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Artifice and Insight in the Philosophical Dialogues of the French Enlightenment

A thesis submitted in the partial satisfaction
of the requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
in French and Francophone Studies

by

Lernik R Hovsepyan

2024

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2024

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Artifice and Insight in the Philosophical Dialogues of the French Enlightenment

by

Lernik R. Hovsepyan

Doctor of Philosophy in French and Francophone Studies

University of California, Los Angeles, 2024

Professor Eleanor K. Kaufman, Chair

The dialogue genre in eighteenth-century France played a significant role in shaping literary discourse and social commentary. This form of writing allowed authors to convey ideas indirectly, often through the dialectical interaction of characters, and explore the relationship between philosophy, literature, and art. By employing the dialogue form, particularly didactic dialogues, writers could explore complex themes and voice their criticism of societal norms in a nuanced and cleverly constructed manner which protected their authorship from being immediately identified and guaranteed their safety from the censors.

My project focuses on artifice in literature. A crucial aspect of artifice is *indirection* as a writing technique that was employed mainly in didactic dialogues to disseminate knowledge inconspicuously. This allowed the philosophers to engage in polemical philosophical debates and discussions using diverse voices, thus blurring the source of their identity to avoid problems with

the censors, or persecution by the Church and the Monarchy. This phenomenon has been studied by Stéphane Pujol in *Le dialogues d'idées au dix-huitième siècle* (2005), Vittorio Hösle in *The Philosophical Dialogue: A Poetics and a Hermeneutics* (2012), Frédéric Cossutta in *Le Dialogue: Introduction à un genre philosophique*, (2004), Chistie McDonald in *The Dialogue of Writing* (1984), and I draw on this scholarship while paying closer attention to questions of didacticism and literary form.

Following Pujol's approach, my project begins with Fontenelle's *Entretiens sur la pluralité des mondes* (1686) and ends with Sade's *Dialogues entre un prêtre et un moribond* (1782). While philosophical dialogues decline gradually by the end of eighteenth century, the notion of artifice remains and influences our lives to this day, and this project studies both the dialogue form and the notion of artifice in an intertwined manner.

The dissertation of Lernik R. Hovsepyan is approved.

Whitney L. Arnold

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University of California

2024

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It has been a true privilege to attend the courses taught by incredible scholars and participate in the conferences and other events which broadened the spectrum of my knowledge from Francophone Studies to Linguistics to Comparative Studies. I am thankful to Professor Malina Stefanovska who advised me until I completed my prospectus examinations, after which Professor Eleanor Kaufman directed me through the rest of my educational journey with an attitude that eliminated the cliché of “bittersweet” relationship between student and advisor. I am grateful to the staff and faculty of ELTS, the chair Professor Presner, vice chair Professor Murat, and the financial support that the department allocated me to help achieve my goals.

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VITA

Lernik Hovsepyan was born in Armenia during the period when the country was still part of the USSR. After the devastating earthquake of December 7, 1988, he moved to a small village where he did most of his practice individually. Due to the lack of dictionaries, Lernik had to translate from French to Russian, then from Russian to Armenian to learn vocabulary and grammar. Growing up in a small resort village, Lernik's ambitions were always pushing him to find tourists who spoke French and befriend them to practice the language since an early age. In 1999, he was admitted to the University of Foreign Languages where he was offered a full scholarship. However, after two years of studies, Lernik participated in a competition at the French embassy in Armenia and was accepted in Economics & Management at the University of Paris II in France, Panthéon-ASSAS, where he obtained his DEUG.

Not only did Lernik witness the dissolution of the USSR, but he also observed how twelve EU countries, including France, changed their currency to the Euro in the year 2002, when he was a student in France. Lernik came to join his family in Los Angeles in the following year, where he obtained his BA at CSU Los Angeles while working in the market of US Rare Coins and Collectibles. After completing his BA, Lernik completed his MA at CSU Long Beach, and taught for one year in his native country, at the University of France (UFAR), which motivated him to study further to have the opportunity to go back and share his knowledge with the wonderful students in Armenia. In the subsequent year, he was admitted to the PhD program at UCLA, all the while working at four different jobs and completing the required coursework for the achievement of his program. Lernik's intentions are to pursue his career in Academia along with developing his hobby in the industry of US and World Rare Coins and Collectibles.

INTRODUCTION

1.1. The Enlightenment in Literary France

In “What is Enlightenment?” (1784) Immanuel Kant paints a colorful image of the spirit *sapere aude* (dare to be wise!) which was one influential motto of the Enlightenment era. The core philosophy of this essay resides in the idea that enlightenment emerges when the individual strives to free herself or himself from self-incurred immaturity or ignorance (iii).¹ Kant’s essay’s opening paragraph describes people’s inability to think for themselves, due not to their lack of intellect but their lack of courage. He denounces a political atmosphere in which fear is the main governing tool; in such an atmosphere, free speech is condemned, religious superstition predominates, intellectual and cultural elements are controlled and suppressed by the State. In order to break that pattern and to reestablish the inner courage of the nation, French intellectuals of the time initiated a different approach to make themselves heard more efficiently by turning towards the art of writing dialogues. The primary reason for engaging in the dialogue genre was that it allowed an indirect representation of the messages they wanted to share with their nation. Carol Sherman notices that “The author [of the dialogue,] for his part, gives up his position as intermediary between the public and the fictional world. The readers are then in immediate contact with the latter world, are constantly summoned and may feel themselves encouraged to weigh opinions, adopt resolutions, and make judgements.” (19) Sherman attests to the rise of people’s self-esteem that contributed to a more courageous expression of logic and rationalism.

¹ See Brewer, Daniel. *The Discourse of Enlightenment*. Cambridge UP, 1993. “Immaturity is the inability to use one’s own understanding without the guidance of another,” writes Kant. He identifies the process of undertaking to think for oneself in the determination of what to believe and how to act. He stresses the importance of daring to act, becoming progressively self-directed in thought and action through the awakening of one’s intellectual abilities and willingness to act.

In their writings, many authors suggested the idea of reducing government presence and religious influence from society, but they represented that idea indirectly and with extreme caution; through allusions, through structuring different figures of speech to create a neutral ground of expression for the readers who would then use their intellect to arrive at their own opinions. The intertwined ideologies of government and institutionalized religion had blocked creativity and rationalism in the middle class so severely that people lived more in fiction than in reality. Superstition, for instance, was at its peak in that era although some authors, such as Voltaire, Diderot, Rousseau, and Casanova denounced it regularly or took advantage of it (which is the case for Casanova, who often fooled superstitious people). Finally, Kant's essay advocates for intellectual freedom, independent thinking, and the importance of public discourse in achieving enlightenment; it is through personal growth and individual efforts, he argues, that one can contribute to personal or societal progress.

In eighteenth-century France religion played an essential role in shaping society and influencing various aspects of people's lives. Catholicism held a firm grip on the country's religious, social, and political landscape. It controlled innovation and cultural progress, trying to mold modernization into its framework, as it enjoyed a privileged status and tried to spread an unquestionable influence. Roger Aubert discusses the dominance of the Catholic Church in his book *The Catholic Church in Nineteenth Century Europe* (1978), where he provides valuable insights into the Church's influence in the preceding centuries, including eighteenth-century France: "In eighteenth-century France, the Catholic Church maintained a dominant position within society, exerting significant influence over political, social and cultural affairs." (81) This may be the reason why opposite currents also grew at the same time, such as skepticism, diverse sects and other movements that challenged traditional religious beliefs and institutions. The

dialogue form enabled individuals to deliver knowledge, discoveries, and innovation to the population in an indirect, rather inconspicuous manner. While these literary works did not necessarily stop religious interference, they challenged religious fiction by creating literary scenes which represented in their turn aspects of new knowledge and detailed discussion of ideas including the defense of materialism, rationalism, logic, as well as other scientific ideas and breakthroughs.

In my project, I read several dialogues by French *philosophes*, whose dialogues are designed as compositions of a rather didactic nature, challenging existing knowledge, and contributing to the development of critical skills in their readership. I attempt to identify the literary tools, the variety of allusive devices and the writing strategies that allowed these writers to dare to express themselves, disseminate knowledge, fight the lack of it, and change the archaic mentality of the population. Readers witness the authorial maneuvers whose discursive strategies try to conceal controversial ideas thanks primarily to the dialogue form. For instance, in Rousseau's dialogues, the author makes use of an eponymous character to open his heart to the other protagonist, Le François, to whom he confesses his critical views on religion, lamenting that "les hautes idées que j'avois de la divinité me faisoient prendre en dégoût les institutions des hommes et des religions factices," (615) thus, exposing a frustration with an abusive religious establishment. The presence of a naïve and eponymous character, in this instance, is a literary tool permitting the double disguise of the author's perspectives. Fontenelle, on the other hand, exposes human inclination to error and artifice to avoid the heaviness of the truth and the real, arguing that what is less visible is more influential, as the notion of God, for example, is invisible, yet it holds all power and supremacy within its believers. Fontenelle talks about different worlds and their inhabitants, which was a forbidden discussion in that era, and

constructs his dialogue in such a way that it seems rather fictional, all the while containing elements of scientific research and factual references. As for Diderot, he depicts his main protagonist d'Alembert in *Le Rêve de d'Alembert* philosophizing in his dream so that his narrative could have been easily refuted should it cause any inflammatory reaction in his audience -- measures whose goals consisted of representing authorial intents indirectly while guaranteeing the security of the writers and reaching out to a larger readership.

These authors wrote different kinds of dialogues in which they disguised their true intentions by using specific literary devices, including choosing anonymous or eponymous characters, building various facets of artifice, referring to allegories, and using metaphors and other literary tactics in the hope that they would be awakening people's higher consciousness without angering the State. As Stéphane Pujol writes: "Le dialogue permettait, par un mélange de voix, de défendre leurs spéculations ou leurs théories *tout en avançant masqués*." (3) My goal is to understand how these authors were able to build these literary masks (to which I refer as different types of artifice), through which they were able to be both informative and fictitious; informative and understandable enough for readers to obtain a more critical understanding, fictitious enough to create an illusion of a literary world to evade religious or state censorship. Masks are meant to conceal or to deceive, so the philosophers of the era were not only maintaining the dialogic motto of "instructing by entertaining" (Latin: *placere et docere*, French: *plaire en instruisant*), but they were mainly reaching the population by combining fiction or deceptive narratives united with real facts from the scientific data of the time.² Kant also describes the process of liberating knowledge as a heroic act which is understandable as these

² These literary discussions contributed to the creation of more fertile ground for raising the general level of consciousness in the nation and encouraging education in the population.

authors were heroic because they used their manuscripts as armor to lead their own fight against social and religious injustices and taboos.

To reiterate, thanks to many theatrical recitals, novels, treatises, letters, or dialogues, the literary content of the eighteenth century showed a more audacious intellectual climate that questioned the older ways of living. In addition, more accurate data of astronomy, geometry, cosmic events, and events in Nature were gradually challenging previously recorded views and showing that men of science relied more on universal truths than on traditional rules or obsolete social constructs.³ In fact, these intellectuals were selflessly seeking the appropriate manners to deliver their discoveries to the population and enlighten as many people as possible; one could say that the Europe of the eighteenth century was a period of economic, intellectual, and social renaissance; however, many discoveries that would compromise the foundations of the *Ancien Régime* were unwelcomed. As the preface of Paul Hazard's book on the crisis of European consciousness states, the population of the seventeenth century preferred authority and obedience, while the population of the eighteenth century had opposite preferences: "les contraintes, l'autorité, les dogmes, voilà ce que détest[aient] les hommes du dix-huitième siècle; les premiers [people of the seventeenth century] croy[aient] au droit divin, et les autres--au droit naturel; les premiers viv[aient] à l'aise dans une société qui se divis[ait] en classes inégales, les seconds ne rêvaient qu'égalité" (5).⁴ The behavior of people, unafraid of asking questions, strongly articulated the contrast from one century to another. In truth, the accumulated public voice, suppressed for centuries, erupted so ferociously that it changed the course of history for

³ These discoveries ranged from the understanding of the smallest particle (atoms) to approximate cosmological estimates, speculating on various distances between earth and other heavenly bodies. For instance, Fontenelle kept a detailed copy of more accurate measurements of distances from planet to planet, recording the progress of scientific data and consequently consolidating *the irrefutability* of scientific observations.

⁴ I modified tenses slightly to fit the context within the imperfect tense. Paul Hazard carefully develops an attack on Christianity, as reason grows, and people start having doubts about the miraculous stories of the Bible.

France and many other countries, by establishing a precedent and an example through the French revolution in 1789. Consequently, the Enlightenment, as is well known, has been a period of great flourishing across different intellectual spheres, promoting secular thought and reshaping people's mentalities.

It is not my intention, however, to glorify the era of Enlightenment. While it is true that it was a period fostering reason and rationality, one may not disregard the existence of various conquests and wars, social injustices, or abuses of hierarchy and power structure that Michel Foucault addresses in his own text "What is Enlightenment?" in which he examines the various critical aspects of power structures and the ways in which they shaped knowledge and social institutions at that time. Foucault admitted that the Enlightenment was a progressive movement promoting reason and logic, but it was also a time of complicated interactions of power, knowledge, and exclusion; it was a period when social inequalities soared, and many groups were marginalized due to their refusal to conform to the new order. In his text,⁵ Foucault analyzes Kant's essay and challenges the traditional understanding. According to him, the Enlightenment should be seen as a continuous process of questioning existing power structures, norms, and institutions: "But that does not mean that one must be 'for' or 'against' the Enlightenment," he writes at the end of his essay, balancing the scales of the injustices and oppressive structures versus societal progress. The acquired willingness of refusing an authoritarian alternative is already a healthy sign for the members of society: "You either accept the Enlightenment and remain within its tradition of rationalism [a term considered both as

⁵ Foucault, Michel. "What Is Enlightenment?" (1984) The goal of this essay consists in representing a reimagined understanding of Enlightenment which is more fluid than Kant's view, as the latter suggests continuous progression of individuals through self-reflection, liberation, and suggests a rather vigorous resistance to oppressive systems of power. Foucault's main argument goes on to prove that the Enlightenment did not necessarily liberate individuals from oppressive systems but rather produced alternative ways of control and oppression.

positive and as a reproach] or you criticize the Enlightenment and try to escape from its principles of rationality which may be seen once again good or bad” (10) writes the author. Further, he characterizes humanism as a separate concept from the notion of enlightenment and questions the authority which determined what was considered “valid” knowledge and who had the authority to produce it. His anti-Enlightenment stance challenges the prevailing narrative that the Enlightenment was solely a force for progress and emancipation. Instead, he sheds light on the ways in which those values, ideals, and practices have been utilized to exert control over individuals and successively marginalize certain groups within society.

As for the dialogue genre in the Enlightenment era, it is worth noting that it brought a renewed approach of philosophical dialogue. For example, one may think of works by Fontenelle, Lessing, Voltaire, Rousseau, and especially Diderot. In the eighteenth century, the dialogue form served to defend freedom of thinking, to denounce existing injustices as well as religious restrictions and abuses: “L’*é*loquence et la cadence des mots bien choisis doit y être naïve et son artifice y doit être si bien caché qu’il produise son effet sans qu’on s’en aperçoive” (43) writes Pujol, supporting the idea of concealing certain aspects of reality within the dialogic discourse, then unfolding them gradually with prudence and paying careful attention to the choice of words and the recourse to artifice in expressing bold statements and critical accounts. The spirited, combative dialogues of the eighteenth century tried essentially to denounce blind devotion, fundamentalism and fanaticism (concepts which are thoroughly discussed in the chapter on Voltaire’s philosophical dialogues); they condemn the cruelty and abuse committed by the representatives of the Church, criticize conventional traditions, which were anchored deeply in French society; and, finally, they produced ideas that aroused the curiosity of the population considering that most of those dialogues were didactic, filled with philosophical

debates and implications, revealing diverse discoveries and inducing a general desire to be educated.

1.2. Dialogue Form and Discursive Techniques

Even though not everything could be freely discussed during the eighteenth century, the abovementioned authors were able to make themselves heard by either writing anonymously, which allowed them to share some of their viewpoints with their audiences, or using indirect and allusive compositions encouraging people to think critically. This is one of the main reasons the dialogue form flourished in this period, as its “indirectness of communication though mediated and asymmetric, was the main tool against other propagandic forces,” (39) writes Vittorio Hösle whose work *The Philosophical Dialogue: A Poetic and A Hermeneutics* (1960) is an important work for studying the place of the philosophical dialogue, its production and reception by the public. He notes that the “concealed” narrative which contributed to the difficulty of discovering the author’s purpose helped readers “to gain autonomy [...] as they could see how the conversation partners were gradually led to the truth” (40).⁶ This aligns with the eighteenth-century writer, historian Marmontel, whose view on the dialogue form was expressed in *Eléments de littérature* (1787), in which he stated that “Le dialogue est le genre le plus naturel, le plus animé, le plus varié, le plus propre à peindre les characters, à développer les sentiments, à faire briller l’esprit, à intéresser le lecteur.” (146)

⁶ Addressing the notion of truth in this context is important. It consists of a variety of micro-truths: such micro-truths could be a correct behavior, for instance, that authors would like to highlight in their works, a new concept that could seem complicated or a taboo that would need deciphering. A freer way of approaching spiritual faith, on the other hand, is another truthful configuration that the *philosophes* addressed. Thus, “reaching certain truth” in a dialogue bears the meaning for discovering and insisting on a beneficial phenomenon in the goal of producing more intelligence thus providing well-being to the population.

What was the nature of the techniques that were used by the intellectuals to conceal their immediate messages? How were they able to spread knowledge while seemingly just creating literary works? These are the questions I will try to answer by observing the various techniques, tactics and strategies these dialogues demonstrate.⁷ These devices range from the use of literary figures to purposefully constructed conversations, or *entretiens*, which change the tonality or the direction of ideas in the given dialogue; other devices pertain to characterization, as a given character speaks in riddles or maneuvers the symbolic nature of names to send a message, as in most of Voltaire's dialogues. These protagonists express their authors' goals indirectly, by adopting various dispositions like irony, naiveté, or curiosity. Furthermore, these protagonists are not portrayed with fixed opinions and often make contradictory statements or reverse their roles in the dialogue to complicate their narrative. In short, there is a great variety of dialogic textual combinations and configurations that simultaneously express and conceal authorial intention with the purpose of hiding any critical or bold claims made by one or the other interlocutor – claims that can be understood with difficulty or have a dilemmic nature.

In attempting to decipher these dialogues' opacity and hidden messages, readers were forced to develop critical skills, which was the precise goal of the writers. As most philosophic dialogues did not have a moralistic ending, like fables, they promoted a sense of autonomy in the readers. These readers were able to understand writers' interior conflicts based on the mosaic of the allusive techniques that the authors used for creating dialogic structures and infusing them with non-explicit messages.⁸ The revelations expressed in the dialogues include Fontenelle's

⁷ In my understanding, tactics were small ruses writers made use of to create their work, techniques were more difficult to structure, and strategies required an even broader effort and larger textual content to construct various facets of artifice.

⁸ In fact, we already know that Rousseau wrote his dialogues to denounce those whom he thought conspiracists, using diverse characters to do so. Voltaire used anonymity and other indirect techniques to mock and ridicule

visionary thoughts about the existence of other planets and inhabitants, Diderot's defense of materialism, Rousseau's confessions about his friends and colleagues,⁹ and Sade's moribund who explores the themes of life and death with a Catholic priest who attempts vainly to force the ideas of the religious scripts on the latter who vehemently rejects them and expresses his controversial and libertine thoughts. Sade's moribund challenges the traditional religious beliefs without concern about being persecuted, for Sade was already in prison; thus, he is fully honest in his discourse, and arguably does not use any artifice or technique to conceal his ideas. In fact, it is Sade's configuration of a "dying man" that makes this honesty possible, which is also a recourse to the dialogue genre for expression of bold ideas; in this unique instance, one may speculate that the absence of artifice is itself an artifice, a tactic for expressing the author's views without fear of consequence.

According to Joseph de Maistre, the term "conversation" refers to social interactions, while dialogue designates a literary genre. Additionally, he describes the dialogue as a mere fiction, as it supposes a conversation that never took place, thus, it is a purely artificial work. (93) De Maistre argues that this artificiality permits authors to create their own ways of organizing and establishing the ways to serve their ends. Almost all definitions of the word "dialogue" refer to the verbal relationship between two or more interlocutors. We exist dialogically, as beings that communicate with one another at the very moment that we are talking with each other. According to Dmitri Nikulin, when we arrive at a conclusion, we accept certain

religious code, while Diderot used opacity of thought and complex discussions of materialism, all of which I elaborate later in this project.

⁹ It is appropriate to acknowledge that the letter also existed at that time as an independent genre, such as Montesquieu's *Lettres Persanes* (1721), and it served many purposes in eighteenth-century French literature. The relation of the two forms, letter and dialogue, could be defined as polyvocal for the dialogues, and rather univocal in the letter, as the latter speaks with one voice and has no opposition compared to the dynamic of the dialogue genre.

arguments and reject others; it is through a set of methods of reasoning called “dialectics” that we reach these conclusions, and the dialogue form remains the most convenient literary genre for the literary application of “dialectics.” As a literary genre, dialogues demonstrate recurring patterns, such as similar dialogic compositions with light differences, including minor variations of form or choice of protagonists, as well as use of symbolic or classic names, textual narratives, or distribution of roles,¹⁰ all of which help authors to create alibis for their inventive and innovative ways of thinking in case religious or monarchic representants would discover and try to persecute them for their bold beliefs.

The dialogues that I include in my study contain various sorts of structures that help to transmit subliminal ideas without openly provoking the sensitivity of the authorities. The very essence of dialogic works in this period is the discussion of sensitive topics in an implicit fashion.¹¹ Writers tried to reach their audience elliptically, implicitly, via allegories or metaphors. Practicing the dialogue form permitted the authors to distribute the primary burden of communicating truth between multiple and various voices, avoiding direct expression, and inhabiting a gray area by distributing their voice between various characters. In other cases, writers chose protagonists of different cultural values and put them in interaction with each other to accentuate the contrast that would emerge from their encounter. Such devices permitted writers to blur the source of their work, depicting their protagonists as fictional, real, or both, and consequently sharing authorship and responsibility with their “writer/creator.” These techniques,

¹⁰ Eighteenth-century France was still under the grip of the Monarchy and the Church, which held strong influence and power until the end of the century. This is relevant regarding the political context, which had changed after the French Revolution and caused a change in the literary field as well; the dialogues written after 1789 did not carry the same level of allusiveness as those written previously.

¹¹ Indirection, as we will see in the ensuing chapters, was the main literary tool for dialogue writers, and each writer used his own style and creativity for being indirect. Additionally, the use of artifice in these dialogues and their didacticism was a decisive factor for choosing them in this study. It is the didacticism that frightened the Church and the Government; thus, most discursive strategies (or types of artifice) have been used in the dialogues I chose here.

as described above, were necessary, in the hope that they would allow authors to propose audacious hypotheses without having to take direct responsibility for them; thus, avoiding problems with the censors.

Finally, the dialogue form was more appealing, persuasive, and pleasant to the readers, considering that most of these texts contained either interesting scientific discoveries, new data about unknown phenomena, or philosophical or humorous discussions. It inspired liveliness and rhythm; some writers used a certain musicality in their dialogues (certainly for a better effect), and they bested other genres by representing complex notions and scientific discourses in a dynamic, uplifting, and conversational setting.

1.3 Religious Influence versus Scientific Thought

French thinkers produced texts with the purpose of liberating the public from existing beliefs and religious dogmas, by a) offering new horizons for embracing true knowledge, and b) encouraging people to rely on scientific rather than metaphysical frameworks. For instance, Diderot asks in his *Pensées*, “Pourquoi donc exiger de moi que je croie qu’il y a trois personnes en Dieu” (126),¹² reproducing the same critique as Montesquieu, whose mock-naïve characters in *Les Lettres persanes* (1721) represented the Pope as a “powerful magician who could make people believe that three were one” (67).¹³ In many texts, eighteenth-century authors considered institutionalized religion harmful to society. In *Emile* (1762), Rousseau accused it of incoherent moral teachings because it blamed people for natural desires that made humans what they were.¹⁴

¹² See *Pensées Philosophiques*, LIX

¹³ See Montesquieu. *Lettres persanes*. Lettre XXIV, Rica à Ibben.

¹⁴ Even though the discussions about divinities are only fantasies, fictions, or simply a pastime, they remain an important topic of study because religion and divinities influence(d) people’s life significantly. A character in the television series *Game of Thrones* said that “People should not claim to talk for gods” (Lord Stanis). Even though Rousseau opposed the Church, his view on God was one of harmony with the natural world, emphasizing the importance of personal conscience: “the existence of God could be grasped through man’s natural faculties -- his

He affirmed that true religion was a private encounter with God rather than an endorsement of the Catholic Church's dogmas.¹⁵ Helvétius went as far as claiming in his *De l'Esprit* (1758) that all religion was arbitrary. He described the religious promise of eternal life as having damaged society by distorting people's beliefs. D'Holbach noted in his text *The System of Nature* (2012) that religious teachings were contradictory, and the superstition resulting from them was corrupting and prevented the development of virtue.¹⁶ He explains the source of the superstition in the section "Upon the Divinity," in which he clearly states that the unknown generates fear, and because of that fear, people invent imaginary constructs through their defense mechanisms, which is a natural psychological response. One such imaginary construct is their blind devotion to the faith which clouds their judgment and overwhelms their reason: "Man is wicked not because he is born so, but because he is rendered so" (146)¹⁷ writes d'Holbach, referring to many rules that religious establishments enforced, which brought about revolts and discontent in general. Men's experience and knowledge were directly at odds with the feeling of superstition and fantasy, argued the author, attempting to demonstrate that virtue and atheism were not necessarily incompatible. (167) His text reflects his atheistic stance, naturally affecting his readers, and promotes skepticism toward the influence of religion in conditioning human understanding. Later in this project we will observe how d'Holbach's atheism and Voltaire's

senses and reason" (Darling 21). There was no need of intermediation or priests. In his article, John Darling evokes the consequences of Rousseau's depiction of religion, which discarded priestly authority as sources of religious knowledge and claimed that every individual should have his/her own relationship with God.

¹⁵ See Rousseau, J.J. (1969) *Lettres morales. Œuvres Complètes*, vol 4, Gallimard, Paris.

¹⁶ In this project, I use the English translation of d'Holbach's work, *The System of Nature*. Translated by Samuel Wilkinson. Theopania Publishing, 2012.

¹⁷ D'Holbach. *The System of Nature* In this work, the author critiques notions such as the immortality of the soul, and the existence of God. Consequently, he asserts that religious devotion or beliefs are the result of fear and societal conditioning: "It has been already stated, that ideas to be useful, must be founded upon truth; that experience must at all times demonstrate their justice: if, therefore, as we have proved, the erroneous ideas which man has in almost all ages formed himself of Divinities, far from being of utility, are prejudicial to morality, to politics, to the happiness of society..." (415) D'Holbach's strong views on the erroneousness of relying on Scriptures or Divinities were meant to promote progress and banish illusive, futile opinions.

deism collide and disrupt their friendship, even though their combined efforts shaped the intellectual landscape of the eighteenth century, promoting critical thinking, reason, and inquiries for freedom of speech and liberty.

CHAPTER 2: ARTIFICE AND PHILOSOPHICAL DIALOGUE

2.1 Artifice in Dialogues

Artifice is a necessary aspect of human existence. For instance, we smile to be polite, we wear cologne or wigs to deceive others' senses, we lie to avoid a stressful situation or keep silent to accomplish a goal. All the above-mentioned actions have some level of artifice – a concealed aspect, *a trompe l'oeil* that momentarily deflects people's attention. This was a helpful literary tool for the Enlightenment thinkers whose dialogic compositions, full of controversial ideas, contained multiple dimensions of artifice for disseminating knowledge unobtrusively. One might even argue that every human accomplishment must have had a certain level of artificiality¹⁸ – the trick that led others to believe in it. The intent of deception may vary, of course; deception itself is not inherently good or bad; sometimes it is used to shield emotions, while at other times, it contributes to the disguise of truth, the deciphering of which provides more answers and builds confidence for the readers of the dialogues.

Artifice in dialogue, on the other hand, refers to the intentional use of clever or deceptive techniques to manipulate or to deceive others through conversation. It may involve trickery, deception or some sort of use of cunning to achieve a desired outcome or to conceal one's true intentions. It can be used to create suspense, which we will see in Fontenelle's and Diderot's texts, build tensions or add complexity to a story, such as in Voltaire's or Rousseau's works. It may involve characters using sarcasm, irony, or double entendre to convey hidden meanings or mislead others. Writers employed various types of artifice in dialogues to indirectly reveal the

¹⁸ Later in this project, I argue that “artificiality” is not an appropriate word to describe the process of cunning or manipulating. “Artifice(iality)” would be more of an appropriate word to use for that specific purpose as it has no relations with digital artificiality but is a rather proper description of the fact of tricking.

true nature of a character, create plot twists or express forbidden knowledge, which often consisted of scientific data and the questioning of religious principles. Artifice in a discourse may also be found in a real-life situation, such as in negotiations, political debates, or sales pitches. Artifice helps to emphasize persuasive language, which becomes a rhetorical device or a manipulative tactic to influence others in gaining an advantage.

Finally, it is worth recalling Aristotle's mention of the notion of artifice in his *Rhetoric* when he discusses means of persuasion. His view on artifice is based on the concept of deliberate and strategic methods of persuasion. In *Rhetoric*, Aristotle discusses various rhetorical devices and techniques that speakers can employ to effectively persuade their audience. One passage that exemplifies Aristotle's view on artifice can be found in Book III, Chapter I, where he states: "The duty of the orator is to use persuasion, and the means of persuasion available to him are the persuasive arguments of the case itself and the personal character of the speaker; and if his speech is intended to be persuasive, he must make use of all the resources of language and thought which are appropriate to the kind of speech in question." (84) In this passage, Aristotle emphasizes the importance of using all available resources, to effectively communicate with and persuade an audience. This involves employing rhetorical devices, appealing to emotion, and reasoning, and leveraging the personal character of the speaker to enhance persuasive effectiveness. It is easier to create tensions, arguments, or fights in a conversation, which is why the conversational setting fosters the use of artifice and the dialogue genre facilitates its application.

2.2 External and Internal Artifice

Before describing these new adjectives I will assign to the concept of artifice, I would like to refer to its definition from the dictionary *Trésor de la langue française*, which defines the word “artifice” as the totality of means used for the accomplishment of certain tasks -- “un moyen habile et ingénieux, un procédé qui se distingue par son habileté, destiné à corriger, à améliorer la réalité et la nature.”¹⁹ Artifice is the invisible that helps to decipher the visible; the strength of the unknown that establishes and directs the course of the known. In such format, the use of artifice as a *discursive literary technique*²⁰ is a useful tool for dialogue writers. These techniques contribute to both concealing and expressing certain intentions or ideas, and artifice contributes to their realization after some period when the reading material is better understood, and its subtle nuances are deciphered, analyzed, and identified.

At this time, it is proper to make an important distinction regarding the notion of artifice, because it may be employed both within the text and outside of it when, for instance, it is configured by exterior characteristics. In other words, an external artifice is an attribute which frames the text, such as the location of the characters, their names which may be symbolic, anagrammed, or invented, and the roles that their authors assign to them. Once established, an external artifice may not be changed, it is fixed and stays as it was initially configured, while an internal artifice is more fluid, as it is created by the narrative of the protagonists who engage in arguments, many of which remain debatable and open ended most of the time. The internal

¹⁹ *TLF*, Online French Dictionary (1976-1993).

²⁰ In addition, the concept of “artifice” may be used in many other instances; however, it is primarily in the sense of a discursive technique that it will be referred to in this project; it is italicized in this instance to pinpoint the specific meaning of “tricking, cunning” that was useful for dialogue writers to conceal their controversial ideas.

artifice is constructed through the speech of the protagonists as opposed to external artifice that is a stable part of the setting.

The philosophical dialogues I am studying include philosophical questions and argumentative methods of answering them through a plurality of characters. Höhle enumerates the tasks of philosophical dialogues, namely, clarifying the relations between certain kinds of people, philosophical views, and forms of debate. The chapter “On the Relationship between Form and Content in the Philosophical Dialogue,” (48) in which he examines the relationship between the philosophical dialogue, philosophical questions, and the contradictory nature of the dialogues, affirms the difficulty of writing a good dialogue and the challenge of choosing an appropriate topic for discussion.²¹ In some cases, he writes, successful dialogues favored contradictions and taught the different positions precisely by debating them. For instance, Diderot’s dialogues are primarily composed of philosophical debates and thought experiments, which are filled with contradictions, inducing a sense of vagueness and ambiguity, gradually solidifying in a defense of his views on materialism. Rousseau’s dialogues also represent contradictory opinions throughout a series of debates, and it is by eliminating those contradictions that Rousseau’s eponymous character succeeds in justifying his actions. Voltaire expresses his truthful emotions through imaginary debates between various fictional protagonists who help him denounce superstition and fanaticism in people’s lives, while Sade’s moribund denounces religious injustices and cruelties in a lengthy debate with a priest without producing any deceptive structure or indirect speech, using extreme honesty as a new form of artifice.

²¹ Höhle affirms that successful dialogues do not have to favor an opposition or a contradiction (49) that allow the protagonists to engage into a Socratic exchange of ideas. Furthermore, he enumerates the appropriate topics for including in philosophical dialogues, such as ethics, the philosophy of religion or the meaning of human life. (50-51)

Some of the writing techniques are common to most dialogue writers who must first identify the topic and the reason for broaching it, thus selecting their characters, and assigning them specific roles or names. Whether traditional or symbolic, starting from this point, everything these characters say or do will depend on who they are or how they represented their view since the beginning. If a character is a doctor, then he or she will remain a doctor, which is a framing device and an example of external artifice, as opposed to discursive features within the dialogue and its context. Another example is Diderot's *Le Rêve de d'Alembert*, in which the core discussion occurs in a dream, or, depending on the analysis, the apartment of a female friend; while this is an example of location as an external artifice, the presence of femininity also plays an exterior role in this instance. The protagonist Julie de Lespinasse remains a crucial character for transcribing d'Alembert's dream's content, then demonstrating wit, curiosity, and intellectual ideas throughout the dialogue. Further, it may involve the protagonists' names, usually symbolic, as the choice of these names may be indicative of some implicit meaning, such as Rousseau's choice of an eponymous character who attempts to create the impression of an unknown, forgotten past. La Hontan also chooses an eponymous character in his dialogue who represents the opposite views of the author, a tactic aimed to avoid censorship from the Catholic Church. Consequently, depending on the course of the conversation, the development of each protagonist's role demonstrates the author's intention, either leading or being instrumental in the transmission of the messages the author attempts to spread. While external artifice has a limit, and its nature and common traits vary from one author to another, internal artifice differs in both nature and style, depending on specific writing styles,²² as it is textual, based on the content of

²² As the notion of artifice in discourse is central for my study, an insight from Hösle's book may be a useful addition regarding its use: "The paradox of art is that it promises a higher truth precisely because it lies, or rather, to put in better or more in accord with the truth, it abandons the conditions of normal discourse." (32-33) This observation addresses my question of the extent to which deception is necessary to reach a higher truth. After all,

the protagonists' narratives. The distinction of external and internal artifice will be discussed in the respective chapters of this project and clarified thoroughly with textual examples of the studied dialogues.

2.3 Dialogues in the Eighteenth Century

Plato's works are unquestionably the widest known dialogues throughout various cultures; many consider him the precursor of the genre, although accounts vary. His dialogues are usually classified along with Cicero's and Lucian's, not because of their content but rather the historic era. Many writers of the early modern era imitated either the style or the topics of the Ancients, such as Fontenelle's enterprise in reproducing a different version of the *Dialogues of the Dead* that Lucian had written initially. While Cicero's dialogues served as didactic, informative, and demonstrative models, Plato's dialectical method, as well as his technique of the *maieutic*,²³ represented significant models for later literary creations.

Before delving into more detailed descriptions of the texts in question, it seems proper to address the issue of distinguishing a dialogue from a philosophical dialogue. If a regular dialogue consists of the many ways we interact, converse, and debate, the philosophical dialogue suggests a quest toward more mutual research, affecting us all and encouraging critical and creative thinking: "The philosophical dialogue is accordingly defined as a literary genre that represents a discussion of philosophical questions" (55) writes Höfle. The concept of "philosophical questions" is too broad for my purpose; therefore, I suggest defining more specifically

artifice is a tool of deception that intends to detour the authorities and transmit messages to the population, and a successful lie will prevail, or, similarly, a successful heist that no one notices will be an achievement and not a crime.

²³ The maieutic method involves a series of questions and dialogue between the teacher and the student. Rather than directly imparting knowledge, the teacher attempts to stimulate critical thinking, revealing the students' own ideas and understanding.

philosophical questions as those having to do with knowledge, reason, and action. Philosophical dialogues give readers an especially intense and gratifying experience of philosophical truth, according to Hösle, because their authors disregard the usual conditions for normal assertions and use the informality of a conversational setting to pique the interest of the audience with entertaining readings represented in a more enjoyable manner. After all, the motto of *placere et docere* (*plaire et instruire*) was at the heart of all dialogues since the times of Lucian, and authors considered writing eloquently to attract the attention of their readers.

My first dialogue of interest, which many consider as having ushered in the Enlightenment era, is Bernard Le Bovier de Fontenelle's *Entretiens sur la pluralité des mondes* (1686), a didactic, teacher-pupil dialogue between Le Philosophe, Fontenelle's mouthpiece, and a fictional Marquise in a conversation where the mouthpiece of Fontenelle speaks in both scientific and fictional terms to educate the Marquise. This dialogue explicitly encourages women's education, as in the preface Fontenelle argues that women are equal to men in their understanding of and enthusiasm for loving philosophy, astronomy, and intellectual debates. The themes this work discusses extend from scientific observations about the Earth and its satellites to other planets and their inhabitants. Its content deviates from conventional biblical references, instead prioritizing and popularizing astronomy, as it advocates for the Copernican heliocentric theory. At that point in time, the data from our planetary system was becoming irrefutable, and the topic of the plurality of worlds was a sensitive one²⁴-- the complete dialogic composition allowed Fontenelle to use a specifically playful and witty style to conceal the text's scientific implications, by adopting a seemingly purposeless manner of instruction with the character La

²⁴ Only a hundred years before publication of the *Entretiens*, Giordano Bruno was burned at the stake for having speculated about the existence of numerous worlds. The Inquisition also affected Galilei Galileo only fifty years earlier. Fontenelle was the next in line to talk about the same topic but there was enough scientific data to back his claims and prevent authorities or the Church from persecuting him.

Marquise who demonstrates curiosity, intelligence, and occasional naiveté. Fontenelle combines rational argumentation, vivid descriptions, hypothetical scenarios, analogies in a dialogue form, and appeals to both authorities and his audience in discussing with nonchalance the possibility of a plurality of worlds and alien inhabitants.

The second author whose dialogues are a source of infinite interpretations is Denis Diderot, who wrote over twenty dialogues. Diderot had previously revised some of Galiani's²⁵ dialogues and afterward wrote in that genre himself. The author defended the use of the dialogue form for the exposition of philosophical subjects because it allowed for greater vivacity and "rapidity by allusiveness," writes Carrol Sherman (42-43), who attests to Diderot's habit of employing allusion as a protective device. In *Le Rêve de d'Alembert* (1769), the protagonists catalyze Diderot's ideas and join the author in strongly advocating for materialism. *Le Rêve* is filled with thought experiments that range from physics and chemistry to astronomy and biology. Diderot himself is staged as an interlocutor in this dialogue, and a discussion follows among three real, yet simultaneously symbolic protagonists, who reiterate or further reproduce his ideas: d'Alembert the mathematician, the doctor Bordeu, and Julie de Lespinasse. Notably, these interlocutors' names were initially meant to be Democritus, Hippocrates, and Leucippus, the originators of the atomic theory of the universe and medical science. In *Le Rêve*, Diderot's protagonists debate, refute, and confirm the author's various assumptions and speculations through their deep philosophical observations. This text serves as a playground for Diderot's various experimental ideas, most daring and inventive in nature, and allows him to join reality and dream, adding more ambiguity to an already complex text. Wilda Anderson, whose work

²⁵ Galiani here refers to Ferdinando Galiani, an Italian economist and writer born in 1728. He was a prominent figure during the Enlightenment period and was known for his wit and satirical writing style.

Diderot's Dream investigates Diderot's thought and highlights his main points in defense of materialism, observes that *Le Rêve* succeeds especially because Diderot chooses the complex structure of the dialogue as a rhetorical vehicle to advance his dynamic materialism. (12-13) The conversation among the characters contributes to a heuristic²⁶ exploration of his suggested ideas that were represented and advocated for via different voices. Even chronologically, Diderot's voice becomes that of d'Alembert; subsequently, d'Alembert's voice becomes that of Julie de Lespinasse; Julie's voice then is combined with Bordeu's to reaffirm what the mouthpiece of Diderot initially had said or argued for. One could say that Diderot distributed his viewpoints to three above-mentioned characters who reiterated them through their own explanations.

Another dialogue written by Diderot is *Le Supplément au voyage de Bougainville* (1776), which is a rather satirical work that discusses cultural relativism, colonialism, and differences of civilizations that conquering nations attempt to assimilate. The dialogue initially has two protagonists named "A" and "B" who discuss the European and Tahitian civilizations, and Orou and L'Aumônier in the later parts of the text. It is interesting to discuss this dialogue in parallel with La Hontan's *Dialogue curieux entre l'auteur et un sauvage de bon sens* (1703), both of which challenge Eurocentrism and Catholicism. Both authors denounce the hypocrisy of European populations that claimed to be more virtuous compared to the native populations which supposedly did not have any conventions or religious rituals. While Diderot's dialogue argues about the Tahitian's sexual freedom or harmony with nature, La Hontan's dialogue denounces the French colonialists in the New World, through the main protagonist Adario, a "sauvage" who

²⁶ In *Le Rêve*, the term "heuristic" is relevant to hypothetical scenarios, thought experiments that uncover even more territory. Diderot uses the character d'Alembert by placing him in a dream and transporting him into a hypothetical realm. He then explores and challenges existing knowledge and assumptions about society, knowledge, and human nature. This allows him to boost critical thinking and further intellectual exploration in a safe space, with enough ambiguity and complexity that the authorities cannot pinpoint any controversy.

had traveled through the world and had observed the developed nations' lifestyles. In both dialogues the main criticism revolves around religion, although other topics are discussed in order to avoid the sense of targeting Catholicism alone.

Rousseau's dialogue *Rousseau: juge de Jean-Jaques* is another important work for understanding Rousseau's thoughts and self-reflections on his personal and philosophical journey, shared with a readership that is to be educated by its informative content. This work is relevant to my project to the extent that the author uses an eponymous fictional character, who gradually segues into the portrayal of his real personality – an original approach that conceals the author's initial emotions and subjectivity.²⁷ This text provides insights into his views on society, human nature, and the role of the individual in a community. In addition, the readers witness an intimate and introspective look into Rousseau's life and ideas which allow a better understanding of his perspectives and of the context in which this work and others were produced.

I also read Voltaire's *Dictionnaire philosophique* (1764), an encyclopedic dictionary that uses short essays, stories, or dialogues in lieu of conventional definitions. This work strongly

²⁷ A similar approach of using an eponymous protagonist is manifested in the text by Baron de la Hontan, a French nobleman sent to New France that I mentioned previously. La Hontan published his *Dialogues curieux entre l'auteur et un sauvage de bon sens qui a voyagé* (1703) in the Netherlands, to avoid censorship and/or persecution. In those *Dialogues*, whose goal is to confront the state of the "savage" with that of a "civilized" human, the author hides behind his Huron protagonist, Adario, to say freely what he thinks about Europeans' religion and lifestyles. This text further elaborates on the theme of "le bon sauvage," which appears later in Rousseau's *Discours sur l'inégalité parmi les hommes* (1755) and Diderot's *Supplément au voyage de Bougainville* (1796).

