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Fragments, satire and philosophy without end: Diderot's Neveu de Rameau

Thinking in fragments: Romanticism and Beyond.

[Quotations/references may be found after the text]

I am going to step back from the conference title chronologically by speaking of *Rameau's Nephew*. The text was probably composed about 1772-4, though it was undoubtedly continued by the inserting of allusions which can be dated after that up till shortly before Diderot's death in 1784. But at the same time, you will perhaps know, the text only becomes live, actual, effective a good deal later than that, round 1805-7, and this must be my excuse. It becomes live because its first appearance on the world stage – it is an undoubted piece of world literature – occurs in the German language, not in French. The greatest German poet, Goethe, translates it in 1805; its first appearance in French on the other hand is in 1823, in the Brière edition. Whereas in Germany, in 1807, Hegel lifts it into international prominence in his *Phenomenologie* – he actually quotes it three times, and his commentary spreads out much farther than is usually realized.

Well, what is fragmentary about this, you may ask, except the rather lacunary history of the text, about which we really don't know a lot? No one in their right mind could call Hegel's *Phenomenology* fragmentary; it is highly constructed, with an elaborate architecture into which Hegel slots his quotations from Diderot (they are by the way the only textual

quotations in this work), allotting to *Rameau's Nephew* a very precise and telling place in the arc of development to the dialectic. Diderot's text itself on the other hand poses a problem: it could very well be fragmentary – though that is not very likely, since what we now read is a version from a very well written fair copy, in Diderot's own hand. So why can't we be sure about its fragmentary nature?

I shall try to draw out this remark into clearer light; to do that I need to talk about the texture of *Rameau's Nephew*. It is stuffed full of allusions, of tales, of gossip. And of lists. Its form is a conversation set into a narrated anecdote: the narrator, ME relates a meeting in a café. It is an afternoon of bad weather, and he is taking shelter. There HIM comes up and claims acquaintance: nephew to the great composer, a poor sod, someone out of his past when they were both students, keeping body and soul together as best they might, ME giving lessons in mathematics, HIM as a music master. ME now has a proper income; HIM explains little by little how he has got to the pitiful state he is in. His trade is to be not just a musician, but a hanger-on, a parasite on certain rich people: especially an official, Bertin de Blagny who makes the king and Government money and of course himself by selling offices. His mistress is a 'celebrity', an overweight and under-talented actress. Around them is a group of hangers-on – the *menagerie*, as Rameau calls them: made up of what we would call *paparazzi* – journalists and groupies. One day, Rameau relates, he had a bit of "common sense". He told the truth to his masters, and allowed the irony with which he was flattering them to show: the result is he gets thrown out, and has nowhere to go. This story – how it happened, how it ended, is the vector of the dialogue.

A vector the dialogue badly needs. The dialogue within the narration is fitful, what one might call ‘lumpy’; we jump from anecdotes, to gossip, to much deeper discussions. But there is a kind of infinite at work: we shall see that it comes from the impression that the dialogue is endlessly extendable, and I shall develop this later. The text, we had said has a precise beginning: Rameau the nephew goes up to ME in the café. And the dialogue they start up has a precise end: the speakers leave each other when the Opera bell announces the beginning of the show and Rameau, who has to go, says “He who laughs last laughs best” as a parting shot.

Apart from the precise beginning and end, there are not the signposts usual in a narrative. We have few clues as to the chronology of the actual conversation – except in terms of what we actually have on the page. Any one who has ever taught the text will know how difficult it is to find one’s way around. And one’s students rightly jeer at the variety of the critics’ accounts of this: a dream says one; a Bahktinian carnival, says another. Internal coherence, why one thing follows another, is not obvious. Worse, the events outside the conversation but recounted in it don’t really fit together either. At one moment Rameau the composer is there, alive and going by in the street; at another moment, he is dead and buried. The operas, plays, stories told, all are real events and can be dated but they don’t fit together in any coherent way. They are also licentious, on one occasion very. The autograph ms I spoke of at the beginning in fact only bears the title “Second Satire”- it is the ms Goethe follows which names it after its hero. Diderot seems to be revenging himself satirically for all the failures and insults he had had to bear, particularly round his playwriting.

