasants' labors had some usefulness to the nation whereas the superfluous valets and lackeys had none.<sup>29</sup> Diderot condemns the "débauche" and "fainéantise" of the laquais, and finds theirs "la dernière des conditions."<sup>30</sup> The possibilities for social ascension

were actually quite rare, and there are very few documented cases resembling the rise of Gil Blas or even Jacob.<sup>31</sup>

What is known of the actual nature of master-servant relationships in eighteenth-century France confirms the tendencies mentioned hitherto, and is intensified by the masters' explicit desire to control the existence of their employees. In a recent article on these relationships, Sarah C. Maza examines the various manifestations of such domination, notably through the control of the servants' finances, clothing and names.<sup>32</sup> Furthermore, "[v]iolence and threats of violence were the crudest - and most widespread - means whereby masters asserted their authority." Salaries were usually dependent upon the assurance of future attachment. Clothing and names were changed at the master's fancy, thus "stripping [the servants] of the signs of their previous identities." Maza insists upon the psychological manipulation inherent in such treatment:

The use of nicknames or aliases has usually been a characteristic feature of institutions that are cut off from the mainstream of society, and whose inmates or inhabitants are subject to highly authoritarian forms of control, such as armies, plantations or prisons. Eighteenth-century households were by no means as tightly organized and controlled as were monasteries, boarding schools, or asylums. But inasmuch as masters sought to establish absolute control over the domestic sphere, they adopted some of the methods characteristic of those institutions: the parsimonious doling out of rewards and minor privileges, humiliation, physical punishment, and the stripping of clothes and names.

Daily, informal contact was common between masters and servants, but this led to no true intimacy between the classes.

The texts cited by Maza refer to the servants as a species apart. For example, a certain Madame de Liancourt advised her granddaughter:

You should never sleep alone in a room, and should even have two women rather than one share your room if it is convenient, but not your bed; that is contrary to the respect they owe you, and goes against cleanliness and decency.<sup>34</sup>

Servants were "mere commodities," functional like animals, and rather on the same level, as a nobleman from Normandy reported to his wife:

Since I last wrote to you about that scoundrel La Jeunesse, he has seemed to me somewhat more submissive; He was ill for two or three days, or pretended to be, then the other one in turn had a bellyache, and just as he was recovering my horse strained its shoulder . . . in short, we are suffering a whole chain of troubles and setbacks.<sup>35</sup>

Maza concludes that in spite of examples of affection and concern for the servants on the part of the masters, "it never crossed their mind that these men and women were beings like themselves."<sup>36</sup> Some of the examples cited in previous chapters clearly exhibit a similar perspective, and, as I shall briefly examine, such an attitude prevailed in the novel as a whole.

The realistic trend leads to a legitimate, conscious attempt to draw into the novel's domain more of the material world, including the common man and his daily life. In this respect, servants maintained a distinct numerical advantage as characters because of their greater contact with the upper classes, the predominant social setting. Attitudes

toward them again usually reflected their lowly origins. In most cases, stereotypes prevailed when it came to drawing literary portraits of these people. The role continued to be limited by very predominant codes of inferiority.

A brief review of some of the other major novels of the time corroborates this initial impression.<sup>37</sup> Writers from the first half of the century, such as Prévost and Crébillon films generally disregard the lower class entirely, and servants appear anonymously only to perform perfunctory tasks. In Manon Lescaut, Des Grieux's passion for the prostitute Manon is not expressed in terms of a conflict of classes, although this is one of the central obstacles to their relationship. The hero calls upon all witnesses to recognize her as an object worthy of his love, yet blindly delegates the others to common inferior stereotypes. He usually assumes that the loyalty of servants can be bought with bribes, and this total attachment to money recurs as the valet's only motivation. Some of his and Manon's misfortunes are caused by the dishonesty of their own valet and suiivante, or by Manon's quite "common" brother and his underworld associations. Marcel, the only positive figure among the servants, is singled out explicitly as having "l'âme moins basse et moins dure que ses pareils." Still, he is portrayed as inevitably different, and yet controlled by monetary gain: "Je comptais bien qu'il me serait toujours aisé de récompenser un homme de cette étoffe."<sup>38</sup> In theory, at least,



Prévost was against belaboring the actuality of a servant's existence within the novel.<sup>39</sup> Furthermore, in his translation of Richardson's Clarissa Harlowe, he glosses over subject matter of this sort in an attempt to please French tastes and the bienséances. His translation of one of Lovelace's servant's letters, an interesting example of such subtle censorship, is analyzed in detail by Jacques Proust. Prévost's preoccupation with good taste leads him to reduce all of the stylistic effects meant to identify the writer as a servant to the bare minimum: "le parti pris de correction grammaticale l'emporte donc de façon décisive sur le souci, somme toute secondaire, de la vraisemblance sociale et psychologique."<sup>40</sup>

The world of the novels of Crébillon fils is even more restricted in social scope; Peter Brooks's concept of "worldliness" is particularly applicable here. The only existence which counts is that of the elite and any other individuals become an anonymous "on." Les Egarements du coeur et de l'esprit portrays a particularly closed society in which the members must conduct themselves according to a set of rules known only to them.<sup>41</sup> Contrary to Prévost's works, there is very little reference at all to economic activity or the external reality outside this group. Or, as Brooks states in the case of Crébillon fils, "he need not reproduce the world in his novel, he rather situates his novel in the world - the one World that counts. . . ."<sup>42</sup> The servants are simply