La Hontan goes through a gradual transformation when he arrives in New France and observes the corrupt behavior of his fellow soldiers, causing him to switch from the role of the colonizer to the defender of the colonized. Along with fulfilling his military duties, La Hontan keeps a detailed account of his surroundings and events, compiled into two large volumes of travel accounts, where the dialogue comes last. In it, the author uses the contradictions in the Bible to expose the absurdity of blind belief. The writer also explores the native's tendency (or culture) of "telling the truth" to discuss the logical discrepancies in biblical stories, so that Adario, the "savage," could speak his mind critically, while the eponymous *Self* would defend these contradictions in an effort of *trompe l'oeil*. This is one of the dialogues in which the author deliberately constructs a reversal of roles, and the choice of names is intentional and consequential. The inversion of roles in this dialogue allows the author to articulate his thoughts through the voices of two very different opinions whose interaction demonstrates the harms of colonization, the uselessness of the missionaries' presence, and finally, the colonizer's realization of wrongdoing that the pretense of Catholicism conceals.

criticizes and ridicules the Catholic Church and other sects. The tone in this text is informal, and Voltaire's own commentaries or anecdotes, which often contain some deliberate inaccuracies, color it further. A propos, Bakhtin picked up Voltaire's deliberately produced inaccuracies, writing in his *The Dialogic Imagination* (1981), that the errors were a device to expose the undesirable conventions of everyday life. "The device of 'not understanding'—deliberate on the part of the author, simpleminded and naïve on the part of the protagonists—always takes on great organizing potential when an exposure of vulgar conventionality is involved" (164) writes Bakhtin. The author reminds us further that this device of "pretending not to understand" was widely employed in the eighteenth century, to expose feudal unreasonableness, well-known examples of which can be found in Voltaire's *oeuvres* as well as in Montesquieu's *Lettres persanes* (1721). Bakhtin refers to Voltaire only a few times in his work, but those observations are significant, considering Voltaire's strategy of choosing specifically polarized protagonists for generating a more detailed and knowledgeable discourse. Bakhtin provides examples of dialogic opposition between the fool and the politician or the poet, explaining that the characters' oppositions could further contribute to drawing a more accentuated contrast of opinions. Bakhtin considers that "he-who-fails-to-understand," referring to the fool, or the "stupidity described as gay deception," (402) as enabling tactics allowing the author to make the world of social conventionality as strange as the author intends to represent it; one could say that he employs one extreme to decipher the line that connects to the other extreme – a geometrical concept interpreted through a literal setting.

Finally, as Pujol mentions in his *Dialogue d'idées*, the age of the dialogue starts with Fontenelle's *Entretiens sur la pluralité des mondes* in 1686 and ends with Sade's *Dialogue entre un prêtre et un moribond*, written in 1782. In this dialogue, Sade explores several themes related

to religion, morality, and the existence of God. In it, the conversation occurs between a dying atheist and a priest, who attempts to convince the dying man of the importance of faith and the existence of God. The dying man, on the other hand, argues for a materialistic worldview and rejects religious beliefs. The purpose of this dialogue is to challenge traditionality and criticize the infinite power and influence of the Church. The atheistic character, who is forced to listen to the priest's preaching, provides a series of arguments which question the rationality and morality of religious doctrines, in addition to exploring the rights of personal freedom, individual autonomy, and self-determination.

In conclusion, my project seeks to understand and identify the elements of artificially produced behavior, along with the verbal tactics that authors in eighteenth-century literary France used to deflect attention while simultaneously sending loud and instructive messages. This dissertation examines the dialectics in these dialogues and investigates their themes, highlighting the clever use of discursive techniques the *philosophes* chose as instruments of *indirection*. Additionally, it brings to light various characteristics of the dialogue genre that aided eighteenth-century philosophers expressing their beliefs more effectively and safely. This safety obtained by the use of various facets of artifice allowed the expression of numerous opinions and the dissemination of a literary movement which used reason, logic and scientific thinking as a means to advance a society that sought to understand the world without bias, reject superstition and solve problems scientifically rather than fictionally; in short, these dialogues constitute a defense of science against religion and stage a longstanding battle between science and religion, influencing people's mentalities and the nascent science which offered realistic perspectives and rational ways of living.

CHAPTER 3: FONTENELLE

The Relationship Between Knowledge and Ignorance in Fontenelle's *Entretiens sur la pluralité des mondes*

La raison a besoin de l'imagination et des illusions qu'elle détruit:
le vrai a besoin du faux; le substantiel, de l'apparent...

Giacomo Leopardi, *Zibaldone*

Giacomo Leopardi was one of the most important Italian literary figures in the nineteenth century. He had a view opposite the general mentality of the era, namely, that a reversal of human progress, and a devolution into artificiality and decadence would be rather beneficial for humanity's flourishing: "And reason, by making us naturally inclined to pursue our own advantage, and removing the illusions that bind us to one another, dissolves society absolutely and turns people to savagery" (22).²⁸ Leopardi's *L'Infinite* shares many ideological similarities with Bernard de Fontenelle, a controversial but a respected and influential figure in France. My initial reference to Leopardi consists mainly in understanding his idea that "truth and fallacy are interconnected in some way," although he puts a long distance between these two opposites. In fact, one must exist for the other to coexist simultaneously; a rather geometrical logic that may relate to many instances. The era when Fontenelle lived was not quite favorable to logic or truth, as the word of God was unchallengeable and protected by strong religious establishments. A similar ideology was expressed by Fontenelle in his *Nouveaux dialogues des morts* (1683), produced in his earlier literary career, attesting to the fact that complete truth would probably

²⁸ See Leopardi, Giacomo. *Zibaldone*. Translated by Kathleen Baldwin. Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2013.

have needless complications and be harmful.²⁹ Consequently, Fontenelle adopted an unassuming approach in producing his *Entretiens sur la pluralité des mondes* (1686), where playfulness, either linguistic or flirtatious, charm, curiosity, and naiveté come to conceal the primary goal of the writer, which is the dissemination of the Copernican astronomy and the scientific facts that come with it. In his *Entretiens*, a semi-fictional dialogic text, the two protagonists, the Marquise and the Philosopher, make curious deductions, logical assumptions, and numerous thought experiments to support their “carefully dissimulated” scientific claims as they engage in a series of intellectual debates over a period of six evenings. Thanks to the curiosity of the Marquise, Le Philosophe succeeds in explaining many aspects of astronomy, entertaining his readership’s imagination, developing a sense of critical thinking all the while expressing indirectly the significance of scientific advancements versus religious imaginary tales and myths.³⁰

The text *Entretiens* is about the nature of the universe and its inhabitants, although the author’s main goal consists of supporting and disseminating the Copernican heliocentric theory that he expresses in his text in an indirect manner. This indirectness is made possible using various facets of artifice, such as the inadvertently expressed mistakes and their consequent corrections, the naiveness or the curiosity of one protagonist allowing the second to elaborate further on scientific facts, and the use of a female voice as hierarchically inferior but claimed as equal by the author. Each of these behaviors is constructed artificiality, creating the illusion of a light and entertaining discussion rather than an instructive intention. When Copernicus proposed

²⁹ *Nouveaux dialogues des morts* by Fontenelle consists of fictional deceased historical figures from various periods whose discussions explore diverse topics and offer a broad understanding of life, societal issues, and morality from the perspective of canonical authors or historic figures. It is a notable text which is considered by many as precursor to the Enlightenment emphasis on the ideals of reason, logic, and rationality.

³⁰ In the ensuing Chapter on La Hontan’s *Dialogues curieux*, the protagonist Adario demonstrates with clear examples how the Catholics themselves attended Church for socializing, flirting, thus disregarding the very commandments that they were meant to support, demonstrating the negative character of European Christians.

the doctrine that the Sun was at the center of our planetary system, his ideas did not win instant adoption. A century later, when Galileo used the newly invented telescope and gave weighty support to the Copernican theory, he also encountered violent hostility and persecution. Fontenelle's *Entretiens* is yet another attempt to defend Copernican astronomy but with an amusing and fanciful manner, mixing the intellectual discussions with lively situations, as the two protagonists, the philosopher and the marquise, delve into the discussion of the universe, the galaxies, the planets, and their inhabitants by referring to scientific assumptions all the while flirting, joking, and laughing, thus entertaining the audience. Fontenelle craftily constructs this dialogic text in which protagonists of opposite sex discuss these astronomical and scientific facts without offending religious sensitivities. The way the author expresses his opinions, incidentally or by insinuations, suggests that even the choice of the protagonists of different sexes was necessary to create that very specific dynamic in which the instructed philosopher would feign to unwillingly educate the young marquise, creating the illusion of avoiding disseminating new knowledge while simultaneously testing the inventiveness of the human mind and its creativity, instead of advocating for religious ideologies or doctrines.

At the time, the popular mind was strongly anchored in the belief that the Earth was the center of the universe and that other heavenly bodies were circling it; however, evolving science had already rebuked that theory. The subsequent conversations of Fontenelle's two characters attempt to reverse this fallacy as inconspicuously as possible; they proceed by discussing general phenomena of nature, speculating about the status of the moon, possible existence of life in other planets, galaxies, and other worlds, gradually approaching a more sensitive topic, such as the existence of alien conscious beings; if such proof or assumption would exist, it would refute the teachings of the Bible and overturn religious teachings. Thus, he has recourse to the dialogue

form which allows these topics to be approached elliptically, distancing the author from the heliocentric view while simultaneously giving the readers enough time to digest the new knowledge presented by the marquise and the philosopher in this dialogue. While, as noted, this book's principal goal consisted of popularizing the system of Copernicus, it also touches on an important theme, the role of women in science, as the author insists in the preface that knowledge could be a fit pursuit for women as well. The extent of education's importance for women seems to be discussed initially to explain the role of the Marquise who creates the opportunistic circumstances for the philosopher to reveal his wisdom--she plays, in fact, an essential part for the transmission of knowledge and information in this text.

Many of Fontenelle's works are controversial because the author endeavors to spread scientific knowledge, but at the same time he appears reluctant to reveal certain truths: "Ne divulgons pas les mystères dans le peuple" (153)³¹ he declares to the Marquise through his mouthpiece *Le Philosophe*, on the final evening of their *entretiens*. While the author insists on preserving certain aspects of knowledge, he also strives to make his ideas accessible to all layers of society, especially the feminine audience: "J'ai voulu traiter la philosophie d'une manière qui ne fût point philosophique," (3) he writes in the preface to the *Entretiens*, reassuring readers that he intended to entertain rather than to instruct his readers. He says, "Je n'ai point du tout prétendu les instruire [the audience], mais seulement les divertir," (4-5) even though his text is highly instructive and rich in information. This statement blurs the truthfulness of his discourse,

³¹ As Robert Shackleton observes, "the contrast between Fontenelle's continued stress on the importance of error and his endeavor to spread knowledge induces one to look in his work for a theory of an *élite*." (33) The stress on the possible advantages of error is justified by the necessity of studying the history of that which is known to be false in order to understand the truth. In this dialogue, the philosopher often commits a "deliberate error" to then explain its whereabouts to the Marquise, as we will see later in the text.

especially when he adds that truth and falsity are entangled in his dialogue: “Le vrai et le faux sont mêlés ici” (6) he writes in the preface, reasoning further that these two concepts are not inherently intertwined, but it is up to the people to identify fallacies from sound reasoning and accurate information. This gives him leverage should disagreements arise about his work and guarantees him some level of safety from the religious establishment as he qualifies his own work as “filled with errors.” Additionally, he appears respectful toward “les Gens scrupuleux,” meaning the representatives of Religion, and he capitalizes both “Religion” and “Gens” to show his respect when referring to them: “Je respecte jusqu’aux délicatesses excessives que l’on a sur le fait de la Religion,” (9) he writes in his text to flatter religion while producing a work that contributed to the popularization of scientific ideas. Later, he states that “les Gens de la Religion” might disagree with his ideas of “putting inhabitants in other places than on Earth” (8),³² mentioning that it should not matter, as his ideas were a mere product of his vivid imagination. He speculates in this semi-fictional text that: “Il ne faut que démêler une petite erreur d’imagination,” (8) insisting that the human mind can imagine various ideas some of which might be inconsequential. This controversial author admits the possibility of being wrong, even at the expense of his reputation, but he accomplishes his goal of revealing the taboos of the century -- the fear of questioning biblical assumptions, and the freedom of expression. With this tactical and delicate approach, he succeeds in planting seeds of knowledge in his audience’s minds, laying the groundwork for future scientific discussions and inciting them towards critical thinking and intellectualism.

³² Translation for “à mettre des habitants ailleurs que sur la Terre.” Occasional translations are mine unless otherwise notified. In some instances, the use of the English language resonates in harmony with the context which is why occasional English versions of the French text may be used.

This text earned Fontenelle the reputation of a man of science. In this didactic dialogue, the philosopher muses on the possibility of alien life since the second evening. He attempts to demonstrate the symbiotic link between unity and variety, a link that would help him to speculate about the existence of other planets and other living creatures by logical implication. The philosopher reminds that “tout ce qui est commun à plusieurs choses se trouve en même temps varié par des différences particulières” (11).³³ This superposition of uniformity and variety has the purpose of expressing his logical assumption that other planets must exist and be inhabited, as he relies on the belief of the chain of events in the universe;³⁴ in other words, humans may not be the only living beings in this infinitely vast universe. This conversation continues addressing all these aspects, starting with Earth’s inhabitants, the proximity of the Moon, and moves to other planets, their climate, their possible inhabitants, and beyond.

In the same fashion as authors who will be also considered, Fontenelle availed himself of the dialogue form to choose protagonists who differ from each other, an important aspect mentioned previously. The fact that the Marquise inquires about all kinds of issues, both social and scientific, and constantly asks meaningful questions, permits the philosopher to respond in complex, complete and inventive ways, providing current scientific knowledge about the movement of the Earth, existing societal norms, and the numerous dynamics and patterns of the

³³ To clarify this link between unity and variety, Fontenelle used the example of human faces, as they all are different, but they are common to human beings, or the trees of the forests, which are trees but vary from one environment to another; similarly, trees, flowers or animals belong to the same species but are different from each other.

³⁴ The controversy surrounding Copernican astronomy and science in France was due to conflicts between religious authorities and the new scientific ideas that challenged traditional theological beliefs. The heliocentric model contradicted the geocentric view that had been accepted for centuries, which placed Earth at the center of the universe. A notable figure in this controversy was the French astronomer and mathematician Pierre-Simon Laplace. In his book *Exposition du Système du Monde* published in 1796, Laplace presents a comprehensive account of the solar system based on Newtonian physics and the heliocentric model. Even though Laplace was not personally involved in that controversy, his work contributed to the growing acceptance of Copernican astronomy in scientific circles.

Universe. It is worth mentioning that the philosopher gradually falls in love with the Marquise, who, in her turn, falls in love with knowledge. It is possible to assume that loving, flirting and somewhat dramatic behavior is introduced to the text to keep the audience entertained while discussing scientific facts. The choice of gender and role represents therefore a mandatory precondition for developing a romance between a woman and a man who risks his life for his love. This choice may pertain to an example of an external artifice, which, as previously discussed, consists of initially given roles or symbolic names chosen by the author to express an implicit thought, external to the text and used as a means for an accomplishment of an end.

Two major aspects of study are revealed in *Entretiens*; one is the study of the evolution of man, and the other is the defense of the Copernican Revolution, the era's first explicit popularization of the heliocentric model. Fontenelle's implicit denunciation of the Catholic Church's understanding of planetary systems is visible when the Philosophe says to the Marquise that many men prefer to stay in the darkness willingly: "Assez de gens ont toujours dans la tête un faux merveilleux envelopé d'une obscurité qu'ils respectent." (4) The philosopher condemns the superstitious and "le faux merveilleux," qualifying as "true magical beauty" the system that holds the planets together.³⁵ He evokes a sense of skepticism³⁶ in his readers because removing Earth from the center of the universe, which was the general mentality regarding the position of

³⁵ In the Chapter on Voltaire, this idea of a system comes back once again as Voltaire believed in a system -- according to him, there should be an intelligent, intentional design for all existing instances, a notion that is brought up by Sade's moribund in the last chapter.

³⁶ Let us note here that Voltaire also encouraged skepticism via his mouthpiece Evhémère, as analyzed in a later chapter, who claimed "Je ne vous donnerais mes opinions que comme des doutes" (32) during the conversation with his other protagonist Callicrate. Even though some things are certain, there is a constant transformation in the Universe, and it is not false to assume that everything could be doubted. Additionally, we could consider Descartes's "Cogito ergo sum" or David Hume's suggestion about the limitations of human knowledge or the unreliability of human senses in the *Meditations on First Philosophy* (1641) and *A Treatise of Human Nature* (1740) respectively.

the sun, and placing it in the center of a local solar system, would contradict existing knowledge (or rather religious dogma) and produce distrust towards leading religious teachings.

When it comes to the *unknown*,³⁷ Fontenelle claims that in the past, people imagined fables and myths to explain its mysteries. In other words, it was a way to answer questions we could not understand. However, in his opinion, science had sufficient evidence by his time so that they no longer needed to rely on the word of God or the invention of fables to better understand various phenomena. This dialogue only implicitly presents this daring perspective as during their lengthy conversations, the marquise and the philosopher explore facts and fiction in an entangled manner; they discuss true facts within fictional situations, such as the varied nature of alien inhabitants, and the differences in their worlds or their living conditions. Fontenelle provides perspective on how climate could affect alien inhabitants, an idea developed later in *De l'esprit des lois* by Montesquieu, who believed that “climate and geography affect[ed] the temperament and customs of a country’s inhabitants.”³⁸ In fact, *De l'esprit des lois* is occasionally referenced in this project’s different chapters depending on their context.

The notion of the unknown is an important aspect in this text. In many cases, Fontenelle insinuates that what seems invisible might be influential, and what we perceive with our senses may, in fact, be deceptive. This is a perfect parallel with Diderot’s thesis that in dreams senses are more heightened compared to when we are awake. Fontenelle cites as examples the

³⁷ Italicized by me as the concept of the *unknown* seems to fascinate Fontenelle who considered the *unknown*, the imperceptible, the impalpable as highly influential in comparison to known instances. In parallel fashion, Voltaire’s strategic choice of remaining anonymous is another form of the unknown that gives him the power to affect the socio-political atmosphere without being noticed; thus, invisibility, indirectness, and concealment are present both textually and practically, as oxymoronic as it may sound, because “invisible presence” is a force that is impossible to decipher, and, according to Diderot, is what constitutes God, which is a speculation made in *Le Rêve de d’Alembert*.

³⁸ See Montesquieu, Baron de. *De l'esprit des lois et les archives de la Brède*. Slatkine Reprints, 1970. Montesquieu had established a theory of climatic determinism, arguing that the difference of the climate conditioned both political and societal structures.

imperceptible yet significant movements of celestial bodies and draws a link with human self-love, which affects everyone's behaviors but remains hidden from us. Our "unawareness" of phenomena occurring at the cosmic level, like the "unawareness" of humans' interior biological functions, connects the physical universe with human beings: just like we do not feel the tremendous velocity at which we are traveling through space, similarly, at a microscopic level we are unaware of the biological phenomena such as the division of the body's cells, digestion, the variety of organ functions, blood circulation, or the distribution of nutrients throughout the body. He speculates that every human being has a piece of cosmic wonder within herself or himself, and that beings from one environment to another may share certain commonalities depending on environmental factors: "Le mouvement le plus naturel, répondis-je, les plus ordinaires, sont ceux qui se font le moins sentir. Cela est vrai jusque dans la morale. Le mouvement de l'amour-propre nous est si naturel, que le plus souvent nous ne le sentons pas et que nous croyons agir par d'autres principes," (88) explains Fontenelle's philosopher to the Marquise by the end of the first evening, reiterating that what is imperceptible has more value and strength, such as, for example, the divinities which are absent but are worshipped, and the atoms or the molecules that we do not see but that constitute the foundation of our existence. What a fascinating parallel that puts "unawareness" into primordially, proving the maxim that "ignorance is bliss."

It is interesting to observe that there is a theory of the *élite* in Fontenelle's text, in which he suggests keeping certain truths unrevealed (for instance, the eventual existence of other creatures in space, an idea which could be a shocking revelation for many, except for the *élite*). We find a similar attitude in Fontenelle's *Nouveaux dialogues des morts*, his first major work, where one of his fictional protagonists, Socrates, declares that only a few people could be considered as

reasonable: “Sur ce nombre prodigieux d’hommes assez déraisonnables qui naissent en cent ans, la nature en a peut-être deux ou trois douzaines de raisonnables qu’il faut qu’elle répande par toute la terre” (65).³⁹ This nuance of elitism is apparent even later in the text when the Marquise complains to the philosopher that her guests dismissed her discussion about the inhabitants of other planets, prompting the philosopher to urge her to keep this information between them: “Contentons-nous d’être une petite troupe choisie,” (145) suggests the philosopher, aligning with Socrates’s observation and reaffirming his reluctance to reveal certain truths to the public. It is worth noting that there are various other discussions which fall in the category of a gray area, or a middle layer of *revealable apprentissage*⁴⁰ which would not be excessively “scandaleuse” and would not stir unwanted sentiments towards the author or his works.

Finally, it is worth recalling one of Fontenelle’s axioms that the editor Donald Schier infers from his *Nouveaux dialogues des morts*: “Mankind usually prefers falsities to truth, mysteries to knowledge, and prejudice to reason, and may well be right in doing so.” (42) This statement is another proof of Fontenelle’s sense of elitism as he prefers to dispense only a portion of knowledge that would make people reasonable and happier. Excessive knowledge or “truths” in the narrow sense of the word would only harm people’s well-being. Additionally, it is worth noting that Fontenelle valued utility over truth, which could be interpreted in terms of him choosing action over inaction : “Je n’ai pas grand zèle pour ces vérités-là,” the philosopher says to the Marquise in his *Entretiens*, “je les sacrifie volontiers aux moindres commodités de la société.”(145) In short, he indicates that all the philosophical discussions were simply wise debates, while he would prefer action and would do his best to provide society with the comfort

³⁹ See Fontenelle, Bernard de. *Nouveaux dialogues des morts*. Edited by Donald Schier. The University of North Carolina Press, 1965. While this work is a close imitation of the classical author Lucian, Socrates in Fontenelle’s version of *Dialogues* retains his characteristic wit and philosophical approach.

⁴⁰ Italicized by me to accentuate the new pattern acceptable to the public.

and knowledge it needed to thrive. In some way, this is a call for the people to be more engaged, as the philosopher clearly downplays the role of biblical interpretations and suggests looking toward the future and innovation. Fontenelle argues that truth is not absolute or fixed, but rather a flexible and evolving concept that can change based on new information and perspective – after all, change is the only constant in the universe, an idea that repeats itself considering its practicality. He emphasizes reason, evidence, and skepticism in the pursuit of truth, even though he claims oftentimes the non-necessity to explore and understand the notion of “truth.” In his *Nouveaux dialogues des morts*, many protagonists treat this topic. For instance, in the discussion between Lulle and Artemise, Lulle says: “Si par malheur la verité se montrait telle qu’elle est, tout serait perdu.” (224) Here is once again a reiteration of Fontenelle’s reluctance to reveal the nature of “truth.” By expressing this willingness to hide the truth or keep it between a few chosen individuals, Fontenelle’s protagonists clearly echo a form of elitist theory. Similarly, the philosopher contends that “il n’y a que les esprits fins qui sentent le plus ou le moins de certitude ou de vraisemblance.” (162) Such a selective mentality was not necessarily a special characteristic of Fontenelle; other authors, such as d’Holbach or Mandeville, had also made similar remarks, respectively pointing out that “Without question very few men are capable of profound, connected meditation” (416),⁴¹ or “to make the society happy and people easy under the meanest circumstances, it is required that a great number of them should be ignorant as well as poor.”⁴² All these statements may be consolidated into the philosopher’s final remark on the last evening when he says to the Marquise that: “L’ignorance est quelque chose de bien à être généralement répandue,” (179) praising the meaningfulness of “unawareness” and “ignorance”

⁴¹ See Baron d’Holbach. *The System of Nature*.

⁴² See Robert Shackleton. *Fontenelle: Entretiens sur la pluralité des mondes. Digression sur les anciens et les modernes*. Oxford UP, 1955. I borrowed this citation from the introductory paragraph on “Fontenelle and Enlightenment” where Shackleton discusses Mandeville’s *The Fable of the Bees*, pp. 105-106.

as necessary types of artifice⁴³ for humans to live in relative comfort without delving into the depth of scientific thoughts and details.

Often, though, Fontenelle stages the protagonists of his dialogue to be deliberately mistaken, so that accurate information can be then provided to cover up this “inadvertent” mistake. For example, as their conversation continues, the Marquise says that she loves the sun, but she is saddened by the fact that its light is covered by the light of so many other stars. This prompts the philosopher to say: “Ah, m’écraiai-je, je ne puis lui pardonner de me faire perdre de vue tous ces Mondes” (15) using the plural form of “mondes” (worlds). At that moment, the Marquise immediately inquires why the philosopher uses the plural form instead of the singular as we are supposed to have only one world: “Marquise: Qu’appellez-vous tous ces mondes, me dit-elle en se retournant vers moi?” The philosopher, faking his surprise of being caught saying something forbidden, reveals his concern by saying that he slipped up: “Ah, vous m’avez mis sur ma folie, et aussitôt mon imagination m’est échappée,” admitting that he made a mistake, albeit deliberately, by using the word “worlds” in the plural form, thus attracting the attention of the Marquise who, as the philosopher knew, would ask him to elaborate further on that thought. The philosopher makes it seem as though he was embarrassed and angry to be forced to recount his scientific opinion and he explains that he made a mistake of believing that every star could be a world: “Hélas, je suis bien fâché qu’il faille vous l’avouer, j’ai mis dans la tête que chaque étoile pourrait être un monde.” (15) This nonetheless insinuates the existence of other planets where

⁴³ In the introduction of this project, I distinguish between external and internal types of artifice; when using an external form of artifice, the authors either frame their works by choosing specific protagonists, metaphorical names, or symbolic places that are exterior to the text but susceptible to implicit meanings. Internal types of artifice derive from the use of a specific discourse when the interlocutors, already engaged in a conversation, speak, and produce examples of dissimulated speech. In other words, instances of internal artifice are rather numerous in the text and produced by the protagonists’ narrative, while external artifice consists of the author’s creative set-up of the dialogue and its participants.

the climate could be different but some of which could harbor inhabitants possibly different from human beings.

This linguistic and behavioral practice of artifice and indirection allows the philosopher to alienate himself from this daring idea (of other existing worlds), all the while defying the conventional belief about the stars and planetary systems. Furthermore, when the Marquise insists that the philosopher clarify these thoughts, he behaves reluctantly saying that knowledge is not as pleasurable and entertaining as the comedies by Molière, and that the discovery of new knowledge may not be as rewarding as laughter. The Marquise disagrees with the philosopher, arguing that she finds pleasure in knowledge as well, which resonates with the dialogic motto *divertir en instruisant*. Horace, the Roman poet, and philosopher, advocated in his work *The Art of Poetry* that philosophy instruct as well as entertain:⁴⁴ “In the choice of the words, the author of the projected poem must be delicate and cautious, he must embrace one and reject another: you will express yourself eminently well if a dexterous combination should give an air of novelty to a well-known word. If it happens to be necessary to explain some abstruse subjects by new invented terms, it will follow that you must frame words never heard of by the old fashioned Cathegi: and the license will be granted if modestly used.” (133) In the following paragraphs, Horace encourages to “coin a word” if that helps to delight the readers. Additionally, the author advocates for the idea that art and literature may have a profound impact on individuals by engaging intellect and emotions simultaneously.

As the conversation continues, the philosopher acknowledges: “J’eus beau me défendre, il fallait céder,” (13) making it seem as if he was talking against his will, prompted by the

⁴⁴ See Horace. *The Works of Horace (Odes, Epodes, Satires, Epistles and The Art of Poetry)*. Translated by C. Smarts. Digireads, 2011.

curiosity of the Marquise, shifting therefore the burden of responsibility of his inventive observations from his persona. Gradually, he goes on explaining his theory of other worlds, assuming at that point the full role of the philosopher who must prove his point. He adopts a specific manner of talking by using maxims, such as “on veut savoir plus qu’on ne voit,” (16) insinuating that there is always more to learn and reminding readers about the “imperceptible” which is always more influential. He continues philosophizing that true philosophers spend their lives in not believing what they see but rather in comprehending what they do not: “Les vrais philosophes passent leur vie à ne point croire ce qu’ils voient, et à tâcher de deviner ce qu’ils ne voient point.” (17) This claim supports the idea that appearances could be deceiving, and what could be ostensibly evident could also not necessarily be right to follow, a thought that would be pertinent to religion or to all other conventions which governed French society. To support his argument of deceitful appearances, the philosopher notes that “dans les Machines que la Nature présente à nos yeux, les cordes sont parfaitement bien cachées,” (112) reaching the conclusion that it is through solving mysteries of science and using logical reasoning that humans may deduce new assumptions instead of blindly following the easily available information.⁴⁵

Other examples of “concealed discourse” reside in the careful choice of words, such as “I tried,” “I assumed,” “I attempted,” which may be suggestive while not imposing the statements that follow: “J’ai tâché de dire tout ce qu’on pouvait penser raisonnablement, et les visions que j’ai ajoutées à cela, ont quelque fondement reel.” (7). The use of wording such as *j’ai tâché* “I tried” adds ambiguity to his discourse, suggesting that he tried without necessarily succeeding. The expression “quelque fondement” -- certain foundations -- suggests that he could not be

⁴⁵ It is worth observing that books were expensive in Fontenelle’s era and the book the most used for answers was the Bible which interpreted most phenomena metaphysically.

totally truthful, only partially; these are discursive writing techniques which, again, shift or mask the responsibility of any controversial writings.

In Fontenelle's first work, *Nouveaux dialogues des morts*, mentioned previously and which was written at the age of twenty-five, the author includes dialogues, most of which contain a certain moral -- Fontenelle's fictional protagonists, both from antiquity or from his own era, converse, analyze, and expose their vision on various matters. The author ends those dialogues in general with undisputable maxims that express his own opinion. This manner of ending the short dialogues is also a form of clever tactic, an indirect manner of sealing each dialogue with an almost undisputable and truthful tenet. For example, the dialogue between *Calirrhée-Pauline*, a text that condemns adultery and deception, ends with the maxim: "Le Cœur est la source de toutes les erreurs dont nous avons besoin."⁴⁶ This maxim is true and contradictory; while faithfulness between lovers is an intrinsic requisite, Fontenelle reveals the eventuality of unstable behavior, implying human imperfection, as humans are prone to error, especially when passions are involved. The contrast between Fontenelle's continued emphasis on the importance of error and his endeavor to spread knowledge causes one to look in his work for the already mentioned theory of the *élite*, parts of which appear in both *Nouveaux dialogues* and *Entretiens*.

Returning to the text *Entretiens sur la pluralité des mondes*, one may argue that it demonstrates its usefulness and the breadth of its importance through implicit thoughts and invisible literary structures that contain both literary and philosophical meanings. Since the very first evening, the philosopher talks about light and darkness, employing a series of metaphors to discuss knowledge or oblivion: "Ne trouvez-vous pas, lui dis-je, que le jour même n'est pas si

⁴⁶ Fontenelle. *Nouveaux dialogues des morts*, p.152.

beau qu'une belle nuit?" (13) he asks the Marquise, as they walk together under the clear sky of the evening. Metaphorically speaking the day and the light could represent knowledge, while the night and the darkness would symbolize the unknown and the mysterious. The fact that the philosopher privileges the beauty of the night indicates that he is a proponent of the unknown, consistent with Fontenelle's reluctance to reveal certain knowledge. The Marquise concurs with the philosopher, letting him pursue his thought, just like Glaucon would agree with Socrates to allow him the continuous flow of his ideas. The Marquise starts speaking in metaphors as well and answers: "Oui, me répondit-elle, la beauté du jour est comme une beauté blonde qui a plus de brillant, mais la beauté de la nuit est une beauté brune qui est plus touchante."⁴⁷ First, one may confirm that the Marquise agrees with the philosopher, and the readers witness that she is learning; second, this conversation about the day and night suggests the pattern for becoming illuminated, demonstrating that one must start with the unknown, with the darkness, and pave the way toward the known, toward the light -- a message that could be intended for both the people and the clerical representants.

The conversation follows with flattery as the philosopher notices that the Marquise is not a brunette but a blond; thus, she incarnates the light (the knowledge) rather than the darkness. He continues his praise of the beauty of the day, immediately changing his initial position as he had already taught the first lesson and starts enumerating the advantages of the day and the daylight: "Il est pourtant vrai que le jour est ce qu'il y a de plus beau dans la Nature," (14) drawing a metaphorical parallel with knowledge and truth. The metaphorical use of day and night for symbolizing knowledge and the unknown respectively is another example of implicit discourse

⁴⁷ Voltaire would ironize this comparison later, mocking Fontenelle's analogy of day and night to a blond and a brunette, respectively. But Voltaire changes his attitude later and praises the eloquence and the beauty of Fontenelle's text. Additionally, this preference of the night, darkness and unawareness suggests the idea of researching the "darkness in the early Enlightenment" as not all knowledge (darkness) was welcomed.

that the philosopher employs, and which the Marquise's approval reinforces; this literary device is an artifice, a type of concealment of direct discourse that encourages the reading audience to think deeply, literarily, and critically.

By the end of the text, the Marquise starts making deductions by herself with such accuracy that the philosopher becomes charmed and delighted, stating that she starts making as meaningful observations as he does. Along with the Marquise, the readers also learn intuitively the data and principles that the philosopher explains to her. The philosopher continues to explain to her the structure of our planetary system, outlining existing data and speculating about the scenarios of alien populations. The philosopher's tactfulness in so effectively exploring the unknown and error contributes to a meaningful and instructive conversational exchange between those protagonists. Finally, it is important to note Fontenelle's Enlightenment perspective on science as something that frees us from our passions, prejudice, and ignorance. The reference to the interconnectivity between the cosmic and humans, offered through the power of veiled allusions and hints, allows him to place in circulation a daring and advanced idea that raises the status of humanity to new heights and emphasizes the importance of a new theory of progress in the history of ideas.

CHAPTER 4: BARON DE LA HONTAN

Reversing Voices: The Representation of the *Noble Savage* and Naturalness in La Hontan's

Dialogues Curieux...

But when shall we ever be done with caution and care? When will all these shadows of God cease to darken our minds? When will we complete our de-deification of nature? When may we begin to “naturalize” humanity in terms of a pure, newly discovered, newly redeemed nature? (167)

Fredrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*.

If Fontenelle wrote his dialogue *Entretiens sur la pluralité des mondes* to prove that other planets may exist and be inhabited, La Hontan wrote *Dialogues curieux entre l'auteur et un sauvage de bon sens qui a voyagé* to show that the inhabitants of the Earth were no different from each other as human beings, adding however that these beings were shaped by their local culture, lifestyle, and religion. A similar idea is expressed in Montesquieu's previously discussed *De l'esprit des lois* in which the author characterizes people according to their environment. Fontenelle's work is rather didactic and requires the reader's imagination to go beyond this world, while La Hontan's dialogue sets a local polemical tone between two protagonists born in different corners of the world who happen coincidentally to cohabit together. These characters are the eponymous character La Hontan, who expresses the “opposite” of La Hontan the author's beliefs, and the American Indian Adario, who is a well-educated individual and who has travelled in many parts of the world. Their topics of discussion extend from religion and law to medicine, marriage, and happiness, although the first section of the dialogue on “Religion” establishes the foundational traits for attaining happiness or enforcing the rule of law and will be

the main subject of this study. In La Hontan's *Dialogues curieux*, the author employs diverse writing techniques to illustrate that individuals thrive in their natural environments, highlighting how the colonizers disrupt these harmonious settings, ultimately suggesting that people are better suited to flourish in their own surroundings. The author has recourse to the dialogue form to construct the dynamic between Adario and an eponymous character who speaks in defense of the Christian faith while permitting his protagonist to criticize the shortcomings of this faith and the supposedly virtuous behaviors and lifestyles of Europeans.

The dialogue opens with the eponymous character La Hontan addressing his defense of Christianity to Adario: "C'est avec beaucoup de plaisir, mon cher Adario, que je veux raisonner avec toy de la plus importante affaire qui soit au Monde; puis qu'il s'agit de te découvrir les grandes véritez du Christianisme" (159).⁴⁸ The character La Hontan attempts to persuade his interlocutor Adario about the beneficial aspects of his nation's faith, reiterating from the outset that religious principles were the most important aspects of an individual's life. It is worth noting that the author La Hontan does not agree openly with his eponymous character; his manner of writing, having configured the presence of an eponymous character, represents a literary technique, a form of artifice to protect himself from the censors, all the while expressing his own opposite opinions through his true mouthpiece Adario, who is curious, and well-travelled, like the title indicates, building an anticipation of a gradual reversal of roles and voices. This gradual reversal of roles occurs as Adario succeeds in persuading the character La Hontan to consider leaving his faith and join the Huron community and faith by the end of the first section of the dialogue, and a reversal of voices occurs whereby the author La Hontan employs Adario's voice to speak freely about his own views about religious injustices. "The real Adario was La Hontan

⁴⁸ Note the grammatical aspect may have echoes from the older versions of French in this text.

himself,” writes A.H. Greenly, describing La Hontan’s dialogue as “a device for airing his somewhat radical views.” (335)

Adario, who is portrayed as a friendly character, responds to the fictional character La Hontan that he would be happy to discuss these principles even though he had heard the same reasoning many times from the missionaries who were sent to the New World to profess the religion adopted by the Europeans: “Je suis prêt à t’écouter, mon cher Frère, afin de m’éclaircir de tant de choses que les Jésuites nous prêchent depuis long temps...[cependant], si ta Créance est semblable à celle des Jésuites, il est inutile que nous entrions en Conversation, car ils m’ont débité tant de fables que tout ce que j’en puis croire, c’est qu’ils ont trop d’esprit pour les croire eux-mêmes.” (159) Adario’s wit and sincerity is quite direct as he immediately denounces the preaching of religious rules because he had the occasion to see for himself that these preachers or the representatives of their nations were not observing these rules themselves. Additionally, he uses the word “fable” to describe the frivolousness of missionaries’ lengthy argumentation, as he is persuaded that these biblical verses are non-credible or depicted erroneously.

La Hontan’s *Dialogues curieux* was published at The Hague in 1703.⁴⁹ It is a work that blurs the lines between fiction and non-fiction. While some aspects of this dialogue are based on

⁴⁹ Books were printed in Holland where they sold hardly any copies, to be exported to France where the market was prodigious (Karlis 417). This is relevant to the extent that “epistolary art was also cultivated and admired; letters, especially those by famous women and men were frequently written with the understanding that they would be circulated and eventually published, so the writers were careful to present themselves in a most favorable light” (Karlis 418). La Hontan and Montesquieu had both written in epistolary form, though the former’s letters were addressed to a family member and written in his voice, while Montesquieu’s moque-naïve characters, depicted in a fictional setting, facilitated the critique of societal vices, hypocrisy, and absurdities through the lens of these letter-writing characters (Usbek and Rica, elaborated in what follows). La Hontan’s letters were illustrative while Montesquieu’s characters used satire to expose flaws in society and human behavior, creating a multi-layered narrative that captivated readers along with deepening the thematic exploration of their works. The epistolary genre represents another form of dialogic communication between author and readership, although both forms rely on the interaction of the characters to relay the messages intended to be spread by the authors. The link between the letters of La Hontan, written to document his travels in North America, and the dialogue he produced, has the commonality of description of indigenous populations, and insights into their culture and ways of life.

La Hontan's own experiences and observations during his travels in North America, there are also elements that are clearly fictional or exaggerated. Overall, one may say that this represents *un point de départ* of dialogic literature where the "savage" plays a key role in identifying the failures of European civilization. Furthermore, this is not the only instance in which European civilization is represented negatively. Montesquieu's *Lettres Persanes*, which is a satirical epistolary novel, also criticizes diverse aspects of European civilization through the lens of Persian travelers, as it highlights the numerous shortcomings of European society, politics, and culture during the eighteenth century. In fact, there are several common themes that are criticized in both La Hontan's and Montesquieu's works; both demonstrate the deficiencies of European civilization through a portrayal of corruption, decadence, and hypocrisy in the Catholic Church and the French court. The Persians in Montesquieu's novel, Usbek and Rica, observe the lack of integrity and moral decline within the European elite, demonstrating the harmful influence of power and wealth on them. Later in the same century, Diderot produces a dialogue titled *Supplément au voyage de Bougainville*, which criticizes the colonizing aspect of European nations, which is taken up in chapter 5, part 1, and discusses the notion of cultural relativism, a theme which is pertinent to this dialogue as well. The similarity between La Hontan's and Montesquieu's texts are important to the extent that one or more of their protagonists traveled to Europe and observed diverse unrighteous phenomena that Europeans glorify mistakenly to other nations who have not traveled in Europe.⁵⁰ It is true that Europe was more developed industrially than many other nations, but it is also true that with economic wealth other vices were born, such as greed and corruption, racism or discrimination, exploitation or cultural imperialism that missionaries neglected to mention to the Iroquois population they were trying to assimilate. This

⁵⁰ See Montesquieu. *Lettres Persanes*. Mercure de France, 1957, and Denis Diderot. *Supplément au voyage de Bougainville*. Folio Classique, 1972.

corruption goes so deep, says Adario, that even the doctors exploit the sickness of their patients and purposefully mistreat them for their profit: “Vos Médecins vous tuent, au lieu de vous redonner la santé; parce qu’ils vous donnent des remèdes, qui pour leurs intérêts, entretiennent long-temps vos maladies, & vous tuent à la fin.” (219) This note resonates with Molière’s satirical view on doctors that he portrayed as pompous, ignorant, and greedy individuals in his plays.

While the eponymous character La Hontan attempts to defend the mores and the laws of the Europeans vis-à-vis his “savage” interlocutor and friend Adario, the latter continuously demonstrates the defects of the European lifestyle, points out the emptiness and pretentiousness of that civilization and the numerous contradictions within the Catholic faith: “Tu vois donc bien qu’il y a de la contradiction ou de l’obscurité dans les paroles du Fils du grand Esprit, puisque les Anglois & vous autres en disputés le sens avec tant de chaleur & d’animosité que c’est le principal motif de la haine entre vos deux Nations.” (165) Adario had been attentive to the differences of religious adherence both in France and in England. In France, the dominant religion was Catholicism, while in England, the Anglican Church⁵¹ was the established religion. This religious divide often contributed to political tensions and conflicts, including the Wars of Religion and the persecution of religious minorities in both countries. La Hontan the author remains himself a contradictory author in that his dialogue praises the simplicities of “la vie sauvage,” yet he draws a rather negative image of American Indians in his *Mémoires*. It is thus important to approach his work with a critical eye and an awareness of the complex mixture of reality and imagination, as La Hontan includes some positive aspects of American Indian culture

⁵¹ The Anglican Church originated when King Henry VIII broke away from the authority of the Roman Catholic Church in the year 1530 and further. It combines elements of Protestantism and Catholicism and reflects a middle ground of these two traditions. See Anthony Milton’s *The Oxford History of Anglicanism* (2017).

yet portrays the Huron, Algonquin, and Iroquois people as uncivilized or primitive in his travelogue, perpetuating the myth of the “noble savage.”

Regarding the protagonists of this dialogue, a distinction between the character La Hontan and La Hontan the author must be made, as previously mentioned, as the author constructs this dialogue in a way that stages Adario as a well-travelled American Indian who can then serve as a mouthpiece for analyzing and denouncing the social injustices of the author’s own nation. As Gilbert Chinard notes, “Dans le premier dialogue, La Hontan joue le même rôle de défenseur peu convaincu du catholicisme, n’oppose à son interlocuteur que des arguments très faibles et lui donne le dernier mot.” (28) Even Adario denounces at some point the weak argumentation and evasive tactics of his interlocutor: “C’est quelque chose d’étrange que depuis nous parlons ensemble, tu ne me répondes que superficiellement sur toutes les objections que je t’ay fait.” (179) Be that as it may, the dialogue is built in such a way that the character La Hontan defends the Christian religion’s doctrines seemingly as best as he can, allowing Adario to attack the cruelty of its laws, injustices, and the artificiality of Europeans’ lifestyle in contrast with the natural ways of life of American Indians who spend their lives with mutual understanding and communal, peaceful existence.