The form of the dialogue is even more unsettling than the incoherence of its chronology. The speakers are in a kind of oblique relation, not ME and YOU, but ME and HIM. When we read, we are probably closest to ME, to the first person, who however, on the page is a bit insipid, a bit self-satisfied in comparison with the odd personage HIM, i.e. the person ME is having to deal with. This obliquity, this lack of reciprocity between ME and HIM gives us an odd take on the world Rameau lives in: a world of bankers and celebrities as might be said now. *Rameau's Nephew* seems to lead us into the seamy semi-hidden staircases of power in the eighteenth century, to what the Goncourt brothers in the 19th century and Robert Darnton in the 20th have tried to throw light on.

Rameau's Nephew has not left any traces during Diderot's own life time. Naigeon, a friend who after the philosopher's death turned himself into his spokesman, seems to know of its existence but not to have a copy. A secret text then. But why? Does it act as a counterweight to the more imposing more public works, the ones Diderot could own up to? In the article "Encyclopédie" which he wrote for that work in part to counter criticism of the lack of quality of the articles on aesthetics and poetics – criticisms justified in my eyes – Diderot writes a paragraph very relevant to our subject and my title: **Q 1** Satire is denounced as too light, too insipid, too allusive to have value: "a foam which gradually collapses". One can only say that Diderot is right to assert that a satirical encyclopaedia would be nonsensical. The passage quoted seems to want to make us think that a work like *Rameau's Nephew*, stuffed full of allusions and little anecdotes is too "bitty" to be serious and is unworthy of our attention. The passage makes one wonder why he brings the theme of satire up at all in the article – rightly one of the most famous he wrote.

In fact there are a series of remarks he makes elsewhere which suggest a serial thinking about his own irony and its relation to the fragmentary. But also to his unorthodoxy, as is clear in **Q 2**. Here, Voltaire is said to have actually contradicted himself to hide his own beliefs, whereas Diderot suggests he himself uses irony, in its classical definition: to mean one thing with the words one uses, and to hint that we feel quite differently : *aliud verbis significamus, aliud re sentimus*.¹ At another point – both these examples are from marginal comments on books **Q 3** – he relates irony not to tone but to order, to an arrangement of ideas which is not expounding what has been found, but which is finding as it goes along. But the irony here would still have an effect, for it would pass round ideas, stir things up, make things dangerous; it would just be more invisible, for the comment I give in **Q 3** concerns Helvétius’ book *de l’Esprit*, and becomes the sharper when we know that the book actually was instrumental in provoking the suspension of publication of the *Encyclopédie* in 1759.

All this suggests that what Diderot does in *Rameau’s Nephew* is deliberate: stringing together anecdotes, examples, proper names, into a satire which I hope to show provokes a good deal of thinking. I am going to look at one particular aspect of this fragmentariness: a student at Queen Mary asked his companions in the seminar “why are there so many lists?” And his question was right on the mark. I am going to argue that one can treat the elements of these lists as mini- anecdotes, fragments of fragments in a way. And to suggest what the purpose of this strange proceeding might be.

¹ Cicero, *Pro Ligario*, quoted from Heinrich Lausberg, *Handbuch der literarischen Rhetorik*, 1960. München: Max Hueber Verlag.

Enumeration is everywhere in *Rameau's Nephew*, done with an emphasis and a sense of the unfitting fitting things together which is extremely funny in many cases **Q4** – piling up of technical terms to describe a Rameau opera – if you know *Castor and Pollux*, you will see how fitting and how bizarre at the same time is the list. But, as Diderot predicted in the **Q 1**, we may need a note to remind us. As what I give in **Q 5** *accumulatio*, a well tried rhetorical device, produces humour.

Elsewhere, the list is part of a sketch of a little incident made up of a series of movements: after one of his pantomimes, Rameau seems to drop off: **Q 6** .

After having tasted for a few moments the sweetness of this repose, he woke up, stretched his arms, yawned, rubbed his eyes, and looked around him still for his insipid toadies.