"mes gens," faceless figures in the background. The novels of Duclos and the comte de Grammont exhibit a similar tendency to highlight only a very exclusive set of individuals. "[L]es domestiques sont des entités abstraites, définis entièrement par les services qu'ils rendent, conduire une voiture ou porter un billet."<sup>43</sup>

The other most prominent trends in the novel before Rousseau's La Nouvelle Héloïse include the roman de mœurs, the sentimental novel, the libertine novel and the philosophical novels of Montesquieu and Voltaire. With few exceptions, the setting remains fixed in the middle and upper classes, and as a consequence, servants rarely appear in terms of their own individuality. Both Montesquieu (Les Lettres persanes) and Voltaire (Candide, Zadig) do examine the issues of servitude and its extreme manifestation in slavery, but their perspective is abstract and allegorical. The chevalier de Mouhy, one of the most representative and productive authors of the roman de mœurs, employs the lower-class world as an impetus to the plot, but denies it any development in its own right. Henri Coulet judges this vein particularly representative of the "bourgeois" spirit in all of its limitations and conventions. He notes a lack of any true interest in actual mores in spite of its categorization.<sup>44</sup> "[T]he bourgeois readers neither wanted nor received a faithful image of their lives. Rather, quite understandably, they wanted an idealized, mythic image of their

lives."<sup>45</sup> The poissard novelists (Caylus and Vadé) descended into the "bas-peuple" for their subject matter, but again only with an eye for the conventional, and now monotonous, details of vulgarity, ignorance and dishonesty.<sup>46</sup> Furthermore, critical condemnation of such works was universal, understandably enough when one recalls the scandal provoked by Marivaux's "scène du cocher."

Both the sentimental and libertine strains largely persisted throughout the century, and, in Coulet's estimation, neither form was fertile ground for a fresh approach to the common people. The sentimental novel brought the emotions to the fore, but tended more and more towards an uncontrolled sensibility which falsified or ignored social questions: "la sensibilité résout toutes les difficultés, réconcilie les ennemis, abolit l'inégalité sociale, les barrières religieuses ou raciales, rend l'innocence au criminel, mieux encore, fait que le criminel est réellement vertueux."<sup>47</sup> The crude realism of a sordid milieu becomes "another means of harrowing the sentimental soul"<sup>48</sup> just as Marianne had to suffer the tribulations of life in Mme Dutour's shop.

The libertine novel preached a message of freedom and liberty yet, as a reflection of political thought of the century, this liberation was only a possibility for the superior elite. The heroes tend to reject and withdraw from society rather than confront its growing heterogeneity and

their ensuing lack of control. This group of novels is often linked to the aristocratic frame of mind,<sup>49</sup> and servants again perform functional roles towards the fulfillment of desire.

A typology of servants emerges from the perusal of any number of novels from the period. Often, each category of servants is also associated with specific personality traits which vary little from novel to novel. These cover a wide variety of specific posts, such as the duègne, intendant, gouverneur or nourrice, and also the many anonymous valets and lackeys, but one's general impression remains that of inferiority. Even when the writer apparently seeks to set the servant in a more positive light in an attempt to evaluate his or her worth, an impression of "non-existence" still emerges. The role of a femme de chambre is thus evaluated in La Vie de Marianne:

C'est une amie d'une espèce unique que la mort vous enlève en pareil cas, une amie de tous les instants, à qui vous ne vous donnez pas la peine de plaire; qui vous délasse de la fatigue d'avoir plu aux autres; qui n'est, pour ainsi dire, personne pour vous, quoiqu'il n'y ait personne qui vous soit plus nécessaire; avec qui vous êtes aussi rébutante, aussi petite d'humeur et de caractère que vous avez quelquefois besoin de l'être; avec qui vos infirmités les plus humiliantes ne sont que des maux pour vous, et point une honte; enfin, une amie qui n'en a même pas le nom, et que souvent vous n'apprenez que vous aimiez que lorsque vous ne l'avez plus, et que tout vous manque sans elle.<sup>50</sup>

In another example, a passage meant to justify the value of closer scrutiny of the lower classes, the insulting tone cannot be thoroughly camouflaged behind a general criticism

of society. The heroine of La Belle Allemande (Villaret, 1745) is here specifically referring to valets and artisans:

Ces vils mortels, pour occuper les derniers rangs de la société n'en sont pas pour cela des objets moins dignes d'attention; d'autant plus propres à nous instruire que chez eux les vices grossiers et tout nus s'y montrent à découvert sans que les yeux puissent être fascinés par ces dehors imposteurs qui couvrent souvent le même fonds dans un monde plus poli.<sup>51</sup>

In short, the general perspective is negative, and this attitude, coupled with the common association of certain personality traits with specific roles, produces only monotonous and unimaginative characterization. The duègne, and other elderly women servants, are either protective to an extreme ("un monstre" ou "un Argus"<sup>52</sup>), or compliant intrigantes with a penchant for bribes.<sup>53</sup> An intendant seeks only his own profit, and the gouverneur usually is an inept and hypocritical teacher.<sup>54</sup> Minor grisons are inevitably spying upon others, whereas the valets and chambermaids either appear as thieves (and often lovers and accomplices), or are the perfectly devoted models of their masters. Adjectives used in characterization range from the obvious extremes of "fripon," "monstre," "traître," to references to fidelity and "leur bon sens naturel." The most common character traits thus include either such blind loyalty or a cupiditous attraction for bribes and material possessions. All in all, little evolution from the seventeenth-century categorization can be discerned insofar as the servants in the background are concerned.