As the title of the dialogue indicates, Adario’s worldliness allows him to have a broader perspective in comparing his way of life with the character La Hontan’s. He travelled in France, New York, and Quebec where he studied the customs of the French, the English, Americans, and Canadians. Adario’s knowledge about European customs and faith emerges gradually as his views overrule those of the protagonist La Hontan, whose role in the *Dialogues curieux* remains mainly that of a passive interlocutor. The author La Hontan places almost all his critical commentary in the indigenous voice, allowing him to articulate his own critical views that would

have been dangerous to write in the first person. One must note that Adario expresses himself with honesty and simplicity, yet he reasons in a logical and reasonable manner in comparison to his interlocutor La Hontan who appears to be influenced by religious superstition and prejudice. Adario's naïve, simplistic yet rational logic has been used in a dialogue form to demonstrate the straightforwardness of "savage" mentality.⁵² His reasoning demonstrates nobler elements compared to the Europeans who thrived in invading, colonizing, and taking over other populations and territories during that era, which was against the principles of La Hontan the author. La Hontan the character attempts to demonstrate the lack of spiritualism in the Huron nation which is immediately refuted by Adario who explains to his interlocutor that they believe in an infinite being, "un Créateur de l'Univers sous le nom du Grand Esprit et qu'ils reconnaissent l'immortalité de l'âme; que la vie est un songe et la mort un réveil, après lequel l'âme voit et connaît la nature et la qualité des choses visibles et invisible." (177) This passage is a demonstration of a double layered artifice, as La Hontan the character's negation of Hurons' spiritualism contributes to the revelation and defense of their faith. Additionally, the candor of Adario's discourse, which contains didactic elements about his nation's faith, is evoked by this interaction and consolidated further so that La Hontan the character stops his relentless preaching about the lack of religion or spirituality amongst the Hurons. The interplay of La Hontan the author's opposite viewpoints add complexity and hide the author's real alliance, which is revealed by the honesty and simplicity of Adario. As Chinard writes in the introduction of the edition of 1931 of La Hontan's *Dialogues Curieux* "A cette simple religion que les hommes peuvent comprendre et pratiquer, le civilisé va opposer ce qu'Adario appelle les contradictions, les obscurités et les visions des Ecritures saintes, maintenant que tout homme qui ne les accepte

⁵² "Tous ces thèmes étaient traités dans un style auquel le public n'était point habitué," explains Gilbert Chinard, "c'est en cela que réside en grande partie l'intérêt de dialogues de 1703." (37)

pas [...] mérite une éternité de châtement.” (30) The impact of the colonial enterprise weighed heavily on the indigenous population who kept challenging the legitimacy of European authority on their land and opposed the missionary’s imposition of foreign religious beliefs.

Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s notion of the “noble savage” is different from the protagonist Adario who is also represented as a “savage” though educated, clever, well-travelled and well-versed about the culture of diverse civilizations. Rousseau refers to his belief that humans in their natural state, uncorrupted by society, are inherently good, peaceful, and virtuous. It is the societal structure and the various institutions that corrupt the individual, eventually leading to inequality, greed, and conflict. While Rousseau’s “noble savage” represents the idealized state of humanity before the influence of civilization, La Hontan’s savage remains noble while traversing and observing the lifestyle of these civilizations. It is common knowledge that Rousseau introduces the philosophical idea of “noble savage” in his *Discours sur l’inégalité*, romanticizing the view of primitive humanity living in harmony with nature. David Harvey writes that La Hontan elaborated the myth of the “noble savage” and argues that this myth was not a creation of the eighteenth century but simply a manifestation of the idea of primitivism. This is a broad topic to delve into but is relevant to the extent that readers may compare Adario, the “noble savage” from 1703, to the “noble savage” discussed later in the century. Harvey is, however, correct in observing that “none of the supposed exponents of ‘primitivism’ including both La Hontan and Rousseau, seriously intended to suggest that contemporary Europeans should renounce their possessions and customs to live as savages in the wilderness.” (163) Furthermore, in a different approach, Frederic Hoxie, recounting Ter Ellingson’s observations, writes in his article “The Myth of the Noble Savage” that “Rousseau was framed as he never argued that Indians were noble savages. Other eighteenth-century ethnographers and social theorists were also

unconvinced that Indians were noble beings.” (2) It is not my purpose to discuss these different approaches but to paint a general picture of that notion, as Adario is represented as being as noble and reasonable as a good person can be. The aspect of a “noble savage” gradually gains qualities of another type of artifice so long as the American Indian illustrates La Hontan’s views in his own simplistic and direct ways, thus using honesty and rationality as leading discursive tactics, or, in other words, facets of artifice that enabled Adario to speak about topics freely, as opposed to the author La Hontan, who would have been condemned had he expressed the same ideas. Using dialogic artifice, La Hontan creates a simplified and distorted image that serves his own particular purpose. This may seem like a double form of artifice because it is a constructed or artificial representation that may not fully capture the complexities and the nuances of indigenous culture. The very positive representation of Adario and his brutal honesty in expressing his opinions illustrates multiple layers of artifice that help the author to reveal certain critiques of his religion and the European lifestyle.

The reason why La Hontan was in the New World is because he was an impoverished nobleman’s son from southwestern France who was sent to Canada in 1683 to reinforce the French governor’s defenses against the Iroquois nation. Deployed to the New France as *garde de marine* of the French Royal Navy at the age of seventeen, he spent almost a decade in the New World fraternizing with the ally tribes the Hurons and the Algonquins. Living side by side with the locals, learning their language and culture, he realized that the presence of the French on that soil was unnecessary: “Pourquoi nous intervenons?” he wrote in a letter dated June 8, 1684, regarding an attack against the Iroquois. In an earlier letter of May 12, 1684, he had confessed that “Ces gens-ci n’ont pas tout le tort après tout; ils chassent et pêchent librement, en un mot, ils

sont riches” (11).⁵³ As time went by, he got to know the local inhabitants closely, which changed him profoundly; if he had arrived there as a colonizer, he gradually became a defender of the colonized.

La Hontan’s three-volume work *Voyages de Mr. le Baron de La Hontan dans l’Amérique Septentrionale* (1703) is considered as one of the best travelogues of the seventeenth century on the New World. Volume I, *Nouveaux voyages*, covers La Hontan’s exploration and experiences in North America, including his encounters with Native American tribes, descriptions of the geography, natural resources, and reflections on colonial life. It provides a detailed account of his travels in an epistolary form, as he writes those descriptions in the form of twenty-five letters addressed to one of his closest relatives in France. This individual, who was a rather distant family member, was providing him occasionally with a small income, and La Hontan’s initial inspiration consisted of writing back to this family member, who helped him financially, describing his life as a new inhabitant of an indigenous land. Volume II, titled *Mémoires de l’Amérique septentrionale*, delves deeper into his encounters with Native American tribes, his interactions with English and French settlers, and his reflections on the political and social landscape of the region. It is in the third volume, which is named *Supplément aux voyages*,⁵⁴ that we find his *Dialogues curieux*, in which La Hontan, embittered by his experiences of French administration, denounces the vices of European society, and expresses his frustrations with European traditions. These discussions occur over four consecutive days, which is formally

⁵³ Since the very beginning of Volume I of his *Mémoires*, one may sense La Hontan’s supportive stance for the indigenous people.

⁵⁴ One may speculate that Diderot imitated the title of La Hontan’s work when he initiated his own *Supplément au voyage de Bougainville*, which is why I draw several parallels in the chapter on Diderot.

similar to Fontenelle's *Entretiens*, where the Marquise and the Philosophe converse during six consecutive evenings.

La Hontan's *Nouveaux Voyages, Mémoires* and *Dialogues* hold a particular place in the texts of the Enlightenment. While many travel narratives are filled with exaggerations, embellishments or overstatements about the local people's lifestyle and behavior, La Hontan's works are praised for their detailed and accurate description of the native people, as he had been a firsthand observer of what happened during his decade long stay. An anonymous author who wrote the preface of La Hontan's second edition of *Nouveaux Voyages* writes that: "L'auteur y parle avec franchise qui doit sembler bonne aux amateurs de la Vérité. Ce ne sont point ici les récits d'un Jésuite ou de quelque autre Missionnaire, qui, pour donner une haute idée de ces travaux apostoliques, ne parlent que de conversion, que de miracles et ne font connaître les Sauvages que par rapport à la Catholicité." (3) It is important to remember that La Hontan was initially writing letters to his relative as a way of gratitude for helping him financially, so it is reasonable to assume that he was not expressly exaggerating or embellishing stories about his adventures, or writing in the fashion of the missionaries who were preaching the ideas of reward and punishment to the local population.

La Hontan's *Dialogues curieux* displays a multilayered degree of didacticism, as the "savage" conveys his own perspectives and observations about his culture and lifestyle. In addition, the dialogue has a philosophical dimension touching on topics such as politics, happiness, and morality, which contribute to the development of the readership's critical thinking. La Hontan peacefully recounts his experiences and describes his surroundings, while his contemporary Marc Lescarbot, author of *Histoire de la nouvelle France* praises in his account "the advantages of living under the authority of a great king, of becoming civilized and

embracing the Christian faith.” (Zecher 109) Furthermore, throughout the *Histoire*, Lescarbot argues for the advantage of Canada, lauding the fertility of the land and insisting that the Indians of North America were more receptive to Christianity than those of South America. (Zecher 114) This may be the reason why in his accounts Lescarbot encourages conquering these lands, defending the occupation of another's territory through the conventional argument that because the earth belongs by divine right to the children of God, the first title of possession to any territory is inherited by those who obey God and show themselves worthy of the heritage entrusted to them. In short, because the American Indians have not been good stewards, they have forfeited the right to their lands.

Lescarbot constructs a metaphor of bigger fishes consuming the smaller fishes while discussing the conquest of territories, and one may surely observe that Lescarbot's accounts are much more aggressive than La Hontan's who was antipathetical to conquest:

La terre donc appartenant de droit divin aux enfans de Dieu, il n'est ici question de recevoir le droit des Gents, & politique, par lequel ne seroit loisible d'usurper la terre d'autrui. Ce qu'étant ainsi, il la faut posséder en conservant ses naturels habitans, & y planter serieusement le nom de Jesus-Christ & le vôtre, puis qu'aujourd'hui plusieurs de vos enfans ont cette resolution immuable de l'habiter, & y conduire leurs propres familles. Les sujets y sont assez grans pour y attirer les hommes de courage & de vertu qui sont aiguillonnez de quelque belle & honorable ambition d'être des premiers courans à l'immortalité par cette action l'une des plus grandes que les hommes se puissent proposer. (Lescarbot 4)

Lescarbot aggressively suggests that only the children of Jesus-Christ deserve to inherit the newly discovered territories, adding that it would be necessary to preserve the existing

inhabitants but ultimately convert them into Christianity. La Hontan's works, on the other hand, suggest avoiding conflict and attack missionaries' reports, who conveyed exaggerated or inaccurate accounts about the inhabitants of the new land. La Hontan learned to speak the Iroquois language, which permitted him to argue that the missionaries, only some of whom were familiar with indigenous dialects, were not fully aware of the surroundings, and that readers of the missionary reports should keep in mind the fact that the missionaries observed imperfectly and with prejudice.

La Hontan's hopes for discrediting the priests' distorted truths motivated him to produce his semi-fictional *Dialogues curieux*, through which he constructed the artifice of dialogue to criticize the missions of the Jesuits and undermine their credibility:

Adario to La Hontan : Ce sont des contes que les Jésuites m'ont fait déjà plus de cent fois; ils veulent que depuis cinq ou six mille ans, tout ce que s'est passé ait été écrit sans altération. Ils commencent à dire la maniere dont la terre & les cieux furent créés; que l'homme le fut de terre et la femme d'une de ses côtes; comme si Dieu ne l'auroit pas faite de la même matière; qu'un serpent tenta cet homme dans un Jardin d'arbres fruitiers... Si je disois qu'il est plus probable que ce sont des fables que des vérités, tu me paierois des raisons de la Bible; or l'invention de l'Ecriture n'a été trouvée, à ce que tu me dis un jour, que depuis trois mille ans, l'Imprimerie depuis quatre ou cinq siècles; comment donc s'assurer de tant d'événements divers pendant plusieurs siècles. (162-163)

This scene demonstrates how overwhelmed the Hurons were by the presence of missionaries who were forcing on them foreign faith and lifestyle that did not make sense to them. It is by the voice of the local Huron, who is familiar with the context of the Bible, that the author questions the textual stability of the Scriptures, their content and all that follows from them. Jean-Marie

Apostolidès writes in “Les Dialogues de la Hontan” that: “La Hontan inverse le processus normal de colonisation et d’analyse. L’analyse qu’on prête à Adario provient de la Hontan lui-même qui tente ici ce que Roger Caillois nommera plus tard une révolution sociologique.” (73) Apostolidès also notices the inversion of voices that is constructed by La Hontan so that Adario expresses La Hontan the author’s thoughts: “Comment veux-tu que je croie la sincérité de ces Bibles⁵⁵ écrites depuis tant de siècles, traduites de plusieurs langues par des ignorants qui n’en auront pas conçu le véritable sens, ou par les menteurs qui y ont changé, augmenté et diminué les paroles qui s’y trouvent aujourd’hui?” (161) Adario raises the important issue that historical texts are often subject to inaccuracy and change: “J’y ay reconnu vint menteries les unes sur les autres,” (163) he continues, reminding his friend that the Scriptures were a set of texts which could not possibly have held textual consistency and must have changed from generation to generation.

The reversal of the voices in this context results in two important effects: first, La Hontan secures himself against Adario’s attacks on the clergy as his eponymous character only defends Catholicism; second, he gives Adario the ability to critique what he as author could not do, simultaneously highlighting Adario’s intelligence, kindness, and noble feelings, traits of the indigenous people generally not emphasized by the missionaries. The latter believed that they were superior because they followed the word of God, as we saw above when discussing Lescarbot’s account. As a matter of fact, La Hontan’s dialogue invites readers to look at the Christian religion from the perspective of an intellectual “savage,” who is ostensibly expressing his opinions with honesty and without bias. It is the first topic of their discussion that demonstrates the opposite positionality of the two interlocutors, as Adario enumerates the contradictions of Europeans’ faith and customs to his interlocutor, who clearly fails to counter

⁵⁵ Note the use of plural form of “Bibles” which reduces the symbolic meaning of the Christian faith.

his arguments successfully. As the character La Hontan jumps to different topics instead of responding to the contradictions observed by his interlocutor, Adario observes that his friend keeps avoiding addressing his arguments: “Je voi que tu cherches des detours, & que tu t’élignes toujours du sujet de mes questions.” (179) This occurs frequently, both here and in the dialogues to be discussed in subsequent chapters, either when they talk about the Christian dualism of good and bad or when they discuss the ability of a “savage” to reason in more realistic terms. The character La Hontan seems to be disconnected from nature and reality, as his opinions are infused with fallacies and superstition: “La Hontan: Le premier et principal point qui cause tant de disputes est que les Français croient que le Fils de Dieu ayant dit que son corps étoit un morceau de pain, il faut croire que cela est vrai...” (178) The character La Hontan attempts to represent Christian doctrines as respected and established faith within European society but ends up emphasizing the most extreme aspects such as promising salvation, redemption, and eternal life. For the indigenous people, who lived by laboring the soil, by hunting and fishing to earn their daily food, it was ludicrous to think of a human body as a representation of bread, as this people had no idea that Catholic Christianity believed Christ’s body to be bread, and that one must believe in it -- “il faut croire que c’est vrai.” Thus, Adario asks his friend, why “*il faut?*”

If the Jesuits reassure that Christianity is the path towards fulfillment and divine acceptance, then how is it possible that some people are punished nonetheless: “Adario: ce Fils du grand Esprit a dit qu’il faut véritablement que tous les hommes soient sauvés, or s’il le veut ‘*il faut?*’ que cela soit; cependant, ils ne le sont pas tous puis qu’il a dit que beaucoup étoient appelés et peu élus...c’est une contradiction.” (159) Adario demonstrates the contradictions of the claim that the Christian God was benevolent, loved every human being, yet punished some of them, in some cases, nonetheless. Despite La Hontan’s moral and ethical teachings, Adario remains skeptical and refuses the numerous incentives of conversion offered by his friend. Beyond this,

Adario goes on the offensive and suggests the character La Hontan convert to his indigenous practices.

As already mentioned, La Hontan was familiar with the native's Iroquoian language,⁵⁶ and Adario, for his own part, knew French and had spoken with many other Europeans. He notes that none of them observed the religious values which were so adamantly forced on the indigenous population: "Ecoute-moi, mon frère, j'ay parlé souvent à des Français sur les vices qui règnent parmi eux, & quand je leur ai fait voir qu'ils n'observaient nullement les lois de leur religion, ils m'ont avoué qu'ils les connaissaient parfaitement, mais qu'il leur étoit impossible de les observer." (178) How could Adario believe in commandments which were ignored by those who preached them? In addition to the French admittedly knowing the foundations of their religion but failing to comply with them, Adario notices other behavioral contradictions. He recalls that when he went to the Church, "Les femmes tiroient un livre d'un grand sac, elles le tenoient ouverte en regardant plutôt les hommes qui leur plaisoient plus que les prières qui étoient dedans." (173) In some way, Adario is making fun of these ceremonies as he describes them as social gatherings for men to find women or for women to flirt with men. On the defensive, La Hontan argues then that those behaviors would prevent those in question from being granted access to Paradise: "si cela étoit, aucun d'eux n'iroit en Paradis," (169) insists La Hontan whose answer was not persuasive for Adario, as he did not believe in the notion of Paradise in the first place.

As their conversation continues, Adario realizes that the Europeans' discovery of North America could be an opportunity for them to correct their faults and follow the example of

⁵⁶ Wyandot, Wendat, Quendat, and Huron are the dialects used to speak within the Iroquois nation. "Iroquoian languages." *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 27 Apr. 2024, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Iroquoian-languages>.

American Indians. While the character La Hontan is clearly trying to convert Adario to Christianity, it is, however, Adario who advises him to convert to the faith of the Hurons. If the author had reversed the voices of his protagonists at first for one purpose, another reversal emerges by the end of this dialogue, which is a reversal of roles. It is now the American Indian who is attempting to convert the European: “Adario: Ma foy, mon cher Frère, je te plains dans l’ame; croi-moy, fais toy Huron.” (184) Adario maintains his position by insisting that the Hurons’ tranquility of mind, innocence of life and selflessness contributed to a stronger collective existence, exempt from the concept “thine and mine” which, as he argued lengthily, was the route to evil: “N’ayant ni tien, ni mien, vous vivrez avec les mêmes félicités que les Hurons.” (174) This reversal is reaffirmed regularly as Adario explicitly recommends that La Hontan give up Frenchness and become Huron: “Mon cher frère, fais toy Huron. Car je vois la différence de ma condition à la tienne” (182).⁵⁷ In this respect, Dorris Garraway observes that “the characters La Hontan and Adario are each other’s double, identical in their refusal of each other’s difference.” (218) They differ only in how they wish to impose sameness on each other: Adario wants to see his friend La Hontan become Huron, La Hontan attempts to convert Adario to Christianity. Yet Adario on the whole appears the more rational, logical and reasonable of the two.

Despite their supposedly “savage” lifestyle, the Huron and Iroquois nations had their own ways of progressing. The discussion of “savage” or “natives” seems to be a relatively flexible notion, considering that at that point, these nations, thought initially as uncorrupted or far from artificiality, had acquired numerous “civilized” behaviors, including the use of artifice. Evolution tends to artificiality; if we look at current lifestyles, with their reliance on digital technologies

⁵⁷ A similar critique of “mine and yours” is discussed in Diderot’s *Supplément au voyage de Bougainville*.

and virtual realities, we cannot deny the tendency to move towards artificial intelligence. In fact, even Rousseau writes in *Discours sur l'inégalité* (1755), that people who lived in nature slowly acquired tools and more sophisticated ways of subsisting: “Il se présenta bientôt des difficultés; il fallut apprendre à les vaincre: la hauteur des arbres qui l’empêchait d’atteindre à des fruits, la concurrence des animaux qui cherchaient à s’en nourrir, la férocité de ceux qui en voulaient à sa propre vie, tout l’obligea à s’appliquer aux exercices du corps; il fallut se rendre agile, vite à la course, vigoureux au combat.” (110) The people who lived in Nature had to evolve in order to survive, using the branches of trees or the pieces of stones as arms for protecting themselves. Additionally, the weather forced the natural man to build shelter against cold or against heat. This is when natural man have first experienced the feeling of pride, writes Rousseau, and even though others living with this man noticed his clever moves and developed a sense of jealousy themselves, they all had the same opportunity in nature and they did not become as corrupt as people in developed societies: “Les conformités que le temps put lui faire apercevoir entre eux, sa femelle et lui-même, le fire juger de celles qu’il s’apercevait pas, et voyant qu’ils se conduisaient tous comme il aurait fait en de pareilles circonstances, il conclut que leur manière de penser et de sentir étaient entièrement conforme à la sienne.” (112) Rousseau continues describing group and individual hunting tactics, and the imperfection of language which consisted of simple, singular sounds instead of full sentences. The reader of Rousseau’s *Discours sur l'inégalité* discovers that the author sees “les sauvages” as evolving, as they build small cabins for more comfort, and start favoring the one who is singing or dancing better: “Chacun commença à regarder les autres et à vouloir être regardé soi-même, et l’estime publique eut un prix. Celui qui chantait ou dansait le mieux; le plus beau, le plus fort, le plus adroit et le plus éloquent devint le plus considéré.” (116) One could argue that the notion of “sauvage” is only

temporary because human consciousness tends towards progress, comfort, and competition, which is a conventional course of evolution.

In the final pages of the first section, Adario reminds his friend about “le grand Esprit,” attesting that the Hurons had certain similarities in regard to spirituality; in fact, they were rather pragmatic and rational, busy surviving the cold or procuring food and supply; they were not concerned as much as the colonizers about the deciphering of the metaphorical stories that the missionaries told them constantly: “Adario: Croi tout ce que tu voudras, mais tu n’iras jamais dans le bon pais des Ames que si tu te fais Huron. L’innocence de nôtre vie, l’amour que nous avons pour nos frères, la tranquillité d’âme dont nous jouissons par le mépris de l’interest, sont trois choses que le grand Esprit exige de tous les hommes en général.” (181) Yet, despite this emphasis on simplicity, there is still artifice. If initially Adario had demonstrated a fragile willingness or flexibility for accepting La Hontan’s spiritualism, it becomes clear by the end of their discussion that he feined his attitude to lead the conversation towards persuading his friend to join his tribe’s own faith. Adario cared that La Hontan, depicted as his friend, retrieve peace, friendliness, and innocence of life. This passage highlights the reversal of roles to the extent that if the character La Hontan was trying to have Adario become Christian from the beginning, he ends up on the verge of accepting the peaceful faith of the native population.⁵⁸

To conclude this broad topic, it is worth mentioning that previous reports on the natives referred to them exclusively as “savages,” while La Hontan introduced the concept of the noble

⁵⁸ Sankar Muthu observes in *Enlightenment Against Empire* that “an understanding of the natural New World could enlighten Europe.” (28) This means further that Europe could take a page from the indigenous lifestyle, which constituted a third reversal, on a macro level, suggesting theoretically that Europeans should abandon their superstitious belief and assimilate the indigenous ways of life. The metaphysical promises of the protagonist La Hontan are gradually replaced by Adario’s realistic standpoints suggesting that freedom from dependance was the true source of liberty, implied not to be known to Europeans but at the heart of life within indigenous communities.

savage, even before Rousseau, as he showed the benefits of their life and not only the disadvantages as portrayed by the missionaries. Tsvetan Todorov observes that “the purest example of the *bon sauvage* is perhaps found in a work which appeared at the beginning of the eighteenth century...that of Baron de la Hontan” (5).⁵⁹ While Todorov aptly characterizes La Hontan’s depiction of the “sauvage,” one must admit that La Hontan’s accounts were contradictory, even though his travelogues were designated as one of the best accounts of the century. Be that as it may, the dialogue form served as an artifice for La Hontan to raise the status of New World people, challenging the view that those people were fundamentally barbaric. His protagonist Adario is portrayed as a decent human being -- patient, eloquent and wise -- who does not get angry like his interlocutor but can manipulate his friends’ narrative through his honesty. This may sound oxymoronic, manipulation through honesty, which is why even honesty represents a form of artifice in this text. Adario is honest in expressing his views according to what he saw and learned, but he also cleverly counters La Hontan the character’s arguments. One could say this was simply a writing strategy by La Hontan the author as Adario is the incarnation of his own thoughts (even though there was a local Huron, Kondiaronk, with whom La Hontan would spend long hours of discussion and the name Adario is a partial anagram of Kondriaronk.) In short, readers observe Adario’s humanism by the end of this dialogue where he expresses compassion towards the European society which obeyed the word of a single ruler, and he suggests La Hontan and his fellow Europeans follow the native way of life: “Les François sont esclaves de leurs passions et de leur roi qui est l’unique François heureux

⁵⁹ Cited in Susan Pinette, “The Importance of the Literary: Lahontan’s Dialogues and Primitivist thought.” *Prose Studies*, vol 28, no. 1, 2006, pp. 41-53. I must note that La Hontan refers to American Indians as “sauvages” as well in his *Nouveaux Voyages* and *Mémoires*; however, his mentions of them are positive and compassionate in most instances even if he calls them “sauvages” throughout his travelogue.

par rapport à cette adorable liberté dont il jouit tout seul.” (169) The hierarchy in the Huron community was different from what Adario had seen during his travels in Europe and America, and he affirms that the Hurons didn’t need European imperial rule, nor did they need the affirmation of the Europeans’ assessments of Hurons’ humanness: “Chacun est aussi riche et honnête que son voisin,” explains Adario to La Hontan, “les femmes ont la même liberté que les hommes et les enfants profitent des mêmes privilèges que leurs pères.” (185) The freedom, naturalness and the equality among American Indians are continuously contrasted in the text with Christian hypocrisy, especially that of the missionaries -- preaching ideologies to the natives while acting so obviously contrary to them.

If Adario and La Hontan were both real life characters, they become two literary creations in this polemicized dialogue. It would not be wrong to qualify La Hontan’s *Dialogues curieux* as a precursor to the genre of philosophical dialogue, as many authors adopted a similar structure and literary devices in their own attempts at persuasive and didactic argument. As will be explained in what follows, Rousseau had also created an eponymous character in his own *Dialogues* to engage in a long discussion with the character of Le François. He also inverted the roles of the interlocutors. These dialogues are similar in form but different in content, as the latter is strongly centered on Rousseau himself. Other writers, such as Voltaire, used implicit manners of writing such as irony and wit, and as we will see Diderot used both an eponymous character and clever tactics to blur his authorship by employing undefined names of protagonists, such as Lui and Moi, or A and B. His dialogues differ from La Hontan’s because A and B bring exterior commentaries to the textual content, as discussed in the ensuing chapter on Diderot, while La Hontan’s *Dialogues curieux* examine the viewpoints of the two protagonists alone. It is, however, certain that La Hontan’s works contributed to the diffusion of philosophical ideas of

the eighteenth century, employing inventive ways and concepts to reach his audience, and serving as a precursor for the authors who will be discussed in the subsequent chapters.

CHAPTER 5: DIDEROT

Cultural Relativism: The Indirectness of Writing Techniques for Criticizing Eurocentrism in Diderot's *Supplément au voyage de Bougainville*

In the eighteenth century, several explorers produced travel narratives that captivated European society. This period in history brought about a wave of travelogues that aimed to explore and understand different cultures, societies, and their ways of subsisting. It is worth noting that most of these travelogues competed to provide a more colorful and interesting portrayal of local populations, often resulting in exaggerated travel accounts. These travelogues were prominent texts in Europe at that time as they provided insights into exotic lands, unusual cultures and populations that did not follow the same rituals or conventions as the Europeans. The local populations lived in ways that were closer to nature, they were unaware of greed, the concept of wealth, or warfare. Wilda Anderson, for example, offers a rich interpretation of Diderot's dynamic materialism within the framework of *Le Supplément* which treats artifice and culture as part of nature itself. The idea that artifice and nature constitute a part of nature is embedded in the viewpoint that human activities, whether in rural or urban areas, are undeniably interconnected with the natural environment.⁶⁰ Consequently, the populations that live in these environments are also accustomed to their local lifestyle and ways of being, the interruption of which results habitually in *dépaysement*, change of scenery and upheaval.

⁶⁰ The difference between natural and artificial is often obscured in human understanding and experience. Cultural constructs and symbolic values permeate natural landscapes and phenomena with specific meaning, while human intervention can be viewed as natural extensions of human agency and creativity. Later in Diderot's *Supplément*, human intervention plays a crucial role in "infant growth," as an infant may not subsist without help or intervention.

Diderot's dialogue *Le Supplément au voyage de Bougainville, ou dialogue entre A et B sur l'inconvénient d'attacher des idées morales à certaines actions physique qui n'en comportent pas*, investigates the Tahitian society's exotic lifestyle versus European civilization's presumably more sophisticated mentality and ways of being, although Diderot uses layers of complex philosophical discussion and satirical accounts that criticize European ethnocentrism through the lens of a fictional travel account.⁶¹ In the first section of this chapter on Diderot, I will give a short summary of the abovementioned dialogue, discuss the role of its protagonists, their symbolic names and debate their standpoints about the conquest of new territories and the assimilation of aboriginal populations. Furthermore, I will focus on diverse literary techniques and metaphors that Diderot used to criticize indirectly the superiority of European nations and their self-entitlement over newly discovered nations. As this text resembles La Hontan's *Dialogues curieux* in many aspects, I will draw occasional parallels with their protagonists' observations and highlight the types of artifice employed by the author to conceal some of his radical ideas. Diderot's numerous literary techniques, his indirect criticism of European society, and the support of the natives' lifestyle is presented by a variety of voices, which is an artifice, highlighting the prejudices of his time while simultaneously advocating for a more open-minded, tolerant approach to cultural differences.

The variety of the voices used is a type of artifice in that the author expresses his opinions through seemingly uninvolved characters. First, we witness the opening section of this

⁶¹ The German sociologist Ferdinand Tönnies distinguished between community-based lifestyle (*Gemeinschaft*) and society-based lifestyle (*Gesellschaft*) as two types of social organization. The *Gemeinschaft* community is characterized by stronger interpersonal relationships, shared values and a sense of solidarity that could be attributed in this case to the Tahitian nation. The *Gesellschaft* society, on the other hand, refers to more modern, urban societies and developed infrastructures, characterized by individualism, and rather formalized relationships that could be attributed in this instance to the European nations. One could observe that the assimilation or conquering efforts of Europeans were meant to move the Tahitian community from *Gemeinschaft* to *Gesellschaft* status. See Ferdinand Tönnies, *Community and Society: Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft*.

dialogue, “Jugement du voyage de Bougainville,” in which the two characters discuss the merits of Bougainville’s travel account while waiting for the arrival of the ship. These characters are called “A” and “B” and indicate the author’s willingness to remain anonymous for producing this text, which frequently offers extreme and radical viewpoints as it moves forward in analyzing the libertarian opinions of the local population. Furthermore, one may note that calling these characters with simple letters may be a literary technique of depersonalizing them, shifting the focus of their role towards the content of their discussion and the dialogue in which they engage. This seems to be one of Diderot’s favorite ways of creating abstract characters, such as the protagonists “Lui” and “Moi” in his dialogue *Le Neveu de Rameau*, which can be viewed as embodiments of broader social, political, and philosophical viewpoints rather than individuals concerned with their own issues or personal stories. This is an approach, or rather a technique, that Diderot employs to investigate more complex and more generalized philosophical topics concerning not only these individuals but also universal and more widespread concepts of significance.

In addition to this writing maneuver, it is worth noting that the characters A and B are meant to contradict each other, only agreeing occasionally. This way, their contrasting views lead readers to draw their own conclusions, as they engage in numerous debates about human nature, society’s conventions, and more complex discussions about free will and morality. Their contrast becomes gradually more apparent as character A demonstrates a rather skeptical or rational approach, while character B upholds a more traditional standpoint even though he often initiates the topic of their discussion and offers logical and reasonable explanations.

B: Il faut attendre [waiting for the fog to dissipate].

A: En attendant, que faites-vous?

B: Je lis.

A: Toujours ce voyage de Bougainville?

B: Toujours. (284)

This is the opening of their conversation that shows B's interest in exploring the content of Bougainville's travels, while A demonstrates a rather nonchalant attitude about it, as he observes that he does not understand why Bougainville, a mathematician, suddenly decided to travel throughout the world: "Je n'entends rien à cet homme-là. L'études des mathématiques, qui suppose une vie sédentaire a rempli le temps de ses jeunes années. Et voilà qu'il passe subitement d'une condition médiative et retirée au métier actif, pénible, errant et dissipé de voyageur." (284) It is the first disagreement that occurs between these two characters A and B, as B counters A's view in a rather metaphorical sense, mentioning that they could well be traveling through imagination thanks to the travel account left by Bougainville: "Nullement. Si le vaisseau n'est qu'une maison flottante, et si vous considérez le navigateur qui traverse des espaces immenses, resserré et immobile dans une enceinte assez étroite, vous le verrez faisant le tour du monde sur une planche, comme vous et moi le tour de l'univers sur notre parquet." (284) It is curious that when B contradicts A, the latter does not attempt to offer his own argument, at least for the moment, but instead continues to express his chain of thoughts about Bougainville, mentioning that he remains skeptical about the reasons for his travels, as Bougainville loved wine, women, and the amusements of society, but instead he chose to go through the trouble "d'un voyage autour du globe." (284) The character B then makes a philosophical observation that elevates his status as a deeper thinker: "Il fait comme tout le monde: il se dissipe après d'être appliqué, et s'applique après s'être dissipé." (284) B clearly admires Bougainville more than A, who keeps questioning the motives behind his travels in a friendly manner. One may notice that

Diderot tends to introduce sentences that resemble mathematical equations; in his dialogue *Le Rêve de d'Alembert*, he has Julie de Lespinasse express a sentence with repetitive structure: “L’homme n’est peut-être le monstre de la femme ou la femme le monstre de l’homme” (207). Mathematically, this kind of sentence resembles the equation $x+y=y+x$. In my opinion, this is a form of writing technique that accentuates the meaning of the sentence produced and cements its connotation by mathematical certainty.

The pair continues discussing the various places where Bougainville has been, such as Argentina or Paraguay, the animals, or the birds he encountered, and the Tahitian man Aotourou (288) with whom he travelled, brought to Paris, then guaranteed a secure passage back to his country. It is at this moment that B reveals his opinion of the superiority of Europeans over Tahitians despite admiring their culture, the exotic lands, and creatures he read about in Bougainville’s travelogue. The character B notices that the Tahitians did not have some of the letters that the French alphabet possessed: “L’alphabet tahitien n’ayant ni *b*, ni *c*, ni *d*, ni *f*, ni *g*, ni *q*, ni *x*, ni *y*, ni *z*, il [Aotourou, whom Bougainville had taken with him] ne put jamais parler notre langue qui offrait à ces organes inflexibles trop d’articulation étrangère et de sons nouveaux” (289).⁶² This passage is interesting for its discussions of the alphabet and the presence of singular letters playing a key role in the perception of certain phenomena, especially when B advocates for the linguistic superiority of Europeans. Here, there is a curious illustration of an external artifice as the protagonists themselves are called letters of alphabet rather than not complete, defining names, while they discuss the properties of the Tahitian alphabet’s letters. An

⁶² This observation attests to the close-mindedness of the character B; why could not he imagine that the Tahitian would be able to learn, but instead limit the native, strictly framing him by his culture.

implicit irony is demonstrated as “letters” discuss letters, combining external and internal artifice.

This discourse leads the character A to have a counter reaction as opposed to his previously quiet and nonchalant attitude:

A: Oh Aotourou! que tu seras content de revoir ton père, ta mère, tes frères, tes sœurs, tes compatriotes! Que leur diras-tu de nous?

B: Peu de choses, et qu’ils ne croiront pas.

A: Pourquoi peu de choses?

B: Parce qu’il en a peu conçues, et qu’il ne trouvera dans sa langue aucun terme correspondant à celles dont il a quelques idées.

A: Et pourquoi ne le croiront-ils pas?

B: Parce qu’en comparant leurs mœurs aux nôtres, ils aimeront prendre Aotourou pour un menteur, que de nous croire si fous. (290)

After this exchange, A realizes he does not share the same opinions as his interlocutor, and he starts thinking more lucidly, as the foginess dissipates and the sky becomes clearer: “A: Voilà le brouillard qui retombe, et l’azur du ciel qui commence à paraître. Il me semble que mon lot soit d’avoir tort avec vous jusque dans les moindres choses; il faut que je sois bien bon pour vous pardonner une supériorité aussi continue!” (290) During the whole first section A agreed with B or let the latter contradict him without any resistance; it is only when B describes the native Tahitian as incapable of recounting the events witnessed in Paris that A realizes his interlocutor’s inner superiority towards the other nation’s population. The initial naiveness or nonchalance of A is another type of artifice, allowing him to have his “friend,” or rather interlocutor, become

comfortable in sharing his personal views and finally expressing his position of superiority, after which their discord and contrast of opinions commence.

Here the dialogue between A and B ends, and the second section “Les Adieux du Vieillard” begins, which consists of a long monologue pronounced by an elderly Tahitian who laments the fate of his nation because of the arrival of the Europeans:

Pleurez, malheureux Tahitiens! Pleurez; mais que ce soit de l’arrivée, et non du départ de ces hommes ambitieux et méchants: un jour, vous les connaîtrez mieux. Un jour ils reviendront...vous enchaîner, vous égorger, ou vous assujettir à leurs extravagances et à leurs vices; un jour, vous servirez sous eux, aussi corrompus, aussi vils, aussi malheureux qu’eux. (291)

The elderly man predicts the behavior of explorers, who visit them initially in a friendly manner, but once they return to their country of origin, others come to rob them of their way of life, to enslave them and make them as corrupt as the colonizers are:

Le Vieillard to Bougainville: Et toi, chef des brigands qui t’obéissent, écarte promptement ton vaisseau de notre rive: nous sommes innocents, nous sommes heureux, et tu ne peux que nuire à notre bonheur. Nous suivons le pur instinct de la nature et tu as tenté d’effacer de nos âmes son caractère. Ici tout est à tous; et tu nous as prêché je ne sais quelle distinction du *tien* et du *mien*.

Diderot uses the Elderly man to express his own views about the brutal ways of colonization, and criticizes the disruption caused by foreigners to the inhabitants of newly discovered territories.

As we saw in the previous chapter, this critique of the concepts of “mine and yours” is present in La Hontan’s dialogue in which the protagonist Adario makes a similar observation to the eponymous character La Hontan: “Adario [after observing that the French do not respect the rules that they attempt to enforce on local populations]: Ces François ont raison de dire qu’il est

impossible d'observer cette Loi pendant que le *Tien* & le *Mien* subsistera parmi vous autres. C'est un fait aisé à prouver par l'exemple de tous les Sauvages de Canada; puisque malgré leur pauvreté, ils sont plus riches que vous, à qui le *Tien* & le *Mien* fait commettre toutes sortes de Crimes." (174) It is curious that Adario considers the natives richer than the explorers because they live in a more peaceful and crime free environment. It is also interesting to observe that La Hontan's text, published in 1703 and Diderot's dialogue, written in 1772 and published in 1796, contain almost identical passages; the first criticizing the colonizers in the New World, and the second the colonizers in Tahiti. In both texts, natives complain that before the arrival of the explorers, local populations did not have the distinction of "mine" or "yours."⁶³ The influence left by the colonizers on the native population was not unnoticeable. Sara Melzer describes in her *Colonizer or Colonized* (2012) how radically some of the American Indians were influenced by the ideals of Catholicism, causing them to interrupt their simple practices and lose their cultural identity. (22) In her introduction, Melzer talks about some of the habits of this population, such as the use of urine for bathing or brushing their teeth. (2) American Indians were considered less developed than populations in the Western Europe, but they had their ways of interacting with nature and existing without the weight of the colonizers' presence.⁶⁴

As Stanley writes: "In its broad gestures, it [Diderot's text] undermines European ethnocentrism and complacent assumptions about the inferiority and barbarism of 'savage' peoples through a comparison between Europe and Tahiti which casts Europe in a decidedly unfavorable light." (2) What gives people the right to feel superior to other nations? Why do

⁶³ This is an exact characteristic of a *Gemeinschaft* community in which interpersonal relationships are much friendlier and those communities survive thanks to their solidarity, which was disrupted by the foreigners.

⁶⁴ In this specific example, it is worth noting that urine contains ammonia which can whiten teeth or clean dirty clothes. Additionally, some non-Western forms of medicine use urine as a form of healing certain diseases even in modern times.

some nations force their culture on other, newly discovered populations? Those questions are answered by the characters of both Diderot and La Hontan, who stand critical of the conquerors' mentality and behavior vis-à-vis local populations.

The European travelers, who initially have the intention of exploration and illustration of newly discovered worlds, are usually followed by conquerors, as noted previously. The latter possess a common goal of assimilating local populations. The French forced the local people to abandon their beliefs and adhere to Catholic rituals and narrative, even though they did not follow these rituals or those commandments themselves. In his attempt to reveal this phenomenon, La Hontan's protagonist Adario insists further that: "Vous [the French] allez à votre Messe pour prêter l'oreille aux paroles d'une langue qu'on n'entend pas; il est vray, les François y vont, mais c'est pour y songer à toute autre chose qu'à la prière. A Québec, les Hommes y vont pour voir les Femmes, & celles-ci pour voir les Hommes." (172) Adario is not afraid to be brutally frank with the character La Hontan, his friend. La Hontan adopted the literary technique of representing himself as a character who defends the values of Catholicism in a rather lighthearted manner, so as to allow Adario to criticize them acerbically.

While Diderot's A and B represent usually contrasting viewpoints, they adopt an identical approach about the importance of the common sense versus the required commandments or traditions:

A: Qu'entendez-vous donc par des mœurs?

B: J'entends une soumission générale et une conduite conséquente à des lois bonnes ou mauvaises. Si les lois sont bonnes, les mœurs sont bonnes; si les lois sont mauvaises, les mœurs sont mauvaises. Si les lois, bonnes ou mauvaises, ne sont point observées, la pire condition d'une société, il n'y a point de mœurs. (325)

B advocates for the existence of conventions and argues that there are good and bad traditions in every society and that not having traditions is in fact even worse than bad traditions. In his consequent discourse, B discusses the phenomenon of procreation in those communities, mentioning both the positive and negative aspects of having children, as it is a challenge to raise them: “Par une contradiction bizarre et commune à toutes les sociétés subsistantes, où la naissance d’un enfant, toujours regardé comme un accroissement de richesses pour la nation, et plus souvent... un accroissement d’indigence dans la famille.” (331) In economics, every individual is essential for the demography as he or she consumes, produces, spends, and thus participates in the overall economical movement. Character B recalls how political or religious institutions encourage procreation. However, according to B, there are instances where having a child is rather difficult for a given family, especially if the child is ill or happens to be harmful to society when it grows up. This shows Diderot’s implicit criticism of the “inertia of traditions,” considering that both marriage and procreation are thought to be good for the population, while there are many instances when marriages fail, and children grow up without a parent which affects their inner growth or mentality.

This idea is advanced further in the text when B recounts all the negative aspects born from sexual liberation, citing Orou, fictional chief of the Tahitians, and more specifically referring to the consequences of sexual gratification:

B: C’est par la tyrannie de l’homme qui a converti la femme en une propriété.

Par les mœurs et les usages, qui ont surchargé de conditions l’union conjugale.

Par les lois civiles, qui ont assujetti le mariage à une infinité de formalité.

Par la nature de notre société, où la diversité des fortunes et des rangs a institué des convenances et des disconvenances. (331)

B continues enumerating the various societal conventions that generated ideas of vice or virtue that had no relevance to morality. (331) While B is represented in this text as a rather traditional character, he is critical of certain aspects that cause women to be the property of men, or force couples into an infinity of formalities which makes them more dependent on the system, on religious rules or civil regulations.

It is worth noting, however, that the critique of traditions or rites is not as explicit in Diderot's *Supplément*, as it is in the previously analyzed dialogue of La Hontan, but in this instance, it is the Tahitian Orou who builds a narrative with his guest L'Aumônier, condemning Europeans for feigning to observe rules that they have established, just as Adario revealed to the character La Hontan that the French did not respect the rules that they wanted to enforce on other populations, and that they were aware of that transgression:

Orou: Réponds-moi sincèrement; en dépit des ordres exprès de tes trois législateurs, un jeune homme, dans ton pays, ne couche-t-il jamais, sans leur permissions, avec une jeune fille?

L'Aumônier: Je mentirais si je te l'assurais.

Orou: Le femme qui a juré de n'appartenir qu'à son mari, ne se donne-t-elle point à un autre?

L'Aumônier: Rien n'est plus commun. (306)

Through the discourse of Orou, Diderot explores the theme of sexual liberation, albeit to an extreme degree, as the conversation between those two characters touches a delicate, sensitive topic for the Europeans.

In the ensuing discussion, the two protagonists discuss the phenomenon of incest, although I am not persuaded that Orou's discourse affirms Diderot's goal of justifying it per se,

but it is rather a literary technique to shock the audience, and spark interest in producing critical thoughts about such radical ideas, as Orou offers his daughter to sleep with L'Aumônier.

Additionally, while the native defends complete sexual liberation, it seems to be a motive for pushing the boundaries of readers' mentality to discourage the phenomenon of needlessly interfering in the affairs of another nation:

L'Aumônier: Un père peut coucher avec sa fille, une mère avec son fils, un frère avec sa sœur, un mari avec la femme de l'autre?