Elsewhere, a list of such verbs accompanied by increasing detail, creates a whole series of events, each a little incident in themselves: **Q7**

They gave me a good time. I wasn't away from them for a moment without their regretting me. I was their little Rameau, their pretty Rameau, their Rameau the madman, the cheeky boy, the ignorant boy, lazy, greedy, the buffoon, the great idiot. Not one of these familiar epithet but got me a smile, a caress, a little tap on the shoulder, a slap on the cheek, a kick, when at table a nice bit of food that was thrown on my plate, when away from table, a license I could take without consequence...

Here each phrase is a kind of summarized action or speech which has occurred in his dealings with Bertin-Hus. We can see that it isn't any kind of consecutive history, but a string first of adjectival phrases, then of little actions : there is no coordination – we have a prime example of what is known as parataxis. One might argue that such a technique is developing what Roland Barthes calls “a reality effect”. But no doubt like much that gets rolled into a striking phrase from a subtle thinker, when the example

just quoted is looked at more closely, the effect is less of reality than of slippage: the reader is unsure which element to choose, nor how to take account of the modification that the elements exercise on each other reciprocally. If you taken the little story, quite a long one, of the harpsichord lesson, the lost music book reappears at last, the mode of its loss having been sketched out by two strictly incompatible methods, incompatible at least at the same time:

Q 8 However, the piano book of Miss had at last been found under an armchair where it had been dragged, chewed at, torn by a young bulldog or by a little cat...

One could thus argue that the superabundance of details in the text, the great number of anecdotes are less designed to paint events exactly than to trick us by a large number of possibilities each of which seems to point us in a different direction. As in the example just given, it isn't certain if we are faced with possibilities which exclude each other, or rather which can be topped up with each other: what seems sure is that the anecdote is NOT assumed by a definite subjectivity (otherwise why 'young' bulldog OR 'little' cat?) In this astonishing example what is going on is put together by a kind of link which to my mind resembles the disjunctive 'or' in logic: here, you can assemble possibilities infinitely, possibilities which are piled up and which will be separated only by a rolling out through time: what is contradictory is only what happens at another moment, what would exist as if in another, different, little story.

But in another case, this time a simple list, the personages named represent less possibilities than examples:

Q 9: HIM – [...] I don't make myself vile by doing the same as everyone else. It isn't me who invented them [these vile ruses] : and I would be bizarre and clumsy not to conform myself to them. Really, I know that if you go applying to this certain general principles of some kind of moral code they all have in their mouth and that nobody practises, we will be left with

white being black and black being white [...] each class has its exceptions to the general conscience, and I would like to give them the name of trade idiotisms. [...] And the sovereign, the minister, the financier, the magistrate, the military man, the man of letters, the lawyer, the prosecutor, the tradesman, the banker, the artisan, the singing master, the dancing master, are very honest people, although their conduct departs in several points from the general conscience, and although it is filled with moral idiotisms. [...] I show myself to advantage by what you call vile pieces of skill, unworthy little tricks. I give my lesson, and I give it well; that is the general rule. I get people to believe that I have more to give than the day has hours. That is the idiotism.

Here we have less singulars, and rather particulars, to use the logical term of the time: particular trades, classed in decreasing order of importance; the classification goes from public to private, and thus with private masters (thinking of Hogarth and his dancing masters) to the interior of great houses and a satirical zone. So you could speak of the particular: “the sovereign”, the “tradesman” are not an individual, not even a class, but a representative of their class. You perhaps know that part of the reform of the theatre Diderot sought to operate consisted of bringing “conditions” into the admissible subjects in the theatre. (“Conditions” is something between ‘class’ and ‘trade’). But in *Rameau’s Nephew*, it is less a question of *conditions* than of *species*. We move from a notion which is socio-theatrical, *condition*, to one which brings up the major problem of classification for the end of the century, that of *species*, whose end point is Darwin’s great work, *On the Origin of Species*, 1859. It is not surprising that Hegel, a careful reader, picks up this word in one of his quotations from Diderot’s text (in his § 489). **Q 10**

If, therefore, individuality is erroneously supposed to be rooted in the *particularity* of nature and character, then in the actual world there are no individualities and no characters, but everyone is like everyone else; but this presumed individuality really only exists in someone’s mind, an *imaginary* existence

which has no abiding place in this world, where only that which externalizes itself, and therefore, only the universal, obtains an actual existence. That is why such an imagined existence is esteemed for what it is, for a *kind* of being. Hegel § 489 (espèce in Diderot's French).