The portrayal of relationships between the classes is also fixed in established structures. An inherent sense of distrust reinforces economic and social barriers, if not because of "l'habitude de se laisser voler par ses domestiques,"<sup>55</sup> then because of the master's sense of the valets' mockery: "ces gens-là sont plus moqueurs que d'autres; c'est le régal de la bassesse, que de mépriser ce qu'ils ont respecté par méprise. . . ." <sup>56</sup> Or again, it could be a combination of the two:

[C'était] un de ces grand coquins insolents et lâches, que le luxe enlève à l'agriculture, que nous autres, gens comme il faut, payons pour jouer aux cartes ou pour dormir sur des chaises renversées près des fournaies de nos antichambres; pour jurer, boire et se moquer de nous dans nos offices; pour manger au cabaret l'argent de monsieur; pour caresser dans les mansardes les femmes de chambre de madame.<sup>57</sup>

Even Rousseau, so often the champion of the cause of the commoner, falls prey to similar tendencies in La Nouvelle Héloïse.<sup>58</sup> This novel, one of the most popular of its time, succumbs to multiple contradictions in its treatment of "le peuple," contradictions quite similar to those noted above in the general attitude of the philosophes. On the one hand, Saint-Preux, a commoner himself, must constantly combat an obsessive fear of servitude and inferiority among all those of Julie's milieu. His sensitivity on this point leads him initially to refuse her gifts of money as dishonorable, and to reject even more adamantly any idea of receiving a salary for his work:

Que je m'érige en maître de philosophie, et prenne, comme ce fou de la fable, de l'argent pour enseigner la sagesse, cet emploi paraîtra bas aux yeux de monde, et j'avoue qu'il a quelque chose de ridicule en soi. . . .

Mais ici, ma Julie, nous avons d'autres considérations à faire. Laissons la multitude, et regardons en nous-mêmes. Que serai-je réellement à votre père en recevant de lui le salaire des leçons que je vous aurai données, et lui vendant une partie de mon temps, c'est-à-dire de ma personne? Un mercenaire, un homme à ses gages, une espèce de valet; et il aura de ma part, pour garant de sa confiance et pour sûreté de ce qui lui appartient, ma foi tacite, comme celle du dernier de ses gens. (NH, I, lettre XXIV, p. 59)

His desire for Julie often leads him to regret his lowly social status: "Sans toi, beauté fatale, je n'aurais jamais senti ce contraste insupportable de grandeur au fond de mon âme et de bassesse dans ma fortune; j'aurais vécu . . . sans daigner remarquer quel rang j'avais occupé sur la terre" (NH, I, lettre XXVI, p. 64). The issue again reappears when Bomston attempts to persuade Julie's father to accept Saint-Preux as her husband, in an explicit condemnation of the artifice of honor with which noble birth is associated (I, lettre LXII, pp. 144-6).

Although he is accepted and loved by most of the members of this closed circle of correspondents, Saint-Preux remains "un personnage déplacé," isolated as the only commoner among the nobility and sensitive to this difference.<sup>59</sup> He must prove his own honor and self-worth through other means. During his travels, for example, he extolls the beauty and emphasizes the equality of life among the inhabitants of the Valais. He dreams of bringing Julie with him to live among them:

que ne puis-je couler mes jours avec toi dans ces lieux ignorés, heureux de notre bonheur et non du regard des hommes! . . . [N]ous pratiquerions au sein de cet heureux peuple, et à son exemple, tous les devoirs de l'humanité: sans cesse nous nous unirions pour bien faire, et nous ne mourrions point sans avoir vécu. (NH, I, lettre XXIII, pp. 57-8)

In the letters from Paris, Saint-Preux remains ultimately critical of "le monde," a society in which he circulates but feels excluded. In his long letter on the theater, he also specifically attacks contemporary authors for the absence of "le peuple" on the stage:

Il y a dans cette grande ville cinq ou six cent mille âmes dont il n'est jamais question sur la scène. . . . [L]es auteurs d'aujourd'hui, qui sont des gens d'un autre air, se croiraient déshonorés s'ils savaient ce qui se passe au comptoir d'un marchand ou dans la boutique d'un ouvrier; il ne leur faut que des interlocuteurs illustres, et ils cherchent dans le rang de leurs personnages l'élévation qu'ils ne peuvent tirer de leur génie. Les spectateurs eux-mêmes sont devenus si délicats, qu'ils craindraient de se compromettre à la comédie comme en visite, et ne daigneraient pas aller voir en représentation des gens de moindre condition qu'eux. Ils sont comme les seuls habitants de la terre: tout le reste n'est rien à leurs yeux. (NH, II, lettre XVII, p. 229)

Of course one senses here some of Rousseau's own preoccupations in his battle with Parisian tastes, but the author, like his hero, only fleetingly lingers upon "la cause du peuple." Julie's critique of Saint-Preux's Parisian letters might also be extended to Rousseau himself:

N'est-il pas singulier encore que vous donniez vous-même dans le défaut que vous reprochez aux modernes auteurs comiques; que Paris ne soit plein pour vous que de gens de condition; que ceux de votre état soient les seuls dont vous ne parliez point? Comme si les vains préjugés de la noblesse ne vous coûtaient pas assez cher pour les haïr, et que vous crussiez vous dégrader en



fréquentant d'honnêtes bourgeois, qui sont peut-être l'ordre le plus respectable du pays où vous êtes! (NH, II, lettre XXVII, pp. 281-2)

Similarly, La Nouvelle Héloïse remains centered upon the inhabitants of Clarens, a select group of correspondents who write mainly about themselves and rarely about society at large.