Orou: Pourquoi non?

L'Aumônier: Passe pour la fornication, mais l'inceste, mais l'adultère!

Orou: Qu'est-ce que tu veux dire avec tes mots, fornication, inceste, adultère?

L'Aumônier : Des crimes, des crimes énormes pour l'un desquels l'on brûle dans mon pays.

Orou: Qu'on brûle ou qu'on ne brûle pas dans ton pays, peu m'importe. Mais tu n'accuseras pas les mœurs d'Europe par celles de Tahiti, ni par conséquent les mœurs de Tahiti par celle de ton pays. (317)

This is the passage highlighting intriguingly the significance of cultural relativism: what is accepted in one part of the world does not have to be necessarily accepted in another. One may further prove this claim by recalling again Montesquieu's work *De l'esprit des lois* in which the author suggests that different nations develop distinctive features according to their lifestyles. In addition to the claim that climate influences significantly a nation's or an individual's character and behavior, Montesquieu makes a division between other factors, such as laws, religion, or traditions that interact with climate and shape a society's comportment.⁶⁵

⁶⁵ See Montesquieu, *De l'esprit des lois*.

Thus, if we draw a parallel, assimilating other nations forcibly should also be an impossible or even a forbidden act, which is why such radical discourse is produced by Diderot. This extreme narrative is simply meant to awaken an understanding in the readers, rather than advocating word by word for what Orou says. Similarly, depending on one's experience, a desire towards one's sister or brother or mother or father may manifest itself due to a certain repetitive behavior that might have conditioned such unusual desires. If we think of Diderot's *Le Rêve de d'Alembert*, we may recall that the doctor Bordeu claimed that there was nothing unnatural in Nature -- this vision is not necessarily about the notion of fatalism, but doctor Bordeu attempts to defend Diderot's materialism when he claims that everything that happens, has a reason, and because of this, no one should be punished or blamed for it. This idea will be taken up and elaborated in the upcoming chapter on Sade as well. More importantly, this discussion is configured by Diderot to defend indirectly the Gemeinschaft communities, which were overwhelmed in that time by diverse European nations who were more interested by the conquest of territories than these nations' well-being or preservation.

Indirection as a writing technique is important to the extent that it represents the art of conveying messages in such a manner that they are not perceived and understood immediately; instead, they allow a slower and deeper understanding of the context and author's objectives by representing contrasting views through gradual dialectical movement. In this case, the interlocutors A and B engage in philosophical debates and only subtly criticize European civilization by highlighting its virtues and enumerating the various elements that were harmonizing with the Tahitian civilization. According to Thomas Kavanagh, Diderot's use of indirection in *Supplément* is a deliberate strategy to avoid direct confrontation with religious and monarchical institutions of his time. Kavanagh argues that Diderot's choice to present his

critique through fictional characters and through the dialogue form allows him to explore controversial ideas without explicitly attacking the prevailing social order, (45) an idea that I defend in Diderot's other dialogue *Le Rêve*. Additionally, Sharon Stanley writes in "Unraveling Natural Utopia: Diderot's *Supplement to the Voyage of Bougainville*" that in the conclusion to the *Supplement*, A asks B whether it is better to civilize men. B responds: "If you propose to be his tyrant, civilize him; poison him as best you can with a morality contrary to nature." (267) It is clear that B is well aware that civilizing a native population may have unwanted consequences, as he mentions consequently that it is better not to intervene in the evolutionary process and leave both natural man and artificial man ("l'homme morale") to find their own ways of coping and evolving: "B: Eternisez la guerre dans la caverne, et que l'homme naturel y soit toujours enchaîné sous les pieds de l'homme moral. Le voulez-vous heureux et libre? Ne vous mêlez pas de ses affaires." (333) The order of the world is such that the "artificial men," in this context the civilized men, will not leave the "natural men" in peace but will intervene in their affairs whether the latter want it or not. The best solution in this situation is to leave the "natural man" alone, which is a rather utopian idea considering the era of colonization and discovery of new territories.

Christie McDonald frames Diderot's text through the notion of *utopia* in that *Le Supplément* attempts to reimagine societal norms in idealized societies. First, she cites Roland Barthes who writes that "utopia is familiar to every writer because his task -- or his pleasure -- is to bestow meaning through the exercise of his writing, and he cannot do this without the alternation of values, a dialectical movement akin to that of a yes/no opposition." (1) In her ensuing analysis, she observes that "present day society (be it ours or Diderot's) partakes of the artifice of culture and thus estranges man from his true, inner self, whereas 'nature'

emblematically signals the return to both the individual and the collective transparency of man's being." (2) Living fully as a "man of nature" is not necessarily possible as, for example, one may observe that from the moment an infant is born, nature and artifice intervene in an intertwined manner -- letting the infant grow on his/her own would be impossible. While each culture has a different way of influencing the process of nurturing a child, intervention of any kind carries a presence of artifice with it, and it is curious to observe that the more intelligent the beings are in this life, the more artifice and care is required for them to survive and grow. Microbes, viruses, or bacteria do not need any intervention; these cells need only "nature" -- a proper environment to grow in. The more the creature is intelligent, capable of higher consciousness later in its life, the more intervention is required for its offspring, and consequently more artifice. It is only when the child can be polite, smile or be smart enough to fake more than his abilities that he may find a way of subsisting on his/her own, especially in Gemeinschaft community.

I started studying Diderot's texts to defend my claim of the significance of artifice in discursive techniques, and I concluded that if left only with "nature," an infant would not be able to subsist. This elevates the importance of intervention and artifice beyond the application of literary techniques and becomes as primary as the idea of Plato's realm of Forms according to which all things are presumed imitated when created in a corporeal realm; thus, all things are artificial, as they are not originals. Additionally, it is worth noting that the dialogue form is the genre that fosters the application of artifice more easily compared to other literary genres. With all due respect to the merits of Rousseau's *Second Discours (The Second Discourse)* positing that individuals who are inherently good would live in a more independent and peaceful manner in a state of nature seems impossible.

The conclusion of my text on Diderot's *Supplément* consists naturally in defending the writing techniques used to compare and contrast diverse opinions or expand and unfold the minds of his readers. In this process, honest and truthful observations are made by the characters of this text, whose names and roles are also intentionally constructed to alienate personal concerns from A and B, while characterizing Orou and L'Aumônier as representatives of their societies, considering that Diderot refers to them by name as opposed to A and B. As Clément Rosset writes in *L'Anti-nature*, "La nature serait une pensée mesquine par quoi emprisonner une réalité qui échappe à toute pensée et fait craquer tous les cadres qu'on prétendrait lui imposer. Chanter le monde, c'est chanter son artifice...renoncer à l'artifice, c'est quitter l'existence et mourir." (117) To praise existence is to praise art, says Rosset, adding that renouncing artifice is like quitting existence and perishing. Nature in its natural state is a raw state, it needs intervention in order to produce and enchant. One must be careful, however, in intervening in people's lives or intervening in the refining of elements or other natural resources. Compounds do not have the same emotional spectrum as human beings; thus, while intervention in natural resources may be essential to shape metal, wood or other substances, sudden intervention in an established human lifestyle carries unpredictable risks capable of deranging the human psyche. In this sense, even Diderot writes in his *Pensées sur l'interprétation de la nature* that: "La nature emploie des siècles à préparer grossièrement les métaux; l'art se propose de les perfectionner en un jour." (49-50) Both authors defend the presence of artifice in most aspects of this life, considering the notion of artifice to represent an essential aspect of it. Rosset challenges the traditional concept of nature as well as the human relationship with it. As he praises artifice versus nature, Rosset argues that nature is indifferent to human concerns, giving the human species an agency to act on themselves rather than to follow the natural order of things:

“L’artifice désigne l’ensemble des faits existants, la nature l’ensemble des lois non-existantes.”

(85) Rosset seems to be indignant against nature to the extent that it considers *la mort* as natural, while the author claims that “la mort appartient non à la nature, mais à l’artifice... la représentation naturaliste de la mort est désavouée en profondeur, au profit d’une intuition purement artificialiste et factuelle.” (85) Rosset removes the romanticized view of nature generally accepted as good or harmonious, by opposition supporting artifice and artificiality. By implication, any romanticized view of the “sauvages” should also be readjusted, as the “sauvage” condition is only environmental and temporary. When the “sauvages” travel or educate themselves gradually, they become as civilized and “artificial” as the European civilizations, not that this artificiality is a negative or unwanted phenomenon. One may use Rosset’s suggested intellectual freedom in the context of Diderot’s dialogue to reaffirm that Diderot’s work engages in an ongoing quest for enlightenment, inspiring his readers to challenge conventional knowledge and encourage critical thinking, as many of Diderot’s contemporaries try to do in the age of reason, promoting individualism, skepticism, and tolerance for cultural relativism.

Diderot's *Le Rêve de D'Alembert*: A Discussion of Matter's Sensibility and Consciousness

Le Rêve de D'Alembert, a text Diderot produced in 1769, is a combination of three philosophical dialogues which draw a picture of a universe sufficient unto itself, *un grand tout* that is conscious and sensible. It is worth noting that this text was uncovered by his friend Jacques-André Naigeon, who considered *Le Rêve* Diderot's most important philosophical work. In this text Diderot gives matter the capacity to act and react on its own, considering it a permanent substance, and establishing a strong foundation of absolute materialism.⁶⁶ The protagonists in this text are personalities known to Diderot, such as his friend, the geometer d'Alembert, the intellectual woman Julie de Lespinasse, and the renowned doctor Théophile de Bordeu. In his *Correspondance* (126),⁶⁷ Diderot declared that he used these protagonists instead of imitating a model of Antiquity (such as Lucian's *Dialogues of the Dead*), initially intending to use fictional characters, namely, Democritus, his mentor Leucippus, and Hippocrates (24).⁶⁸ To understand this choice of protagonists, let us remember that Democritus was known as the originator of the atomic theory of the universe, while Leucippus was the earliest Greek to have developed the theory of atomism.⁶⁹ Both thinkers were fundamental for the establishment of materialistic theory. This context already indicates Diderot's interest in developing a text about

⁶⁶ Diderot had not intended to publish this text, because a) he knew that his friend d'Alembert would not react positively to his role in the text, and b) he had expressed his thoughts under the disguise of deep philosophical thoughts, vagueness, narrative in a dream and expression of his views through different characters in order to create facets of artifice, various pretexts to avoid possible persecution should this text see the light of day while he was alive; he had already served prison time once for his bold ideas in 1749 which had affected him deeply.

⁶⁷ Diderot, *Œuvres*, éd. Dieckmann, Section IX.

⁶⁸ See Stéphane Pujol, *Le dialogue d'idées au dix-huitième siècle*.

⁶⁹ Atomism is the theory that all reality and objects in the universe consist of very small, indivisible, and indestructible building blocks known as atoms—a topic extensively discussed throughout this text.

the unity and the organization of the self,⁷⁰ which he defines layer by layer and extends from the smallest particles to the largest beings and instances, including atoms and molecules, living organisms, networks of nerves, consciousness, memory, reason, and the universe. Wilda Anderson presents Diderot's materialism as vibrant and active, describing his structure as "spatial and dynamic organization existing within matter." (48) This captures d'Alembert's sense of matter's composition and distinctiveness, because Diderot attributed an identity to even the smallest existing particles: "D'Alembert: Y a-t-il un atome en nature rigoureusement semblable à un autre atome?... Non, il n'y en a point... il n'y a qu'un seul grand individu; c'est le tout." (196) In this instance, *l'individu* or *le tout* is the atom, or the animal, or the substance of any matter that exists through the process of the smallest particles' constant movement, their specific yet random combinations, and the consequent chain reaction they may cause: "Vivant, j'agis et je réagis en masse; mort, j'agis et je réagis en molécules," (313) affirms d'Alembert in his dream, implying that once any substance exists, it is, in fact, immortal or infinite. Reducing matter to ashes may modify its level of consciousness, but the ashes still consist of molecules in permanent motion at the molecular level and, therefore, to an extent, are moving and alive.⁷¹

Diderot's recourse to materialistic philosophy may be considered a deliberate attempt to render the understanding of his text more difficult. Numerous instances of artifice are used to create a sense of elusiveness in it. Diderot blurs his initial ideas which may seem controversial, employing types of artifice such as the dream, the different voices through which the author

⁷⁰ Charles Wolfe, "Diderot and the Materialist Theory of the Self" suggests that "Diderot puts forth one of the more significant and original versions of a materialist theory of the self." (37) He believes that Diderot provides "a timeless feature of materialist thought." (38)

⁷¹ Lucretian atomism proposes that the universe is composed of indivisible particles, called atoms, which move randomly in an infinite void colliding and forming various combinations to create matter. In *On the Nature of Things* there is a passage that claims, "Substance is eternal. More clearly what we seek: these elements from which alone all things created are, and how accomplished by no tool of Gods." (11) See Lucretius. *On the Nature of Things*. Translated by William Leonard. FV Editions, 2020.

expresses his viewpoints, and the use of symbolic names from Antiquity or simply letters such as A and B. The latter is a common approach in the dialogues of La Fontaine, Rousseau, and Voltaire as well, as symbolic names create an immediate understanding of the characters (such as the character Boldmind in Voltaire, who expresses audacious ideas, his name of course pointing to a “courageous mind” or “brave speaker” in English). The use of fictional names in Diderot is not used as frequently as a form of external artifice as in other authors considered in this project, but it remains nonetheless an efficient form of implicit expression, which transmits messages inconspicuously. In the study of Diderot’s *Le Rêve*, as well as in the previous sub-chapter on *Le Supplément au voyage de Bougainville*, I focus on the discursive techniques used to remain anonymous, all the while unnoticeably transmitting knowledge and expressing bold ideas in defense of materialism and criticizing religious and monarchical establishments.

Living during a period in which laboratory instruments or scientific techniques were not sophisticated enough for the purposes of thorough research, Diderot made use of speculative experiments and logical implications to maintain his theses and viewpoints about the universe, which he claimed to be materialistic and founded on the rules of nature.⁷² In addition to many thought experiments that the author used to support his stance on materialism, there is a reoccurring presence of artifice, which Diderot employs as an important literary tool to either obscure his initial thoughts⁷³ or challenge conventional knowledge, thereby provoking critical thinking in his audience. The concept of artifice has been frequently discussed as a clever means or tactic for spreading knowledge inconspicuously, and the dialogue of *Le Rêve de d’Alembert*

⁷² Baron d’Holbach’s *The System of Nature* makes a similar claim at the very beginning of his work: “Man is submitted to the Laws of Nature. He cannot deliver himself from them; [he] cannot step beyond them even in thought.” (15) D’Holbach presents a materialistic and atheistic worldview arguing that Nature operates through mechanistic and deterministic principles, rejecting the existence of a deity or a supernatural force.

⁷³ As noted previously, the vagueness, the indirection and the implicit expression of Diderot’s ideas were meant to create alibis for his own safety should his work be published.

demonstrates many examples of it. The dream itself is an artifice, an absent presence, a framework in which every conversation may be considered non-referential, thus sparing the author from eventual monarchic or ecclesiastic persecutions. The reproduction of d'Alembert's discourse through Mademoiselle de Lespinasse is another type of artifice for blurring the origin of the author's original thoughts. As in most of his works, Diderot attempts to justify his position as a materialist. In doing so, he employs several forms of indirectness in his dialogue, allowing subtlety, allusions, and complex layers of meaning which portray a more nuanced human interaction. Indirectness itself is a form of artifice as it serves to separate the author and his viewpoints -- it is the protagonists who take charge of explaining bold notions and carry the burden of responsibility for the author's ideas.

The first section of the dialogue, *Entretien entre d'Alembert et Diderot*, serves primarily to lay down the problematics for discussion in the second part, *Le Rêve de d'Alembert*, which is more voluminous both in form and in content, and where the doctor Bordeu and Julie de Lespinasse reinterpret the topics from the initial conversation between the character Diderot and d'Alembert: "Le dialogue du médecin et de la jeune femme est aussi un dialogue avec les interlocuteurs précédents, à savoir d'Alembert et Diderot," (273) observes Pujol, who supports the idea that separate sections of this dialogue are extensions of their precedents. The third section, entitled *Suite de l'Entretien*, is short in content but quite daring in context, foreseeing a merger of species as it treats the question of sexual morality, challenging the constraints and standards established by previous conventions. "La nature ne souffre rien d'inutile," (242) says Diderot through Bordeu's voice, a daring statement which justifies every vice and every unusual

phenomenon in this life.⁷⁴ Diderot himself describes it as a dangerous thought which should be kept silent. As he writes in his *Correspondences*, the dialogue *Le Rêve de d'Alembert* is a “dangereuse production dont la publicité disposerait sans ressource de mon repos, de ma fortune, de ma vie et de mon honneur.” (165) Diderot’s other dialogue, *Le Neveu de Rameau* (1761-1774), published in 1805, is a unique work that defies easy categorization into a single genre and may be considered both dialogic and theatrical to some extent.

The danger of producing this dialogue consisted of neglecting to profess the Christian faith as well as a Christian view of man and the universe, which could have negative repercussions inflicted by the Catholic Church. Even Bordeu asks Julie to stay silent about their conversation:

Julie de Lespinasse: Si l’on savait tout ce que vous m’avez raconté
d’horreur!

Bordeu: Je suis bien sûr que vous vous en tairez. (385)

Such an acknowledgment from the characters themselves underscores that society would not be ready to conceive or decipher the complex ideas expressed in the text. From the very first two lines, Diderot the character openly negates the existence of a deity, arguing that living instances may be created through the process of fermentation, reducing the religious version of life’s creation to a countersense. In addition, through d’Alembert’s voice the author explains the temporality of existence: “tous les êtres circulent les uns dans les autres; tout animal est plus ou

⁷⁴ If nothing is unusual in nature, then any kind of criticism or restraint should not be imposed by the Church or the authorities. This is a powerful statement that may have a dual meaning; first, it frees humans from their “sins” because “whatever happens in nature is meant to be,” but it also takes the concept of free will away, because Providence, which conditions all fates and movements, comes forward. However, the final thought to be deduced is that nothing that exists is deprived of purpose. In one of the Marvel movies, the artificially created android states that: “Even debris have a purpose.” (*Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D.*) A similar thought process is present in the chapter on Sade.

moins homme; tout minéral est plus ou moins plante, toute plante est plus ou moins animal.”

(195) A similar observation is made by d’Holbach who writes in *The System of Nature*:

“Animals, plants, and minerals, after a lapse of time, give back to Nature; that is to say, to the general mass of things, to the universal magazine, the elements, or principles which they have borrowed: the Earth retakes that portion of the body of which it formed the basis and the solidity.” (37) Both authors strongly defend the principles of materialism which was a daring move in their time. The relativity of being or the volatility of creatures that may change their initial shape after some period was against religious teachings that placed the human as the highest of all intelligent beings. Diderot’s materialism envisioned an interconnected material world, illustrated by the example of spider webs noted by Mademoiselle de Lespinasse, and elaborated by doctor Bordeu: “Les fils sont partout. Il n’y a pas un point à la surface de votre corps auxquels ils n’aboutissent.” (198) The numerous unconventional observations made by d’Alembert and doctor Bordeu disturb Mademoiselle de Lespinasse, who then becomes a philosopher in her turn to analyze those observations, and in that process, explain those details to the readership. This proves another writing strategy by Diderot for letting his readers take in opaque philosophical discussions and analyze them on their own.

It seems important to observe the threefold dynamic that appears throughout this dialogue. This echoes Diderot’s knowledge of geometry and his visionary sense in expressing that knowledge in literary form, as triangles are one of the strongest shapes in Nature; thus, logically, the threefold dynamic created through the interrelated sections of the dialogue are meant to bear strong, undisputable ideas as well.⁷⁵ In addition to the division into three sections,

⁷⁵ Buckminster Fuller talks about “threeness in the Universe.” He believes that threeness represents a balance between stability and dynamic change, topics which are discussed throughout Diderot’s text.

the three abovementioned protagonists discuss Diderot's initial hypotheses, similar to the structure of the text which resembles, figuratively speaking, the process of the sleep cycle -- the ascent, the process, and the descent.⁷⁶ That is, this parallels the process of falling asleep, the duration of the sleep, and the waking up process, wherein the second period lasts the longest, analogous to the middle lengthiest section of *Le Rêve de d'Alembert*. Additionally, the dream itself functions as a playground, a safe space for the discussions and hypotheses made by the protagonists. The sequences of d'Alembert's dream allow Diderot to delve into the realms of imagination, artifice, and fantasy, considering that d'Alembert occasionally wakes up, mutters some words, falls asleep, and even masturbates at some point proving that he has been half-conscious during the conversation between doctor Bordeu and Mademoiselle de Lespinasse:

D'Alembert: Mademoiselle, vous êtes avec quelqu'un? Qui est-ce qui cause là avec vous?

Julie de Lespinasse: C'est le docteur.

D'Alembert: Bonjour, Docteur, que faites-vous ici ce matin?

Bordeu: Vous le saurez. Dormez.

D'Alembert: Ma foi, j'en ai besoin. (200)

This exchange-interruption occurs in the middle of a heated discussion between Bordeu and Mademoiselle de Lespinasse, who thought d'Alembert to be asleep. D'Alembert's sudden awakening from his sleep interrupts their meaningful discussion about the conception of human beings, and annoys the doctor a little bit, who tells him to fall back asleep as he continues his discourse on the topic of human conception: "Bordeu: Vous fûtes en commençant, un point

⁷⁶ D'Alembert makes a similar comment near the end of *Le Rêve*, when the three protagonists discuss the state of dreaming, and d'Alembert recalls that he had vivid dreams that night.

imperceptible, formé de molécules plus petites éparses dans le sang, la lymphe de votre père ou de votre mère....” (201) This is the moment of their conversation that is highly visionary, as it refers anachronistically to the notion of human DNA, considering that Julie observes that an additional molecule, atom or a cell (referring to those as *un brin*) may randomly attach to the fetus, allowing nature to configure it accordingly, and consequently, cause the growth of either male, female or even both genitalia: “Julie de Lespinasse: Mais si je vous ai bien compris, ceux qui nient la possibilité d’un sixième sens, un véritable hermaphrodite, sont étourdis. Qui est-ce qui leur a dit que nature ne pourrait former un faisceau avec un brin singulier qui donnerait naissance à un organe qui nous est inconnu?” (202) Mademoiselle de Lespinasse raises this question about the creation of human beings and implies that this process would not be predetermined by any divine forces but rather through the random combination of atoms and molecules.

Those occasional interruptions by d’Alembert are frequent, sometimes lengthier, sometimes briefer, conditioned by the nature of his dream, one that d’Alembert himself qualifies as partially ascending and partially descending: “Ainsi, il y a le rêve en montant et le rêve en descendant. J’en ai eu un de ceux-là cette nuit” (230) he utters at some point. This gives Bordeu the occasion to explain that our senses may be heightened in our dream as “dans le sommeil c’est l’exercice de sa propre sensibilité qu’émane tout ce qui se passe en lui.” (231) This part of the discussion about the dream is important to the extent that d’Alembert raises fruitful questions and hypotheses in the first section of the dialogue but after going to sleep he then immerses into different modalities of his dream, such as waking, sleepwalking about in his nightcap, philosophizing and understanding the ongoing conversation while being in a half-conscious state, or occasionally falling asleep. Portraying d’Alembert as being half conscious yet capable of

exploring philosophical and scientific ideas is a clever literary device which symbolizes the intersection of reason and imagination, reflecting Enlightenment ideals. This technique of engaging with complex philosophical concepts is a mode of artifice that allows Diderot to present his ideas through the characters' internal reflections, offering another creative way to convey essential layers of philosophy within the context of the narrative while also warding off potentially negative repercussions from censorship.

In *Discourse on the Enlightenment* (1993), Daniel Brewer summarizes the first chapter of *Le Rêve*, confirming that in the first section of the dialogue the voice of Diderot “takes direct aim at the residual metaphysical underpinnings of mechanistic materialism, rejecting any divine, spiritual or otherwise idealist explanation of matter and its dynamic transformations.” (190) Throughout *Le Rêve*, the protagonists attempt to disprove any existence or influence of a “god function,” using a sequence of logical implications, and employing diverse forms of artifice to extend their message and remove any doubts about divine intervention in human affairs:

D'Alembert: J'avoue qu'un être qui existe quelque part et qui ne correspond à aucun point de l'espace; un être qui est inétendu et qui occupe de l'étendu, qui diffère essentiellement de la matière et qui lui est uni, qui la suit et qui la meut sans se mouvoir; un être d'une nature aussi contradictoire est difficile à admettre. Car enfin cette sensibilité que vous lui substituez, si c'est une qualité générale et essentielle de la matière, il faut que la pierre sente.

Diderot: Pourquoi non?

D'Alembert: Cela est dur à croire.

Diderot: Oui, pour celui qui la taille, qui la coupe, la broie et ne l'entend pas crier.

D'Alembert: J'aimerais que vous me disiez quelle différence vous mettriez entre l'homme et la statue, entre le marbre et la chair.

Diderot: Assez peu...on fait du marbre avec de la chair, et de la chair avec du marbre.
(161)

A reference to a “being that occupies no space but is space” seems to refer to a deity, which d'Alembert clearly mentions being of “contradictory nature” and “difficult to admit.” On the other hand, as d'Alembert had mentioned previously, “any human is a little animal, any animal is a little bit plant, and so forth” (195), confirming that any material substance changes through time. Thus, Diderot moves forward with this assumption that a “piece of marble is flesh and vice versa,”⁷⁷ next highlighting the process of fermentation, which creates living microbes and consequently more complex biological interactions. Additionally, Diderot defends the concept of universal sensibility (299),⁷⁸ from the point of view that enables materialism to account for conscious or sentient life, such as, in short, the claim that a stone has inner movement within it; thus, some form of sentience is present at its molecular level.

Even though the author Diderot occasionally distances himself from diverse claims by calling them “an assumption” or “a supposition,” he nonetheless offers an initial statement of matter’s sensibility and its various forms of organization, by using d'Alembert’s dream as a landscape for his speculations that he elaborates throughout his text. Their discussion continues, in the first section of the dialogue, with thorough analysis of the essence of the smallest particles, atoms, and molecules relevant to the physical universe; then, human cells, germs, nerves, and

⁷⁷ This passage recalls Diderot the character’s thought experiment, where he explains the process of creating living creatures from the combination of marble and soil.

⁷⁸ In a letter of 10 October 1765 to Duclos, he had affirmed already: “Selon moi, la sensibilité est une propriété universelle de la matière.” See Denis Diderot, *Correspondance inédite*.

bodies, pertinent to the biological aspect; finally, their combinations allow the discussion of systems and networks, such as memory, consciousness, stars, the infinite universe, God, and other abstract concepts that may possess some level of awareness. Diderot proceeds with his logical investigation through highly imaginative thought experiments, using as a starting point the assumption of all matter being *sensible*, as previously described, nuancing further his claim by making a sub-distinction between the inert and active sensibility of matter using the voice of d'Alembert. In the first section of the dialogue, where the character Diderot is present, d'Alembert inquires: “Serait-ce par hasard que vous reconnaîtriez une sensibilité active et une sensibilité inerte, comme il y a une force vive et une force morte?” Diderot the character concurs with a short response: “A merveille, vous l’avez dit.” (162) To be conceivable, such a materialistic perspective should go through certain logical steps requiring matter to go through specific stages and transformative elasticity to move from an inert state to an active one.⁷⁹

Both concepts, the temporality and the transformative flexibility, are discussed in the beginning when Diderot the character introduces his initial hypothesis of matter’s sensibility by demonstrating that through a series of simple arrangements, one may render an inert matter into thinking matter. To do so, he uses the example of breaking down a random material, such as a statue of marble sculpted by Falconet,⁸⁰ then mixes the powdered marble with soil and other fertilizers to use them in planting and growing fruits and vegetables that would be later consumed by people and become part of them, thus gaining the ability of participating in the thinking process:

⁷⁹ In this instance, as Diderot explains to d'Alembert, eating is a process of transformation allowing “un corps de l’état de sensibilité inerte de [passer] à l’état de la sensibilité active.” (261)

⁸⁰ Diderot uses the example of Falconet’s sculptures because Diderot had correspondence with Falconet since 1765 and they discussed mainly “le sentiment de l’immortalité.” (262) They were not getting along too well, hence Diderot’s choice of destroying Falconet’s statue for his experiment.

Diderot: Lorsque le bloc de marbre est réduit en poudre impalpable, je mêle cette poudre à de l'humus ou terre végétale; je les pétris bien ensemble; j'arrose le mélange, je le laisse putréfier un an, deux ans, un siècle; le temps ne me fait rien. Lorsque le tout s'est transformé en une matière à peu près homogène, en humus...j'y sème des pois, des fèves, des choix, d'autres plantes légumineuses. Les plantes se nourrissent de la terre, et je me nourris des plantes. (263)

This passage contributes to affirming once again that consciousness and intelligence are not necessarily created by a divine force but may instead be attainable through human intervention, implying the superficiality of blind belief in godly involvement in human affairs. Both the indirectness about human ability to create, and the complex philosophical thoughts are modes of artifice to ward off the adoration of God as Creator and prove the human ability to producing consciousness. To no small extent, humans and God are equaled in this equation.

Wilda Anderson defends Diderot's definition of sensibility, adding that: "All forms of organizations are conditional material states [and] even sensibility can function as a form of disorganizing motion." (57) In short, both the author and the critic agree in this instance that the material state is in constant flux and even solid matter may become a thinking being (*un être pensant*) through a series of specific compositions. This passage is significant to the extent that it asserts life may be created through a series of humanly initiated actions, fermentation being the first example. This was a highly visionary thought and action for Diderot's era, envisioning different possible outcomes of creating life through other means than divine creation, thereby contradicting the religious or rather biblical version of the beginning of life.

In most cases, the doctor Bordeu echoes Diderot's assumptions, but he challenges this view when asking the following question to Julie: "Bordeu: Mais qu'est-ce qu'un être sensible?"

Qui ne sait ce qu'il devient; plus de sang-froid, plus de raison, plus de jugement, plus d'instinct, plus de ressource." (227) She responds simply with: "Je me reconnais," (227) meaning that she agrees, recognizing the compromising or rather constantly changing essence of matter that has been postulated as *sensible*:

Julie de Lespinasse: Un moment, docteur: récapitulons. D'après vos principes, il me semble que par une suite d'opérations purement mécaniques je réduirais le premier génie de la terre à une masse de chaire inorganisée à laquelle on ne laisserait que la sensibilité du moment et que l'on ramènerait cette masse informe de l'état de stupidité le plus profond qu'on puisse imaginer à la condition de l'homme de genie. (234)

Julie de Lespinasse thus reaffirms the same idea of the chain of events for creating a thinking substance, and she goes even further in her speculation, deducing that the abovementioned arrangements could create people of higher intelligence should they change the components of *l'humus*, the raw material which would condition the manner of evolving of *un être sentant*.

At this moment, she recounts a previously discussed notion, the rearrangement of the *brins*, as she speculates that by adding certain components (*des brins*) they could alter the essence of a being, in addition to creating this sentient, thinking being: "Julie de Lespinasse: Je reprends cette masse et je lui restitue les brins olfactifs et elle flaire: les brins auditifs, et elle entend; les brins optiques et elle voit..." (235)⁸¹ Additionally, in this discourse, sensibility

⁸¹ The word "brin" translates as "strand," "a wisp," "a small ending," similar in this instance to the idea of the DNA which did not exist in Diderot's era but is imagined by Julie de Lespinasse in a thought experiment in a logical manner. As Julie represents in fact another voice of Diderot, which is thoroughly discussed in the third part of this chapter, one may once again qualify Diderot as highly visionary, as the protagonists continue this discussion of adding and removing "des brins" which would affect the capabilities of an intelligible person -- a talk of gene editing which is centuries away but conceived by Diderot the character, discussed by d'Alembert, and reiterated by Julie de Lespinasse.

converges with vulnerability, and for a good reason. If Diderot refers to an immortal God as possessing sensibility (and he does so in the very first paragraph of his text through the discourse of d'Alembert and the character Diderot), he deprives Him⁸² of immortality. As doctor Bordeu later reaffirms to Julie de Lespinasse: "il [Dieu] serait matière dans l'univers, portion de l'univers, sujet à vicissitudes; il vieillirait, il mourrait." (199) Diderot's step-by-step reanimation of the material substance and the subsequent substitution of the sensible matter for the concept of God further underscores the impermanence of the deity, which contributes to asserting the contemporary understanding of the concept of God.⁸³

The analysis of divine impermanence through d'Alembert's dream gave Diderot the flexibility of pretext, or an eventual alibi to deny such a bold assumption, had religious or monarchical authorities understood these deep philosophical thoughts he was expressing. This is another reason I insist on the importance of vagueness or textual complexity as facets of artifice to deflect any eventual accusation of blasphemy. By humanizing the divinities and giving them the attribute of sensibility, Diderot makes them perishable, implying that they are not eternal, and therefore, unworthy of being worshipped as such. As previously noted, he also supports the idea that all matter has a certain level of consciousness, especially at the atomic level, as the molecules remain alive and move constantly. This constancy of movement which may be described as eternal, could attest to an entity of permanent existence which could relate to God; thus, on one hand Diderot denies the existence of God, and on the other, he acknowledges the

⁸² By respect to the existing religious beliefs, I capitalize the word "God," although it is my opinion that similar discussions, relevant to divinities, may not be true when discussed between people; I am analyzing those because they are present contextually.

⁸³ In his *Pensées XXVI*, Diderot is rather sympathetic to deism: "On nous parle trop tôt de *Dieu*, on n'insiste pas sur sa présence. [...] Elargissez *Dieu*; voyez-le partout où il est et dites qu'il n'est point." (25) See Diderot. *Œuvres. Pensées Philosophiques*. It is important to note that deism is not a disbelief in God. It posits the existence of a higher power though accentuates the importance of reason and rationality, often arguing that the Creator or the Higher power did not meddle in human affairs.

permanence of certain forces, a more scientific approach. Logically, if anything permanent exists, it could be described as *divine* without necessarily agreeing or arguing with any existing religious concepts of God. Therefore, Diderot creates a dilemma, a contradictory nature of a divine being that he may both prove and disprove, although he leans towards the concept of deism, acknowledging a distant creator while simultaneously rejecting organized religion.

Constructing his text in such manner, Diderot creates a dynamic of both inward and outward forces, which exist but are impossible to observe. This contradiction serves as a useful explanation throughout the text, allowing him to both confirm (if need be) and/or deny God's existence. I discuss contradictory elements later in this chapter, in the context of dreams, which also function as an important artifice for the encounter between the known and the unknown, conscious, and unconscious, and allow enhanced sensual perception. By the end of d'Alembert's dream, doctor Bordeu confirms that while asleep, a human mind is more analytical than in the awakened state, an idea that Daniel Brewer supports by stating:

Le Rêve disputes theoretical discourse claiming to represent nature as an object of cognition, to analyze and interpret it and thus formulate its ultimate truth. The way things are staged here suggests that nature presents itself and is embodied in manners incomprehensible in cognitive terms alone.⁸⁴ These manners simply cannot be represented to consciousness, at least not unless one engages in the most extravagant philosophical illusion imaginable. (193)

Brewer confirms further that this text is "extravagantly" philosophical, which reiterates the importance of stylistic artifice such as, for instance, vagueness, complexity, and intricacy which

⁸⁴ If it is incomprehensible in cognitive terms alone, then by opposition it should be comprehensible in noncognitive terms, such as the unconscious state of dreaming.

keep the author's viewpoints in an opaque, difficult to decipher state. It is only after reading the given text a couple of times that one may begin to grasp its importance, though some passages nonetheless remain contradictory and open to interpretation.

The dispute of the theoretical discourse is rather a form of meta discourse for Diderot to explore his own ideas from various angles. In the *Diderot ou le bonheur de penser*, Jacques Attali mentions that those three dialogues resulted from "le plaisir de se rendre compte à soi-même de ses idées." (440) His attempt to substitute for the concept of sensibility the concept of a universal substance or essence, an equivalent for God, may well be the quest for an ultimate truth (a substance which is and is not, yet exists at the same time) as already stated previously. This antithetical approach, embodying the hyperbolic, infinite extremes, is an adventurous way of thinking. A human being in its normal, awakened state would conceive with difficulty of a substance that would and would not exist at the same time. That could be the reason why the author represented these thoughts from the perspective of a sleeping man's voice and logic. In sleep, our reason exists and, at the same time, it does not: "Il s'agit, pour Diderot, de substituer la sensibilité comme puissance universelle, comme substance unique, au Dieu horloger des philosophes" (271) confirms Pujol. The images that Diderot's voice puts in d'Alembert's mind in their first encounter are both abstract and vivid, requiring a strong imagination to understand them in depth, for they are picturesque, intangible notions full of oppositions and contradictions. This perhaps explains the reason why the author portrays d'Alembert as sleeping and dreaming in the next *Entretien*.

According to Aram Vartanian, "Diderot's philosophical dream, like real dreams, has the role of rendering the 'unthinkable' somehow 'thinkable.'" (8) This is why recourse to the dream becomes important: it allows the human being to approach slightly closer to the inconceivable.

Doctor Bordeu supports this approach observing that “l’homme éveillé n’aurait ni plus de raison, ni plus d’éloquence, ni plus d’imagination; quelquefois si violentes, si vives, que l’homme éveillé reste incertain sur la réalité de la chose.” (360) This underscores that while awake, our senses are less capable of conceiving reality to its full extent because of their connection to the rules of conventionality. Brewer observes further that “[S]leep will free the mind of this all-lucid geometer from the constraints of mathematical logic as he discovers that the body has reasons the reason does not know,” (190) confirming Vartanian’s perspective that “Diderot frees mechanical science from the demands of mathematical certainty, transforming science into a figural, poeticized discursive and literary form.” (194) Bordeu later reaffirms this, contending “Dans la veille, le réseau obéit aux impressions de l’objet extérieur. Dans le sommeil, au contraire [...] il n’y a point de distraction. De là sa vivacité. C’est presque toujours la suite d’un éréthisme, un accès passager de la maladie.” (229) It is a challenge to stay undistracted in face of the realities of everyday life while awake, either physically or psychologically; thus, the continuity provided by the absence of distraction in d’Alembert’s dream allows the production of heightened philosophical ideas which remain coherent throughout the dialogue.⁸⁵ In fact, the form of the dialogue itself presents a disincentive to distraction and provides continuity because one protagonist’s comments or questions are answered by the other(s), thus providing an unbroken chain of ideas. Dreaming is, for Diderot, a state of increased sensibility, wherein the conscious identity or individuality of the person is also weakened or even suspended. This leads

⁸⁵ While it is undisputable that d’Alembert provides an account of unprecedented philosophical thoughts, it is worth noting that such disposition required generating some conflictual views or contextual contradictions to stimulate creative ideas so as to explore and present diverse philosophical viewpoints. It happens that characters in the dream engage in debates, often expressing conflicting ideas. This method allowed Diderot to illustrate the diversity of thought on matters of morality, existence and, most importantly, materialism. Through the various contradictions presented in the text the author prompts readers to examine critically different perspectives encouraging intellectual inquiry and narrative.

us to speculate that if the senses are amplified while dreaming, then perhaps they are superficial and feeble while we are awake.

By a retrospective approach through which Diderot claims to recreate a world (“celui qui suppose un nouveau phénomène ou ramène un instant passé, recrée un nouveau monde”⁸⁶), one could claim that dreaming attests to the fact that we perceive time differently, and that other realities may exist. Moreover, as previously mentioned, the temporal elasticity which occurs in this instance from segueing from one phase of dreaming to another, makes it possible in the realm of the dream to go back in time. This resonates with Gilles Deleuze’s differentiation of the notion of time, between Chronos, the present, and Aion, the conjuncture of past and future: “Instead of the present which absorbs the past and future, a future and past divide the present at every instant and subdivide it ad infinitum into past and future, in both directions at once.” (164) In real life, our reality is subjected to Chronos’s unidirectional pace, while a dream creates the freedom of moving back and forth in time (Aion) or observing movement without moving. Once more, Diderot transcends chronological time and enters a dimension where it is possible to move backwards. This further underscores the assumption of double or multiple realities and complex philosophical thoughts that incite readers to develop critical thinking or reason outside existing conventional norms. The dream is Diderot’s artifice for exploring this different dimension of time, as he constructs this dialogue to attempt transgressing conventionality vis-à-vis time in d’Alembert’s dream.

As noted, the ideas d’Alembert initially rejected while awake were transformed and accepted in his sleep. In *Le Rêve*, Diderot portrays d’Alembert initially rejecting his ideas while

⁸⁶ “ramener un instant passé” means turning back time by an instant, which is a retrospective movement and is only probable in a dream, and not in an awakened state. “Recreating a new world” would be then possible because of the equation $\text{Life} - 1 \text{ Instant}$, as creation is known to have taken less than an instant (or a second).

awake but accepting or confirming them in his dream. The whole section I of this dialogue is composed of d'Alembert disagreeing with the character Diderot. This literary technique serves to highlight the conflict between established beliefs and the potential of new, unconventional ideas (which are represented in both sections II and III). While awake, d'Alembert resists or even criticizes Diderot the character's philosophical notions, and doing so, he reflects the rigidity of societal norms using his intellectual strength as resistance. However, in the dream sequences, in which the boundaries of reality are more fluid, d'Alembert's subconscious allows a more open exploration of previously expressed ideas. The dream becomes a safe place, where he can reconsider and embrace unconventional ideas initially suggested by the character Diderot. In some regard, this is a narrative strategy that underscores the tensions between tradition and innovation in Enlightenment thinking.

D'Alembert is overwhelmed by their first conversation and says to Diderot the character that in fact he does want to go back to sleep: "Qu'il en arrive ce qui pourra. Je veux dormir. Bonsoir." (177) He says goodbye to his friend and moves towards Julie de Lespinasse's apartment where he falls asleep immediately. Once asleep, d'Alembert starts speaking in his sleep, and his semi-somnolent state worries Julie, who then starts writing down all that d'Alembert says, hoping that the doctor, whom she had already called over, would make sense of it. D'Alembert was naturally unaware of his delirium, which ends up being "de la haute philosophie," according to doctor Bordeu whose comment surprises Julie de Lespinasse. D'Alembert wakes up occasionally in a confused state, asking if he dreamt or if he talked in his dream, as we see him interrupt the discussion between the doctor and Mademoiselle de Lespinasse frequently: "Est-ce que j'ai rêvé?" inquires d'Alembert to whom Julie responds: "Toute la nuit et cela ressemblait tellement à du délire . . ." (226) D'Alembert fails to recall his

dreams, which is only normal as we forget most of our dreams. The “forgetting” frees d’Alembert from the responsibility of the numerous daring assumptions he had advanced “inadvertently” in his sleep after his initial talk with the character Diderot. This seems an intentional artifice to cancel out all d’Alembert’s contentious ideas, expressed in a somnolent state, should a controversy arise about them. Who could blame a person who dreamt, spoke in his dream, then forgot about it. Forgetfulness serves as another type of artifice employed in this instance to obscure the depth of d’Alembert’s philosophical observations.

To reiterate and to conclude at the same time, putting his friend in a dreaming state was a clever strategy that Diderot employed, freeing both himself and his friend from the burden of responsibility and guaranteeing a level of security in the face of the dangers posed by monarchial societal conventions and the institutionalized religious establishment, should any of this delirium become public knowledge. Jean-Claude Bourdin notices in his article “Rêve et délire dans la philosophie de Diderot” that “Diderot faisait un usage singulier et très beau du ‘rêve’ et du ‘délire’ comme modes d’exposition de sa philosophie.” (3) Furthermore, Bourdin recalls that Diderot wrote a letter written to Sophie Volland about his strategic approach of employing a character to express his own ideas: “Il y a quelque adresse à avoir mis mes idées dans la bouche d’un homme qui rêve: il faut souvent donner à la sagesse l’air de la folie afin de lui procurer ses entrées” (18).⁸⁷ This *adresse* that Diderot mentions relates to the concept of dream as a facet of artifice, which contributes to expressing some dangerous thoughts in a dissimulated manner. Diderot’s statements are articulated in a dream and thus carry a certain level of fictionality, concealing his candor. Second, the expression of his sincere opinions through the voices of

⁸⁷ Cited in Jean-Claude Bourdin. “Rêve et délire dans la philosophie de Diderot.” *L’Enseignement philosophique*, vol. 59a, no. 2, 2009, pp. 3-24.

different protagonists is another manner of dissimulation that conceals the radicality of his viewpoints thanks to the distribution of those perspectives into three different protagonists who serve as Diderot's *others* representing the author's ideas and perspectives outlined above. D'Alembert's unawareness of his own discourse is the very essence of dissimulation and artifice. In the next sub-chapter of this study, I analyze the role of the protagonists in *Le Rêve*, and demonstrate that these characters embody Diderot's ideas, and that everything they say contributes to the reaffirmation of his ideals.