So the particularity of a subset of a genus (being a magistrate or a military man) doesn't guarantee an individuality: we can all be put into a species, which in turn belongs to a genus, so we are "une espèce" - in the slang of the time, as LUI points out, a nobody. (Genevan slang too).

Diderot goes farther : he lets Rameau suggest that there are particularizations in morality, as there are in a language: there are departures from the general conscience, the general morality, as there are "idiotisms" that is, particular ways of speaking in a particular language.² They are practices adapted to a particular trade. LUI gives himself as an example **Q 9 again**:

moral idiotisms. [...] I show myself to advantage by what you call vile pieces of skill, unworthy little tricks. I give my lesson, and I give it well; that is the general rule. I get people to believe that I have more to give than the day has hours. That is the idiotism.

At several moments in the dialogue, for example **Q 11**, we pass from nameless personages to a list of trades "people from the court, financiers, big commercial people, bankers, financiers, business people" to actual people, real actresses Deschamps or Guimard, to come to yet another list, this time of minor trades. But they are all in a predatory relation one to the other.

We exercise justice each on the other, without the law getting mixed up in it.

² See the article "idiotisme" in the *Encyclopédie*.

The animals in the menagerie, as Rameau calls them, devour each other; everyone in the world lives in a dependent relation to all the others. They all, says Rameau, dance the great dance of the world.

It is the word used by Diderot ‘espèce’ which opens the profoundest perspective on all this gossip, this satire of ‘celebrities’ and politicians which fills up the text of *Rameau’s Nephew*. The Nephew says **Q 12**

What we call species, [kinds], the epithet most to be feared of them all, because it marks mediocrity and the last degree of contempt. A great good-for-nothing is a great good-for-nothing, but is not a species.

The term in the logics of the time is inserted between the singular and the general, between the individual and the genus. Its use in the eighteenth century seems to indicate an uncertain relation between the individual and the universal, an uncertainty which leaves some traces in Kant, as I hope to show very briefly in conclusion.

Though the eighteenth century individual, whose existential dilemma is expounded for instance by Rousseau, posits himself as an autonomous subject, in fact he is less sure of himself, less clear about his relation to others of his kind – The society of the marketplace, the early capitalism developing means that men’s strength, their talents, can be treated like so many goods; and there will necessarily develop in such a society huge inequalities (such as Rousseau denounces with such eloquent vigour at the end of his *Discourse on the origin and foundations of inequality*). In such a situation, man feels himself to be one of a kind, at the same time as he feels he is forced to bend to the will of his patron, to the customs of his milieu, lost in the press of flatterers, that is among others of his species: “the worst thing is the constrained posture that need holds us to. The man in need doesn’t walk like another; he jumps, he crawls, he

twists, he drags himself; his whole life is spent taking up positions”. And Rameau executes a pantomime to prove it:

Q 13

he has his right foot in front, the left at the back, his back bent, the arms out towards some object; he is waiting for an order, he gets it; he goes off like an arrow; he comes back, the order is done; he give account of it. He is attentive to everything; he picks up what falls, he places a pillow or a foot stool under feet; he holds a saucer, he moves a chair forward, he opens a door; he closes a window; he pulls some curtains; he observes the master and mistress; he is immobile, his arms hanging; his legs in parallel; he listens; he tries to read faces; and he adds: “That is my pantomime about the same as those of flatterers, of courtiers, of valets and of beggars”.

Hegel saw quite clearly the relevance of this – in general literary critics are too quick to dismiss him. *Species*, the fifth of the scholastic *predicabilia*, is traditionally situated between the genus on the one hand and the individual on the other. *Species* represents then the *particular* – which is only a part of a bigger group, the *genus*. Rameau’s lists don’t present us with numerically singular individuals, but with the particular, a group of beings who have a common quality, a characteristic which designates the, as a sub-class, a species of a genius. I would just add that the changes that Kant made throughout his work in the relation he assigned to judgements of quantity and the categories of quantity, that is between “universal, particular, singular” on the one hand and “unity, plurality, totality’ on the other, seem to me to reveal a worry about the concept of the “particular”.