The one letter from Fanchon Regard (I, lettre XL), a servant to the family, is filled with humble respect and devotion to Julie,<sup>60</sup> and the entire incident chiefly serves to highlight Julie's charity towards the unfortunate, a personality trait which appears with regularity in the novel. Her attention to the poor lends them no elaborate treatment within the text; once again, their presence is but technically necessary to establish the perfection of Julie's character. The goodness and devotion of her own servants reflect back upon her, and are not accentuated independently of this structure.

The long letter from Saint-Preux to Bomston concerning the treatment of the employees and servants at Clarens is also particularly illuminating in its tone of implied superiority (NH, IV, lettre X, pp. 422-52). In its content and expression, this letter represents the most glaring contradiction in the novel to the premise that social status is irrelevant to the worth of the individual. One of the most astonishing facets of this passage is its very impersonal tone, and the writer's tendency to refer to the workers as

objects of the masters' desires. The paternalistic orientation of the system at Clarens seems to omit one essential element, the personality of these "children," which is negated in every aspect of their existence.

In the case of the servants, for example:

[o]n s'y prend de bonne heure pour les avoir tels qu'on les veut. . . . On ne les tire donc point de la ville, mais de la campagne. . . . On les prend dans quelque famille nombreuse et surchargée d'enfants dont les père et mère viennent les offrir eux-mêmes. On les choisit jeunes, bien faits, de bonne santé, et d'une physionomie agréable. M. de Wolmar les interroge, les examine, puis les présente à sa femme. S'ils agréent à tous deux, ils sont reçus, d'abord à l'épreuve, ensuite au nombre des gens, c'est-à-dire des enfants de la maison. . . . (NH, IV, lettre X, pp. 426-7)

Salaries are first offered sparingly, with raises attached to the number of years of service, or, in the case of the hired hands, bonuses for surplus production and outstanding conduct. "Vous sentez bien, milord, que c'est un expédient sûr pour augmenter incessamment le soin des domestiques et se les attacher à mesure qu'on s'attache à eux," writes Saint-Preux (p. 428). The valet's cupidity is thus exploited to the masters' advantage.

In effect, the general attitude towards all of the workers is exemplified by this idea that their penchant towards a variety of vices must be constantly thwarted and then stifled. The bonus system is meant to "[prévenir] l'insolence des vieux" (p. 430). The dangerous influence of the city upon these gullible beings is constantly kept at

bay. The importance of a strict separation of the sexes is especially stressed:

Pour prévenir entre les deux sexes une familiarité dangereuse, on ne les gêne point ici par des lois positives qu'ils seraient tentés d'enfreindre en secret; mais, sans paraître y songer, on établit des usages plus puissants que l'autorité même. On ne leur défend pas de se voir, mais on fait en sorte qu'ils n'en aient ni l'occasion ni la volonté. (pp. 431-2)

It takes particular skill to control the men:

Ce n'est rien de contenir les femmes si l'on ne contient aussi les hommes. . . . [M]ais comment contenir des domestiques, des mercenaires, autrement que par la contrainte et la gêne? Tout l'art du maître est de cacher cette gêne sous le voile du plaisir ou de l'intérêt, en sorte qu'ils pensent vouloir tout ce qu'on les oblige de faire. (pp. 435-6)

And finally, the dishonesty inherent in the servant's state must be controlled by the rigorous example of the honesty and justice of the masters:

On a commencé par détruire ou prévenir clairement, simplement, et par des exemples sensibles, cette morale criminelle et servile, cette mutuelle tolérance aux dépens du maître, qu'un méchant valet ne manque point de prêcher aux bons sous l'air d'une maxime de charité. (p. 446)

In this manner, the entire letter counteracts any previous impressions of the virtuous peasant and of the general integrity of "le peuple." While the end of the passage suggests some insight into the "unnatural" effects of servitude upon the individual, no solutions are proposed, only the conclusion that the servant's state must be eased and artistically hidden from him, so that he should depend solely upon the master and his desires. The servants at Clarens

"louent Dieu dans leur simplicité d'avoir mis des riches sur la terre pour le bonheur de ceux qui les servent et pour le soulagement des pauvres" (p. 443).

As a consequence, an elitist outlook dominates even the perspective of Saint-Preux, an outsider himself in La Nouvelle Héloïse. This contradiction reflects those found elsewhere in much of Rousseau's work. His illusions and genuine sympathy for the plight of the lower classes led him to moments of "sincere indignation," but his simultaneous feelings of "separateness and superiority"<sup>61</sup> lead to this tendency towards the exclusion of "le peuple."

Perhaps the most prominent exception to this attitude is found in the work of Restif de la Bretonne, one of the first eighteenth-century novelists to explore the world of the peasantry and the lower classes of Paris in an unprecedented manner. His originality lies in his interest for characters and social settings previously disdained by literary tastes and conventions.<sup>62</sup> Much of this observation is however contained in his collections of shorter pieces, such as Les Nuits de Paris, Les Contemporaines, Les Françaises, and Les Parisiennes, whereas his two most important novels, Le Paysan perverti and La Paysanne pervertie, focus insistently upon the corruptive influence of the city and sordid poverty. Ideologically, these two works appear to reinforce Rousseau's message that the common people must be excluded from the mainstream of society and can only attain the virtue

of a rural existence through strict regimentation and manipulation of their instincts. Still, Restif forces his reader to sense the reality of the existence of the poor in a more concrete way than his predecessors:

Une chose qui frappe encore tout d'un coup à Paris, c'est la gradation de tous les rangs. Quel coup d'oeil pour un philosophe que celui de cette foule d'individus qui se touchent, dont l'un se contente d'un jour de plaisir sur sept, et dont l'autre emploie à se divertir les jours et les nuits qu'il trouve trop courts encore! L'ouvrier supporte jour et nuit les plus durs travaux dont il sait que rien ne peut l'affranchir, que la mort, dans l'espoir d'aller le dimanche, à la guinguette, boire un vin détestable et manger d'un ragoût de cheval équarissé avec le grossier et peu ragoûtant objet de son amour. Le valet, ravalé au-dessous de la qualité d'homme, mis sur la même ligne que les chevaux et les chiens de son maître, endure le mépris, quelquefois les coups, toujours l'impertinence, et, applaudissant lui-même à sa dégradation, voue son existence au faste et aux commodités de son égal dans l'espoir de survivre à son tyran et d'avoir part à ses tardifs et mal assurés bienfaits.<sup>63</sup>

Such degradation is most explicitly accentuated by Restif, yet he often reverts to a more idealistic vein when he focuses solely upon the peasantry. The nuances of his social attitudes merit further exploration. At the close of Le Paysan perverti, at least, the members of Edmond's (le paysan perverti) family enthusiastically accept the lesson of his tragic corruption and willingly embrace a communal code which totally regiments their lives. Again, in effect, their "instincts" are held in check so as to protect them from the evils of the outside world.

Throughout the century, then, the common people are held apart from the dominant classes, even when, as servants,

they are in intimate contact with them. As a group, they are viewed with fear or disdain, and as individuals they remain on the most part opaque, functional characters, almost a foreign species. Their conventional association with inferior characteristics generally persists, because of both social and literary codes accepted at large by both writers and readers. The increased attention drawn to their lot actually further perpetuates this association, rather than liberating them from the stereotypes.

## NOTES - CHAPTER V

<sup>1</sup>See S.P. Jones, A List of French Prose Fiction from 1700-1750 (New York: Wilson, 1939), A. Martin, V.G. Mylne and R. Frautschi, Bibliographie du genre romanesque français, 1751-1800 (London: Mansell and Paris: France Expansion, 1977) and Henri Coulet, Le Roman jusqu'à la Révolution, Collection U: Lettres Françaises, 2 vols. (New York: McGraw-Hill - Armand Colin, 1967).

<sup>2</sup>Roland Mortier, "Voltaire et le peuple," in The Age of Enlightenment: Studies presented to Theodore Besterman, ed. W.H. Barber, J.H. Brumfitt, R.A. Leigh, R. Shackleton and S.S.B. Taylor (Edinburgh and London: Oliver and Boyd, 1967), 137-51; Roland Mortier, "Diderot et la notion du peuple," Europe 405-406 (jan.-fev. 1963), 78-89; Werner Bahner, "Le Mot et la notion de 'peuple' dans l'oeuvre de Rousseau," Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century 55 (1967), 113-127; and Lester G. Crocker, "Rousseau and the Common People," Studies in the Eighteenth Century 3 (1976), 73-93.

<sup>3</sup>Harry C. Payne, "Elite versus Popular Mentality in the Eighteenth Century," Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture 8 (1979), 5.

<sup>4</sup>Ira Wade, "Poverty in the Enlightenment," in Euro-päische Aufklärung: Herbert Dieckmann zum 60. Geburtstag, ed. by Hugo Friedrich and Fritz Schalk (München: W. Fink Vert., 1967), 311-25.

<sup>5</sup>Payne, pp. 5-8.

<sup>6</sup>See Roland Barthes, "La Bruyère," in Essais critiques (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1964), p. 227: "la clôture . . . prend un sens historique précis lorsqu'elle s'applique au monde dans son ensemble; car ce qui est alors dans la clôture et hors d'elle correspond fatalement au partage économique de la société; c'est le cas pour la mondanité générale décrite par La Bruyère; elle a forcément des racines

sociales: ce qui est dans le clôtüre, ce sont les classes pourvues, noblesse et bourgeoisie; et ce qui est dehors, ce sont les hommes sans naissance et sans argent, c'est le peuple. . . . La Bruyère ne définit cependant pas les classes sociales; il peuple diversement un inland et un outland: tout ce qui prend place à l'intérieur de la clôtüre est par là même appelé à l'être; tout ce qui reste à l'extérieur est rejeté dans le néant. . . ."

<sup>7</sup>See also Mortier, "Diderot et la notion du peuple," pp. 79-80.

<sup>8</sup>Mortier, "Diderot et la notion du peuple," pp. 80-2 and Payne, p. 4.

<sup>9</sup>Encyclopédie article "Multitude," cited by Mortier, "Diderot et la notion du peuple," p. 84.

<sup>10</sup>Encyclopédie article "Représentants," "Ethocratie," ii, 16, as quoted by Mortier, "Voltaire et le peuple," pp. 137-8.

<sup>11</sup>See for example Marcel Reinhard, "Elite et noblesse dans la seconde moitié du XVIIIe siècle," Revue d'Histoire Moderne et Contemporaine 3 (jan.-mars. 1956), 5-37; Marie-Hélène Huët, Le Héros et son double: Essai sur le roman d'ascension sociale au XVIIIe siècle (Paris: José Corti, 1975), who affirms that there was no "phénomène de progression sociale importante" in the century, pp. 163-171; and also Adeline Daumard et François Furet, Structures et relations sociales à Paris au milieu du XVIIIe siècle (Paris: Colin, 1961).