Finally, keeping in mind the discussion of dreams as an artifice of mediation, let us acknowledge that there is no steady, known pattern that regulates them. Dreams are successions of images, stories, emotions, or ideas that result from various stimuli in the environment on one's subconscious. The nature and the composition of dreams produces much interest in this text, considering that dreaming for Diderot is a state of increased sensibility, as already noted, wherein conscious identity is weakened or suspended. D'Alembert's philosophical dream helps us to witness the expansion of d'Alembert's initial discussion with the character Diderot, translated into a dream and transformed into a discourse, thanks to a feminine presence, namely, Julie de Lespinasse with her inclination for transcribing the utterings of her friend d'Alembert. As I move to study the reproduced and repurposed narrative that Julie offers, it is important to emphasize that she had no prior knowledge of d'Alembert's initial disagreement with Diderot the character, which makes her own insights original and shaped by her own reflections. Furthermore, the conversation between doctor Bordeu and Julie de Lespinasse demonstrates the growing organization and the bond of their two minds into one and represents their narratives as elements of Diderotian ideologies.

Diderot's *Others*: Reproduction of Discourse in the Philosophical Dialogue *Le Rêve de d'Alembert*

The dialogue genre has its roots in the ancient Greek tradition of philosophical dialogues, as I previously indicated in my Introduction. It was revived during the Renaissance but gained widespread popularity during the Enlightenment as it offered means of expressing, debating and challenging new ideas and perspectives. According to eighteenth-century French historian Jean-François Marmontel,⁸⁸ who is known for his belief that truth should be the guiding principle of all human activity, and that a philosophical dialogue should also have truth as its object. Truth, in this context, is meant to be the rational outcome of moral, political, and intellectual endeavors as well as the result of individuals' critical thinking and embracing of reason – a theme which is predominant in Diderot's dialogue *Le Rêve de d'Alembert*. The latter explores the themes of the quest for knowledge and truth in addition to the defense of materialism. In this sub-chapter, I will discuss my claim about the nature of the characters in this dialogue, followed by the role of the dialogue form insofar as it reveals the writer's viewpoints indirectly, and contributes to the development of the critical thinking of its audience. It is by enumerating the various advantages of the dialogue genre's attributes that I intend to demonstrate the nature of the protagonists as Diderot's *others* or, in other words, illustrate that despite portraying three different protagonists, the final assumptions or implications voiced by diverse characters nevertheless stand in for Diderot's unique beliefs.

⁸⁸ See Marmontel, Jean-François. *Mémoires de Marmontel: Mémoires d'un père pour servir à l'instruction de ses enfants*. This autobiographical work was published posthumously in 1804. The novel *Les Incas* (1777) criticizes colonialism and explores themes of human behavior and rights, offering insights on the dialogue form as aiming to explore the standpoints of others reach a personal truth for each reader.

In this text, Diderot takes advantage of his protagonists, including himself as an eponymous character in the first section of the dialogue, to express and reiterate his own diverse views through the voice of d'Alembert, whose semi-somnolent discourse is proven to be more intellectual and meaningful, as it is expressed in his sleep wherein the senses are heightened; through the voice of a renowned doctor Bordeu who qualifies his discourse as highly philosophical, ("c'est de la haute philosophie," he says to Mademoiselle de Lespinasse after hearing fragments of it, noted above); and through the voice of Mademoiselle de Lespinasse, without whom this text would not exist as she is the one who transcribes the witterings of d'Alembert and contributes to rendering the text more complex and analytical by engaging in intellectual discussion with Bordeu. In fact, at some point, Bordeu is so impressed by the analytical abilities of Mademoiselle de Lespinasse that he compliments her: "Vous avez raison. Il y a plaisir à causer avec vous" (202).⁸⁹ As this text is mainly a reproduced discourse, uttered by d'Alembert initially, then expressed by de Lespinasse who shares it with the doctor, I consider these characters as Diderot's *others* who not only analyze and express the same perspectives as the author, but add their own viewpoints which reinforce the main ideologies of Diderot. This literary device, which breaks down one text into three parts and investigates these parts separately through three distinct voices, adds layers of complexity to the text; metaphorically speaking, it is like breaking a stone to examine its interior, then reattaching the parts of this stone to reconstitute its initial state (curiously enough, there is a parallel of breaking the stone in this

⁸⁹ There is an obvious parallel again with Fontenelle's *Entretiens* in which the philosopher becomes gradually impressed by the Marquise's observations which seems to be a tactic, an artifice for not revealing scientific ideas immediately, but rather slowly and through the voice of a "feminine other." This tactic may serve two goals: first, the statements made by a woman could be discarded considering the archaic mentality towards women; second, these revelations serve as new knowledge for the audience, shielding the author from censorship.

text, as Diderot the character breaks the statue of Falconet to grind it and mix it with soil to grow vegetables, with the ultimate goal of making the stone into a thinking being – “*un être sentant*”).

In *Le Rêve de d’Alembert*, the doctor Bordeu “confirme l’importance de son originalité [of the text] dans l’évolution de sa pensée” (24) writes Dominique Boury in his article on Bordeu in which he attempts to demonstrate the doctor’s authority, wisdom, and experience along with assessing diverse attributes about Julie de Lespinasse. The latter represents a feminine voice and encourages the flow of the conversation with her short questions, exclamations or “seemingly” naïve and curious assumptions which turn out to be more meaningful than her own awareness of them:

Julie de Lespinasse: Docteur, êtes-vous prêts ?

Bordeu: Oui.

Julie de Lespinasse: Ecoutez...Un point vivant...Non, je me trompe. Rien d’abord, puis, un point vivant. A ce point vivant, il s’en applique un autre, encore un autre, et par ces applications successives il résulte un être.... (181)

“Are you ready, doctor?” she asks before reproducing the narrative that she transcribed by listening to d’Alembert, hoping that her transcriptions would help the doctor to diagnose the condition of his friend more accurately. Why would talking in one’s sleep be a symptom to be diagnosed in first place? Is it not a deliberately willful act to have written down what a sleeping man might utter in his sleep? She acts naively at first, then she creates intrigue by asking the doctor if he is ready to start listening to her. Once she starts talking, she interrupts her monologue by portraying herself as confused and scared: “Oh wait, I am wrong; first he says

nothing” she explains to the doctor, then recounting d’Alembert’s first sentences about building a living being by combining several smaller parts, or cells – *un point vivant*.

Even more interesting in her subsequent imitation of d’Alembert’s dream’s vocality⁹⁰ is the idea of continuity portrayed as one drop of mercury merging with another, and the two becoming one larger mass through assimilation: “Et la formation de cette continuité? ... Comme une goutte de mercure se fond dans une autre goutte de mercure, une molécule sensible et vivante se fond dans une molécule sensible et vivante... D’abord, il y avait deux gouttes, après le contact, il n’y en a plus qu’une... la sensibilité devient commune à la masse commune.” (181) There are several implications to deduce from these opening sentences. First, the idea of two becoming one parallels my claim of Diderot’s protagonists being his different selves as their viewpoints merge to reinforce the one standpoint of Diderot the author. Additionally, d’Alembert utters ideas which were initially expressed in the first section of the dialogue, while Mademoiselle de Lespinasse repeats them, and doctor Bordeu agrees with their content or implications. Just as the two drops of mercury become one, the three protagonists are also one in expressing Diderot the author’s perspectives. Furthermore, the first drop of mercury is like the second drop of mercury, as metaphorically one character is like another, considering that all the characters express a common agreement over the ideas conveyed in this text. Finally, the drops disappear at contact and become “a larger mass” which may relate to the strength of opinions consolidated by not one, not two but three characters combined: “Le contact de deux molécules homogènes, parfaitement homogènes forme la continuité.” (181) The convergence of these characters’ viewpoints is the reason why I see them as Diderot’s *others*. Doctor Bordeu only

⁹⁰ The dream becomes vocal to the extent that Julie de Lespinasse voices its content, discusses it with doctor Bordeu, who confirms that d’Alembert’s utterings are deep philosophical thoughts.

admires and confirms the ideas of d'Alembert surprising Julie to the point that she inquires if the doctor is being delirious in his turn: "Julie de Lespinasse: Docteur, délirez-vous aussi?" (194) She is portrayed as startled to have discovered that the ramblings she heard and transcribed were intellectual thoughts.

This manner of representing the protagonists is a unique approach and an efficient literary device for Diderot the author to employ the dialogue form to blur the source of his ideas, which support his views on materialism. Pujol advocates for the genre of the dialogue over other forms of narrative because of the genre's attribute of concealment: "Le dialogue permet d'avancer masqué et donne ainsi la parole à des systèmes hétérodoxes, normalement suspectés ou censurés. *Larvatus prode*⁹¹: avant comme après Descartes les philosophes éprouvent le besoin de déguiser leurs pensées à travers certaines procédures rhétoriques." (16) Pujol emphasizes the ruses of writing techniques which permitted authors to express their thoughts without putting themselves in danger. This is where the recourse to artifice becomes necessary as authors try to reveal their doctrines while simultaneously concealing them. The use of various types of artifice in *Le Rêve*, consisting of Julie's presence as a feminine voice, her charm, her curiosity, her meaningful observations, along with D'Alembert's dream as a state of being and doctor Bordeu's numerous logical assumptions that bear the strength and authority of meaning prove capable of providing a safe space for discussing Diderot's ideologies and debating them freely, whether through metaphors, complexity of ideas, or the vagueness of reproduced discourse provided by d'Alembert's dream.

⁹¹ English translation: "I go forward bewitched/masked."

As for the protagonist d'Alembert, he is depicted as a "rare" genius and the main protagonist, around whose dream the text is constructed, and who gives an occasion for the protagonists to digress and expand their thinking horizons. Diderot the author portrays d'Alembert's presence and influence in this dialogue in such a fashion that the protagonists may escape momentary responsibilities of answering specific questions, while always having the possibility of coming back to them if necessary. A few examples of such back and forth movement will be discussed in what follows. D. J. Adams observes in his *Diderot, Dialogue & Debate* (1986), that "dialogue is one of the essential tools he [Diderot] uses to explore problems to which he constantly returned." (14) This is true in that the dialogue form allows its characters to interrupt each other, then return to their discussion and continue the unfinished thoughts. And it is true especially for d'Alembert, who occasionally wakes up and voices his thoughts in a semi-somnolent state either for the purpose of clarifying an idea, or for offering his own views about what he heard in his semi-asleep state. This genre is an advantage that Diderot's protagonists use from the very first section of the dialogue, where d'Alembert reaffirms that they may skip topics, and get back to them if they would like to: "D'Alembert: Qu'est-ce que cela fait? Nous y reviendons ou nous n'y reviendrons pas," (234) he says to Diderot the character in a nonchalant tone, dismissing the need for mandatorily pursuing a specific topic. It is worth noting that Diderot the character is only present in the first section of the dialogue, after which he disappears, letting other characters represent his views.

This departure from the subject, particularly emphasized by the utterances of d'Alembert's dream, allows Diderot to jump from one topic to another, imitating the allure of a dream that is made of diverse sequences which are sometimes unrelated to each other: "Diderot: Je vous disais . . . Mais cela va nous écarter de notre première discussion," (166) he responds to

d'Alembert's question, with a small interruption. After a slight pause, almost immediately thereafter, it so happens that he changes the topic of their conversation by mentioning the existence of the sun and its effects on living creatures, even though they were initially discussing preexisting germs (a theme to which they return much later in the dialogue when discussing the origin of sentient beings, particularly analyzing it through the lens of Epicurean philosophy). If the character Diderot suddenly switches the discussion towards the sun, the light, and the impact they have on the population, it is because light, in both literal and figurative senses,⁹² conditions a major part of social life: "Diderot: Le soleil éteint, qu'en arrivera-t-il? Les plantes périront, les animaux périront, et voilà la terre solitaire et muette. Rallumez cet astre, et à l'instant vous établissez la cause nécessaire d'une infinité de générations nouvelles" (167) In a figurative sense, light as knowledge may also have a significant impact on the population: if a nation is well educated and knowledgeable, it will thrive, while in the absence of knowledge and awareness, any nation would certainly perish.

The characters then discuss the idea of the conservation of energy, following d'Alembert's interpretation of life that viewed living organisms in perpetual motion, representing complex organisms' nature as conditioned by physical rather than metaphysical forces: "... tous les êtres circulent les uns dans les autres, par conséquent, toutes les espèces... tout est en un flux perpétuel . . . Il n'y a rien de précis en nature" (195) Bordeu supports the same logic, insisting that: "La nature de souffre rien d'inutile" (242) and later "[t]out ce qui est ne peut être ni contre ni hors de nature." (243) The dynamic nature of the universe implies, on the other hand, that any system may be interrupted or regenerated at any moment, and if we see in this text a micro-universe -- just like d'Alembert sees the world in a drop of water -- we may find these

⁹² Clearly, light in a figurative sense would mean knowledge or enlightenment.

occasional mental digressions valuable, as we find d'Alembert's infrequent interruptions meaningful when he intervenes from time to time in Julie de Lespinasse's and Bordeu's discussions. Additionally, these digressions or interruptions represent a form of indirection which is a strategy adopted by the author who undoubtedly expresses his own ideas by using the dialogue's various protagonists. Carol Sherman notes in *Diderot and The Art of Dialogue* (1976), that "As several critics have observed, everyone speaks, in fact, with one voice, Diderot's voice, in the illustration of materialism." (89) Such digressions or interpretations help conceal the radical nature of the content of the reflections offered by the complex observations of the protagonists, providing an opportunity to approach other themes indirectly.

Another method supporting materialism is initiated by Mademoiselle de Lespinasse who brings up the theme of the merger of species. If Julie was initially surprised by the content of d'Alembert's narrative, she starts expressing her own curiosity after engaging in a lengthy intellectual discussion with doctor Bordeu. Additionally, if the doctor had previously insisted that nothing was vainly present or done in nature, then why not explore bolder ideas, such as the merging of species. After all, d'Alembert had started his utterances with the merging of drops of mercury, and had compared humans to animals, animals to plants and so on:

Julie de Lespinasse: Que pensez-vous du mélange des espèces ?

Bordeu: Ma foi, la question est bonne aussi. Je pense que les hommes ont mis beaucoup d'importance à l'acte de la génération, et qu'ils ont eu raison, mais je suis mécontent de leurs lois tant civiles que religieuses. (240)

In this case, Diderot expresses his discontentment with the existing religious and monarchical rules indirectly, by using the opinion of a famous doctor to voice it out loud. The doctor Bordeu seems to avoid answering Julie de Lespinasse's question at first, saying: "En ce cas changeons de

propos,” (240) but Julie de Lespinasse insists on continuing their conversation by offering him a drink and getting him to comment on her question. This manner of interrupting then coming back to the desired topic functions, once again, as both an artifice for deflecting a specific subject and a singular advantage for the dialogue form in allowing such movement. The doctor then replies:

Bordeu [specifying yet broadening the nature of Julie de Lespinasse’s question]: Votre question est de physique, de moral, ou de poétique.

Julie de Lespinasse: De poétique!

Bordeu: Sans doute. L’art de créer des êtres qui ne sont pas à l’imitation de ceux qui sont, est de la vraie poésie. Cette fois-ci, au lieu d’Hippocrate, vous me permettrez donc de citer Horace. Ce poète ou faiseur dit quelque part: *Omne tulit punctum, qui miscuit utile dulci*. Le mérite suprême est d’avoir réuni l’agréable à l’utile. La perfection consiste à concilier ces deux points. L’action agréable et utile doit occuper la première place dans l’ordre esthétique. (242)

This short exchange encompasses several important points. First, the doctor inquires if Julie de Lespinasse’s question arises from physics, morality, or poetics to which Julie answers: “Poetics!” which proves her desire to philosophize about it. “Why not,” says the doctor “it would be artful to create something original, which is not produced by imitation.” Julie de Lespinasse had previously inquired about the nature of hermaphrodites, which is somewhat similar to the idea of creating something original and contains elements of dual instances. It is curious that these bold questions come from a feminine voice, yet they represent Diderot’s standpoints. In both cases, it is Diderot the author who is behind Julie and suggests to his readership that humans may create other species, if those creations are both pleasant and useful. The doctor attempts to aestheticize

this idea, citing Horace whose idea of *placere et docere* -- to please and to instruct (or to be useful) -- is repeated in this context. This also points to the usefulness of the dialogue form itself, which tends to follow the same pattern of educating while entertaining the readers.

The easiness of conversing freely in a dialogue boosts the dialectical encounter between the protagonists and leaves a fair choice to the readers to make their own decisions or conclusions about the topics presented to them. Each section of the dialogue in *Le Rêve* ends with an ambiguous closure, such as doctor Bordeu's inconclusive departure, d'Alembert's unfinished conclusions or Julie de Lespinasse's questions that Bordeu occasionally avoids answering. Sherman observes that Bordeu who avoids responding fully accurately "[aims] to render the discussion acceptable to the readers and avoids provoking a scandal and violation of taboos." (87) Since science was advancing at a fast pace, some authors and scientists had ventured to make experiments with hybridization, such as Maupertuis who was interested in genetics, and had attempted to create new races of animals "montrant avec complaisance les produits de ces accouplements, notamment de chiens, de pigeons et de serins."⁹³ If fructuous trees could be implanted with another type and be "grafted" successfully in agriculture, the animal kingdom, including humans, could also be merged with similar or even different species resulting in another, different form of life, possibly stronger or healthier -- similar to the creation of alloys of metals, such as gold combined with silver or copper, resulting in a stronger metal which loses its initial softness. The last section of *Le Rêve de d'Alembert* is almost fully devoted to this discussion, a particularly bold idea which transgresses the existing belief in creation, maintaining further that humans could be capable of creating life on their own. This displays an

⁹³ See Emery Alan. "Portraits in medical genetics." *Journal of Medical Genetics*, vol. 1, no. 25, 1988, pp. 561-564 and Pierre Louis Moreau Maupertuis. *Une dissertation sur l'origine des hommes et des animaux*. Jean Martin Husson, 1776.

awareness of new knowledge that is almost as scary as the punishment that would be inflicted by the Catholic Church or the Monarchy if revealed and spread publicly.⁹⁴

To reiterate, the structure of this dialogue promotes intellectual efforts and critical thinking all the while avoiding surprising its audience too radically. Julie de Lespinasse's ideas about the merger of species not only demonstrate her curiosity about the resulting copulations but also express "the nature of pleasure becoming more and more often the explicit object of philosophic analysis," (10) as Natania Meeker notes in *Voluptuous Philosophy* (2007).

According to Meeker, the Enlightenment provided a fertile ground for the cultivation of forms of scientific materialism with radical and destabilizing effects on *ancien régime* religious orthodoxy, resulting in dissemination of Epicurean thought vis-à-vis the pursuit of pleasure and atomism. (18) Notably, Diderot has Julie de Lespinasse state that: "Lorsque Epicure assurait que la terre contenait des germes de tout, et que l'espèce animale était produit de la fermentation, il avait proposé de montrer une image en petit de ce qui s'était fait en grand à l'origine des temps."

(302) This marks the idea of germs growing into a living instance that she mentioned earlier.

Julie de Lespinasse sides in this case with Epicurean thought, arguing that an elephant could be the product of fermentation and a random assemblage of the smallest particles, atoms, and molecules. Both Epicurius and Lucretius⁹⁵ are present in the background of this dialogue, not

⁹⁴ It is important to keep in mind that not all novel attitudes and practices resulted in severe punishment by the Catholic Church, but only the ideas that were perceived as threatening to its authority. The Church had a significant influence over societal norms, and only those who challenged its doctrines faced legal consequences. Diderot spent some time in prison in 1749, due to the publication of the *Encyclopédie*. It is worth noting that the Catholic Church's attitude towards scientific advancement was softened in the eighteenth century, especially after Copernicus's heliocentric theory was proved and validated; nevertheless, Galileo was tried in the seventeenth century by the Roman Inquisition (in 1633 to be exact) and was placed under house arrest for life. Dava Sobel writes extensively on this topic in *Galileo's Daughter: A Historical Memoir of Science, Faith, and Love*. (1999). In it, she explores the emotional aspects of Galileo's life during his conflict with the Catholic Church.

⁹⁵ Diderot was familiar with Lucretius's *De Rerum Natura* (1st century BCE) which was a treatise on Epicurean philosophy, discussing the nature of the universe, the origin of the world, and was the source of his belief that random molecular motion made this universe self-regulatory without any divine intervention.

only because Diderot wanted to name one of his protagonists Lucretius, but also because he adheres to their principles, such as a universe composed of atoms moving randomly without divine intervention.⁹⁶ Lucretius had argued against the existence of gods who were thought to intervene in human affairs, and had promoted a materialist view of life.

Diderot emphasized reason and scientific inquiry, seeking truth through logical implications, empirical evidence, and critical thinking. Otis Fellows observes that “the individual is but a helpless link in the chain of universal necessity (especially in *Rameau’s Nephew*).” (168) Fellows’s observation aligns with Diderot’s deistic position, which acknowledges a universal force that contributed to initial creation but distanced itself from existence afterwards, leaving the creation to evolve on its own, without any additional interference. Both Fellows and Christie McDonald support Diderot’s position on materialism, atomism, ethics and determinism, arguing that the dialogue form is the genre that facilitates the discussion about logic, rationality, and critique of religion. It is through the exploration of diverse ideas, critical examination and the Socratic method that characters in a dialogue challenge each other’s interpretations and articulate their perspectives leading the readers to a conclusion that has been observed from several angles. It is the accuracy of these conclusions that are meant to be considered as truthful as local, contextual truths that have been reached through dialectical methods.

⁹⁶ It is worth mentioning that Lucretius, the ancient Roman philosopher, and Spinoza, a seventeenth-century philosopher, share certain similarities in their views, but they differ in their approaches. Spinoza does not necessarily embrace the traditional theory of atomism, instead proposing that God and Nature are synonymous in *The Ethics*, (1677) or, in other words the Universe (U) is a manifestation of God (G) as in U=G. Lucretius’s view, on the other hand, aligns with Epicurean atomism emphasizing materialistic explanations for natural phenomena. There are more details regarding both authors’ understanding of existence that I will not discuss in this instance, other than the fact that both philosophers explore the interconnectedness of existence, with Lucretius focusing on material elements and pleasure in his *De Rerum Natura*, and Spinoza delving into a more abstract metaphysical framework. It is also my own personal belief that every point, atom, cell, and the whole composition of the existence is simultaneously the concept of God or Universe.

McDonald claims that the “philosophic dialogue has truth as its object, and is useful, because ... with great difficulty one can order and classify ideas, [wherein] each step in this dialectical process raises and resolves a problem.” (12) She supports Diderot’s viewpoints in her book *The Dialogue of Writing* (1984), as well as his method for producing works which force readers to think critically and philosophically. This volume closely analyzes dialogue, both as a literary genre and as a critical principle underlying the works of Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Diderot. In her analysis, the author examines relationships between texts and writers, between texts and readers, and between texts and other texts (intertextuality is a theme also discussed by Hösle). Further, she distinguishes between conversation and dialogue, qualifying the first as a more social, spontaneous, and unplanned exchange while the dialogue is defined as a structured construct and has a specific purpose of revealing or exposing certain phenomena or some form of truth.⁹⁷ In *Le Rêve* the same ideas or opinions expressed via different voices reinforce their content instead of sounding redundant. Furthermore, the flexibility of moving from topic to topic, as already mentioned, allows the protagonists to come back to previously unfinished conversations and tackle any themes they had not had occasion to discuss.

This technique could be coined a *bouncing ball*—metaphorically speaking, once released, it touches the surface, just like protagonists start discussing a subject and their sentences “touch” each other’s awareness. The ball bounces back allowing the passage of time, the understanding of ideas, and during this time new ideas and new assumptions are produced. The ball touches back to the surface, but with less kinetic energy; in this analogy, the energy spent due to the movement represents the knowledge acquired, as the lost kinetic energy has transformed to

⁹⁷ The analysis of the concept of truth is too broad to include in this project. One would have to consider the authors of Antiquity, such as Plato who believed that the ultimate truth existed in the realm of Forms. See Plato. *Republic*. Translated by I.A. Richards. Cambridge UP, 1966, and my concluding discussion on Plato.

knowledge through the law of conservation (or transformation) of energy. Thus, the ball gradually loses its kinetic energy, which, in turn, is transformed into knowledge, and once the topic is consumed, the ball sets down on the surface and stops moving. The whole structure of this dialogue is based on this kind of dynamic – the interlocutors lay down the experimental theories, they digress, then they come back to discuss them, back and forth, via different voices.

To illustrate this with the example of the elephants in the first section of the dialogue *Entretien entre d'Alembert et Diderot*, the character Diderot argues about the origin of species, expressing his discontent that even the language does not have a term to define his thought experiment: “Diderot: ...la raison nous apprend que la divisibilité de la matière a un terme dans la nature, quoiqu'elle n'en ait aucun dans l'entendement et qui répugne à concevoir un éléphant tout formé dans un atome et dans cet atome un autre éléphant tout formé, et ainsi de suite à l'infini.” (166) In the second section of the dialogue, it is Julie who uses the same creature to argue her point about the origin of species: “Julie de Lespinasse: Qu'était l'éléphant dans son origine? Peut-être l'animal énorme tel qu'il nous paraît, peut-être un atome, car tous les deux sont également possible.” (236) In fact, d'Alembert mentions the elephant in his dreamy discourse as well, reiterating what Diderot had initially said: “Qu'importe une forme ou une autre? Chaque forme a le bonheur et le malheur qui lui est propre. Depuis l'éléphant jusqu'au puceron...depuis le puceron, jusqu'à la molécule sensible et vivante, l'origine de tout, pas un point dans la nature entière qui ne souffre ou qui ne jouisse.” (196) In a similar manner the themes of sensibility and movement are bounced back and forth between the first and the second section of the dialogue.

The elephant is only one topic bounced between the three characters. Several other topics are discussed by all three protagonists in the second section *Le Rêve de d'Alembert*, such as the

web of the spider, referring to both human nerves and muscles, connecting and holding all in one place microscopically, or the universe and the stars, macroscopically; the metaphor of the swarm of bees that can move, change in position, or come together creating different forms as when one bee moves the others follow him which remind the readers about the initial discussion of continuity. This is to say that most topics are discussed through metaphors or directly by the different characters, who reiterate Diderot the character's previously expressed ideas. Thanks to the process of communicating diverse ideas through the same three characters, new ideas are born and elaborated, and the freedom of talking and thinking without a specified timeline or pressure contributes to boosting their creativity. The more knowledge is shared and disseminated between protagonists, the more innovative and productive their comments become. Julia Ingram observes of *Le Rêve*'s dialogic structure that "the content of the dialogue changes with the transmission of the ideas from person to person, much like matter in the universe is subject to constant change." (63) Regarding change, one may agree that it is the only constant phenomenon in the universe, a reoccurring universal formula that is often quoted in this project to reinforce the idea of flexibility and elasticity of both material and immaterial "substances," including spacetime or atoms and molecules.⁹⁸

Finally, the freedom of moving in and out of the chronological timeline fits Diderot's philosophy and reflects on his dialogic form and content, where the interlocutors can be present

⁹⁸ Our understanding of the universe is minuscule, and humans have only explored a small fraction of it. Matter makes up a third of the universe, while two thirds is unknown substance called "dark matter." In a same way, the human brain uses only a fraction of its potential, the remaining part staying a mystery; only a quarter of the human DNA has been sequenced and the remaining part is called "junk DNA." This is to reaffirm that we observe only a tiny portion of existence, while the largest part remains a mystery although we know that it exists. In some way, the human body and the cosmic are related, as Fontenelle argued simply by using his logic. See "How Big is the Universe?" *Space.com* (<http://www.space.com/24073-how-big-is-the-universe.html>) and Jack Buehler "The Complex Truth about Junk DNA." *Quanta-magazine*. <https://www.quantamagazine.org/the-complex-truth-about-junk-dna-20210901/>

or absent, allowing each other enough time for reflection and response. D'Alembert's distracted, yet highly meaningful discourse echoes what Diderot had initially mentioned about the random assemblage of atoms which created his very friend: "Diderot: Je veux dire qu'avant que sa mère...eût atteint l'âge de puberté, et avant que le militaire Tencin [d'Alembert's father] fût adolescent, les molécules qui devait former mon géomètre étaient éparses dans les jeunes et frêles machines de l'une et de l'autre, se filtrèrent avec la lymphe, circulèrent avec le sang jusqu'à ce qu'enfin elle se rendissent dans les réservoirs destinées à leur coalition, les testicules de sa mère et de son père. Voilà ce germe rare formé ...le voilà attaché à la matrice...le voilà né" (185).⁹⁹ Diderot the character explains in somewhat graphic detail how the molecules of sperm are produced, stored in testicles, and cause the conception of his friend d'Alembert. As for his mother, doctor Bordeu comments that female genitalia are a reversed version of those of the male, which incites Mademoiselle de Lespinasse to observe that "L'homme n'est peut-être que le monstre de la femme ou la femme le monstre de l'homme," (207) an original comparison that was controversial yet carried some meaning – are not all fetuses female during the first two months of pregnancy? It is only after that period that genitals form in the manner that was described by d'Alembert. In a semi-somnolent state, he hears some of their discussion and tells Bordeu that "il raconte des ordures à Julie de Lespinasse" (203) yet reiterates what the doctor had explained to her in his own words: "D'Alembert: Vous disiez donc à mademoiselle que la matrice n'est autre chose qu'un scrotum retourné de dehors en dedans, mouvement dans lequel les testicules ont été jetés hors de la bourse qui les renfermait, et dispersés de droite et de gauche dans la cavité du corps." (208) All three protagonists discuss what the character Diderot had

⁹⁹ Eparses -- the definition of this French word means "randomly dispersed throughout." Another important aspect in this sentence is Diderot's reference to human organs as parts of a machine, an idea which was an ongoing theory especially brought forward by de La Mettrie's *L'Homme Machine*, (1748) which is thoroughly elaborated by Meeker in *Volumptuous Philosophy*, although this concept of the Man-Machine dates to Descartes.

initially intended to express, and each of them contributes in his or her own way to the elaboration of the author's contentions about human nature and the configuration of its body. This is only one of Diderot's many examples of the complexity of human anatomy, and the implications of the body's structure. Diderot was challenged in reconciling the mechanical, materialistic understanding of the body with the intricacies of human experience, consciousness, and moral agency. The author grapples with how the physical mechanisms of the body, described in rather mechanistic terms, align with the subjective aspects of human existence, prompting readers to reflect on the relationship between the physical and metaphysical aspects of existence and humanity.

Diderot wrote more dialogues than any other early modern writer. He reinforced most of his ideas that he had expressed in his *Interprétations*, *Lettres*, or diverse novels. His use of the dialogue genre permits him to express his thoughts free of constraint and with vivid imagination – his protagonists exchange voices and personalities and are united in their defense of materialism, a topic carefully configured by Diderot the character from the dialogue's beginning. The use of artifice in these philosophical dialogues is original and ranges from a simple allusion to a full paragraph of a thought experiment. Occasionally, simple exclamations by Julie de Lespinasse such as: “Cela est dur à croire!”, “Quelle folie!”, “Cela est singulier!”, or “Cela est triste” (194, 210, 211, 243) allow the protagonists to take a step back to reassemble their thoughts, and readers to decipher the complex philosophical statements. She may speak the least compared to the other protagonists, but her logic seeking applications of the hypotheses to human experience places her as one of the principal personae of the dialogue. Even the doctor Bordeu, as previously mentioned, compliments her frequently as he admires the functioning of her mind: “Vous ne saisissez pas seulement ce qu'on vous dit, vous en tirez encore des

consequences d'une justesse qui m'étonne." (202) Diderot produced complex dialogues which suggested more than they seemed to express and he was known for those maneuvers. It is true that by using his protagonist's dream, Diderot performs various thought experiments and at times contradicts the existing order of things. It is only by the delicacy of his ability to produce complex philosophical layers in his dialogues that he remains relatively safe, as his works do not reveal his objectives immediately, but rather require substantial interpretation.¹⁰⁰

To conclude, let us recall that French Enlightenment authors used reason and the senses to access knowledge in their efforts of revolting against religious injustice, intolerance, and abuse. However, Catholicism remained strong and influential, due to its direct connection with the monarchic regime; therefore, criticizing its traditions or teachings explicitly would be dangerous and unwise. Thus, these *philosophes* battled religious ideologies indirectly, tacitly, and implicitly to avoid unnecessary attention and persecution. In this process of disseminating their theories, they adopted various strategies, such as anonymous writing, publishing in foreign countries, or adopting specific literary genres that could help them express their opinions and goals all the while staying in the shadows. I would like to recall Sherman's note about *Le Rêve* as possessing a great number of dramatic aspects, including interlocutors who camouflage the lack of divided opinion furnishing both serious and witty exchange – seeming as a model for philosophic conversation among its readers. (90) Finally, *Le Rêve* presents the vision of “le grand tout” to which the characters come back regularly. This “grand tout” may refer to sentient beings, materialistic objects, or the universe itself: these instances exist without any external influence, rather randomly, through matter's intrinsic configuration and arrangement. These

¹⁰⁰ This said, Diderot did not escape state persecution (mainly after *Les Pensées Philosophiques*) and spent several months at the dungeons of Vincennes (as briefly mentioned previously) after which he changed both his strategy of publishing and his character which is described in Rousseau's *Confessions* as having become more distanced. See Rousseau, *Oeuvres complètes: Volume I*. Gallimard, 1959.

ideas, along with many other viewpoints, are continuously reiterated by Bordeu, d'Alembert or Julie de Lespinasse whether during their discussion of atoms, these atoms' combinations or the resulting corporality (*un point vivant*, along with numerous *points vivants* to create *un être sentant*). As we have seen in previous sub-chapters, and will see in the chapter on Sade, they confirm at several instances that anything happening in Nature is normal and is not meant to be judged. In this fashion, they criticize the mentality of prejudice and persecution, which represented a menace for the advancement of new theories or new knowledge, while masking their narratives in the complex layers of thoughts and observations. This text pushes the boundaries of materialistic explanations, all the while addressing the complexities of the human experience within a mechanistic world, which was described with highly visionary perspectives and provides numerous insights into futuristic understandings of consciousness, emotions, and moral decision-making.

CHAPTER 6: VOLTAIRE

The Dialogue as Artifice in Voltaire's *Dictionnaire Philosophique*

Originally published in 1764, Voltaire's *Dictionnaire Philosophique* is a seminal work of the Enlightenment period. In this "dictionnaire portatif," a dictionary that could fit in one's pocket, Voltaire explores a wide range of topics, such as religion, morality, politics, and philosophy. The form of the dictionary, the anonymity, the choice of the entries' forms -- narrating or dialogic, and the symbolic choice of the fictional characters' names constitute a landscape for the use of both internal and external artifice that help Voltaire to express his resentment about the religious establishment and spread revolutionary messages implicitly. The author makes use of his wit, humor, skepticism, and occasional ambiguities¹⁰¹ to lead a fight against religious ideologies, and simultaneously educate the population by encouraging critical thinking and disparaging the hollow rules and rituals of the religious establishment. In this dictionary, the dialogic aspect plays a crucial role in expressing Voltaire's ideas and for engaging with the readers, all the while allowing the author to remain behind the curtains. The back-and-forth exchange between characters and diverse voices allows the readers to actively participate in the discussion, feel their involvement and importance, along with developing their own critical thinking. Additionally, the dialogue form permits Voltaire to explore contrasting viewpoints on various social and philosophical issues and present his arguments through different imaginative characters, which maximizes the efficiency of recourse to dialogue form.

¹⁰¹ As discussed previously, the vagueness and ambiguities employed in the texts of the eighteenth century were meant to provide an alibi for the author's safety in case the authorities would have identified these authors. While most texts criticizing authorities or religion were written anonymously, their authors constantly faced the danger of being identified and persecuted.

It is well-known that Voltaire was furious with religious fanaticism, and most of his works denounce the religious setting in France. Felicia Gottman mentions this querulous attitude in her dissertation *The Eighteenth-Century Luxury Debate: The Case of Voltaire*: “Voltaire’s *Dictionnaire Philosophique* was ‘un oeuvre de combat’. Intended to demolish the remaining bastions of the *infâme*, it was ‘conçu comme une machine de guerre.’” (182-183) Voltaire’s writings employed various types of artifice to convey his philosophical ideas from the position of acerbic religious denunciation. Furthermore, allusive writing and didacticism are prevalent throughout the various entries of his dictionary, which reference other works, authors, historical events, and characters to enhance the depth and the significance of his text. Voltaire uses many astute literary techniques, such as deliberate exaggeration or carefully calculated expression of erroneous statements¹⁰² to then have the subsequent interlocutor moderate or refute those exaggerations and errors. This work consistently demonstrates Voltaire’s adverse sentiments about the clergy and the injustices of his time. His anger and frustration are visible in his entry-definitions, through which he exposes the problematic aspects of the Catholic Church’s unchecked and unlimited power over the population.

Nonetheless, the entries in this dictionary are conveyed via a Horatian model of pleasing and instructing, the dialogic motto followed by the authors of the eighteenth century. Voltaire, as cited in Franco Piva emphasized that: “Le public se composait pour l’essentiel de beaux esprits et de lettrés qui cherchaient l’agrément et refusait la pédanterie, c’est à dire la spécialisation du savoir et le jargon concomitant.” (3) It is appropriate to recall that Fontenelle also stressed the pleasantness of the narrative for succeeding in influencing people’s minds, which resonated with

¹⁰² The various Catechisms and other dialogues entailing a teacher-pupil relationship show those deliberately naïve questions and statements which are explained by the wiser interlocutor, the latter serving as Voltaire’s mouthpiece.

Voltaire's own viewpoint: "Je me dis toujours, il faut tâcher qu'on te lise sans dégoût; c'est par le plaisir qu'on vient à bout des hommes." (2) continues Voltaire, indicating that "la plupart des articles du *Dictionnaire philosophique*, [sont] écrits sous formes d'anecdotes, de fables, d'allégorie, de songe, de Discours, de dialogue, de série de questions... imprégnés de cet esprit de conversation dans lequel le XVIIIe siècle était passé maître." (3) Piva concludes his book review in Italian by considering the importance of strategic writing, more specifically the cleverly employed *discursive strategies*, in order to suggest and establish better living human conditions: "Besides the heartfelt defense of what made human life worth living at any time and place, this text constituted a very timely lesson in discursive strategies which were useful from many aspects for the intellectuals and the authors of the era." (3) This passage is important because it mentions the use of discursive strategies some of which are essential for the understanding of implicit ideas.¹⁰³

It is my own goal to link the discursive strategies to the constructs of external and internal artifice which Voltaire employs to further the didactic purpose of inciting the population to cease believing blindly in religious teachings and ideologies. I intend to demonstrate the useful indirectness of Voltairean discourse through which the author reveals the incompleteness of biblical interpretations, and religion's unreasonableness, all the while humoring and instructing his audience with lively, logical, and coherent explanations. In this chapter, I will focus on the strategic value of the dialogue form employed in a dictionary and will demonstrate the various instances where Voltaire criticizes authorities and the religious establishment by creating a

¹⁰³ The original passage is in Italian "oltre che un'accorata difesa di ciò che rende la vita umana degna di essere vissuta in qualunque tempo ed in qualunque luogo, costituisce quindi anche un'attualissima lezione di strategia discorsiva, di cui non sarebbe male che certi scrittori o intellettuali d'oggi tenessero debito ed umile conto." (3)

conversational setting of satirical definitions meant to convey his ideas about the irrational behavior of religious groups.

The use of dialogic definitions within the dictionary facilitated the construction of precisely aimed discussions that contrasted blind followers of religion and their more dogmatic interlocutors. Regarding the dialogic usefulness, one may recall Bakhtin's *The Dialogic Imagination* in which he writes that "The double-voiced prose has a double meaning." (327) This observation is relevant to dialogic compositions in which the speech diversity allows individual oppositions and contradictory discourses to be interpreted in more than one way: "Internal dialogism of double-voiced prose can never be exhausted thematically." (326) Bakhtin also mentions that the double-voicedness is prefigured in language, such as in metaphors, as well as in myths. As already noted, Voltaire's metaphors use fictional imagery to convey his messages,¹⁰⁴ allegories, symbolic references, and the dictionary itself represents an example of heteroglossia in language as it contains a variety of genres within one specific work, in which multiple voices and styles coexist.

In doing so, despite having published this work anonymously, Voltaire uses indirection to guarantee his safety and to maintain his anonymity should authorities suspect him of being the author of this work, which Voltaire himself qualified as an "ouvrage de Satan." Roger Pearson recalls in *Voltaire Almighty* that: "To him, and also to Damilaville he described it with gusto 'an abominable little dictionary', 'smacking of heresy', 'the work of Satan'" (406).¹⁰⁵ This small

¹⁰⁴ One may think of his definition of "optimism" in *Candide* where the protagonist encounters all kinds of hardship yet remains mockingly optimistic. This specific case, however, is known for serving as a criticism of Leibnitz's philosophy who claimed that we live in the best of possible worlds. See *Candide ou de l'optimisme* by Voltaire.

¹⁰⁵ Étienne Noël Damilaville was an eighteenth-century French man of letters and a friend of Voltaire, Diderot and d'Alembert. See Roger Pearson. *Voltaire Almighty: A Life in Pursuit of Freedom*.

pamphlet (which initially contained only a few entries) played a key role in awakening people's minds and contributed to inducing a historic Revolution which changed the order of things not only in France but in the world.¹⁰⁶ Conceived initially as a vast philosophical project, Voltaire's dictionary became one of the most violent pamphlets against the Christian religion until Nietzsche's *The Antichrist*, which also criticized traditional Christian values and argued adamantly that these traditions did not allow the human race to prosper. Nietzsche writes that: "Christianity finds sickness necessary, just as the Greeks found war necessary" (72) insisting that "the Church is like a Catholic lunatic asylum which makes people sick" (73).¹⁰⁷ This sickness is metaphorically the blind faith that hinders humanity's flourishing. The intense and direct wording of Nietzsche's text is far in excess of Voltaire's, although they both contain similar denunciatory suggestions and ideas.

From one edition to the next, Voltaire intensifies his attacks on *L'Infâme*, a concept in his works that refers to the oppressive influence of the religious establishment, reflecting his stance against religious fanaticism and for a more rational, enlightened society.¹⁰⁸ Previously studied authors aimed to educate and enlighten, while Voltaire produced this work intentionally to *faire mal*, attempting to harm and discredit the authority of the Catholic Church, all the while adhering to the Horatian principle and producing eloquently written texts, which attracted a larger

¹⁰⁶ It is important to note that Voltaire's goal did not consist of inducing a revolutionary event; and it is only inadvertently that he has contributed, to some extent, to the French Revolution. The idea of masses revolting was appalling to Voltaire, while Rousseau was more comfortable with the idea of sparking an event that would change the dynamic in France. This said, both authors, who are often considered to have helped ignite the French Revolution, died almost at the same time, before the turmoil of revolutionary events.

¹⁰⁷ Nietzsche. *The Antichrist*, Section 51.

¹⁰⁸ While this chapter is specifically studying the dialogues within the dictionary, some crucial critical observations are made in entries such as "Fanatisme" in which the author's wordings anticipate Nietzsche's acerbic condemnations: "Le fanatisme est à la superstition ce que le transport est à la fièvre, ce que la rage est à colère. Lorsqu'une fois le fanatisme a gangrené un cerveau, la maladie est presque incurable." (286-287) The claim that religion is a sickness is extreme considering the circumstances, which is one of the reasons this work was published anonymously.

readership. His anger was transformed to rage when he learned about the persecution of his friend Chevalier de la Barre who faced brutal punishment simply because of not saluting a religious procession, whose officers found a copy of Voltaire's dictionary (still anonymously in circulation) on his persona upon inspection, and proceeded to amputate his tongue followed by beheading.¹⁰⁹ What kind of divine faith would permit such atrocity in the name of God? Was it not time for the people to see that their "benevolent God" would not have burned a person alive? Some of Voltaire's other friends were killed or persecuted by the Church, such as Jean Calas, who was wrongly accused of the murder of his own son, and Denis Diderot who was imprisoned at the dungeons of Vincennes. All this motivated Voltaire to start a ferocious attack on religious extremism and became the reason for starting *l'infâme*.¹¹⁰

Voltaire was not alone in his quest to harm the credibility of the religious establishment. Baron d'Holbach's *The System of Nature* also exposed the dangers of superstition, ignorance, and credulity, considering them to be the main obstacles to ameliorating the condition of humanity: "The erroneous idea which man has in almost all ages formed to himself of the Divinity, [is] far from being of utility, and [is] prejudicial to morality, to politics, to the happiness of society." (415) He also insists that "Man has always deceived himself when he abandoned experience to follow imaginary systems." (15) D'Holbach's work is more systematic and didactic, presenting his rather atheistic and materialistic views in a more direct manner than

¹⁰⁹ First accused of having desecrated the crucifix, la Barre, and his friends, d'Etallonde and Moissnell, are also accused of having sung impious songs and of not having taken off their hats when a procession had passed. Accounts vary about the possession of Voltaire's anonymous dictionary on Chevalier de la Barre or in his apartment, but the act of amputating then burning the young man along with the philosophical dictionary infuriated Voltaire who learned about it on the day the execution carried on. See Roger Pearson's *Voltaire Almighty*.