Rameau’s Nephew with its anecdotes, its gossip, paints a cruel, unstable, funny world. One where every one is for himself, uses his elbows, but in doing that is part of a species, *of flatterers, of courtiers, of valets and of beggars*. Presenting the Ancien Régime world in this way, in different

forms of lists, is truly to present something infinite – in a list, you can always insert a new term. So the mysterious form of the dialogue, the impression it gives of lack of construction, of shapelessness, seems thus entirely fitting: it is infinite because infinitely extendable through insertion between fixed limits.

I am running out of time, so a few remarks, as an amateur. The tensions between encyclopaedic and fragmentary found in Leopardi's *Zibaldone* are not unlike the tensions in Novalis – I leave that to others. Diderot experienced what it is to write an encyclopedia: between the 18 volumes he had inserted extra articles when they were needed. The infinity here is that of a Dedekind cut: between the hard covers of the first and last volumes articles could be inserted as desired, and to the number desired, if your publishers would let you. In both the *Zibaldone* and in Diderot I think I see what I would call a spiritual atheism: limited but also infinite.

Quotations/References

1. Je hais cent fois plus les satyres dans un ouvrage, que les éloges ne m'y plaisent: les personnalités sont odieuses en tout genre d'écrire; on est sûr d'amuser le commun des hommes, quand on s'étudie à repaître sa méchanceté. Le ton de la satire est le plus mauvais de tous pour un dictionnaire; & l'ouvrage le plus impertinent & le plus ennuyeux qu'on pût concevoir, ce seroit un dictionnaire satyrique: c'est le seul qui nous manque. Il faut absolument bannir d'un grand livre ces à-propos légers, ces allusions fines, ces embellissemens délicats qui feroient la fortune d'une historiette: les traits qu'il faut expliquer deviennent fades, ou ne tardent pas à devenir inintelligibles. Ce seroit une chose bien ridicule, que le besoin d'un commentaire dans un ouvrage, dont les différentes parties seroient destinées à s'interpréter réciproquement. Toute cette légèreté n'est qu'une mousse qui tombe peu - à - peu; bientôt la partie volatile s'en est évaporée, & il ne reste plus qu'une vase insipide.

Tel est aussi le sort de la plupart de ces étincelles qui partent du choc de la conversation: la sensation agréable, mais passagère, qu'elles excitent, naît des rapports qu'elles ont au moment, aux circonstances, aux lieux, aux personnes, à l'événement du jour; rapports qui passent promptement. Les traits qui ne se remarquent point, parce que l'éclat n'en est pas le mérite principal, pleins de substance, & portant en eux le caractère de la simplicité jointe à un grand sens, sont les seuls qui se soutiendroient au grand jour: pour sentir la frivolité des autres, il n'y a qu'à les écrire. Si l'on me montrait un auteur qui eût composé ses mélanges d'après des conversations, je serois presque sûr qu'il auroit recueilli tout ce qu'il falloit négliger, & négligé tout ce qu'il importoit de recueillir. [...] Il est des grands ouvrages ainsi que des grands édifices ; ils ne comportent que des ornemens rares & grands.

I hate satires in a work a hundred times more than praises in it please me: personal remarks are odious in any genre of writing ; one is sure to give amusement to the general run of men when one takes pains to feed their nastiness. The tone of satire is the worst of all for a dictionary; & the most impertinent and most boring work one could conceive of would be a satirical dictionary : it is the only one we haven't got. Those light remarks on the side, those subtle allusions, those delicate embellishments which would make the fortune of a little story have absolutely to be banished from a great book; features which have to be explained become insipid, or become unintelligible without delay. It would be something pretty ridiculous to need a commentary in a work whose different parts were supposed to interpret each other reciprocally. To take everything lightly in this way is only a foam which gradually collapses; soon the airy part has evaporated from it, & there is nothing left but an insipid sediment. The fate of most of the sparks which come out of the cut and thrust of conversation is also like this: the agreeable but temporary sensation which they excite is born from the relations they have with the moment, with the circumstances, the places, the people, with what is going on on that day; relations which are very quickly over. The features which are not noticed because their principal merit is not brilliancy, which are full of substance, carrying with them the character of simplicity together with great good sense, are the only ones which will not fade in the light of day: to become aware of the frivolity of the others, you only have to write them down. If I were shown an author who were to have composed his selected works out of conversations, I would be almost sure that he has put together everything that had to be neglected, & neglected everything that it mattered to put together. [...] Great works are like great buildings ; they only have a few great ornaments.