<sup>12</sup>Politique naturelle ou Discours sur les vrais principes du gouvernement, 1773, as quoted by Denis Richet, "Autour des origines idéologiques lointaines de la Révolution française: Elites et despotisme," Annales. Economie. Société. Civilisation, 24 (jan.-fev. 1964), 13.

<sup>13</sup>Quoted by René Pomeau, ed., Politique de Voltaire (Paris: Armand Colin, 1963), 45-6.

<sup>14</sup>James A. Leith, "Modernisation, Mass Education and Social Mobility in French Thought, 1750-1789," in Studies in the Eighteenth Century, 2 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1973), 226.



<sup>15</sup>Leith, p. 230.

<sup>16</sup>Leith, p. 231.

<sup>17</sup>Lettre à Damilaville, 1<sup>er</sup> avril 1766, Besterman 12358, quoted by Bahner, p. 125. See also the article "Fertilisation" in the Dictionnaire philosophique and Pomeau's comments, pp. 45-47.

<sup>18</sup>Emile, Book I, paragraph 87, as quoted by Irvin Ehrenpreis, "Poverty and Poetry: Representations of the Poor in Augustan Literature," Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture 1 (1971), 19. For a further evaluation of Rousseau's more implicitly superior attitude, see the discussion of La Nouvelle Héloïse below, pp. 320-326.

<sup>19</sup>See Mortier, "Voltaire et le peuple," p. 139 and Pomeau, p. 7.

<sup>20</sup>Le Contrat social is the most obvious example. See also Bahner, pp. 117-18.

<sup>21</sup>See Mortier, "Voltaire et le peuple," pp. 145-151. This attitude is notable in works by Diderot such as Les Deux amis de Bourbonne and De la vie heureuse.

<sup>22</sup>As quoted by Pomeau, p. 85.

<sup>23</sup>Essai sur les règnes de Claude et de Néron et sur la vie et les écrits de Sénèque pour servir d'introduction à la lecture de ce philosophe (1778-1782) in Oeuvres complètes, ed. Assézat, III (Paris: Garnier, 1875), 263.

<sup>24</sup>Quoted by Bahner, p. 124.

<sup>25</sup>Mortier, "Voltaire et le peuple," p. 140.

<sup>26</sup>Georges D'Avenel, "Le Train de maison depuis sept siècles, II: Les Domestiques," La Revue des Deux Mondes (mars-avril, 1912), 632.

<sup>27</sup>Sarah C. Maza, "An Anatomy of Paternalism: Masters and Servants in Eighteenth-Century French Households," Eighteenth-Century Life 7 (Oct. 1981), 2. See also Jean-Pierre Gutton, Domestiques et serviteurs dans la France de

l'ancien régime (Paris: Aubier, 1981), 73-82 and J. Dupaquier, "Sur la population française au XVIIe et au XVIIIe siècles," Revue Historique 239 (jan.-mars, 1968), 48.

<sup>28</sup>Olwen Hufton, The Poor of Eighteenth-Century France, 1750-89 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1974), 311-12.

<sup>29</sup>They are condemned as "inutiles à la république" by one Ange Goudar, in his Intérêts de la France mal entendus (Amsterdam, 1756), I, 239-40, quoted by S.F. Davies, "Diderot and the Problem of the Servant," Quinquereme. New Studies in Modern Languages, 2, 184.

<sup>30</sup>Encyclopédie, article "Laquais," quoted by Davies, p. 181.

<sup>31</sup>While D'Avenel, p. 640, cites the case of Gourville, who served under La Rochefoucauld, Fouquet and Mazarin and eventually became ambassador to Spain and married La Rochefoucauld's sister, he specifies that by the eighteenth century, "il ne se rencontre plus alors d'anciens domestiques devenus gentilshommes . . ." (p. 639). See also note 11 in this chapter.

<sup>32</sup>"An Anatomy of Paternalism . . .," cited above.

<sup>33</sup>Maza, 11.

<sup>34</sup>Madame de Liancourt, Règlement donné par une dame de qualité à M. . . sa petite fille pour sa conduite et celle de sa maison (Paris: 1698), 45, quoted by Maza, 15.

<sup>35</sup>Archives Départementales du Calvados, 2E 6645, Fonds Simon de Franval, letter of 13 June 1745, quoted by Maza, p. 19.

<sup>36</sup>Maza, p. 19.

<sup>37</sup>For the sake of brevity, I am using the categories outlined by Henri Coulet in his analysis of general trends in the eighteenth-century novel. He isolates individual authors such as Lesage, Marivaux, Prévost, Crébillon, Rousseau, Laclos, Sade, Restif de la Bretonne and Diderot, then classifies the other trends as "roman de mœurs," "roman sentimental (ou réaliste)," "roman libertin," "roman philosophique," "roman poétique," and "conte fantastique et le roman du mal."

<sup>38</sup>L'Abbé Prévost, L'Histoire du Chevalier des Grieux et de Manon Lescaut, ed. F. Deloffre et R. Picard (Paris: Garnier, 1965), 104. See also Patrick Brady's remarks in "Other-Portrayal and Self-Betrayal in Manon Lescaut and La Vie de Marianne," Romanic Review, 64 (1973), 107-108.

<sup>39</sup>See Chapter I, p. 44.

<sup>40</sup>"Les Maîtres sont les maîtres," in L'Objet et le texte: Pour une poétique de la prose française du XVIIIe siècle (Genève: Droz, 1980), 261. See also Coulet, pp. 428-9; F.C. Green, "Further Evidence of Realism in the French Novel of the Eighteenth Century," Modern Language Notes 40, 260; Servais Etienne, Le Genre romanesque en France depuis l'apparition de la "Nouvelle Héloïse" jusqu'aux approches de la Révolution (Paris: Armand Colin, 1922), 120-3.