¹¹⁰ Jean Calas was a Protestant merchant in Toulouse who was accused of killing his own son. Despite lacking evidence, Calas was convicted and executed in 1762. Voltaire was deeply disturbed by that persecution and wrote extensively about the case highlighting religious intolerance and bigotry. See "Jean Calas," *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 15 Mar. 2024, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Jean-Calas>.

Voltaire who employs satirical tropes and dialogical style, using fictional characters to convey his ideas. In fact, whereas d'Holbach denounces deception, Voltaire uses it as a form of artifice. Whereas d'Holbach's ideas are straightforward, Voltaire uses indirection, employs various forms of deceptive discursive techniques to avoid immediate detection and, subsequently, evade any prosecutorial instances.¹¹¹

By engaging multiple characters in a conversation, Voltaire explores contrasting viewpoints enabling readers to evaluate critically his innovative ideas, and form their own opinions, which was the main goal of the Enlightenment thinkers. As noted by Pujol, Hösle, Cossutta, and McDonald, the dialogue form contributed to the circumvention of censorship by avoiding direct attacks on religious or political institutions. The dictionary format made *Le Dictionnaire Philosophique* more accessible and engaging to a wider audience. I have selected dialogues most illustrative of the combined presence of artifice and didacticism to further demonstrate the prominence of indirection using diverse facets of artifice.¹¹²

In the entry "Fraude," two interlocutors, Ouang and Bambabef, debate the idea of appearances, imitation, and deception in an indirect manner. The conversation starts with Bambabef opining that "Il faut imiter l'Être suprême qui ne nous montre pas les choses telles

¹¹¹ It is important to note that d'Holbach avoided persecution because most of his texts were published under a different name, in addition to being printed in Amsterdam where many *philosophes* published their texts either anonymously or under a different name: "D'Hobach's works were mostly conveyed to the printer at Amsterdam, and the secret of their authorship was carefully preserved, so d'Holbach escaped persecution." (James, Mc Donald, *Beyond Belief: Two Thousand Years of Bad Faith in the Christian Faith*, Garnet Publishing, 2011.) This said, the Catholic Church threatened the French Court to stop financing if *The System of Nature* was not removed from circulation. In addition, it is important to mention that while many of Voltaire's and d'Holbach's ideas pursued the same goals, Voltaire considered d'Holbach's work atheistic which conflicted with his own deistic position, prompting Voltaire to sever his ties with d'Holbach.

¹¹² The use of artifice permitted the author to induce *indirectness* and even a level of haziness to blur initial ironic tones. This chapter may be extended further by looking at Voltaire's other works most of which carry the same goal of awakening the population from the hypnotic effect of religious influence, as Voltaire understood superstition was not an easy force to eliminate, which is why his mouthpiece character Evhémère describes it as the most evil force to reckon with in *Dialogues d'Evhémère*.

qu'elles sont. Il nous fait voir le Soleil sous un diamètre de deux ou trois pieds quoique cet astre soit un million fois plus gros que la Terre. Il nous environne d'erreurs convenables à notre nature." (298) Ouang, his interlocutor, contradicts him in rather scientific terms mixed with a certain degree of metaphorical discourse by insisting that human eyes were not meant to see the sun directly, arguing that other advanced tools would be necessary to see that star in its entirety: "Nous n'apercevons réellement, et nous ne pouvons apercevoir que le Soleil qui se peint dans notre rétine, sous un angle déterminé" (300) he reasons in scientific terms. This idea is a direct parallel to Fontenelle's *Premier Soir* in his *Entretiens*, in which the philosopher tells the Marquise that "Les mouvements les plus naturels sont ceux qui sont les plus imperceptibles." (75) This supports the idea that the invisibility of an instance, be it a lie or an imitation, and by extension, artificial, is more influential than what is visible, palpable, or true. This, of course, opens a new door for a broader discussion about the relationship between the concepts of true and false, but Voltaire supports imitation, therefore the non-original, the "untrue" in the same way Fontenelle considered oblivion essential for leading a regular, hassle-free life. That which is invisible may not be endangered while it can be dangerous; such an example may be the anonymity of the authors who avoid persecution but produce texts expressing dangerous ideas for the governing regime; thus, the entry "Fraude" tends to defend imitation and artifice. It is also curious to observe that Voltaire chose specifically the definition of "Fraude" to analyze, as fraud implies plotting, cunning or lying, all of which require strong manipulative skills to succeed. A feeble mind is incapable of committing fraud, and apart from Sadean ideology,¹¹³ committing fraud is mostly viewed as a negative phenomenon. In this case, Bambabef is the religious

¹¹³ In the chapter on Sade, the idea of vices and human imperfections is prevalent, and given his libertine ideology, Sade could see fraud and deception as ways of imposing personal freedom or power. However, Sadean philosophy is an exception in the history of ideas, and in this instance, Voltaire's choice of analyzing the notion of "fraud" is another way of reinforcing his attack on clericalism.

representative who is advocating for lies and deception, which might be an implicit way for Voltaire to double his denunciations of clergy's delegates who make a living by deceiving.

The use of heteroglossia in Voltaire's dialogues is frequently perceptible because another voice, a third person, the narrator, intervenes to clarify a discussion, therefore changing the pure genre of dialogic composition into a more theatrical type. For instance, the narrator adds additional comments to make those dialogue-entries more easily understandable: "Bambabef parut fort étonné de ce propos [comme] Ouang lui a expliqué la théorie de l'optique." (297) The narrating voice inputs additional commentaries to illustrate or facilitate the understanding of these dialogue entries. Ouang, however, insists on the argument that deception, though misleading and manipulative, may sometimes be a crucial phenomenon for the creation of better conditions for the population: "Si Dieu ne nous trompe pas par le ministère de nos sens, avouez au moins que les médecins trompent les enfants pour leur bien : ils leur disent qu'ils leur donnent du sucre, et en effet ils leur donnent des médicaments. Je peux donc, moi fakir,¹¹⁴ tromper le peuple qui est aussi ignorant que les enfants" (298) says Bambabef, proving that lying is occasionally necessary for the good of the people. This is an idea we have seen in Fontenelle; beyond deducing that not all lies are inherently harmful, sometimes it is helpful to lie to save someone's life, or to avoid harming someone's feelings. To some extent, artifice is a lie, and in these examples, it is not intrinsically good or bad; the use of artifice is contextual, particularly internal artifice. Voltaire makes use of external artifice more frequently, as he chooses symbolic names and specific forms of writing, such as dialogic entries within a dictionary, which indicates

¹¹⁴ A subtle reference of religious representants whom Voltaire qualifies as ignorant. According to *Webster dictionary*, "fakir is a wandering Hindu holy person who performs feats of magic, or, etymologically, a poor person devoted to religion who is often hired to babysit, educate children." (*Merriam-Webster Dictionary*, accessed January 5, 2024.)

his objectives immediately; for instance, when a symbolic name such as “Boldmind” is chosen, the reader immediately understands that this character, real or fictional, will express bold ideas. Voltaire’s inventiveness and playfulness with names, words, and anagrams suggest that he attempts to represent a hidden idea for the readers to decipher themselves; otherwise, the author could narrate in a more direct tone, without having recourse to these diverse discursive forms.

It could be assumed that this dialogue is meant to highlight the interlocutors’ contrasting views of the people, suggesting implicitly that different opinions may exist simultaneously, as opposed to religious teachings which were fixed knowledge to be followed without questioning. Ouang counters Bambabef’s stance saying that he never had to lie to his sons: “J’ai deux fils, je ne les ai jamais trompés. Je leur ai dit que le médicament était amère mais qu’il fallait avoir le courage de le prendre.” (299) Bambabef notices that not all families have such levels of honest interaction as Ouang’s, insinuating that exceptions may happen, while the main pattern usually remains: “Le peuple n’est pas né si heureusement que votre famille” (299) he adds. This moment of their conversation allows Ouang to criticize religious representatives, as he observes that: “Tous les hommes se ressemblent; ils sont nés avec les mêmes dispositions. Ce sont les fakirs qui corrompent la nature des hommes.” (299) “Les Fakirs” were usually of Muslim origin, poor and without any possessions, though they were hired sometimes to educate children about the religion’s principles in exchange for shelter and food. Furthermore, Ouang engages in a conflict with Bambabef as the latter is represented as a fakir, which creates an added tension relevant to their contrasting views.

Despite drawing parallels between Christianity and Islam as both “unnecessary,” readers may sense a stronger attack on Christianity versus a milder attack on Islam. Voltaire viewed Christianity as a source of repression, while he recognized the involvement of Islamic

intellectuals in scientific fields such as mathematics, philosophy, or literature. In sum, Voltaire considered Islam as a more rational and tolerant religion compared to Christianity. Emilio Rousseau's *Voltaire and Islam* explores his engagement with Islam and the civilizations worshipping it. In *Voltaire's Politics* by David Williams, we are introduced to Voltaire's philosophically complex ideas, where he is advocating for secularism and the freedom of thought. Williams concentrates on Voltaire's entries such as "State," "Laws," or "Wars" to discuss the legitimacy of power and social order within the growing disorder of the French economy through a wide selection of Voltaire's diverse works, novels, and dialogues. Ibrahim Kalin writes in his article "An Old Story: Looking for a Muslim Voltaire" (2018) that: "He was even presented as a common-sense defender against the deep-rooted prejudices of European religious and intellectual circles. His distaste for institutionalized Christianity and defense of deism was seen as natural outcome of his struggle with papal authority and scholastic bigotry." (3)

On the other hand, Zakaria Fatih notes that "Islam did not escape the virulent attacks of the *philosophes*, nor did it help that its image had already been tarnished in previous centuries; it had been portrayed as a religion of excess, and its practitioners as fanatics deeply immersed in religious persecution and sexual expenditure." (1072) However contradictory Fatih's observation is regarding previous reflections, it is worth recalling that one of Voltaire's writing strategies consisted of destabilizing the readers' reactions, in an effort to encourage them to think for themselves to sort things out, to which end he produced deliberately contradictory ideas, causing critics of different eras to have contrasting views. Kalin's and Fatih's comments are proof of such a clash of opinions. While Fatih does not specifically mention Voltaire but the *philosophes* in general, Voltaire is implicitly included in his analysis. It is important to know, however, that Voltaire's dialogues are the ones with especially inconclusive and ambiguous contexts, forcing

the readers to make their own assumptions about his diverse use of linguistic registers in his effort to increase individuals' speculative and critical abilities.

Voltaire's satire is so subtle that it is hard to distinguish between his ironic or truthful address. Bambabef says that errors are deliberately taught for the good of the people, which is not necessarily true, in addition to the fact that his admission of lying may have a larger implication as he is part of a religious establishment. Thus, Ouang insinuates that religious representatives, such as the fakirs, are the ones corrupting the minds of the people, and he constructs his criticism so delicately that it may pass as a simple observation, without any intent or insinuation. At that moment Bambabef continues "Nous leur enseignons des erreurs, je l'avoue, mais c'est pour leur bien," (299) forcing the other interlocutor to lose patience and respond angrily, denouncing religion more directly: "Ouang: Ne voyez-vous pas que vous pervertissez ces pauvres gens? Il y en a parmi eux ceux qui raisonnent et se moquent des miracles, de vos superstitions... et ils ont assez de sens pour voir que vous leur prêchez une religion impertinente et qui s'élèvent vers une religion pure et dégagée de superstition telle que la nôtre. Leurs passions leur font croire qu'il n'y a point de religion parce que la seule qu'on leur enseigne est ridicule. Vous devenez coupable de tous les vices dans lesquels ils se plongent." (300) Here, it seems, Voltaire's use of ambiguity is once again at play, as he uses Islam as a parallel to Christianity in order to reinforce his ironic viewpoints about religion in general, depicting it as ridiculous and proving that religions are the reason why people's minds become corrupted and rooted in superstition.

One must admire the configuration of this dialogue and the nuance of switching the conversation from the description of the sun to the critique of religion so delicately. It becomes clear that Ouang serves as Voltaire's mouthpiece as he continues his ironic and seemingly naïve

observation that they (fakirs, or parallelly, religious representatives) are harmful to the people while Bambabef argues that they do their best to educate better morality: “Point du tout, car nous ne leur enseignons qu’une bonne morale” (300) Bambabef says, defending religious teachings. There is another layer to this conversation because they started this discussion reasoning that what was invisible or imperceptible was more influential and significant. Superstition was the *mal du siècle* because superstitious people believed in an invisible essence of unlimited power, and it was an almost impossible task to reverse their beliefs. Finally, Ouang acknowledges in a clear manner that the best way to avoid superstition and error is by studying science and adhering to its principles: “J’avoue que tous les hommes ne doivent pas avoir la même science; mais il y a des choses nécessaires à tous. Il est nécessaire que chacun soit juste; et la plus sûre manière d’inspirer la justice à tous les hommes c’est de leur inspirer la religion sans superstition.” (301) Thus, through the dialogue form and with the ardent engagement of his mouthpiece, Voltaire condemns the superstitions of the Catholic religion while demonstrating the force of the invisible in a different instance, completing his constructed circle of artifice. Just like any theoretically invisible person would be able to harm and get away without consequences, anonymity is Voltaire’s artifice of invisibility, allowing the author to reveal controversial topics inconspicuously and get away unscathed.¹¹⁵ Roger Pearson notes in *Voltaire Almighty: A Life in*

¹¹⁵ While the use of symbolic names is absent in this entry, it becomes more significant in the next entries employing a dialogue form. Therefore, it is worth noting that at the beginning of this entry, “Fraude”, there is a small passage narrated in the third person, which describes who these two characters are, and which is the only insight into the choice of these characters’ names; Ouang is admittedly an Asian name, while Bambabef is subject to speculation as to why Voltaire chose such name. The entry begins with a narrative voice describing the imminent dispute: “Le fakir Bambabef rencontra un jour un des disciples de Confutzé, que nous nommons Confucius, et ce disciple s’appelait Ouang; et Bambabef soutenait que le peuple a besoin d’être trompé, et Ouang prétendait qu’il ne faut jamais tromper personne; et voici leur dispute.” (298) Most of the other dialogic entries have symbolic, recognizable names, or names that resemble a concept or a foreign word, but in this specific entry, the name “Bambabef” does not have any scholarly reference or approximation with foreign words. It is a fictional name that does not have a clear or implicit meaning, though readers are free to speculate and observe that it sounds amusing, perhaps even slightly ridiculous,

Pursuit of Freedom that “Voltaire played dumb -- and enjoyed himself hugely as he denied authorship in letters designed to be read by the police.” (203) Additionally, his colorful denial had the opposite effect of making sales of his dictionary soar. The demand was so high that after being sold, the book was traded from hand to hand. Pearson describes it as a “contagion” that spread quickly like an epidemic.

The choice of the protagonists’ names is another implicit tactic, a form of external artifice, that Voltaire uses to express his irony. The entry “Nécessaire” is also written in a dialogue form, occurring between two interlocutors named Osmin and Sélim, names that are of Turkish origin and resemble Muslim names, all the while criticizing Islam amongst other themes. These interlocutors direct their arrows at religion in the same way the previous conversers do in the dialogue “Fraude.” Their discussion in this entry emphasizes the relativity of needs from one nation or from one human being to another, and advocates for free will and the pursuit of knowledge. In addition, it criticizes dogmatic beliefs, including disapproval of *The Quran*, and advocates for tolerance and the quest for knowledge. The discussion starts with Osmin who is portrayed as a naïve interlocutor and begins the dialogue by asking a broad philosophical question: “Ne dites-vous pas que tout est nécessaire?” (426) Sélim, who appears to be more confident, responds that such a statement is misleading because it would mean that God would have created useless things along with the useful, prompting Osmin to inquire: “C’est-à-dire qu’il était nécessaire à la nature divine qu’elle fit tout ce qu’elle fait?” (426) Sélim answers that he thinks so, even though there are different opinions about it: “Je le crois; ou du moins je le soupçonne. Il y a des gens qui pensent autrement. Je ne les entends point; peut-être ont-ils raison.

thus underscoring the nature of his personality and function as a religious representative. Additionally, the mention of Confucianism underscores that it is better than Islam, which is better than Christianity in his turn.

Je crains la dispute sur cette matière.” (426) Sélim could be said to serve as a vehicle for Voltaire to express his deist views: “Il me semble que Dieu a donné tout ce qu’il fallait à cette espèce : des yeux pour voir, des pieds pour marcher, une bouche pour manger, un œsophage pour avaler, un estomac pour digérer, une cervelle pour raisonner, des organes pour produire leurs semblables.” (427) Sélim explains that God gave all that is necessary to the human species, thus there is no need to keep worshipping God in the same manner (blindly.) Through Sélim, Voltaire challenges superstition and advocates for reason and freedom of thought, as he clearly states that people have brains to think for themselves. Pearson writes in this regard that “rather than hectoring his readers or even professing soberly to inform them, [Voltaire] constantly calls on them to put two and two together, to think for themselves, to dare to know.” For as Voltaire wrote in the preface of *Dictionnaire Philosophique*, “Les livres les plus utiles sont ceux dont les lecteurs font eux-mêmes la moitié; ils corrigent ce qui leur semble défectueux, et fortifient par leurs réflexions ce qui leur paraît faible” (4).¹¹⁶ Several instances of this way of thinking are mentioned in the dictionary: “Lecteurs, c’est à vous de les dire vous mêmes” (456) writes Voltaire in the entry “Prêtres” in which he suggests that priests be healers of peoples’ souls, or, in the entry “Sensation,” the author describes various theological theories, but asks his readers to conclude on their own: “Que conclure de tout cela? Vous qui lisez et qui pensez, concluez!” (493) The spirit of *sapere aude* that he wants to share with his readership, is firmly embodied in Voltaire’s philosophy. Perhaps it is the reason why the name Bambabef was an invented group of letters for the readers to try and understand its meaning or even attempt to give meaning to it. It is possible that both fictional characters, Osmin et Sélim, represent Voltaire’s hypothetical views. As Sélim notes, human beings are endowed with thinking abilities and, therefore, they

¹¹⁶ Voltaire, Préface au *Dictionnaire Philosophique*, édition de Raymond Naves et Olivier Ferret. Classiques Garnier/ Poche, 2008, p. 4.

should use them to think for themselves rather than following others' thoughts without questioning them.

As their conversation continues, Osmin claims that what is necessary to one person is not necessary to another, targeting in this instance the way people believed in a benevolent God: "Faire un crime, c'est agir contre la justice divine, c'est désobéir à Dieu. Or Dieu ne peut désobéir à lui-même, il ne peut commettre de crime, mais il a fait l'homme de façon que l'homme en commet beaucoup. D'où vient cela?" (429) This line of questioning raises the philosophical problem of a kind Creator who makes unkind creations, thus indirectly criticizing the concept of God. Sélim uses this occasion to attack Islam, ironically, because through the criticism of Islam, in this instance, Voltaire criticizes in parallel fashion the other religions (similar to the the entry "Fraude," where Voltaire talks about one religion to highlight his disapproval about all other religions.)¹¹⁷ This is a writing technique, an artifice used to conceal the author's direct thoughts about his own religious principles; therefore, the author choses a homogeneous notion to criticize and, thereby, expresses his disagreement about both notions, Islam, and Christianity, respectively, which is a clever approach adopted by the author who chooses his strategy of attack.

Thus, Sélim attempts to respond to Osmin's previous question about a God making people commit unwanted acts, and in his response, he insinuates the discrepancies encountered in the Scriptures: "Tout ce que je sais bien, c'est que l'Alcoran est ridicule quoique de temps en temps il y ait beaucoup de bonnes choses. Certainement, l'Alcoran n'était point nécessaire à l'homme. Je m'en tiens là: je vois clairement ce qui est faux et je connais très peu ce qui est

¹¹⁷ Consider the previous discussion of Voltaire's favoritism of Islam despite criticizing it and using it as a representation of religions in general to implicitly attack Catholicism, which was his primary target of condemnation.

vrai.” (429) Here is another example of encouraging the readers to think for themselves as Sélim expresses his opinion yet acknowledges that he knows very little about what may be true: “Je ne suis point médecin, et vous n’êtes point malade. Mais il me semble que je vous donnerais une fort bonne recette si je vous disais: Défiez-vous de toutes les inventions des charlatans, adorez Dieu, soyez honnête homme, et croyez que deux et deux font quatre.” (430) Sélim’s final note encourages reasonableness and morality. René Pomeau observes in his article on Voltaire’s *Dictionnaire* that the author intended to plant initial ideas for his readers to develop them further, similar to Pearson’s explanations: “Les lecteurs étendent les pensées dont on leur présente les germes.” (323) In this fashion, Voltaire provided “food for thought” by creating these entries and hoping to awaken critical thinking in his readers like many of his contemporaries, while particularly highlighting Sélim’s advice for staying rational, logical, and having faith in science rather than religious doctrines.

The entry in dialogue form “De la Liberté” has the apparent use of the symbolic and simplistic names of the interlocutors (here A and B, similar to the protagonists’ names in Diderot’s *Supplément au voyage de Bougainville*, also named A and B.) The characters engage in a philosophical debate exploring the themes of freedom, societal norms, and morality. As the title indicates, the characters put an emphasis on the importance of freedom of thought and expression, reflecting Voltaire’s denunciation of any form of oppression that restricted individual liberty. In this dialogue, there is also a nuanced condemnation of authoritarianism.

A: Eh bien, vous êtes mille fois plus libre que votre chien, c’est-à-dire vous avez mille fois plus de pouvoir de penser que lui: mais vous n’êtes pas libre autrement que lui.

B: Quoi? Je ne suis pas libre de vouloir ce que je veux?

A: Qu'entendez-vous par là?

B: J'entends ce que tout le monde entend. Ne dit-on pas tous les jours « les volontés sont libres »?

A: Un proverbe n'est pas une raison; expliquez-vous mieux.

B: J'entends que je suis libre de vouloir comme il me plaira. (372)

The content of this heated exchange, full of indignation, surprise, and exclamations, shows that Voltaire attempts to advocate for the idea of “free will” while the interlocutor A demonstrates a different perspective: “Votre volonté n'est pas libre, mais vos actions le sont” (373). This idea that B's will is free, but his actions are not may be compared to the individual rights of the French society whose choices were limited in education or faith. Thus, the idea of freedom of thought and the freedom to act resonates with the ongoing discussions on human rights and individual autonomy. Voltaire exhibited enthusiastic ambition to emphasize the importance of individual freedom and the rights of citizens to express their thoughts and beliefs without fear of persecution. This said, Voltaire presents a nuanced and multifaceted perspective on liberty, acknowledging its limitations, which is apparent when the interlocutor A admits that an individual is free to want and act on anything, but his actions are limited depending on the given country's legal system and traditions. In some sense, as readers get more familiar with Voltaire's playfulness with his characters, their names, and diverse discourses, they could assume that characters A and B were representing different sides of freedom and constraint. Character A argues for individual rights and the limitations of state power, while character B prioritizes broader and more centralized regulations for insuring social stability. The subsequent entry

“Liberté de Penser” also has certain ideas of freedom’s limitation, such as Médroso’s forced adherence to the Inquisition as seen in the ensuing dialogue.

The next entry of dialogue form is “Liberté de Penser,” which represents two interlocutors Boldmind and Médroso, Boldmind serving as a literal reference to the bold ideas expressed in that entry by that character. Once again, it is thanks to the dialogue form that the use of symbolic names becomes a factor of significance; thus, readers witness a double occurrence of artifice, the external artifice of the names combined with internal artifice of the dialogues’ context. In “Liberté de Penser,” Boldmind and Médroso develop a debate as their interaction resembles a conflict which is initiated by Boldmind, whose comments are both offensive and educational. Voltaire exposes two different theses through the voices of these two fictional interlocutors, although Boldmind speaks more than Médroso, which creates a pupil-teacher dynamic. Like the Socratic dialogues, Boldmind is the one who conditions the answers of his interlocutor.

Voltaire uses a third voice to produce the setting of the upcoming conversation and describe the roles of the two protagonists, in which Boldmind has the role of a strong, wise philosopher while Médroso is described as a servant of the religious establishment, more specifically, of the Inquisition: “Vers l’an 1707, temps où les Anglais gagnèrent la bataille de Saragosse, protégèrent le Portugal et donnèrent pour quelque temps un roi pour l’Espagne, milord Boldmind, officier general, qui avait été blesse, était aux eaux de Barège. Il y rencontra le compte Médroso, qui étant tombé de cheval derrière le bagage, à une lieu et demie du champ de bataille, venait prendre les eaux aussi. Il était familier de l’Inquisition; Milord Boldmind n’était familier que dans la conversation.” (374) This humorous beginning portrays already the nature of the two characters. Boldmind was wounded in the battle, was brave, bold and direct, while

Médroso had fallen off his horse about a mile and a half away from the battle, thus was fearful, weak, and familiar with the Inquisition, meaning employed by it. After the battle, they came to drink, which is when Médroso and Boldmind had the following conversation:

Boldmind: Vous êtes donc sergent des dominicains? Vous faites là un vilain métier.

Médroso: Il est vrai: mais j'ai mieux être leur valet que leur victime, et j'ai préféré le malheur de brûler mon prochain à celui d'être cuit moi-même. (374)

The beginning of this conversation references the perceived cruelty of the Dominican Order as Voltaire refers to the custom of burning people at the stake to construct this dialogue. Boldmind adds: "Quelle horrible alternative! Vous étiez cent fois plus heureux sous le joug des Maures,¹¹⁸ qui vous laissaient croupir librement dans toutes vos superstitions, et qui, tout vainqueurs qu'ils étaient ne s'arrogeaient pas le droit inouï de tenir les âmes dans les fers." (374) Boldmind speaks his mind freely, noting that Médroso would have better lived with people practicing Islam. Apart from the tragic historical period during which numerous atrocities were committed in the name of the Church, this dialogue serves to directly condemn killings justified in the name of God, as through the character Médroso Voltaire reveals the difficulty for the people to disobey the religious representatives: "Que voulez-vous? Il ne nous est permis ni d'écrire, ni de parler, ni même de penser."¹¹⁹ Enfin... on ne nous condamne pas d'être brûlés pour nos pensées secrètes." (375)

Boldmind then tries to motivate Médroso to think like a man and to inspire him courage, changing his initial querulous tone. The latter responds that he is less of a man than Boldmind.

¹¹⁸ Les Maures are the Arabic population of the Medieval era.

¹¹⁹ The fact that they were not allowed to think is a direct reference to the impossibility of "sapere aude."

Boldmind: Vous êtes homme, et cela suffit.

Médroso: Hélas, vous êtes bien plus homme que moi. (376)

The readers have pity on the character Médroso because he is portrayed as a weak character, having no choice but to obey the religious principles of the described period, even if it required killing or burning a person alive. Additionally, it shows that once part of the Inquisition, it is like a cage from which escaping is nearly impossible, and which does not allow its subjects to study anything other than their doctrines. Just as the previous dialogue entries allowed a smooth transition from topic to topic, such as in the entry “Fraude”, where the interlocutors discussed astronomy and science then gradually moved into the discussion of deception and artifice, this dialogue-entry also allows a gradual transition of Boldmind’s mood from angry to compassionate.

The name Boldmind, as already mentioned, is an indication of the character’s boldness in expressing ideas or stating the obvious without fear. Notably, the name Médroso means “fear” as a shorter version of the word “*metorosum*”¹²⁰ from Vulgar Latin. It is clear at this point that the use of symbolic names is one of the favorite ways for Voltaire to express an immediate idea, and he used the close approximation of the Latin word to create his fictional character. The use of the names Boldmind and Médroso highlights Voltaire’s strategic playfulness with symbolic names, which are employed as forms of external artifice in both this, and the ensuing dialogues studied. Even though Médroso is depicted as a coward, it is insinuated that the Inquisition’s role was too

¹²⁰ A direct translation from Latin, the word “*metorosum*” means “fear” in English. It is important to note that Voltaire’s dialogue-definition-entry may be viewed as anachronistic as the Inquisition was mainly present in the fifteenth century, although its presence varied in different regions and time periods.

heavy of an influence for the latter to escape it. At some point this character desperately confesses that he has no other choice and must do what is asked of him.

In another instance, Boldmind, who was from England, mentions Cicero, one of the most famous philosophers of Antiquity, while Médroso responds with surprise that he did not recognize that name: “Quel est ce Cicéron? Je n’ai jamais entendu parler de cet homme-là” (375).¹²¹ Boldmind then recounts that the Roman empire continued flourishing even if Cicero wrote freely and critically. Finally, Boldmind expresses a visionary idea that Kant and many other thinkers suggested in the following centuries, namely, having the courage to think for themselves and educate themselves, as knowledge would be the only light that could pierce the darkness reigning during that era. Boldmind: “Il ne tient qu’à vous d’apprendre à penser; vous êtes né avec de l’esprit; vous êtes un oiseau dans la cage de l’Inquisition: le Saint-Office vous a rogné les ailes, mais elles peuvent revenir. Celui qui ne sait pas la géométrie peut l’apprendre. Tout homme peut s’instruire. Osez pensez par vous-même.” (377) Dare to think on your own; Boldmind gives hope, reiterating the Enlightenment motto unknowingly, according to the setting of the dialogue, and inspiring strength, optimism and showing that it is up to an individual’s willingness to rise and revolt against the injustices committed by the Church.

The originality of the dialogue format allows for the application of discursive techniques, including means of argumentation, contrast, or debates, which is not as feasible in a novel or a narrated text. In *Dialogue d’idée au dix-huitième siècle*, Pujol suggests that the dialogue both unifies and deflects, but also radicalizes in some cases: “Chez La Hontan, Voltaire ou Diderot, la

¹²¹ Note the representation of ignorance that is constructed in this sentence as Médroso refers to Cicero as “what is that Cicero?” while a knowledgeable individual would have said at least “I am not familiar with that name” or “I have not heard that name. “Ce Cicéron” highlights the ignorance of the interlocutor Médroso insinuating that he is fed religious doctrines and no other knowledge.

confrontation critique est radicalisée par la mise en scène d'un conflit de valeur entre les interlocuteurs de mœurs ou de nationalité différente." (317) This observation is certainly relevant in this case, as the dialogue entry in the dictionary expresses more than a narrated one.¹²²

Additionally, eighteenth - century dialogues appear in a variety of genres: "Le dialogue verse en effet bien souvent dans d'autres formes ou d'autres genres comme le dictionnaire chez Voltaire." (321) Finally, as already seen in many instances, the dialogue form allows an immediacy of understanding, through the choices of the characters' names and the segueing from one topic to another or from a character's bad mood to a better one, which is usually more entertaining than a narrating text, because the dialogue is short, and engages readers by assigning them a third voice, as they delve into the conversation and become part of it.

As with previously mentioned dialogues, the dialogue entry "Catéchisme chinois," contains an implicit condemnation of superstition,¹²³ The entries "Liberté de Penser", "De la Liberté," and "Catéchisme chinois," also resembles a Socratic dialogue because there is a clear teacher-pupil dynamic. The full title of the entry is *Catéchisme chinois ou Entretien de Cu-su, disciple de Confutzée, avec le prince Kou, fils du roi de Lou; tributaire de l'empereur chinois*. Kou, who was the prince had Cu-su teach him wisdom, in the process of which Voltaire uses Kou's naiveté to have Cu-su profess essential knowledge which was meant to reach the general population through the eventual reign of the prince. Their conversation starts with Kou inquiring: "Que dois-je entendre quand on me dit d'adorer le ciel," a sentence in which "adorer le ciel" is

¹²² It is important to note that Voltaire was not the only one who had recourse to the dialogue form in his dictionary; in his *Encyclopédie*, Diderot had several entries which were in a short dialogue form along with Jean le Rond d'Alembert with whom he collaborated for the completion of this monumental project.

¹²³ The use of the term "catechism" had a satirical and ironic purpose. It is a summary of religious doctrine often in the form of questions and answers. By appropriating this word for his own purposes, Voltaire proceeds to subvert the authority of religious institutions, as he uses this term to assert his own visions about a more enlightened society.

understood in a direct rather than metaphorical sense. This gives Cu-su the occasion to explain in a scientific manner the importance of language and its uses, as he condemns the “ignorant” statement of “adoring the sky,” explaining that “ce serait une folie d’adorer les vapeurs,” given that the sky is Earth’s atmosphere and is composed of various gases and elements. As their discussion continues, Kou observes “Il me semble que les hommes ont fait des folies plus grandes,” inciting Cu-su to remind him that authorities should not succumb to imaginary belief or superstition: “Il est vrai” says Cu-su, continuing his lesson: “mais vous êtes destiné à gouverner, et vous devez être sage.” (145) By advising to “be wise,” Cu-su suggests Kou avoid all instances of superstition or belief in miracles, as the latter was influenced by a sect that preached miracles and irrational ideas:

Kou: Que prétend-on quand on dit le ciel et la Terre, monter au ciel, être digne du ciel ?

Cu-su : On dit une énorme sottise. Il n’y a point de ciel...chaque Soleil est le centre de plusieurs planètes qui voyage continuellement autour de lui. (145)

Let us observe that Kou had been influenced by the idea of one’s soul elevating towards the sky, admittedly towards Paradise, while Cu-su succeeds in removing that belief from the future prince’s mind, supporting the advancement of science and advocating for the Copernican heliocentric theory that Fontenelle had bravely promoted in his *Entretiens*.

As Kou indicates, his previous instruction was different from what Cu-su was professing:

Kou : “on nous a bien trompés quand on nous a dit que Fo était descendu chez nous du quatrième ciel et avait paru en éléphant blanc.” (146) It seems that Kou was taught teachings of Confucius (Kong Fuzi), Confucianism, which emphasized moral virtues, social harmony, and righteousness, along with the principles of the sect of Laokium whose principles the prince

disliked even though he had been taught to know them. Kou: “Mais la secte de Laokium dit-elle qu’il n’y a ni juste ni injuste, ni vice ne vertu.” (148) At that moment, Cu-su compares the doctrine of the Laokium sect about the inexistence of vice and vertu with the inexistence of health and sickness to facilitate the understanding about the erroneousness of such teachings. Vice accounts for sickness and virtue for health in the analogy drawn by Cu-su, who continues his educational discourse in an instructive tone, observing that those insights were mistaken and did not have any merit:

Cu-su: La secte de Laokium dit-elle qu’il n’y a ni santé, ni maladie ?

Kou: Non, elle ne dit point une si grande erreur.¹²⁴

Cu-su: L’erreur de penser qu’il n’y a ni santé de l’âme ni maladie de l’âme, ni vertu ni vice, est aussi grande et plus funeste. Ceux qui ont dit que tout est égal sont des monstres. Est-il égal de nourrir son fils ou de l’écraser sur la pierre, de secourir sa mère ou lui plonger un poignard dans le cœur ?

Kou: Vous me faites frémir : je déteste la secte de Laokium. Mais il y a tant de nuances du juste et de l’injuste. On est souvent bien incertain. Quel homme sait précisément ce qui est permis et ce qui est défendu ? Qui pourra poser sûrement les bornes qui séparent le bien et le mal ? Quelle règle me donneriez-vous pour les discerner ?

Cu-su: Celle de Confutzée, mon maître. *Vis comme en mourant tu voudrais avoir vécu; traite ton prochain comme tu veux qu’il te traite.*

¹²⁴ One may confirm that Kou is a capable student and is learning quickly from the instruction of Cu-su. Since in their last conversation Kou had brought up the idea that the sect of Laokium was not recognizing virtue or vice, nor right and wrong, Cu-su then draws a parallel deducing that in such a setting “healthy or unhealthy” would not matter either. However, Kou had already grasped Cu-su’s intellectuality and rationally concurs with him in agreeing that such parallels, along with previously discussed concepts, did not make much sense.

Kou: Ces maximes, je l'avoue, doivent être le code du genre humain. (148-149)

Cu-su succeeds in persuading him that Confucianism was superior to the doctrines of the Loakium sect. This discussion continues in the same spirit of ridding the young prince's mind of erroneous ideas of a sect, completing it with logic and reason.

Furthermore, Cu-su does his best to divert the prince's indoctrinated fable-like stories towards Voltaire's deistic position, by insisting that: "Nous devons adorer que l'auteur éternel de tous les êtres." (146) This resembles a deistic position to the extent that Cu-su suggests believing in a Creator who set the universe in motion and did not intervene afterwards in its workings. He is successful in installing this new belief in the young prince, as when he asks if the latter concurs about a powerful Creator, and Kou responds: "Oui. Mais s'il existe par lui-même, rien ne peut donc le borner, il est donc partout." (147) The prince is clever and builds on Cu-su's teachings to assume that this Creator must be everywhere, including in himself, an idea which is a rather Spinozist approach:

Kou: Il existe donc dans toute la matière, dans toutes les parties de moi-même?

Cu-su: Pourquoi non?

Kou: Je serais donc une partie de la Divinité. (147)

The young prince is not confrontational and understands his instructor's suggestion to worship the Creator God, rather than an omnipresent God: "Je crois vous comprendre. Il ne faut qu'adorer Dieu qui a fait le ciel et la Terre." (146) Cu-su responds: "Sans doute, il faut n'adorer que Dieu. Mais quand nous disons qu'il a fait le ciel et la Terre, nous disons pieusement une grande pauvreté." (146) Kou enjoys the company of Cu-su, as well as their discussion, so he compliments Cu-su: "Je vous dis que vous êtes un grillon plus instruit que moi; et ce qui me plaît

en vous, c'est que vous ne prétendez pas savoir ce que vous ignorez." (147) While it is pleasant to see the prince give up the teachings of a sect, it is questionable how the prince knew that Cu-su did not pretend to know more. It is possible that Voltaire constructs his dialogues in this way so that it stays open to suggestions and promotes critical thinking.

Thus, through the voice of Cu-su, Voltaire succeeds in expressing one of the most important universal formulas of behavior, which is treating others as you would like to be treated by them, "the golden rule." It is an illumination of one's mind if it is perceived and applied, especially by a young prince who is meant to reign over an empire. If everyone had practiced this formula, the world would have been a much better place, though it sounds more utopic than realistic in the practice of everyday life. The readers witness an artifice of reverse-representation, such as Cu-su incarnating Voltaire's voice, or drawing analogies to prove his claims.

Additionally, an occurrence of artifice consists in the dialogue form entry within a dictionary that is employed as definition, yet it contains more suggestions and insights than definitions. Finally, the recourse to symbolic names or approximated names recalls the use of external artifice, as Kou resembles "Qui" in French while Cu-su resembles "Qui sut" which matched the context of the dialogue perfectly; the "Who?" was learning from the one "Who knew!" In addition to this implicit use of names, Voltaire's messages, represented in this case by Cu-su, are full of wisdom and reason, aiming to illuminate and ameliorate people's state of being and their ways of thinking.

The "Catéchisme Chinois" is followed by the entry "Catéchisme Japonnais," another entry in dialogue form, an allegorical text, in which almost every context has an indirect meaning. It is a deeply satirical piece that Voltaire uses to explore different cultures by presenting a fictional Japanese character who questions Western customs and beliefs. This

dialogue serves for Voltaire to critique European practices and promote tolerance and understanding of diverse perspectives. Voltaire represents different religions as different cuisines practiced in Japan, which, in its turn, represents England, the country with more religious tolerance than France.¹²⁵ This is why the discussion of all religions occurs in the Japanese kitchen. The choice of such allegorical writing is an artifice for representing (albeit mockingly) the nature of religions. To reveal this approach to his readers without offending sensitivities, Voltaire has recourse to anagrams, another layer of artifice, referring to Hebreux as *Breuxeh*, or the Papistes as *Pispates*.

There are contradictory accounts of Voltaire's relation to Judaism. For example, in Chisick Harvey's article on "Voltaire's Attitude towards the Jews," Chisick explains that the author was influenced by an archaic and contradictory mentality in his attitude towards Jewishness: "In the *Dictionnaire philosophique* Voltaire accords the most sympathetic and respectful treatment to the Chinese, Japanese, and Hindu religions and to deism. Treatment of the three great revealed religions and their scriptures ranges from mildly critical to denunciatory. Given Voltaire's universalist ethical assumptions and classical bias, his appreciation of the Hebrew Scriptures can hardly be expected to be positive. At the same time, these values also caused him to relate critically to the Greek Scriptures and the Koran." (580) In the previous entries, we witnessed some criticism of Islam, although it is worth noting that Voltaire was most critical of the Judeo-Christian traditions, particularly the organized religion of his time.

¹²⁵ England had experienced significant developments which were marked by a gradual shift towards greater acceptance of religious diversity and the freedom of worship. While religious discriminations existed in different forms, there was, however, a notable tolerance and pluralism compared to the France of the eighteenth century. See William, Gibson. *The Church of England 1688-1832*. Routledge, 2002. Gibson explores the evolution of religious tolerance in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, mentioning the various religious reforms that shaped the landscape of religious freedom in that period.

Voltaire's critique of the Judeo-Christian tradition can be seen in his many of his works, including letters, essays, plays or other philosophical writings. In the *Catéchisme Japonais*, when the interlocutor l'Indien inquires about the people who used the Japanese cuisine, his interlocutor Le Japonnais, who seems to be Voltaire's mouthpiece, responds rather negatively, mentioning that the Breuxeh did not cooperate well with the others: "Il y a premièrement les Breuxeh qui ne donneront jamais ni boudin, ni de lard.¹²⁶ Ils sont attachés à l'ancienne cuisine: ils aimeraient mourir que de piquer un poulet. D'ailleurs, de grands calculateurs, s'il y a une once¹²⁷ d'argent à partager entre eux et les onze autres, ils en prennent d'abord la moitié pour eux et le reste est pour ceux qui savent le mieux compter." (173) While this passage may represent a critique of Jewish population, Chisick also notes that "Voltaire's attitude towards Hebrew Scriptures was paradoxical. Were his attacks on the values and behavior of many of the protagonists of Hebrew Bible directed towards the Jews of his time, or were they for the most time thinly veiled criticism of the Greek Scriptures and the Christian militants?" (577) In fact, we already observed several instances when Voltaire talks about one religion to direct his criticism towards the other; in previous entries like "Nécessaire", Islam is criticized but through the voice of a character whose name is Islamic, thus suggesting a writing tactic for referring to another faith, Christianity, which was Voltaire's primary target as per his famous *l'Infâme*. In the "Catéchisme Chinois" he draws analogies and parallels to criticize a sect and to favor a philosopher.

¹²⁶ Once again, there is an implicit meaning in this sentence. A note in the *Dictionnaire Philosophique* suggests that it is an: "allusion à un interdit alimentaire, qui défend aux Juifs de consommer la chair du porc ou son sang." (544) "Boudin" is a sausage made with a concentrated blood of pork, which creates a contradiction in this sentence as the Hebreux (breuxeh) would not care to keep "le boudin" for themselves. Not only is this dialogue full of anagrams and analogies, but is also filled with contradictory notions, demonstrating Voltaire's deliberate neutrality towards all other religions but Christianity.

¹²⁷ Note "une once" is the French translation for "one ounce" in English.

In this instance, Voltaire's use of the anagram Breuxeh may indicate his reasons to criticize the Jewish religion, while at the same time avoid being direct about it, but Chisick observes that Voltaire perceived the Hebrew Scriptures as partaking in fanaticism: "First, the Hebrew Scriptures reflect[ed] a revealed ideology beyond rational criticism, and that ideology resulted in large-scale suffering and loss of life, directly negating the key Enlightenment values of *humanité* and toleration. Second, the paradigm of Hebrew fanaticism and persecution was adopted by the Christians, whose dogmatism and brutality Voltaire condemns every bit as harshly as he does similar instances among the Hebrews." (583) This condemnation of cultural and religious practices is visible in the continuation of their conversation, in which Voltaire denounces the abusive "Papist" Catholics who blindly follow their religion: (Le Japonais answering L'Indien) "Ensuite, il y a les pispates qui certains jours chaque semaine, et même pendant un temps considérable de chaque année aimerait cent fois mieux manger pour cents écus de turbots, de truites, de soles, de saumons, d'esturgeons, que de se nourrir d'une blanquette de veau qui ne reviendrait pas à quatre sous." (173)

Voltaire is revolted by the lavish lifestyle of the catholic representants who would abuse the wealth of the Church instead of giving it to the poorest as the biblical commandments suggested. In both cases, the author uses anagrams to avoid being considered an obvious antisemite or anti-Christian. There is much more to be analyzed in this example, but my interest consists in demonstrating the double, even triple, layers of artifice used in this entry to reinforce the indirection of Voltaire's critical approach while remaining an anonymous author who meant to enlighten a large portion of population in his time. An additional form of artifice is that of Voltaire's recourse to parallelism with other religions, such as Islam and Confucianism that also

challenge traditional Judeo-Christian doctrines, which incites readers to analyze and think critically about their own beliefs and question the authority of religious establishments.