(Diderot, article « Encyclopédie » pour l'*Encyclopédie*)

2. Et que dire de Voltaire, qui dit avec Locke que la matière peut penser, avec Toland que le monde est éternel, avec Tindal que la liberté est une chimère, et qui admet un Dieu vengeur et rémunérateur ? A-t-il été inconséquent ? Ou a-t-il eu peur du docteur de Sorbonne ? Moi, je me suis sauvé par le ton ironique le plus délié que j'aie pu trouver, les généralités, le laconisme et l'obscurité

And what to say about Voltaire, who says with Locke that matter can think, with Toland that the world is everlasting, with Tindal that freedom is a chimaera, and who allows a God who avenges and rewards? Was he lacking in logic? Or did he get scared of the Sorbonne theologians ? Me, I got myself off by the

most ironic tone, the most nimble one I could find, by general statements, by laconism, and by obscurity.

(Diderot, *Réfutation d'Hemsterhuis*, vers 1774, éd. Lewinter, XI, p.105).

3. L'esprit d'invention s'agite, se meut, se remue d'une manière déréglée ; il cherche. L'esprit de méthode arrange, ordonne, et suppose que tout est trouvé... Voilà le défaut principal de cet ouvrage [*de l'Esprit*, d'Helvétius]. Si tout ce que l'auteur a écrit eût été entassé comme pêle-mêle, qu'il n'y eût eu que dans l'esprit de l'auteur un ordre sourd, son livre eût été infiniment plus agréable et, sans le paraître, infiniment plus dangereux... Ajoutez à cela qu'il est rempli d'histoires. Or, les histoires vont à merveille dans la bouche et dans l'écrit d'un homme qui semble n'avoir aucun but et marcher en badinant et nigaudant; au lieu que ces histoires n'étant que des faits particuliers, on exige de l'auteur méthodique des raisons en abondance, et des faits avec sobriété....

The spirit of invention works itself up, moves, is stirred up in an unregulated way; it is in search of. The spirit of method arranges, puts in order, and supposes that everything is found... This is the principal defect of this work [*of Spirit*, by Helvétius. If everything the author has written had been piled up as pell-mell, if there had only been in the mind of the author a muffled order, his book would have been infinitely more agreeable, and infinitely more dangerous, without appearing so. Add to that that it is stuffed full with little stories. Now, these anecdotes fit admirably in the mouth and in the writing of a man who seems to have no aim, and to walk along joking and being silly; instead of which, these stories being only particular facts, the author who is methodical needs to supply reasons in abundance, and facts with sobriety...

(Diderot, *Réflexions sur le livre de l'Esprit*, 1758, éd. Lewinter, III, p. 246).

4. [Rameau l'oncle] de qui nous avons un certain nombre d'opéras où il y a de l'harmonie, des bouts de chants, des idées décousues, du fracas, des vols, des triomphes, des lances, des gloires, des murmures, des victoires à perte d'haleine; des airs de danse qui dureront éternellement...

[Rameau the uncle] who has given us a certain number of operas where there is harmony, bits of songs, incoherent ideas, noise, flights, triumphs, lettings-loose, glory-bes, murmurs, victories till we are out of breath; dance music which will last for ever...

(Diderot, *Neveu de Rameau*, éd. J. Chouillet, Livre de Poche, p. 18).

5. MOI - Quand un homme de génie serait communément d'un commerce dur, difficile, épineux, insupportable, quand même ce serait un méchant, qu'en concluriez-vous ? – LUI - Qu'il est bon à noyer (p. 22).