<sup>41</sup>See Claude Labrosse, "Récit romanesque et enquête anthropologique: à propos des Egarements du coeur et de l'esprit," in Roman et Lumières au XVIIIe siècle (Paris: Editions sociales, 1970), 77, and Peter Brooks, The Novel of Worldliness: Crébillon, Marivaux, Laclos, Stendhal (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969), 23-28.

<sup>42</sup>Brooks, p. 35.

<sup>43</sup>Marie-Hélène Huet, "Roman libertin et réaction aristocratique," Dix-huitième siècle 6 (1974), 139. In another novel, Crébillon mockingly provides for a servant's entrance, in the interest of "realism," and exhibits this same attitude: "Comme il y a des lecteurs qui prennent garde à tout, il pourrait s'en trouver qui seraient surpris, le temps étant annoncé si froid, de ne voir jamais mettre du bois au feu; et qui se plaindraient, avec raison, de ce manque de vraisemblance dans un point si important. Pour prévenir donc une critique si bien fondée, on est obligé de dire que, pendant l'entretien de la Marquise et du Duc, Célie a sonné, et que c'était pour qu'on raccommoât son feu." (Le Hasard du Coin du feu, 1763).

<sup>44</sup>Coulet, pp. 373-8.

<sup>45</sup>English Showalter, Jr., "Eighteenth-Century French Fiction: A Review Essay," Eighteenth-Century Studies 5 (Spring, 1972), 474.

<sup>46</sup>Coulet, p. 377 and F.C. Green, "Realism in the French Novel in the First Half of the Eighteenth Century," Modern Language Notes 38 (1923), 321-9 and also "Further Evidence of Realism. . . ."

<sup>47</sup>Coulet, p. 421-2.

<sup>48</sup>Green, "Further Evidence . . .," p. 268.

<sup>49</sup>See Huet, "Roman libertin et réaction aristocratique."

<sup>50</sup>Marivaux, La Vie de Marianne ou les aventures de Madame la comtesse de xxx, ed. F. Deloffre (Paris: Garnier, 1963), 499.

<sup>51</sup>Quoted by Green, "Further Evidence . . .," p. 266.

<sup>52</sup>Antoine Hamilton, Les Mémoires du comte de Gramont, in Romanciers du XVIIIe siècle, ed. Etiemble, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade (Paris: Gallimard, 1960), 87 and Alain-René Lesage, Le Diable boiteux, in the same collection, p. 287.

<sup>53</sup>Charles Duclos, Les Confessions du comte de xxx, ed. Laurent Versini (Paris: Didier, 1969), 16; Le Diable boiteux, p. 372; Jean-Baptiste Louvet (de Couvray), Les Amours du chevalier de Faublas, in Romanciers du XVIIIe siècle, ed. Etiemble, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, II (Paris: Gallimard, 1965), 424, 435 and 593.

<sup>54</sup>Le Diable boiteux, pp. 222 and 448; Les Confessions du comte de xxx, p. 4; Faublas, pp. 422-3, 426, 547-8, 550; Les Mémoires du comte de Gramont, pp. 35-7.

<sup>55</sup>Gramont, pp. 222-3.

<sup>56</sup>La Vie de Marianne, p. 92.

<sup>57</sup>Faublas, p. 761.

<sup>58</sup>Ed. R. Pomeau (Paris: Garnier, 1960). Further references will be made in the text, preceded by the abbreviation NH.

<sup>59</sup>Huet, Le Héros et son double, pp. 75-6.

<sup>60</sup>An analysis of this letter is found in J. Proust, "Les Maîtres sont les maîtres," p. 262.

<sup>61</sup>L.G. Crocker, "Rousseau and the Common People," pp. 76-9.

<sup>62</sup>Coulet, pp. 483-496.

<sup>63</sup>Le Paysan perverti, ed. F. Jost, I (Lausanne: L'Age d'Homme, 1977), 371-2.

## CONCLUSION

These pervasively negative attitudes towards the socially inferior, which last beyond the end of the Ancien Régime and the Revolution, determine in part the problematic nature of the servant-hero. The character holds great potential as a participant in a variety of social milieux, yet his acceptability is questionable unless he adopts the language and the perspective of the dominant classes. In order to survive as a literary character and as a social figure, the servant-hero must thus reduce and even repress all that is "common" in him. The ascension of Gil Blas, and that of the other parvenus, is necessary to their ultimate respectability. Jacob, Jeannette and Marianne are all especially careful to insist upon their arrival in the upper-class world, and set themselves at a great distance from the class of their origins. Jacques, the only servant to retain this initial role, escapes by other means. Each of these characters is also progressively stripped of the conventional "trappings" of the servant, either explicitly within the structure of the plot, or, again in the case of Jacques, with a conscious eye towards the distortion of such traditions. The neutralization of the association with the stereotype

provides for greater freedom of movement for the character than is commonly found in the theater of the same period, for example.

The appearance of the servant as a serious literary personage also undergoes an evolution towards greater sophistication and complexity. From the acceptance of servitude found in Gil Blas, the former servant negates it entirely in Le Paysan parvenu, whereas there are hints in Jacques le fataliste that servitude might also offer access to liberation. These three novels best exemplify the three levels of meaning associated with the servant and the matter of servitude: a literary level, most closely linked to the conventional and comic role of the valet; a social level, the image of man's interaction in a social environment; and finally a philosophical level, an interrogation into the problem of human freedom.