Finally, it is worth noting that the different ways of eating represented the heterogeneity of religious rituals, all homogenized in a sense that religions should be spiritual nourishment, and nourishment should not be something to fear. If a kitchen parallels religion and provides faith, then the “pauxcospies” or the “canusi” (additional anagrams used for episcopal and Japanese priests respectively), thus the representatives of religion, should not interfere in the nourishment process, represented metaphorically in this instance as the spiritual faith:¹²⁸

L’Indien: Mais enfin, il faut qu’il y ait une cuisine dominante, la cuisine du roi.

Le Japonais: Je l’avoue, mais quand le roi du Japon a fait bonne chère, il doit être de bonne humeur; il ne doit pas empêcher ses bons sujets de digérer. (174)

Le Japonais mentions that the authorities should not prevent their subjects from digesting food, which serves as a metaphor for faith. The use of analogies, anagrams and figurative discourse represents again various modes of artifice to help the author express his thoughts indirectly. The content of this fully allegorical dialogue-entry suggests that all faiths should be practiced in peace without fear of persecution, just like people should not fear cooking or eating different foods. Additionally, Le Japonais comments that “Il est vrai qu’on ne doit point disputer des goûts; mais on en dispute et la querelle s’échauffe.” (172) This observation comes from a French saying “on ne dispute pas les goûts et les couleurs,” meaning that everyone has different tastes, and it is only normal. However, in this context, it refers to the choice of one’s faith, suggesting

¹²⁸ A similar idea is expressed in the entry “Evangile,” in which the narrator writes: “Les rites de la religion sont de même nature.” (277)

that despite his anti-Judeo-Christian sentiments Voltaire does respect and affirm the concept of religious tolerance without any bias.

As the series of Voltaire's "Catéchismes" continue from the Japanese kitchen to a shorter metaphorical story which also mentions food, though in the form of fruits, "Catéchisme du Jardinier" is the final catechism in the dictionary between the interlocutors Tuctan and Karpos, Karpos meaning "fruit" in Greek. This dialogue is meant to demonstrate the decency of the working class compared to the arrogance of religious representants, as Tuctan is a Muslim priest who is rude and arrogant. The gardener is a simple and modest man, while Tuctan, who comes to bother him, also holds the Turkish title of *bacha* (pasha) indicating a person of importance. The author shows in this case the opposition of nationality and the inequality of their status, though implicitly the gardener's intelligence proves superior to that of the *bacha*. This dialogue is composed of brief questions and answers, and like all the previous entries, it has religion as its dominant theme.

Tuctan: Tu as là de très belles figues!

Karpos: Mon bacha, elles sont fort à votre service!

Tuctan: On dit que tu as une aussi jolie fille.

Karpos: Oui mon bacha, mais elle n'est pas à votre service.

Tuctan: Pourquoi cela, misérable?

Karpos: C'est que je suis un honnête homme. Il m'est permis de vendre mes figues, mais non pas de vendre ma fille. (178)

It is worth noting the address of both protagonists, as Tuctan refers to Karpos using the familiar “you” (he “tutoies”) while the gardener is more respectful and answers back by using the formal “vous.”¹²⁹ While the gardener is socially inferior, he is more decent and intelligent as opposed to the arrogance of the *bacha*. Sensing the good manners and the intelligence of the gardener, Tuctan notices that he is both reasonable and has strong principles: “Tu es un raisonneur, tu as donc des principes.” (179) Innocent and hierarchically inferior, the gardener proves to be superior by his behavior. In this instance, the gardener serves as the voice of reason, moderation, and tact, representing the common sense and the wisdom of ordinary citizens. Through the voice of the gardener Voltaire highlights the discrepancy between professed faith and moral conduct.

The combination of work and nature was more steady than hierarchical disposition, and Karpos does not hesitate to let the Turkish dignitary know that he would proceed to pledge allegiance to anyone who would replace the superiors of his country as long as he could continue doing his humble work: (Karpos to Tuctan) “Si vous étiez chassé, c’est comme si vous étiez mort, car vous auriez un successeur auquel il faudrait que je fisse serment.” (179) The gardener allows himself to make this hostile comment, as we already saw that he had “des principes” and he had swallowed the insults of the *bacha*, who talked about his daughter without respect and called him a “miserable,” even though by the end of the dialogue he changed his tone. Additionally, when Tuctan asked him if he would submit to his commands should this island be taken, Karpos expresses his opinions that regimes come and go but the working man will always have his bread and water:

Tuctan: Je suis curieux de tes principes.

¹²⁹ “Tutoyer” and “vouvoyer” are respectively the familiar and formal way of addressing someone.

Karpos: C'est par exemple d'être bon mari, bon père, bon voisin, bon jardinier. Je ne vais pas au-delà et j'espère que Dieu me fera miséricorde.

Tuctan: Et tu crois qu'il me fera miséricorde à moi qui suis le gouverneur de ton île?

Karpos: Comment voulez-vous que je le sache ? Est-ce à moi de deviner comment Dieu en use avec les bachas. C'est une affaire entre vous et lui, je ne m'en mêle en aucune sorte.

Tuctan: Par Mahomet, je suis fort content de cet idolâtre-là. Adieu mon ami; Allah vous ait en sa sainte garde!

Karpos: Theos ait pitié de vous, mon bacha! (180)

Tuctan shows inconsistencies and contradictions within his discourse, as he is first contemptuous, then curious, and finally friendly as he blesses the gardener by the name of Mahomet, who returns the blessing using the Pagan God Theos. Considering that no further conflict arises between them despite the difference in their worshipped divinities, one could reassert Voltaire's view on religion in general. One could also assume that this dialogue is composed to advocate for social justice and compassion, as Karpos wishes Tuctan to have the piety of Theos, which is God in the Greek New Testament. In addition, this dialogue entry demonstrates the metaphor of gardening to delve into the themes of growth, cultivation, and the value of honest work.

The previously discussed "Catéchimes" denounce superstition and religious extremism, which have a thematic connection with another philosophical dialogue, not included in the *Philosophical Dictionary* but worth discussing – *Les Dialogues d'Evhémère*. This is a satirical work that parodies the notions of religious myths and divinities. The character Evhémère is most

likely Voltaire's mouthpiece and educates his disciple Callicrate about the dangers of conventional religious narratives and instead encourages secular interpretations of divine entities.¹³⁰ Evhémère condemns "la superstition du vulgaire des Grecs qui croyaient que les planètes étaient habitées par les divinités." (56) In fact, from the outset, the dominant theme of the dialogue is superstition, which is criticized and denounced in bitter and various ways:

Callicrate: Dites-moi donc qui est le plus sot et le plus méchant!

Evhémère: C'est la superstition.

Callicrate: Pourquoi le plus superstitieux est le plus méchant?

Evhémère: C'est que le superstitieux croit faire par devoir ce que les autres font par habitude ou par un excès de folie. Un barbare ordinaire... quand il a bien tué, bien volé, bien bu le vin de ceux qu'il vient d'assassiner, bien violé des filles des pères des familles égorgées, n'ayant plus besoin de rien devient tranquille et humain pour se délasser. Il est comme le lion qui ne court plus après la proie dès qu'il n'a plus faim. Mais le superstitieux est comme le tigre qui tue et qui déchire encore même qu'il est rassasié. (4)

One may notice the violent, excess of language in describing the influence of superstition that Voltaire's mouthpiece does not spare, as superstition is rooted in one's consciousness and is

¹³⁰ The name Evhémère most probably refers to an ancient Greek philosopher Evhemerus. He proposed the idea that gods were deified historical figures, offering rational rather than metaphysical explanations of his spiritual beliefs. This said, just like in the previous entries, these names are open to interpretation, are speculative and based on common associations with the etymology or symbolic nature of names. As for Callicrate, who is portrayed as a disciple, his name may suggest a combination of beauty and strength, referring to separate parts of his name, as "cali" may be associated with "kalos" in Greek, meaning "beauty", while "crate" is another Greek word meaning "strength." While those characters' names remain speculative, they are based on etymological, linguistic, and symbolic associations contributing to the contextual development of the dialogue's analysis, such as the assumption of Kou as "Qui" and Cu-Su as "Qui sut" as mentioned previously.

almost irreversible.¹³¹ This conversation shocks the disciple Callicrate who then inquires if all humans are superstitious:

Callicrate: L'espèce humaine est donc horrible?

Evhémère: Il y a quelques moutons parmi le grand nombre de ces animaux, mais la plupart sont des loups et des renards.” (9)

This insinuates that in their society most of the population submits to irrational and mythical religious principles. This creates a paradoxical feeling in Callicrate who inquires if it is God's will to create such evil notions. Such a sentiment questions the conventional idea of God's kindness, as we saw in the interaction between Sélim and Osmin: “Callicrate: Dieu n'a pas pu empêcher le mal? Et en ce cas, est-il tout puissant, ou il a pu et il ne l'a pas fait; alors où est la bonté ?” (18) This question posited by the disciple opens a way for doubting the conventional understanding of God's kindness, although one should ask why we would assume that God would be kind in the first place?

The force of superstition represented a vast barrier for intellectual progress, infusing minds with unreasonable ideas and fear. It pervaded many aspects of life concerning humans' ability to think logically, forcing them towards absurdities and irrational beliefs. Voltaire's protagonist Evhémère considered it the most dangerous force that demoted progress and hindered logic, reason, and critical thinking. In some way, it is a testament to human creativity,

¹³¹ Casanova, the author of *Histoire de ma vie*, has in fact profited by people's superstition to make fortunes, sleep with beautiful women and even succeeded in escaping prison because of his cellmate's superstitiousness. This author chose this name Casanova on his own, and observed the importance of euphonic names, including Voltaire, as he writes that Voltaire would not have reached such success and glory in life had his name remained François-Marie Arouet. (17) This idea is resonant with Voltaire's use of many symbolic or modified names to spread implicitly his messages and intentions.

its ability to invent wonderful stories and then succumb to these stories because of the inevitability of the finality of life, which forced most to become superstitious and to believe in the existence of an afterlife, heaven, and hell -- concepts that the clergy used to manipulate people, giving them false hope or false fear. Pearson writes in *Voltaire Almighty* that “atheist materialists, like Diderot, Helvétius and d’Hobach believed that matter is eternal and constantly evolving, so that ‘nature’ is simply what we call its current configuration. Being part of that ‘nature’, we humans are bound to see it as well ordered: all talk of a Divine Creator is mere superstition and infantile illusion.” (93) It is true that many surprising phenomena are configured in such harmonious ways that people are incited to believe there is a divine intervention behind it. A force, there is, but it is the force of evolution for creating and preserving life and consciousness rather than a force represented by religious institutions.

In either case, despite the importance of the abovementioned topics, it is important to highlight that the use of various facets of artifice contributed to the expression of Voltairean ideologies which called for intellectual freedom, consistently questioned the legitimacy of religious doctrines, and encouraged his audience to dare to think rationally, without any external influence, using their own minds to create and to prosper instead of begging to unknown entities for material or immaterial assistance. While the prominent theme in most of Voltaire’s dialogue form entries represent a critique of organized religion, superstition, and fanaticism, it is worth emphasizing that diverse other themes of reasonableness, knowledge, and empirical observations are also mentioned by Voltaire’s various characters and those of many other Enlightenment thinkers. Freedom of expression, which is symbolized in some way by inventing fictional names and stories which critique authoritarianism and challenge it through the respect of individual

rights, is prevalent in this special dictionary, which played a crucial role in elevating the consciousness of French and European society to higher and more logical levels.

CHAPTER 7: ROUSSEAU

None of us know exactly how it's going to end; that's what makes the present so important.

Anonymous

Meta-cognition in Rousseau's Dialogues: *Rousseau juge de Jean-Jaques*

Scholars of Rousseau have noted that his genius was coupled with an instability, which produced his spontaneous conditions of consciousness and consequently, the creative works that often reflected his mental states. *Les Confessions*, for instance, one of Rousseau's most innovative works, are repurposed in his dialogic work *Rousseau juge de Jean-Jaques*,¹³² which is the text he produced after realizing that his confessions, and the intended honesty of his statements, generated an unwanted public reaction. The content of these texts sometimes overlaps, even though the *Confessions* are presented in Rousseau's own voice, while *Dialogues* are represented by a fictional Rousseau voice which discusses a third, initially absent character Jean-Jaques's works with another protagonist called Le François -- a character representing the persecutorial opinions and, initially, unfounded defamatory statements about the philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau.

In this chapter I will examine the various events in Rousseau's life that led him to revisit *Les Confessions* by having recourse to the dialogue form, which offered a different version of

¹³² Note in the cited edition the name "Jacques" is written as "Jaques." This may be an authorial maneuver with names, constituting an illustration of an external artifice, although other editions use the name "Jean-Jacques," so I will not elaborate on that detail. Additionally, it is worth noting that Rousseau's French has some grammatical elements of older versions of French, which will be apparent in the ensuing citations.

analysis through fictional voices rather than a directly autobiographical one.¹³³ Considering that once published, the texts could not be changed, the only remaining option was the production of a new text to make amendments or to counterattack critics or schemers; thus, Rousseau produced other works which either confirmed or refuted his previous statements and/or responded to the critics, such as *Les Confessions* (1765-1770), *Les Dialogues* (1772-1776), published in 1782, and *Les Rêveries* (1776-1778). I argue here that Rousseau's *Dialogues* are a response to his very own *Confessions*, as they attempt to recalibrate ideas or statements that were previously expressed with more honesty than the public could accept. The readers may confirm Rousseau's attitude vis-à-vis his candor as he writes that in *Confessions*: "J'ai promis ma confessions, non ma justification: je m'arrête ainsi sur ce point. C'est à moi d'être vrai, c'est au lecteur d'être juste. Je ne lui demanderai jamais rien de plus." (359) Rousseau attempts to balance out through these late works some of his previously stated controversial statements, or various kinds of misunderstandings, which resulted in great emotional pain for him.¹³⁴ This said, a combined analysis of *Confessions* and *Dialogues* permits us an understanding of the complex psychological states that affected the author generally, both at the personal level and throughout his career.

By creating this original work, *Les Confessions*, Rousseau gives away, *nolens volens*, a piece of his privacy. With every original step he takes in the composition of his confessions, he

¹³³ The fictional Rousseau's role is to judge in fairness the deeds of Jean-Jaques. He is depicted as a neutral character although we see him side with Le François initially, then change and argue against the latter's baseless accusations, which consists of plagiarism, immorality, literary theft, subversion and promotion of dangerous ideas.

¹³⁴ Contradiction existed within Rousseau himself; he writes in the first volume of *Confessions*: "Toujours craintif, en flétant dans cette cruelle incertitude, j'avois recours pour en sortir aux expédients les plus risibles, et pour lesquels je ferois volontiers enfermer si je lui voyois faire autant." (243) He tries to say that he would sometimes behave contrary to what could be considered as rational. Additionally, he had found contradictory texts by authors such as Locke, Malebranche, Leibnitz, and Descartes: "J'ai aperçu bientôt que tous ces auteurs étoient en contradiction presque perpetuelle." (237) Though it may attest to the concept of human irrationality that contradiction exists within everyone, not just Rousseau, a series of misunderstandings and contradictions troubled the author's already disturbed inner self. In another parallel, Starobinski writes in *Blessings in Disguise*: "remedies are to be found near where poisonous plants grow," (120) indicating that contradiction is an inescapable part of our lives.

leaves a noticeable trace of feelings, intentions, and a detailed account of events; events that could be reinterpreted, and emotions that could to be relived differently in the future.¹³⁵

Rousseau's determination to amend his previous statements motivated him to create his *Dialogues* in which he makes use of various forms of artifice to recover his lost relationships and reestablish his reputation. "Rousseau exhibits a tendency to ascribe to certain events a fatal significance," (131) writes Starobinski in his well-known work *Jean-Jacques Rousseau: Transparency and Obstruction* (1971), in the sense that the author is sensitive and overly emotional at times. Starobinski describes Jean-Jacques's obsession with wanting to be perfect, to be loved, while also being compulsive and spontaneous, which results in the deterioration of his numerous friendships, something that the author had not intended or predicted. This is the reason why Rousseau produces another work, *Les Dialogues*, as they allow him to generate different confessional formulations, allowing the fictional protagonists of his text to express ideas which might have been rejected had he expressed them in his own voice.

He configures the dialogues in such a way that one of the protagonists, Le François, accuses Jean-Jaques (J.J.) of misdeeds he did not commit, while the second protagonist, a fictional Rousseau, adopts a rather neutral position, at least in the beginning of this text, and navigates through Le François's statements to either defend Jean-Jaques or to respond to the accusations brought forward by his "enemies" -- the word "enemies" in quotes because these adversaries were Jean-Jaques's former friends with whom the latter had close relations that had gradually become strained with disagreements and misunderstandings.

¹³⁵ One of Tolkien's famous lines is that "True creation requires sacrifice," which is a line by Celebrimbor from the series of *Lord of the Rings: The Rings of Power* (2022). The loss of Rousseau's privacy was the reward (or curse) for the originality of the *Confessions*, as the scales were balanced through the gain of notoriety and loss of privacy.

Before delving into the analysis of his texts, it is worth recalling certain biographical details that could shed light on possible illnesses that affected Rousseau's mental states. The medicine of the time defined mental illnesses differently from today's medicine. Rousseau was suffering from several mental health issues, such as stress, anxiety, and panic attacks that modern readers may identify by studying the content of his writings. Those caused him to live in constant fear and complicated his daily routine, forcing him into further isolation and fostering depression. Rousseau's inner world must have collapsed on itself when he was adult enough to understand the concept of finality and his innocent role in causing the irreparable loss of his mother at birth. Perhaps it is the reason why the author affirms in *Du contrat social* that "L'homme est né libre et partout il est dans les fers," (3) meaning that freedom, to its full extent, joy and enjoyment were unattainable, as he was bearing a too heavy burden throughout his life. After all, the amount of time grieved over his loss could be equivalent to the same amount of time of being locked in a personal mental prison.¹³⁶ The reader must consider the heavy responsibility on Rousseau, whose father would cry in his presence and ask him: "Jean-Jaques, parlons de ta mère." (7) What could his inner self feel in these recurring situations but a sense of powerlessness and sorrow that had accompanied him throughout his life, building his defense mechanisms accordingly? "Eh bien mon père, nous allons donc pleurer?" (7) he would reply in these situations and see his father burst in tears who would then demand: "Ah, rends-la moi, console-moi d'elle: rempli le vide qu'elle a laissé dans mon ame." (7) Despite these tortuous

¹³⁶ Rousseau's perfectionist tendencies were evident in his personal and philosophical life. First, he had famously argued that people are inherently good in their natural state and corrupted only by society. This idealistic view of human nature led him to criticize various institutions or the norms of society, as he advocated for rather radical reforms. Second, Rousseau's belief in creating a utopian society which would be based on the principles of liberty and equality faced numerous challenges in practical implementation. Finally, and most importantly, his perfectionist tendencies might have contributed to his dissatisfaction with himself and others, causing strained relationships with friends, or lovers. While this perfectionist character contributed to the creation of original and influential ideas, it also led him to wrestle with personal and philosophical complexities that weighed heavy on his mental health.

situations, Rousseau always held tender feelings for his father, all the while bearing silently the burden of growing up without maternal love combined with irreconcilable paternal sorrow. It is worth noting that these psychological circumstances must have shaped indirectly the irresistible need of self-defense and self-explanations of being innocent, which is discernable in almost all his literary works, and is the adjacent psychological burden that seems to have conditioned his mood and his talent for producing literary and autobiographical works.

In the complex composition of Rousseau's family, the father's approach must have been traumatic and must have shaped his son's mentality which was substantially affected by conflicts and self-accusatory memories.¹³⁷ Höfle assumes that Rousseau's representation of his dialogues "probably corresponded to a desperate need, grounded in the author's self-hatred and the desire to distance not only from his public image, but also from himself." (267) This observation echoes Starobinski's analysis which confirms Rousseau's regret for being famous. This inescapable self-hatred affected him at both conscious and subconscious levels. When he produced *Emile* (1762), in which he insisted that students should leave formal education, and develop skills on their own, rather than learning in a community, he must have expressed his own desire for reaching a "utopian freedom," a freedom of autodidacticism, striving towards a sense of personal liberty and relief, considering the tremendous guilt and sorrow he lived with.

Hence, misunderstandings and contradictions follow Rousseau throughout his life. Still earlier in his *Confessions*, we see a Rousseau who submits to the brutality of his employer -- Monsieur Ducommun, who was a young man of a very violent character, and who must have significantly shaped Rousseau's mentality and behavior: "Mon maître appelé M. Ducommun

¹³⁷ The confession of gaining pleasure from sexual humiliation is perhaps an indication of other traumas Rousseau experienced while growing up, especially as we see him being very sensitive and emotional as a child.

étoit un jeune homme rustre et violent, qui vint à bout en très peu de temps de ternir tout l'éclat de mon enfance, d'abrutir mon caractère aimant et vif, et de me réduire par l'esprit ainsi que par la fortune à mon véritable état d'apprenti.”(30) Additionally, we hear Rousseau confess that he was a submissive lover, as he recalls his relationship with Mademoiselle Lambercier in the following manner: “Être aux genoux d'une maîtresse impérieuse, obéir à ses ordres, avoir des pardons à lui demander étoient pour moi de très douces jouissances, et plus ma vive imagination m'enflammoit le sang, plus j'avois l'air d'un amant transi.” (17) Rousseau was accustomed to pleasing others, while enduring pain and humiliation for himself and affirms, after having endured the character of his master Ducommun, that “les goûts les plus vils, la plus basse polissonnerie succédèrent à mes aimables amusemens.” (30) In the *Dialogue troisième* of *Dialogues*, the protagonist Le François reaffirms this state of being by citing a line that Rousseau the author had written to Madame Beaumont: “Les peuples une fois accoutumés à des maîtres ne sont plus en état de s'en passer.” (921) This statement is controversial because it is said in a critical manner, but at the same time it suggests that Rousseau found pleasure in humiliation. The reasons for people finding pleasure in sexual humiliation can vary greatly and depend on the interplay of psychological, social, and biological factors. In Rousseau's case, one may assume that the power dynamics of experiencing dominance or submission, control, or surrender, might be counterposed by his constant need of “being right,” or the arousal that may stem from the eroticization of feelings of shame, embarrassment, and humiliation.

Les Dialogues is not simply a means of self-defense against the accusations of plagiarism, the hatred of the Encyclopedists or the dismissal of immoral thoughts, but it is also a way of attaining objectivity, through the splitting of the “self” and the “other,” followed by their consequent dialectic interactions. The recourse to an eponymous character is not, however, an

original move. As we saw in the chapter four, La Hontan had already employed a similar technique in 1703, using an eponymous character La Hontan to denounce the religious missionaries in his *Dialogues curieux*. The very fact of employing different voices in a dialogic format explains that Rousseau's identity would continuously be at issue in this work. Knee and Allard observe that "[h]e explains there that he has chosen the dialogue form in order to discuss the 'pros' and 'cons' of the public's view of him." (63) Hösle notes that "[s]tudying the unclear relationship between the authorial 'I,' the interlocutor 'me' and the third party 'Le François' represented the public perception of Rousseau and alterity." (267) Le François's alterity is necessary to the extent that it moves the wheel of the dialogue towards the necessary points of discussion, such as Jean-Jaques's reputation, the wrongful accusations or the attacks against him and his texts.¹³⁸

In the *Dialogues*, the author is both the subject and the object: "Ici, l'autre c'est le même" says Pujol who qualifies Rousseau's protagonist as "un moi dédoublé." (199) He is the subject to the extent that both protagonists' voices are his own, and he is the object as both protagonists discuss Jean-Jaques's achievements and failures. The most discussed matters in the dialogues are Rousseau's severed ties with many of his contemporaries, unfounded or exaggerated allegations against him, which explain his resultant solitary lifestyle. The author, who had previously written in *Confessions* "j'étois né pour l'amitié" (364) was suddenly accused by his friends of spreading immoral ideas and having plagiarized several musical compositions. It is worth noting that

¹³⁸ Rousseau and Le François are interlocutors in a dialogue which is initially meant to condemn J.J (Jean-Jaques) who is "L'Auteur des Livres" in the subsequent discussions and who represents the identity of the author Jean-Jacques Rousseau. The splitting of these characters is an illustration of an artifice employed by Rousseau who distributed different voices to each of these protagonists; Le François denounces Jean-Jaques in the beginning without having any truthful evidence, only rumors and hearsay, and the character Rousseau is depicted as neutral initially and a proponent of Le François's unfounded accusations solely for the purpose of gaining his confidence and friendship, in order to have the power of influencing him later in the text, which is exactly how the plot occurs.

Rousseau's musical system was unorthodox, because he was a practical musician, and his musical philosophy, according to Eric Taylor, "was unduly dogmatic, short sighted and inaccurate." (231) Taylor must have made this observation because Rousseau had developed his own system of musical notation, which was numbered and compatible with typography, but whose invention had been rejected by the Académie des Sciences, which had praised, however, his innovative spirit and creativity. We may recall from the *Confessions* that Rousseau made a living in Paris by copying music and contributed to the completion of the "music" section of the *Encyclopédie*, "Lettres sur la musique française," as he was driven to help Diderot before the latter wrote *Le fils naturel* (1757), which became the object of their relationship's falling out.¹³⁹

In 1742 Rousseau composed his first opera *Les Muses galantes* and ten years later he wrote his most famous opera *Le Devin du village* which, however, seemed inconsistent with Rousseau's musical abilities; thus, critics started to claim that he was not the composer of that opera. Therefore, rumors started and propagated as fast as fire in the population. The topic of musical compositions is thoroughly discussed in Rousseau's *Dialogues* by Le François and a "seemingly" impartial character Rousseau, whose neutral behavior demonstrates the hidden frustration and almost bursting anger that were cautiously compressed and concealed in his narrative.¹⁴⁰ Rousseau the character pretends to completely abhor this personage about whom Le François speaks. However, he gradually commences the defense of this "Auteur," establishing

¹³⁹ *Le fils Naturel* is one of Diderot's dialogues that explores the themes of illegitimacy, and the role of identity within social class. The main protagonist, Dorval, who is the son of a nobleman, discovers the truth about himself; thus, this dialogue-play investigates the difficulties of social expectations and the complexities of familial relationships. Rousseau criticized *Le fils naturel*, qualifying it as immoral and lacking virtue, which caused the deterioration of their relationship especially insofar as both authors had previous disagreements over other matters.

¹⁴⁰ Deliberate acting or purposeful (in)action were variants of artifice that the character Rousseau employed throughout the first and second sections of the *Dialogues*.

slowly that he does not think that such a talented person would be capable of the crimes despite Le François's insistence that he had heard those rumors from the *Messieurs*:¹⁴¹

Rousseau: Quelles incroyables choses que je viens d'apprendre! [says the character Rousseau after learning the crimes of the "Auteur"] Je n'en reviens pas: non, je n'en reviendrai jamais. Juste ciel! Quel abominable homme! Qu'il m'a fait de mal! Que je vais le détester!

Le François: Et notez bien que c'est ce même homme dont les pompeuses productions vous ont si charmé, si ravi par les beaux préceptes de vertu qu'il y étale avec tant de faste.
(667)

The readers may immediately sense the ironic and almost ridiculing tone of the character Rousseau who behaves so dramatically, declaring that he can never feel as the same person after hearing the various accusations and crimes of this "Auteur des Livres." This concealed ridicule is encountered by the naïve and genuine emotion of Le François who somewhat ironically and unknowingly reminds the readership that "J.J" is a genius because the character Rousseau had truly appreciated the profoundness of Jean-Jaques's texts. As mentioned above, J.J. (Jean-Jaques) and Rousseau the character are different layers representing the eighteenth-century philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau.

It is only gradually that the character Rousseau leads his interlocutor to a conflict, having adopted the specific strategy of befriending le François at the outset as already specified:

¹⁴¹ *Les Messieurs* is understood to be the intellectual circle of writers and philosophers, such as Voltaire, d'Alembert, Grimm, Diderot, Concorde, Condillac and Baron d'Holbach.

Rousseau: Ayant lu plusieurs fois les écrits que J.J. s'attribue, l'effet total qu'il en a résulté sur mon ame a toujours été de me rendre plus humain, plus juste, meilleur que je n'étais auparavant; jamais je ne me suis occupé de ces livres sans profit pour la vertu.
(696)

The character Rousseau slowly shares his true opinions about the readings he has done, and compliments Jean-Jaques on his ability to produce such works that “touch one’s soul.” Le François, however, had not read any of these works, because he was influenced by the rumors, so he admits that he may not express his opinion in full integrity:

Le François: Ne les ayant pas lus c'est ce que je ne saurais faire; mais j'en demanderai la liste à nos Messieurs qui les ont recueillis, et je vous la communiquerai. Je me rappelle seulement qu'on cite une note de *l'Emile* où il enseigne ouvertement l'assassinat.

Rousseau: Comment, Monsieur, il enseigne ouvertement l'assassinat, et cela n'a pas été remarqué par la première lecture! Il falloit qu'il eût en effet des lecteurs bien prévenus ou bien distraits. Et où donc avoir les yeux les Auteurs de ces sages et graves réquisitoires sur lesquels on l'a si régulièrement décrété? Quelle trouvaille pour eux! Quel regret de l'avoir manquée! (694)

Clearly, the character Rousseau is still mocking the previously suggested idea by exaggerating his exclamations and the degree of surprise related to the opinions expressed about *Emile*. Amusingly enough, Le François does not notice it, probably because the character Rousseau had aligned his views with those of Le François at first, and was gradually stating the opinion he had formed:

Rousseau: Je vous l'ai dit sans mystère et je vous le répéterai sans détour. La force de vos preuves ne me laisse pas douter un moment des crimes qu'elle attestent, et là-dessus je pense exactement comme vous:¹⁴² mais vous unissez des choses que je sépare. L'Auteur des Livres et celui des crimes vous paraît la même personne; je crois fondé à en faire deux. Voilà, Monsieur, le mot de l'énigme.

Le François: Comment cela, je vous prie? Voici qui me paraît tout nouveau.

Rousseau: A tort, selon moi; car n'avez-vous pas dit qu'il n'étoit pas l'Auteur du *Devin du village*?

Le François: Il est vrai, c'est un fait dont personne ne doute plus [the fact about Rousseau never having written the famous opera *Le Devin du village* which had an astounding success in the royal court], mais quant à ses ouvrages je n'ai point osé encore de les disputer (674).¹⁴³

It is worth noting that Rousseau the character is depicted as having read and studied the works of the "Author," while le François had refused to even try to read them as they were supposedly blasphemous, corrupting, and offensive. It is only during the second section of the *Dialogues* that le François decides to study these works, on the condition that Rousseau the character would find this "Auteur des Livres." Rousseau the author employs his eponymous character to act obliviously at first, which is an occurrence of both external and internal artifice as this character

¹⁴² The crimes that the protagonists discuss are a) literary theft, considering that Rousseau was accused of plagiarism, b) corruption of morals as Rousseau's writings were told to promote dangerous ideas, c) misconduct and other manipulative behavior because of the influence of his literary works.

¹⁴³ Le François speaks about Rousseau's other works, that he never studied, and only knows them through rumors; a fact that he acknowledges later when he agrees to read those books and realizes he was wrong. The two interlocutors are discussing Rousseau's famous opera *Le Devin du village* which was performed in 1752 at the royal court in Fontainebleau. That opera has been a great success, which is why Le François describes it as plagiarized, and the protagonist Rousseau initially feigns to be surprised about Jean-Jaques' abilities.

has the same name yet he analyses another with also a similar name (thus, demonstrating a double instance of external artifice), and he narrates it in a naïve and innocent tone, which successfully persuades Le François to join him finally in defending Jean-Jaques, who is Rousseau the author on three diverse layers.

At some point, they agree to disagree. The character Rousseau keeps defending “L’Auteur des Livres” capitalizing A for “auteur” and L for “livres,” and demanding Le François prove that Jean-Jaques is not the author of the very successful opera *Le devin du village* as well as many other literary works that fascinated him. This serves to demonstrate to all adversaries and enemies that Jean-Jaques was the composer he had claimed to be, while in the *Dialogues*, Le François tells Rousseau that Jean-Jaques did not write that opera, inducing the inadvertent “surprise” of the character Rousseau:

Le François: Sans vous parler donc des pillages bien attestés dont on a prouvé d’abord que cette pièce étoit composée, sans même insister sur le doute s’il sait faire des vers, et par conséquent, s’il a pu faire ceux du *Devin du village*, je me tiens à une chose plus positive et plus sure; c’est qu’il ne sait pas la musique; d’où l’on peut, à mon avis, conclure avec certitude qu’il n’a pas fait celle de cet Opéra.

Rousseau: Il ne sait pas la musique! Voilà encore une de ces découvertes auxquelles je ne me serois pas attendu.

Le François: N’en croyez là-dessus ni moi, ni personne mais vérifiez par vous-même.

Rousseau: Si j’avois à surmonter l’horreur d’approcher du personnage que vous venez de peindre, ce ne seroit assurément pas pour vérifier s’il sait la Musique: la question n’est pas assez intéressante lorsqu’il s’agit d’un pareil scélérat. (674-675)

Alongside the character Rousseau's mocking tone, there is a "seemingly" surprised tonality, and a sense of indignation that may be found when Jean-Jaques is accused of not knowing music. The highly dramatic exclamations attest to it. Even though Rousseau the character is created to show how to study Jean-Jaques's works properly, he succeeds in dissipating some of the vilest accusations by humorously showing the falsehood behind them. The only proof Le François had consisted of hearsay, so he becomes defensive at the request of proof and responds without foundation:

Le François: La preuve? Il y en a cent. Toutes péremptoires.

Rousseau: C'est beaucoup. Je m'en contente d'une. Mais je la veux, et pour cause, indépendante du témoignage d'autrui. (675)

Le François fails to provide any proof at all, as he never studied any of Jean-Jaques's books. Thus, the two protagonists make a deal: Le François will have to study the works of Jean-Jacques, while the character Rousseau will find this author and interact with him in person. The author Rousseau structures his dialogue in such a way that the eponymous character goes to find J.J. at the very moment when the latter was in the process of composing that very same visit in his *Dialogues*; therefore, the fictional Rousseau and the author Rousseau (represented as J.J.) meet at the moment when the author Rousseau was producing that exact occurrence textually. With their meeting, the boundaries of fiction and reality become symbiotically connected, and the fictional Rousseau discovers that Jean-Jaques is the opposite of what Le François had been describing all along, as J.J. was a friendly, caring, and compassionate person. As Kelly and Masters write in their introduction to Rousseau's *Dialogues*, "Whereas the center part of the *Dialogues* is a description of Jean-Jacques's character, the necessity for this description is provided by the false depiction of Jean-Jacques circulating in public opinion. From the beginning

of the work the real Jean-Jacques is placed in opposition to his reputation as ‘an abominable man’ or even a ‘monster.’” (244) The mystery to be solved by the interlocutors is the matter of the disproportion between the written books and the reputation of the author who produced them. Rousseau constructs his dialogues in such a way that the *Premier dialogue* creates a gradual conflict between the two protagonists, which is a conventional manner of producing a dialogic composition, so that the conflict is then resolved in the succeeding chapters. From that point of view, these dialogues resemble to an extent Diderot’s *Le Rêve de d’Alembert* where there is a conflict in the first section, which is reconciled in the subsequent sections. *Dialogues* also responds, using artifice, to antagonisms with friends documented at least as far back as the *Confessions*. In the *Deuxième dialogue*, the fictional Rousseau is more confident and demands evidence about Jean-Jacques’s “prétendue immoralité,” while the nature of the *Troisième dialogue* is more assertive as the character Rousseau affirms that Le François and his *Messieurs* were wrong in associating rumored Jean-Jacques with the real one, refuting the speculations of Le François about Jean-Jacques being an impostor.

Rousseau recounts in his *Confessions* how he attempts to recalibrate the score with one of his best friends, Diderot, toward whom he had contradictory feelings. First, when Rousseau learns that Diderot is imprisoned at the dungeons of Vincennes, he cries and asks the authorities to share a prison cell with him, as he could not bear the idea of his friend being held in prison:¹⁴⁴

J’écrivis à Madame de Pompadour pour la conjurer de le faire relâcher ou d’obtenir qu’on m’enferma avec lui. Je n’eus aucune réponse à ma lettre. Elle étoit trop peu raisonnable pour être efficace et je ne me flatte pas qu’elle ait contribué aux adoucissements qu’on mit

¹⁴⁴ One could speculate that such a devoted behavior of asking to be placed in a prison cell with another man has a more intimate setting of emotions. That relationship seemed to be a “bromance” rather than a friendship.

quelque tems après à la captivité du pauvre Diderot. Mais si elle eut duré quelque temps encore avec la même rigueur je crois que je serois mort de désespoir au pied de ce malheureux Donjon. Au reste, si ma lettre a produit peut d'effet je ne m'en suis pas, non plus, beaucoup fait valoir; car je n'en parlai qu'à très peu de gens, et jamais à Diderot lui-même. (348)

Regrettably, after Diderot published his *Le fils naturel*, Rousseau distanced himself from his former friend, though it is not clear if Diderot alluded to Rousseau when he wrote that that “[i]l n’y a que le méchant qui soit seul” (50)¹⁴⁵ in *Le fils*. Rousseau knew that Diderot had other friends who lived in solitude, but he felt affected enough to express his feelings in *Confessions*:

Ce que je me rappelle bien distinctement, dans cette occasion c'est qu'arrivant à Vincennes, j'étois dans une agitation qui tenoit du délire. Diderot l'aperçut; je lui en dis la cause, et je lui ai lu la prosopopée de Fabricius écrite en crayon sous un Chêne. Il m'exhorta de donner l'essor à mes idées et de concourir au prix. Je le fis et dès cet instant je fus perdu. Tout le reste de ma vie et de mes malheurs fut l'effet inévitable de cet instant d'égarement (365).¹⁴⁶

This confession, as well as others regarding Rousseau's disapproval of Diderot's behavior or some of his ideas, is offensive to Diderot, so Rousseau attempts to recalibrate this remark by softening his stance on Diderot later in the *Dialogues*: “Le philosophe Diderot dut être seul

¹⁴⁵ This is another reason for the misunderstanding between the two Enlightenment thinkers, the behavior by Diderot who simply expresses his opinion about lonely individuals with the straightforward mentality of the time. Diderot did not aim at Rousseau specifically, but the sensitive nature of Rousseau was stronger than his rational self, even if he loved and admired Diderot immensely for a long time.

¹⁴⁶ Let us observe that Rousseau tried to express his thoughts as sincerely as possible, although no one can truly grasp the extent of his sincerity expressed in his *Confessions*. This is not the only instance when Rousseau dramatically announces a decisive moment for failure; he behaves similarly in an episode with Madame de la Poplinière, refusing to do any creative work but then gradually starting to write again.

quand il écrivit cette réflexion [that of the lonely men].” (799) The character Rousseau acknowledges this to Le François when he tries to explain the extenuating circumstances surrounding that misunderstanding, going on to enumerate several other authors who preferred solitude.

Similarly, the friendship with David Hume, with whom Rousseau had developed a close relationship in 1766, falls apart when Hume writes: “a man who retires from life does not harm society. He only ceases to do good” (Hume 103). Rousseau feels targeted again but testimonies from the abovementioned authors attest that they never intended to make him feel that way. The readers of *Confessions* learn many details about other canonical authors of the era, such as Grimm, d’Alembert, Baron d’Holbach and especially Voltaire, who could not resist the chance to strike out at Rousseau. In the first part of confessions, Rousseau had shared that “être aimé de tout ce qui lui approchoit étoit le plus vif de ses désirs.” (14) Later in his career, after he gained fame and became the object of controversial accusations, he wrote a similar idea:

Rousseau : J’étois né pour l’amitié, mon humeur facile et douce la nourrissoit sans peine. Tant que j’ai vécu ignoré du public, je fus aimé de tous ceux qui me connurent, et je n’eus pas un seul ennemi. Mais sitôt que j’eus un nom, je n’eus plus d’amis. Ce fut un très grand malheur, un plus grand encore fut d’être environné de gens qui prenoient ce nom et qui n’usèrent des droits qu’il leur donnoit que pour m’entraîner à la perte. (362)

Once again, one may confirm Rousseau’s soft nature, which makes it understandable that he struggled with feelings of insecurity and preferred to be loved and have friends rather than to be famous and be alone; but unfortunately, he never succeeded in gaining back the love or the consideration of his previously supportive friends, despite his softened narrative about them in *Les Dialogues*.

Contrary to the *Confessions*, Rousseau's *Dialogues* are constructed in such a spirit that they do not lament his fate but rather reveal his feelings filtered through the artifice of fictional voices; however, the more Rousseau tried to escape his fate and his fame, the more they followed him regardless.¹⁴⁷

Le François: Tenez, Monsieur. Il n'y a dans tout ceci une chose qui m'étonne, c'est qu'un étranger isolé, sans parents, sans appui ne tenait à rien sur la terre, et voulant dire toutes ces choses-là, ait cru les pouvoir dire impunément.

Rousseau: Voilà ce qu'il n'a point cru, je vous assure. Il a dû s'attendre aux cruelles vengeance de tous ceux qu'offense la vérité, et il s'y est attendu. Il savoit que les Grands, les Vizirs, les Robins, les Financiers, les Médecins, les Prêtres, les philosophes et tous les gens de parti qui font de la société un vrai brigandage ne lui pardonneroit jamais de les avoir vus et montrés tels qu'ils sont. Il a dû s'attendre à la haine, aux persecutions de toutes espèces, non au deshonneur, à l'opprobre, à la diffamation. Non, Monsieur, ne croyez point que la destinée dans laquelle il est enseveli soit le fruit naturel de son zèle à dire sans crainte tout ce qu'il crut être vrai, bon, salutaire, utile. (926-927)

Not only does the eponymous character defend and justify Rousseau the author's actions, but he suggests that he should have been forgiven. Additionally, he convinces us that this author was scared and concerned about many truths that he may have said or written about influential people, certain authors, or concepts. In *The Prince*, Machiavelli writes: "Because there is no other way to guard oneself from flattery unless men understand that they do not offend you in

¹⁴⁷ In Armenian, there is a proverb that says, "it is better to lose an eye, than loose a reputation," meaning that once a reputation is affected, it may not be repaired under any circumstances, at least at the locale where the misfortune occurred.

telling you the truth, but when everyone can tell you the truth, they lack reverence for you” (126-127).¹⁴⁸ The author implied that not all truths were to be revealed, echoing the claim by Jean de la Bruyère that it was not wise to show wisdom among influential people of different opinions.¹⁴⁹ The reader may confirm that Rousseau admits being afraid, surprised, and tired, apparently because he did not expect that the involved parties would attempt to “dishonor or defame” him based on his confessions (926).¹⁵⁰ One could notice that it was naïve of him to think in such a way -- of course his contemporaries would feel especially offended if they were subjected to Rousseau’s lengthy and “sincere” criticisms of them. Additionally, according to Le François’s observations, revealing partial or eventful truths about others may not remain without consequences; an idea that the character Rousseau admits having understood in a hard way, reflecting Jean-Jaques’ views, and showing certain remorse for having exposed private details of his acquaintances, which is produced by the real voice of the philosopher Rousseau.

The question one might ask is: in what manner could these truths be harmful? Well, just like a printed text that is impossible to wipe from existence, the sour memory of criticism which may contain elements of personal or ideological sensitivities may also be dangerous and evoke vengeful feelings by the concerned parties. Unfortunately, Rousseau realizes it after finishing his *Confessions*, in which he claims that he tried to simply to tell the truth: “Je dis la vérité.” (234) In his last work, *Les Rêveries*, he realizes himself to be alone: “je suis seul.” (79) As kind-hearted as one may be, it is acknowledgeable that once any truth emerges, it stays on the surface forever. Information has a life of its own, and despite having softened certain aspects or instances through

¹⁴⁸ See Chapter 23 of Nicollo Machiavelli, *The Prince*.