ME –Supposing a man of genius were in general unyielding to deal with, difficult, prickly, unbearable, when he were even to be a wicked man, what would you conclude about him? HIM – that he is good for drowning.

6. Après avoir goûté quelques instants la douceur de ce repos, il se réveillait, étendait ses bras, baïllait, se frottait les yeux, et cherchait encore autour de lui ses adulateurs insipides (p. 27).

After having tasted for a few moments the sweetness of this repose, he woke up, stretched his arms, yawned, rubbed his eyes, and looked around him still for his insipid toadies.

7. On me fêtait. On ne me perdait pas un moment, sans me regretter. J'étais leur petit Rameau, leur joli Rameau, leur Rameau le fou, l'impertinent, l'ignorant, le paresseux, le gourmand, le bouffon, la grosse bête. Il n'y avait pas une de ces épithètes familières qui ne me valût un sourire, une caresse, un petit coup sur l'épaule, un soufflet, un coup de pied, à table un bon morceau qu'on me jetait sur mon assiette, hors de table une liberté que je prenais sans conséquence (p.28-29).

They gave me a good time. I wasn't away from them for a moment without their regretting me. I was their little Rameau, their pretty Rameau, their Rameau the madman, the cheeky boy, the ignorant boy, lazy, greedy, the buffoon, the great idiot. Not one of these familiar epithet but got me a smile, a caress, a little tap on the shoulder, a slap on the cheek, a kick, when at table a nice bit of food that was thrown on my plate, when away from table, a license I could take without consequence...

8. Cependant le livre de mademoiselle s'était enfin retrouvé sous un fauteuil où il avait été traîné, mâchonné, déchiré par un jeune doguin ou par un petit chat (p.42).

However, the piano book of Miss had at last been found under an armchair where it had been dragged, chewed at, torn by a young bulldog or by a little cat...

9. LUI - [...] Je ne m'avilis point en faisant comme tout le monde. Ce n'est pas moi qui les ai inventées [les viles ruses] : et je serais bizarre et maladroit de ne pas m'y conformer. Vraiment, je sais bien que si vous allez appliquer à cela certains principes généraux de je ne sais quelle morale qu'ils ont tous à la bouche , et qu'aucun d'eux ne pratique, il se trouvera que ce qui est blanc sera noir, et que ce qui est noir sera blanc. Mais, monsieur le philosophe, il y a une conscience générale, comme il y a une grammaire générale ; et puis des exceptions dans chaque langue que vous appelez, je crois, vous autres savants, des [idiotismes] [...] Chaque état a ses exceptions à la conscience générale auxquelles je donnerais volontiers le nom d'idiotismes de métier [...] Et le souverain, le ministre, le financier, le magistrat, le militaire, l'homme de lettres, l'avocat, le procureur, le commerçant, le banquier, l'artisan, le maître à chanter, le maître à danser, sont de fort honnêtes gens, quoique leur conduite s'écarte en plusieurs points de la conscience générale, et soit remplie d'idiotismes moraux. [...] je me fais valoir par ce que vous qualifiez d'adresses viles, d'indignes petites ruses. Je donne ma leçon, et je la donne bien ; voilà la règle générale. Je fais croire que j'en ai plus à donner que la journée n'a d'heures. Voilà l'idiotisme (p. 44-45).

HIM - [...] I don't make myself vile by doing the same as everyone else. It isn't me who invented them [these vile ruses] : and I would be bizarre and clumsy not to conform myself to them. Really, I know that if you go applying to this certain general principles of some kind of moral code they all have in their mouth and that nobody practises, we will be left with white being black and black being white [...] each class has its exceptions to the general conscience, and I would like to give them the name of trade idiotisms. [...] And the sovereign, the minister, the financier, the magistrate, the military man, the man of letters, the lawyer, the prosecutor, the tradesman, the banker, the artisan, the singing master, the dancing master, are very honest people, although their conduct departs in several points from the general conscience, and

although it is filled with moral idiotisms. [...] I show myself to advantage by what you call vile pieces of skill, unworthy little tricks. I give my lesson, and I give it well; that is the general rule. I get people to believe that I have more to give than the day has hours. That is the idiotism.