In Gil Blas, the hero largely retains the traces of inferiority associated with the valet of comedy, and often functions in a similar manner. Gil most explicitly embraces the traditional role of the servant. His adept imitations of his various masters provide for social satire of both individual and group character traits. Furthermore, his presence is a stimulus for some social versimilitude, for as a servant Gil forms a logical link between levels of the social hierarchy. The comic realism and conventional picaresque action commonly associated with the lower-class

milieu are thus quite evident in this text. The master-servant relationship, while denying independence to the protagonist, does provide experience and knowledge of the world. Within the context of this novel, however, the individual, no matter what his rank, always remains subservient to his social role, and thus Gil Blas never escapes the inherent inferiority of his origins.

Like Gil Blas, Jacob is also an outsider seeking acceptance and success in an unfamiliar social arena, and the parvenu's desire to imitate the master has similar satirical functions. The character, however, is quickly freed from the stigma of literal servitude so as to embrace the world of the masters more whole-heartedly. The emphasis placed upon the denial of the "servant within" in the cases of Jacob, Marianne and Jeannette leads to more interesting psychological depth of character and a more conscious sense of the alienation of the individual in society. The narrators of these memoir-novels are on the defensive, and this attitude betrays an insistent need to justify their existence within "le monde." The specter of servitude persistently reappears, most obviously in Le Paysan parvenu. In each of these novels, the protagonist must directly confront figures of authority and publicly request the right to exist among the elite. The master-servant relationship is projected figuratively upon the hero's search for "self-enactment" in an



increasingly hostile environment. The relationships among individuals are progressively depicted as a battle for the upper hand.

Jacques le fataliste elaborates even more insistently upon this assessment of social interaction as a struggle for power. Jacques and his master form only one in a series of mutually dependent couples who appear within a novel most explicitly concerned with the limitations placed upon the freedom of the individual in any social context. Quite appropriately, the narrator manipulates a shift in perspective from that of the master to that of the servant. It is the master who is locked in a conventional mold, while Jacques is offered the opportunity to manifest his own power. The ensuing valorization of the servant's role is not intended to glorify the lot of the common man, in spite of hints to that effect. Jacques is Everyman, at the whim of his own instincts and the circumstances, but he is also more particularly the artist/philosophe, forced to create in order to live, his creativity dependent upon public taste and the censor's pen. Jacques also reiterates the same global concept that relationships between men inevitably define themselves between the poles of domination and servitude. The fact that "all men have masters" extends to all levels of society.

The servant's rise to literary prominence in the eighteenth-century novel is most significant in this respect.

With the development of such a character in a serious vein, the concept of servitude also receives explicit thematic attention. Between the stereotypes and the deliberate distortion of appearances, the servant-hero does not appear as a faithful reproduction of "real" servants, nor does he function as a spokesman for the lower-class viewpoint. Once we understand how these conventions constrict the character, we can better assess the servant's figurative potential in the eighteenth-century novel. It is in this respect that the Hegelian paradigm of Master and Slave offers the most obvious parallels with the masters and servants depicted in these works. Social station functions as an image of the search for identity in the eyes of others. While some of the elements of the Hegelian quest appear in all of these novels, Gil Blas and Le Paysan parvenu imperfectly fit the mold. The protagonists revert back to servitude, incapable of negating the world of the master. The dialectic reversibility of the struggle for domination is most effectively enacted by the unpredictable antics of Jacques and his master. Diderot's novel accurately portrays the subtleties of the master-servant relationship seized upon by Hegel.

Another interesting ramification of the appearance of the servant-hero as narrator of his own story is the parallel increase in the complexity of the form of narration. In each of these novels the hero or heroine addresses the matter of servitude in a unique way, with ensuing repercussions

upon the form of the text. The servant's voice participates more and more actively in the telling of the story, just as the narrator shows an increasing degree of control. Gil Blas is open to all masters, and his story likewise is continually opened up to the narratives of others. As narrator, he imposes himself the least. Jacob and Marianne, especially, have more to conceal and transform, and as narrators as well their honesty is questionable in spite of their insistent claims to the contrary. The negation of a part of their existence adds a convoluted twist to their memoirs, which must paradoxically reveal and hide the self. The parvenu hero and heroines do not attain control of themselves or of their social masks, partly because they cannot come to terms with the truth of their obscure origins. The protagonists' impasse in the search for an identity is mirrored in the abrupt halt to the narration.

Jacques le fataliste totally reverses the traditional representation of the locations of power, for the servant flaunts his control over the master just as the narrator mocks his gullible reader. The servant's role, like the novel's predictable literary form, is distorted and questioned. Both Jacques and the narrator claim an unprecedented freedom in the telling of their respective tales and thus subvert the conventional roles expected of them.

The servant-hero's struggle depicted in the novel is emblematic of one facet of the eighteenth-century conception of man in society. Social relationships are consistently reduced to the terms of domination and servitude, far beyond the initial literal master-servant relationship. True freedom becomes elusive within such an environment, and thus the hero's servitude best captures these limitations upon the individual. During a period of greater attention to realistic detail and the material world, the literary portrait of the servant surprisingly becomes an abstraction. He is usually stripped of explicit association with his class, and social consciousness is minimized. Ideologically, then, the rise of the servant-hero is not a result of increased preoccupation with the socio-economic reality of the lower-class world, nor is it a call for equality among all men. The image of the servant functions more readily as an expression of the individual's inevitable subservience to a "master" in the quest for self-definition.

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