¹⁴⁹ Jean de la Bruyère expresses this in *Les Caractères*, initially published in 1688, which is a collection of moral and satirical sketches.

¹⁵⁰ “deshonorer ou diffamer.” The question of sincerity reemerges again, proving that speaking in the first person is far more dangerous compared to the dialogic format which, on top of allowing numerous voices, allows the construction of various facets of artifice to be used as alibis should disagreements arise.

the production of his *Dialogues*, the content of Rousseau's *Confessions* shared so many private ideas about himself and his view of others that it was not going to be repaired easily; to some extent, Rousseau gave up his privacy and relationships for fame, and his regrets, while valid and compelling in the eyes of the readers, were to remain with him until the end of his life.

Reputation, credibility, or reliability are concepts that must not be transgressed, otherwise the harm emanating from those transgressions may last for as long as one lives.

Les Confessions revealed details about people who did not necessarily want to have their privacy or secrets publicized. While intending to produce a creative work, Rousseau certainly created one that coming generations studied and venerated, but he also revealed his feelings, his secrets, his views about almost all his friends, in the form of confessions, which did not prevent them from giving up on him. Some degree of concealment is necessary in life, just as the bubble that remains in the bottle after it is filled with water. Some might argue about the sincerity of Rousseau's *Confessions*; they may not be fully sincere, but they are sincere enough to reveal unwanted details -- who would have liked to see his or her friend produce an *oeuvre* and procure fame at the expense of their relationship? Not many, I would presume.

Finally, it is worth noting that Le François, who was meant to represent the voice of the French intelligentsia, was influenced by the *Messieurs* who conspired against Rousseau and was hateful at first of Jean-Jaques but comes around and regrets his previous attitude. The reversal of this behavior is also engineered by Rousseau the author, who creates a flexible character in Le François whom the protagonist Rousseau influences throughout the dialogues. If in the first two dialogues le François continuously accuses Jean-Jaques of all kinds of crimes, by the end, when he studies some of Jean-Jaques's works, he entirely changes his position:

Le François: J'ai pu me tromper tant que je jugeois sur la parole d'autrui. Mais après l'avoir lu moi-même j'ai su bientôt à quoi m'en tenir. Après avoir suivi les manœuvres de nos Messieurs, je suis surpris...J'ai trouvé les écrits de J.J. pleins d'affections d'ame qui ont pénétré la mienne. (933)

One may conclude that Rousseau was changed as well, because he did not seek to impress his audience anymore, but instead tried to make amends for his harsh comments in *Confessions* and used his protagonists, the fictional Rousseau, and Le François, to tone down some of his confessions which had offended a great number of people. He used the dialogue form as an artifice, in which the character Rousseau was depicted differently from the author, as well as many occurrences of internal artifice compelling the character Rousseau to express implicit ironic ideas or mocking exclamations as we saw above.

In conclusion, I believe the author introduced these two different voices in an effort to amend his previously made statements. Comparing the complete content of these two major works, the *Confessions* and the *Dialogues*, would be a tremendous task; thus, I only explored Rousseau's self-defensive strategies, his state of being and his strategies of persuasion, one of which consisted of having recourse to the dialogue form, as the dialogue allowed an indirect approach that provided several helpful insights into Rousseau's ways of thinking, operating and maneuvering the discourse of his protagonists. Even though the *Dialogues* are a text in which he is frequently refuting himself, the splitting of his personality(ties) is a literary technique, which allowed him simultaneously "to write and to hide" (125) as Starobinski writes in *Blessings in Disguise*. Overall, it is through Rousseau's "supposed" genuineness alongside his sense of artifice that we witness the representation of his ideas, methods, and various interactions, making us sympathize with his struggle to find his identity. In this process, he supplies numerous

insights for understanding the world, politics, science, and religion through his vision, thereby enriching readers' mentalities, and contributing to the expansion of French ideas in the era of the Enlightenment.

CHAPTER 8: SADE

Defiance or Submission: Sade's *Dialogue entre un prêtre et un moribond*

The dialogue by Sade is an appropriate ending chapter of this project as it reiterates many of the previously studied notions such as parallels with Diderot's view on materialism, Fontenelle's perspective on uniformity within variety, and Voltaire's notion of the "Necessary" that was previously analyzed. Additionally, the use of artifice in this dialogue differs significantly from the previous texts, as there is no manipulation, cunning technique, or indirectness in expressing controversial ideas. Sade's protagonist the moribund proceeds to the discussion with the priest without any artifice, but honesty and truthfulness, which demonstrate the decline of artifice by the end of the eighteenth century.

The Marquis de Sade is a controversial figure in literature and is known for his challenging and sharp critiques of religion and societal conventional norms. He was descended from a distinguished lineage of nobility, which granted him the title of "Marquis." Some scholars claim that his lineage extended to the King of France, from the side of his mother, and the Kings of France -- both Louis XV and Louis XVI -- knew Sade well because they issued warrants for his arrest, due to his blasphemous language towards religion, and they also awarded him pardons, considering his aristocratic family's influence at least for the time being. He was known to like both men and women during his life, minimizing the conventional ways of living and maximizing the pursuit of happiness and passions. Initially possessing a castle and means to hire servants, Sade used that opportunity to satisfy his sexual appetite with his family's servants, some of whom endured psychological and physical traumas during these intimate intercourses and filed complaints against Sade resulting in the latter's imprisonment. In some instances, his mother or his family had to bribe the victims to withdraw their complaints which enabled him

further as he never stopped hiring servants, both men and women, and forcing them into sexual orgies. Sade's "inventive" ways of engaging in extreme sexual behaviors were outrageous to the traditional people of his century and even to date. The acts practiced by Sade were extreme by nature, causing pain and humiliation to his partners who endured injuries, or nearly died.

Sade's extreme libertine behavior at a period where the French Monarchy was to be imminently abolished and the notions of "libertinage" or "free will" flourished, contributed arguably to the desensitization of the population's mentality about materialistic determinism, sexual practices, homosexuality, and other "forbidden" intimate relations. If Diderot in his *Supplément* had pushed the limits of sexual liberation in a fictional setting with the depiction of a Tahitian lifestyle, in which his protagonist defended incest with ease, Sade was the non-fictional representation of all that was previously discussed as forbidden within fictional settings. Sade was a fictionalized libertine come to life. Geoffrey Roche argues in "The Enigma of the Will: Sade's Psychology of Evil" that Sade's characters viewed death as trivial (371), depicting Sade's philosophy in a rather negative disposition, adding further that Sade's theory of libertinage is "a failure due to a misunderstanding of the relationship between 'criminal pleasure' and morality," noticing additionally that "in order to understand Sade at all, it is required that one mentally reconstruct the eighteenth-century Catholicism against which he is reacting." (378) The dialogue that I am about to analyze is certainly a reaction to the ideas of Catholicism professed in his era, as most of the discourse in this dialogue is an attack on religious principles. Nonetheless, Melissa Russell notes in her work on Sade's ethics that "despite his many arguments for a natural order without God, Sade's position as an atheist is difficult to sustain considering his dependance upon the very religion that he disavows." (3) She further recalls Susan Neiman's argument that if Sade was an atheist, he was a God obsessed-one. (18) It is an accurate statement because his obsession

with negating God generates the creativity to do so. This obsession is apparent in this dialogue, where the honesty of a dying man constitutes a form of artifice that allows him to tell without bias or any concealing literary device all that he thought about the notions of divinities, religion, or God. This honesty is employed as a discursive technique to persuade his interlocutor of his views, sharing his genuine beliefs, and disregarding previously taught religious doctrines.

Thus, in his work *Dialogue entre un prêtre et un moribond* (1782), Sade presents a contemptuous critique of organized religion, and employs a “dying man” as the main protagonist to be his mouthpiece in expressing frank views on religion’s fable-like doctrines. As this man was approaching death, he had nothing to lose, therefore he calmly and logically explained to his interlocutor the priest the discrepancies that existed in religious teachings. One may easily assume that Sade is portraying himself while presenting the dying man in this dialogue, as he was also imprisoned and condemned to death, although his mother-in-law was able to reduce the charges to imprisonment. Gert Heckma, who describes parts of Sade’s biography in his article “Rewriting the History of Sade,” mentions that Sade had escaped to Italy with his man servant, though “after many wanderings, Sade came back to Paris where he was immediately arrested. His mother-in-law succeeded in getting his death sentence reversed, but he was nevertheless imprisoned on a *lettre de cachet*.” (133) Heckma describes Sade as a “libertarian anarchist” adding that “according to Sade, his thinking was intimately connected to his physiology. He felt himself persecuted for what he was.” (132) This implies that perhaps Sade wanted to be punished, and his sexual behavior attests to that as “he whipped himself as well as the prostitute who refused to do so.” (133) In any case, like the dying man, and unlike Rousseau, Sade had little to lose and therefore less need for the use of external or internal types of artifice discussed previously.

Initially published in 1782, this philosophical dialogue is between an anonymous man and a priest who struggles to get the libertine's last confession and convert him into embracing faith. Nevertheless, the rebel is not willing to concede to the ways of the Church, and hence provides a harsh critique of the Church's false piety, clericalism, and doctrine. The priest's conversation and the dialogic setting not only allow Sade to direct his "corrosive skepticism" (Phillips 18) to religions' claim to morality but also offers him a platform to support his radical views. Furthermore, the dialogue form allows Sade's protagonist to demonstrate the dying man's peaceful and logical disposition, as opposed to the impatient, easily irritated priest, who insults the dying man, calling him names such as "misérable," "aveugle" or "malheureux," implicitly demonstrating the biased mentality and unpleasant behavior of the clergy's representative.

The dialogue begins with an opening that seems to insert a third voice merged with the discourse of the priest who says: "Arrivé à cet instant fatal [sounding like the narrator] où le voile de l'illusion ne se déchire que pour laisser à l'homme séduit le tableau cruel de ses erreurs et de ses vices, ne vous repentez-vous point, mon enfant des désordres multipliés où vous ont emporté la faiblesse et la fragilité humaine." (5) "Faiblesse?" "fragilité?" – could those traits not be considered inherent to the human species, thus erroneously criticized by the priest? Why should the man declare to have regretted his passionate nature, which conditioned his very being and personality, and express remorse for having behaved exactly as nature intended? "Je me repens," he answers to the priest who feels momentarily triumphant for his influence on this "poor soul" who expresses regrets. The priest replies: "Eh bien profitez de ses remords heureux pour obtenir du ciel, dans le court intervalle qui vous reste, l'absolution générale de vos fautes, et songez que ce n'est que par la médiation du très saint sacrement de la pénitence qu'il vous sera possible de l'obtenir de l'éternel." (5) One may notice the satisfaction of the priest, who is

momentarily contented with his influence for having submitted the dying man to his empty promise of eternal life, redemption, and divine clemency.

But at that moment the man clarifies to the priest in informal language that he does not regret what he has done, but he regrets what he has not:

Le moribond: Je ne l'entends pas plus que tu ne m'as compris.

Le prêtre: Et quoi!

Le moribond: Je t'ai dit que je me repentais.

Le prêtre: Je l'ai entendu.

Le moribond: Oui, mais sans le comprendre.

Le prêtre: Quelle interprétation?

Le moribond: La voici... Créé par la nature avec les goûts très vifs, avec des passions très fortes; uniquement placé dans ce monde pour m'y livrer et pour les satisfaire, et ces effets de créations n'étant que des nécessités relatives aux premières vues de la nature, ou si tu l'aime mieux, que des dérivations essentielles à ses projets sur moi, tous en raison de ces lois, je ne me repens que de n'avoir pas assez reconnu toute sa puissance, et les uniques remords sur le médiocre usage que j'ai fait des facultés (criminelles selon toi, toutes simples selon moi) qu'elles m'avaient données pour la servir. Aveuglé par l'absurdité de tes systèmes, j'ai combattu par eux toute la violence des désirs, que j'avais reçue par une inspiration bien plus divine, et m'en repens, je n'ai moissonné que des fleurs quand je pouvais faire une ample récolte de fruits... Voilà les justes motifs de mes regrets, estime-moi assez pour ne m'en pas supposer d'autres. (5-6)

This first large statement by the dying man has numerous themes: a) it challenges the priest about his fundamental tenets, b) demonstrates that satisfying one's desires or passions is natural to humans, who are filled with passions and desires, and that it would be absurd to condemn an individual for expressing his or her desires, and c) he shows no remorse other than not having enjoyed more of this life's delights. If desires are forbidden (or criminal), desires being simply feelings, an essential part of the human being, part of his or her senses, then seeing is forbidden (or criminal) too, hearing or touching should be punishable as they are also senses. The moribund's logical chain so defies the priest's commentaries that the latter gradually becomes a weaker character who begins gradually to ask questions to the dying man instead of insisting on the arguments he had previously made. As Roche argues, Sade uses his characters in a way that suits him according to the context, while Henry Lloyd posits that "nature has thrown us unthinkingly [into this life] and what follows is that we are without any obligation that may have been generated by nature's deliberate creation of us" (212).¹⁵¹ The dying man's logic implies that human beings did not choose to be born or to be such passionate creatures. It is simply how nature configured humans; some are strong, some are weak, some are more passionate than the others; it is within the principle of variety within uniformity that we exist, and this variety is conditioned genetically or environmentally without leaving people any choice of their ways of being. Sade was more passionate compared to most people, but he was not alone in that regard; he simply chose not to hide his overly passionate nature, or his libertarian anarchist ideologies, thus becoming a target for frequent persecutions.¹⁵²

¹⁵¹ This manner of thinking resembles the philosophy of deism.

¹⁵² It is worth noting that etymologically the word "passion" is derived via Latin *passio* from the verb *patior* that means "to suffer." Sade's passionate nature made him suffer, both literally and figuratively. See "Passion" in *Dictionary of Untranslatables: A Philosophical Lexicon*.

The moribund demonstrates in one paragraph the absurdity of the laws that forbid the expression of sexual desires, an idea that resonates with Diderot's *Le Rêve de d'Alembert* where the doctor Bordeu insisted several times on the idea that anything that happens in nature is part of nature, simply because it happens, thus nothing should be condemnable in this existence. As the moribund's discourse demonstrates, people are created by the emotions that nature gives them, and they exist to live or consume these emotions in the same way people live by consuming food for nourishment. It is unfortunate, the dying man continues, that there are systems forbidding the expression of these emotions, thus he felt compelled to contest these systems in order to express what was inherent in his nature. In other words, Nature had given him his own nature, passionate and ardent, and he tried to live up to his potential, though he confesses to have succeeded only partially.

The priest is momentarily shocked by this unexpected argument and counters the man's disagreement, saying that the latter is using sophisms and attributing erroneously the existence of such desires to the Creator, but the dying man responds with a direct critique of God: "Ton Dieu est une machine que tu as fabriquée pour servir tes passions, et tu l'as fait mouvoir à leur gré, mais dès qu'elle gêne les miennes trouve bon que je l'ai culbutée, et dans l'instant où mon âme a besoin du calme ou de la philosophie, ne viens pas de l'épouventer de tes sophisms." (6) The moribund explicitly denounces the way the clergymen constructed the notion of God, asserting that this construct is meticulously elaborated to serve the needs of the priests instead of the general population. Furthermore, he denounces the representatives of religion who use the notion of divinities to exert influence, even on a dying man, who needs peace and rationalization that they are apparently incapable of providing.

Subsequently, the dying man explains to the priest that the human mind is not able to conceive the essence of divinities, including the priest himself; therefore, he is simply submitting to the forces of nature rather than forces of an unknown entity such as God:

Le prêtre: Vous ne croyez donc point en Dieu ?

Le moribond: Non, et cela pour une raison bien simple, c'est qu'il est parfaitement impossible de croire ce qu'on ne comprend pas. Entre la compréhension et la foi, il doit exister des rapports immédiats, [si] la compréhension n'agit point, la foi est morte, et ceux qui dans tel cas prétendraient en avoir, en imposent. Je te défis toi-même de croire au dieu que tu me prêches, parce que tu ne saurais me le démontrer, pour qu'il n'est pas en toi me le définir, que par conséquent tu ne le comprends pas, tu ne peux plus me fournir aucun argument raisonnable et qu'en un mot tout ce qui est au-dessus des bornes de l'esprit humain est ou chimère ou inutilité; que ton dieu ne pouvant être l'une ou l'autre de ces choses, dans le premier cas je serais un fou d'y croire, un imbécile dans le second. (4)

The dying man establishes a link between understanding and faith, and demonstrates that without understanding a concept, one may not establish faith, and if anyone claims otherwise, it is an error. In addition, it is worth noting that the priest capitalizes *Dieu* while the moribund refers to it as *dieu*, as the latter views that concept as simply inconceivable while the clergyman pretends to understand its godly nature, and divinifies it.

The critique of religion is however only one aspect of interpretation of this major dialogue; in this instance, my focus is the use of the dialogue form which helps these topics and discussions about them emerge. The dying man is truthful, without any reservations or need for

recourse to any form of artifice. This said, the absence of artifice is an artifice itself, or complete honesty without a trace of fear represents another dimension of artifice(iality).¹⁵³ This is not unlike the case of La Hontan's main protagonist Adario, who was brutally honest in his observations about the misbehavior of the Christians who claimed to be godly and accused others of lacking "the correct faith." Another parallel that one may draw with the text of La Hontan is the fact that Sade's priest, like La Hontan's character La Hontan, does not pursue his arguments, but instead becomes curious about the dying man's representation of life. By the end of this dialogue, the priest only asks questions, as opposed to the beginning when he was adamant about converting the dying man to Christianity.

Thus, Sade's dialogue serves as a landscape for his vehement criticism of organized religion, particularly Catholicism.¹⁵⁴ The priest is depicted initially as a hypocritical and manipulative figure, a representative of the corrupt institutionalized power of the Church. The priest's attempts to comfort the dying man with promises of salvation are shown as insincere and self-serving, highlighting the double layer of hypocrisy inherent both to the priest and to religious doctrine. On the other hand, the dying man becomes exhausted by the end of their conversation, which is the only passage that shows his physical weakness: "Mais je sens que je m'affaiblis, prêdicant, quitte tes préjugés et sois homme, sois humain, sans crainte et sans espérance." (9) Thus, having nothing to lose, the dying man offers his last advice to the priest,

¹⁵³ Artificiality is not necessarily the intended concept of "artifice(iality)." This may be a neologism to indulge, until a better version of this adjective may be invented. Artificiality refers to the unnatural, while "artifice(iality)" refers to the ability to maneuver or manipulate. A neologism is needed to distinguish these two concepts.

¹⁵⁴ While this is a criticism of Catholicism, the moribund depicts Jesus, Mohammed, and Moises all as con artists for succeeding in persuading the masses about their "supposed" godly origins: "Ton Jésus n'a rien fait de plus singulier qu'Apollonius de Thyane, et personne pourtant ne s'avise de prendre celui-ci pour un dieu; quant à tes martyrs, ce sont bien assurément les plus débiles de tous tes arguments." (5) Apollonius de Thyane (15-100AD) was a Greek philosopher who dedicated his life to teaching and preaching. The moribund clearly explains that those who have been divinified were simply intelligent human beings that less intelligent masses remembered as exceptional, thus divine.

suggesting that the clergyman remain human, be a stronger man, and understand that desires and passions, along with human imperfections, are inherent to all human beings.¹⁵⁵ While initially depicted as a manipulative figure, the priest himself succumbs to the logic and philosophy of the dying man, no longer contesting the dying man's logical observations, and instead listening to or inquiring about the latter's unique views.

The dying man is depicted as a philosopher and a wise man. He advises the priest to study science, get rid of his religious clichés and prejudices, after which this religious man should realize that “his appui” on God was unnecessary: “Perfectionne ta physique, et tu comprendras mieux la nature, épure ta raison, bannis tes préjugés et tu n’auras plus besoin de ton Dieu.” (4) The priest loses patience after hearing this advice and calls the moribund “malheureux!” realizing that he is an irrevocable atheist. Further he says “On ne rend point la lumière à un aveugle,” (4) describing the moribund as blind and incapable of accessing knowledge (or light,) while in Sade’s presentation it is the dying man who is enlightened and the priest who blindly follows religious doctrines. The dying man keeps his calm, and responds to the priest: “Mon ami, tu édifies, tu multiplies, tu inventes, moi, je détruis, je simplifie. Tu ajoutes erreurs sur erreurs, moi je les combats toutes. Lequel de nous est aveugle?” (6) Who is blinder -- the priest who talks metaphysics and unfounded promises of miracles and redemption, or the dying man who is reasoning in logical terms, and arguing for evidence based on the senses: “Mon ami, prouve-moi l’inertie de la matière et je t’accorderai le créateur, prouve-moi que la nature ne se suffit pas à elle-même, et je te permettrai de lui supposer un maître, jusque-là n’attends rien de moi, je ne me rends qu’à l’évidence et je ne la reçois que de mes sens.” (4) The

¹⁵⁵ A similar observation is made in the film *The Matrix* by the Wachowski Brothers, where humans live in an artificially simulated reality.

moribund talks in an educated and intelligent manner, asking for empirical evidence that the priest could not provide. Therefore, he continues challenging the conventional understanding of divinities and emphasizes the primacy of materialism.

Sade's use of the dialogue form is an attempt to allow the speakers to interact freely, to be open and candid in their criticisms or beliefs. Through the natural question and answer sessions between the priest and the dying man, and a "back-and-forth" that resembles an informal dialogue, readers witness an atmosphere where direct exchange is enabled. The dying man's voice remains unadorned by figures of speech, which only strengthen his objections and help the readership side with him. Marcel Hénaff notes in his book *Sade: The Invention of the Libertine Body* that "the dialectical approach spawns a discussion that is an honest discourse that has been evaded by philosophy." (47) The dialogue is open-ended, like most dialogues of the era, enabling interlocutors to observe and criticize assumptions. Sade's dialogue is didactic insofar as the dying protagonist offers numerous insightful and meaningful observations about the roles of rationality versus faith, and science versus religion, causing the priest to cave in by the end of their conversation. David Allison observes in *Sade and the Narrative of Transgression* that "[a]ll traditional beliefs were considered targets that could be assaulted directly." (142)

Sade's transgression of convention advocates for an enlightened society, progress, and defiance of religious doctrines, which forced him into imprisonment throughout his life and which he saw as non-sensical, as explained by the dying man:

Rien ne périt, mon ami, rien ne se détruit dans le monde; aujourd'hui homme, demain ver, après demain mouche, n'est-ce pas toujours exister? Et pourquoi veux-tu que je sois récompensé de vertus auxquelles je n'ai nul mérite; ou puni de crimes dont je n'ai pas été le maître; peux-tu accorder la bonté de ton prétendu dieu avec ce système et peut-il avoir

voulu me créer pour se donner le plaisir de me punir, et cela seulement en conséquence d'un choix dont il ne me laisse pas le maître. (5)

While Sade is distinctive in not fearing censorship, his philosophy is consistent with other views we have encountered. Sade echoes Diderot's materialist theory, implying that no energy is lost in the universe. In the chapter on Diderot, we encountered the argument that a creature exists forever, in one form or another; thus, once born, there is no going back, the physical body will transform into a different substances (according to d'Alembert, everything is a perpetual flow; every human is a little animal, every animal is a little plant, and every plant is a little animal) and the spiritual energy will dissipate into something else that science has not yet fully determined. Second, the dying man underscores some basic questions that eighteenth-century thought poses to religion; why would God create humans for the purpose of punishing them? would it cause God pleasure to punish them? By implication, if God may experience pleasure, even if it is the pleasure of punishing, then God is not a permanent being, as God feels and must be corporeal. Thus, God "serait matière, sujet à vicissitude et à l'impermanence," (199) as Diderot's protagonist doctor Bordeu argued in *Le Rêve de d'Alembert*. The dying man destroys religious doctrines right and left, which is why Allison's description of "assault" is an appropriate term. This approach is reinforced by Neil Schaeffer's observation in *The Marquis de Sade* (1999) that this dialogue is a clash between rigid religious dogma and secular individualism (116), and that the dying man's secularism prevails in the eyes of the readership.

Sade outlines his opposition to virtue by stating that adherence to moral codes of conduct only ensues when natural needs and desires are restricted or hushed. When the moribund says "il n'y a pas une seule vertu qui ne soit nécessaire à la nature, et réversiblement, pas un seul crime dont elle n'ait besoin," (7) the character is claiming that everyday concepts that are accepted as

good, are not real at all. He balances the scales by asserting the universal balance: for every white, there is a black, for every light, there is a shadow, for every virtue, there is a vice and that is the order of the world. Punishing someone who simply follows the order of the world is futile and unfair: “Ton Jésus ne vaut pas mieux que Mohamet, Mohamet pas mieux que Moïse, et tous trois pas mieux que Confucius qui pourtant dicta quelques bons principes pendant que les trois autres déraisonnaient.” (8) By establishing this, the moribund maintains that none of the religious characters’ preaching was worth that much, which may be an echo of La Hontan’s Adario’s critiques of the missionaries. Confucius, however, whose name is mentioned by the dying man, as well as by Voltaire, who described him as a wise man, made several good observations which could be helpful for the education of a given civilization.

Additionally, it is curious to observe the question of the priest to the moribund, who replies that all that happens is meant to be so, and the priest asks whether the crimes were necessary. This appears as a deliberate or coincidental echo of Voltaire’s dictionary entry “Nécessaire”, which begins with almost the same phrasing as the discourse of the priest:

Le prêtre: Ainsi donc tout est nécessaire dans le monde? ¹⁵⁶

Le moribond: Assurément.

Le prêtre: Mais si tout est nécessaire tout est donc réglé.

Le moribond: Qui te dit le contraire? (6)

As their conversation continues, the priest is more and more conflicted, and he no longer persists in his arguments, but becomes curious about the dying man’s views. Still, it is a mistake to underestimate the strength of superstition, if we think back to Voltaire’s *Dialogues d’Evhémère*

¹⁵⁶ In Voltaire’s *Dictionnaire*, the entry “Nécessaire” starts with Osmin asking Sélim: “Ne dites-vous pas que tout est nécessaire?”

in which the eponymous character insists that superstition is the most evil of notions and almost impossible to get rid of. Despite the logical and rational explanation, the priest in this dialogue is portrayed as conceding but only implicitly. Thus, the moribund verbalizes Sade's theory that the internal "madness" of human beings is inevitable, yet religious institutions knowingly restrain one's most vital impulses and pleasures, labeling them as vices and incriminating people for simply doing what nature intended them to do.¹⁵⁷ For Sade, personal freedom is the ability to attain the maximum pleasure, as the dying man implies, without social interventions or moral codes used to manipulate or regulate one's choices.

The notion of artifice, while not frequently discussed, is present throughout this text. Generally, the more artifice is used, the more successful the enterprise. After all, artifice is defined as adroit manipulation to attain a goal. While animals may also be capable of subterfuge, only human beings are gifted with language that allows them to use artifice more efficiently. The more intelligent a human being is, the more capable he or she is of using artifice and attaining his or her goals. The moribund's logical truthfulness is an artifice that forces the priest to stop preaching, instead developing curiosity and inquiring about the dying man's viewpoints. Therefore, the dying man's honesty represents an artifice that affects the priest to the extent that he starts simply listening, barely talking, and only with hesitation. Even in Diderot's *Le Rêve*, doctor Bordeu hails the efficiency of artifice in terms of both truths and lies, for attaining a goal:

¹⁵⁷ The notion of madness encompasses human vices, desires to thief, or to destruct. Sade had used d'Holbach's metaphysics to justify destruction: "Destruction being one of the original laws of Nature, nothing that destroys could be a crime. How could an action which so well serves nature ever outrage her? This destruction of which man boasts is, besides, nothing but an illusion; murder is no destruction; he who commits it only alters forms." Henry Lloyd observes that this madness exists because "God gives the passions which the virtuous person resists against God's will." (219). The contradiction imposed on humans by this supreme being is obvious. Lloyd writes that the propositions "there is no God" and "God is evil" affirm that the Sadean system is predicated on a fundamental philosophical contradiction." (222) If God is creating contradictions, therefore any other creation must be contradictory, an idea which is not false, as life has death, health has illness. The contradiction is the two extremes that help keep the balance in this existence.

“Les avantages du mensonge sont d’un moment; et ceux de la vérité sont éternels” (233) says Bordeu who then admits consequently that “les vérités peuvent être fâcheuses,” leaving us to think that Diderot himself understood the importance of artifice (or lies and rationalizations) to avoid conflict or to succeed in a given enterprise.

It is worth noting that through this dialogue we have an abbreviated version of Sade’s philosophy, also seen in his other works like *Justine ou les Malheur de la vertu* (1791), *La Philosophie dans le boudoir* (1795), or *Les 120 jours de Sodom* (1785), which are viewed as subversive as they contain subjects deemed immoral by both secular and religious authorities.¹⁵⁸ These works uphold his supreme principle that “the subjective pleasure of the senses is the only criterion of conduct” (Lauwaert 159). Once again, we saw this idea in Diderot’s *Supplément*, in which the idea of incest is normalized to push the boundaries of the understanding of sexual liberation overall, and which has materialized about half a century later in Sade’s understanding of individual freedom. His dialogue’s verbal attack on Catholic dogma, therefore, represented merely the opening *préambule* of Sade’s lifelong literary project, demolishing all “ethical constraints on erotic life” (Schaeffer 5).

To conclude, *Le Dialogue entre un prêtre et un moribond* was one of Sade’s first weapons to fight religious bigotry and hypocrisy. The author’s secular philosophy was expressed in the form of an audacious and impertinent moribund who rejected the Church’s “supposedly” moralizing principles and doctrines, offering his own perspectives which were atheistic but down-to-earth, rational, and meaningful. This twofold dialogue echoes the ideological base of Sade’s philosophy and his interpretation of radical individuality, the pursuit of sensual pleasure,

¹⁵⁸ Note these are Sade’s primary works that explore more deeply the themes of extreme behavior, such as violence or perverse sexual desires, along with the themes of morality and challenges to societal norms, but this chapter is solely dedicated to Sade’s *Dialogue*.

and the disregard of established orders of civilization, all of which are foundational for his libertine doctrine. Through his “interrogation of established values” (Airaksinen 25) and his unusually extreme interpretation of the concept of personal freedom and ideals, he established a precedent that was to be followed by generations of other authors, artists, and philosophers. Airaksinen makes several relevant observations about Sade’s inner world, noting that he cherished his “pet theory of vices,” (4) and remained an anarchist throughout his life, believing that “there were no real values, social life was a veritable hell and man was a beast.” (16) If one considers the short existence of this life, consciousness, and the universe on a macroscopic level, and on the microscopic level the competitiveness amongst people who tend to do best each on his or her own, which often results in the misery of others, Sade’s anarchist message might not be untrue. Additionally, the lack of artifice in the dying man’s discourse makes this dialogue especially unique for the context of the eighteenth century during which most authors produced dialogues that contained some form of literary device concealing their objectives. Sade was in such a unique position, already institutionalized, confined in solitude, that he did not need any recourse to standard artifice to express his challenging or daring thoughts. If it can be argued that he used any form of artifice, it is the artifice of full disclosure, of living his life without having to hide his desires or his needs. Whether Sade’s advocacy is praised or condemned, his notion of total liberation will continue stirring a lively debate surrounding the restrictions of personal liberties versus conventional norms, and his free-willed, individualistic rebellion will continue to generate an echo in the minds of modern theorists presently and in the future.

CONCLUSION

The notion of artifice as a clever way of maneuvering to reinforce an opinion, or help disseminate knowledge, has been approached here mainly as a component in a dialogic composition. Internal artifice played an essential role in deciphering the inconspicuousness within dialogic contexts, while external artifice showed its usefulness in choosing the form, the style of the figure of speech employed, the choice of symbolic or anagrammed names, which suggested an immediate understanding of the fictional or real characters' upcoming behaviors. The chapter on Voltaire is the one where the most instances of external artifice have been demonstrated, as he used metaphors, analogies, anagrams, allegories, and specific fictional names in his dialogue entries, which were themselves forms of artifice as they represented definitions in a dictionary. With Diderot, we saw the most numerous occurrences of internal artifice, as the complexity of his thought, various ambiguities, the reversal of roles between the character Diderot and Diderot the author, and the choice of the dream as a playground for expressing his thoughts are all writing techniques that express his ideas and doctrines in such a way that they are not immediately or easily understood, remaining open to various interpretations. La Hontan and Rousseau both use the artifice of role reversal, as they employ eponymous characters, depicted as separate personalities from the authors. Rousseau creates a singular move by making his eponymous character meet with himself the author, after which all doubts about the author's negative reputation are dropped in that context and the dialogue starts building a renewal of respect for Rousseau whereas it had initially insulted him in many ways. This deliberate ignorance, that Bakhtin describes in terms of "gay deception" (146) is frequently used by the *philosophes* to create a dynamic of teacher-pupil relationship where one protagonist is seemingly forced to share his knowledge with another. This is a frequent occurrence in authors

like Diderot, Rousseau and Voltaire. Additionally, Voltaire's use of parallelism in using one concept to highlight the good or bad of a related concept, such as focusing on Islam rather than Christianity, is also an artifice, a clever tactic for saying or expressing what was forbidden to voice in that era.

As McDonald notes in *The Dialogue of Writing*, "philosophic dialogue has truth as its object, because it is only with a great difficulty that one can order and classify ideas, [while] each step in this dialogical process raises and resolves a problem." (12) Truth does not refer to the concept of Truth in general, but the subjective truth of the author, consisting of his objective of wanting to express his opinion and stand by it by providing enough exemplary evidence to support his claim about that subjective truth, albeit at times in disguise. McDonald continues by observing a parallel version of the use of artifice: "Dialogue contains within it a thematic statement whose goal is always to exceed its own limits.... In so doing, they [authors of dialogues] open a latent scene of history, basically that of literature, in which the rusing strategies of writing subject put into conflict the methodological and performative functions governing all dialogue." (12-13) This ruse is the employment of artifice, the absent presence, the inconspicuous influence that contributes to dissemination of knowledge while guaranteeing the author's safety. As the chapter on Fontenelle demonstrates, deliberate error, committed by the philosopher to tease the curiosity of the Marquise, allows him to explain the science behind the solar system, charmed by the intellect and curiosity of the Marquise. The philosopher in this fictional dialogue insists on keeping these truths between them, as does doctor Bordeu with Julie de Lespinasse explaining that not all would be ready to hear the theoretical conclusions they reached.

The indirection in the dialogic discourse has been demonstrated in many ways, either via anonymity, or by reproducing a discourse in addition to placing it in the mouth of a dreaming philosopher, allowing the dream to blur the limits of authorship such as in Diderot's *Le Rêve de d'Alembert*. Indirection is also constructed using fictional or semi-fictional dialogues. Pujol writes that "Voltaire savait que la fiction avait plus de chance à persuader et de convaincre le lecteur des méfaits de l'athéisme qu'un traité théorique, dût-il emprunter la forme dialoguée. La vérité du récit, Voltaire ne la nie pas, mais ne l'assume pas non plus: le dialogue, en revanche entraîne de force son actualisation et sa prise en charge." (322) Thus, fiction, and by implication artifice, has a better chance of persuading the readership than a truthful story, although the truthfulness of a story remains a relative notion, considering the human tendency to exaggeration or omissions of details.

Even Platonic dialogues contain an artifice as Plato is absent in them and has Socrates professing instead. Höhle talks extensively about Plato's various dialogues, their influence, and the *logos Sokraticos*: "No matter how much development may have prepared the way for the dialogue, the latter still seems to owe its birth to a phenomenon that was precisely not literary in nature, the unique personality of Socrates." (76) It is worth noting in these conclusive remarks that a consensus exists about Plato being basically the precursor of the dialogue genre, who in his turn used Socrates as a leading voice, creating the idea of *indirection* in the first place, which is an essential attribute of the dialogic composition.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁹ It is also interesting to note that the Greeks were not the inventors of the dialogue genre. While dialogic works are as old as 2000 B.C., from diverse origins in Egypt, Mesopotamia, China, Israel, or Buddhist India, *The Conversation of the World-Weary Man with his Soul* stands out as the oldest dialogue with an anonymous or unknown author (Höhle 72). Aristotle, however, names Alexamenus of Teos as the first author of dialogues, but we know nothing else about him. (78) Thus, the first dialogues were not Socratic in nature. On the other hand, Höhle observes that Plato is probably the greatest of all philosophers, especially for the originality and wealth of his ideas. This is pertinent to an extent that "anonymity is characteristic of Platonic dialogue" (80) and that some of the

To conclude on this vast topic of artifice, dialogic composition, artifice within dialogues and didactic, philosophical dialogues, I would like to discuss Plato's considerable contribution to the concept of *mimesis*, as his acknowledgment of the realm of Forms is the background of the notion of artifice. While it is an abstract concept that is assumed to exist independently of the existential, corporeal reality, within a plane where all forms are perfect and unchanging, one could assume that it is connected to the existential reality in a parallel or spontaneous manner, as the formation of new forms in the imperfect world affects the theoretically unchanging dimension. This perfect dimension must not necessarily contain ALL the forms; if so, the idea of Providence or Predestination would be indisputable, along with the illusion of free will (as things would be fixed and preconfigured). But we do have free will to an extent, for instance, when one goes on a hunger strike and stays hungry for weeks despite the natural urge of having nourishment or when a student stays up at night to elaborate his or her project despite the need to sleep. In sum, going against the forces of the universe makes the perfect plane develop new forms of behavior, which proves the flexibility of concepts, material beings, and the connectivity between these two realms -- one imaginary, and the other (our perceived world) supposedly real. The very idea of the "real" may be an illusion, and illusion is an artifice which is felt especially when one goes against the conventional rules or natural forces, on a larger scale. Interestingly, the universe seems to want us to go against its forces; for example, when we lift heavy objects, we go against the gravitational forces, but we gain strength and more muscles. Knowledge and scientific discoveries were made as man invented a plane, a rocket ship, a satellite, that contributed to the efficiency of our lifestyle and provided vast amounts of knowledge. The use of artifice means often going against the conventional ways of writing or being; it requires a

dialogues studied in this project were written anonymously, thus, sharing or rather imitating one or two aspects of Plato's ways of writing.

specific configuration and a form of temporary deception, and its results prove to be positive as its use contributes to the dissemination of knowledge and the safety of its authors.

Plato must have felt this when he described that the physical world is a simple reflection of ideal forms that exist outside of our conceptual dimension, though it has been said that the only constant thing in the universe is change. Thus, we might speculate that even this perfect realm must be subject to change, therein the imperfect world causes the perfect realm to either shift its ideal forms or produce new ones. If we refer to the materialism of d'Holbach, Diderot or La Mettrie, to the determinism of Hume, we will confirm the idea of God's inexistence, and man and the universe consisting of nothing else but matter which is constantly broken down, and repurposed, never perishing as a form of energy. Furthermore, this implies that unborn children or other creatures that did not come into existence, do not participate in the frenzy of the matter's reconfiguration *ad infinitum*. However, once born, existing in this reality, there is no going back; the material body of the animalistic world will perpetuate in the universe in one form or another.¹⁶⁰

An additional implication of this project is that an absolute absence of illusion could be considered an illusion itself as we saw in the chapter on Sade. When one thing is absolute, it is no more that initial "one thing," which implies in its turn that anything that is or becomes perfect changes from its original form; therefore, Plato's ideal forms are perhaps changing so fast that they seem unchanging. But this implies that they move or rotate (depending on our perception of that realm's dynamic) inwards or outwards at an absolute speed, just like a wheel or a tire that

¹⁶⁰ This idea is a speculation based on previously discussed states of matter in the chapters on Diderot and Sade. Matter may be reconfigured so as to create a "thinking being" according to Diderot's *Le Rêve*, then that "thinking being" will go back to become soil, or part of plants and animals, as Diderot's protagonist d'Alembert claimed. It is "doomed" to exist in perpetuity. However, if no additional matter is created (or procreated), that incorporeality will not be affected by the universal forces that affect the transformation of matter.

moves so fast it looks as if it is steady and unchanging, yet it is the high acceleration that gives it the illusion of looking unmoved, or the stars and the constellations that seem unchanging but are moving at the speed of light. These reflections are indeed speculative thoughts that may benefit from further research.¹⁶¹

Fontenelle was considered an “elitist” by Robert Shackleton, yet Starobinski notes the same about Rousseau in his *Blessings in Disguise or the Morality of Evil*: “We recognized the Rousseauist ideal of community, which can be as large as a city-state, but which can equally well be limited to a small ‘elite society’ of noble souls (*belles âmes*).” (120) While less relevant to this topic, Starobinski’s next sentence is: “The antidote is the poison itself provided it is kept under strict surveillance by exceptional men, certain not to be corrupted by its deleterious power.” (120) This is about the “ambiguous privilege of knowledge to a small number of men, who will seek to perpetuate and even increase that knowledge while limiting its diffusion.” (120) This select number of men who are to perpetuate knowledge yet limit its diffusion is exactly

¹⁶¹ For a more colorful depiction, let us observe the form of “words”; for instance, the word “different” is an adjective and adjectives are a type of word that direct the meaning of a noun. The meaning behind this word is so strong that depending on how we perceive it (its form: in letters, colors, or shapes), it is vibrating/rotating extremely fast; the word “same,” however, must not have the same speed, or have a different allure, horizontal or other, that the human mind will have difficulty grasping. This concept of words’ liveliness seems abstract, but it is an existing phenomenon as we hear and understand those words. In fact, only adjectives are prone to such infinitely fast changes; nouns that are fixed must vibrate (or rotate) at a lesser velocity. This may seem like a speculative theory regarding words, but the link between our imperfect world and Plato’s perfect realm must be somehow connected and create some special dynamic. Considering the flexibility of newly forming shapes, neologisms, behaviors or decisions, which are abstract forms, these ideal forms would accelerate or decelerate accordingly. If we combine this concept with Diderot’s speculation about all things being alive to an extent, it advocates for a possible theory of vibrational force, depending on the biochemistry of the substance and its level of existential force or consciousness. Albert Einstein famously quoted that “Everything in life is vibration.” (The Fitzgerald Report). Thus, atoms and molecules are in a constant state of motion, and depending on the speed of these atoms, things may appear as a solid, liquid, or gaseous. Sound is also a vibration, which implies that so are thoughts, words and concepts which must have a different form of vibrational force; in fact, Nietzsche described words as corporeal instances in his “On Truth and Lies in a Nonmoral Sense” and argued that words have been used so much that they lost their face value (meaning) like coins that have been used and have undistinguishable face value. Nietzsche sensed that aspect of words, thus there must be another, such as, for instance, neologisms, which according to his theory or assumption, must be a word in a “mint state condition;” thus, words also have a life of their own, a consciousness outside of their face value or meaning. Derrida’s views on words would also confirm the above-mentioned speculation, that I will leave at this point, as my interest lies in what these words’ *mimesis* are in a parallel dimension, and the dynamic that they create, again hypothetically, in the perfect realm of forms.

what Fontenelle was professing in his *Nouveau dialogues des morts*, in which he claims in short that ignorance is a bliss, yet scientific knowledge must be disseminated to fight superstition, extremism, and to stop the Catholic Church from committing atrocities. The task of the *philosophes* who produced didactic philosophical dialogues was double edged: first, they had to construct their dialogues so as to remain invisible, to avoid censorship or persecution; second, they had to produce and disseminate knowledge that would help the population to become free from religious bonds and use that knowledge to think for themselves. This contradiction of keeping knowledge an elitism yet disseminating it is the blessing in disguise, the poison being itself the antidote, as it is precisely the role of artifice, deceptive yet useful. Its organization within dialogic composition required a set of skills such as subtlety, finesse, and intelligence that abovementioned authors demonstrated in a most pleasant and entertaining manner. The dialogue form used the motto of *placere et docere* to eloquently spread the messages of the *philosophes*, contributing to both revolutionary movements and the development of French society and European civilization.

Finally, it should be noted that there has been a lot of criticism of religion in this project which may leave the impression of complete opposition to religious establishments. It is important to acknowledge that the eighteenth-century religious system was significantly different from the current understanding of it. The freedom of faith in our era more readily allows people to choose to believe in whatever fulfills their spiritual wishes or atheistic views. Writers do not need to have recourse to artifice to produce their texts, thus didactic dialogues are rare since the era of the Enlightenment. The use of artifice in literature is not as necessary anymore, but such freedom of speech shaped the literary discourse in such a way that philosophy has been replaced by fiction, imaginative narrative, historical texts, memoirs, and other genres. One could contend

that the relieved pressure of persecution from previous centuries has reduced philosophical dialogues, which is the reason why Pujol argues that philosophical dialogues came to an end by the end of the eighteenth century. The lifestyle of civilization has changed, and so did the literary discourse, arguably for the best.

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