10. Wenn daher fälschlicherweise die Individualität in die *Besonderheit* der Natur und des Charakters gesetzt wird, so finden sich in der realen Welt keine Individualitäten und Charaktere, sondern die Individuen haben ein gleiches Dasein füreinander; jene vermeintlich Individualität ist eben nur das *gemeinte* Dasein, welches in dieser Welt, worin nur das Sichselbstentäußernde und darum nur das Allgemeine Wirklichkeit erhält, kein Bleiben hat. – Das *Gemeinte* gilt darum für das, was es ist für eine Art.

(Hegel, *Phänomenologie des Geistes*, 1807; Suhrkamp Taschenbuch p. 364).

Si donc l'individualité est posée faussement dans la *particularité* de la nature et du caractère, c'est que dans le monde réel, il n'y a pas d'individualités et de caractères, mais que les individus ont un être-là égal l'un pour l'autre. Cette prétention d'individualité n'est que l'être-là visé qui ne parvient à aucune stabilité dans ce monde dans lequel ce qui renonce à soi seulement, et par conséquent seulement ce qui est universel, gagne l'effectivité. *L'être visé* [*das Gemeinte*] passe donc pour ce qu'il est, pour une espèce (Hegel, *Phenomenologie*, II, p. 56, trad. Jean Hyppolite).

If, therefore, individuality is erroneously supposed to be rooted in the *particularity* of nature and character, then in the actual world there are no individualities and no characters, but everyone is like everyone else; but this presumed individuality really only exists in someone's mind, an *imaginary* existence which has no abiding place in this world, where only that which externalizes itself, and therefore, only the universal, obtains an actual existence. That is why such an imagined existence is esteemed for what it is, for a *kind* of being. (Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A.V. Miller, §489.)

11. Les parents regorgeaient d'une fortune acquise, Dieu sait comment ; c'étaient des gens de cour, des financiers, de gros commerçants, des banquiers, des gens d'affaires. Je les aidais à restituer, moi, et une foule d'autres qu'ils employaient comme moi. Dans la nature, toutes les espèces se dévorent ; toutes les conditions se dévorent dans la société. Nous faisons justice les uns des autres, sans que la loi s'en mêle. La Deschamps, autrefois ; aujourd'hui la Guimard venge le prince du financier ; et c'est la marchande de mode, le bijoutier, le tapissier, la lingère, l'escroc, la femme de chambre, le cuisinier, le bourrelier, qui vengent le financier de la Deschamps (p.46).

The parents were fat with an a fortune acquired God knows how; it was people from the court, financiers, big commercial people, bankers, financiers, business people. I helped them give back, me and a crowd of others that they employed like me. In nature, all the species devour each other; all the classes devour each other in society. We exercise justice each on the other, without the law getting mixed up in it. The actress Deschamps, in the past; today, that Guimard revenges the prince for the financier; and it is the fashion specialist, the jeweller, the interior decorator, the underwear specialist, the crook, the chamber maid, the cook, the harness maker, who revenge the financier for that Deschamps.

12. Ce que nous appelons des espèces, de toutes les épithètes la plus redoutable, parce qu'elle marque la médiocrité, et le dernier degré du mépris. Un grand vaurien est un grand vaurien, mais n'est point une espèce (p.93).

What we call species, [kinds], the epithet most to be feared of them all, because it marks mediocrity and the last degree of contempt. A great good-for-nothing is a great good-for-nothing, but is not a species.

13. Puis il se met à sourire, à contrefaire l'homme admirateur, l'homme suppliant, l'homme complaisant ; il a le pied droit en avant, le gauche en arrière, le dos courbé, la tête relevée, le regard comme attaché sur d'autres yeux, la bouche entrouverte, les bras portés vers quelque objet ; il attend un ordre, il le reçoit ; il part comme un trait ; il revient, il est exécuté ; il en rend compte. Il est attentif à tout ; il ramasse ce qui tombe ; il place un oreiller ou un tabouret sous des pieds ; il tient une soucoupe, il approche une chaise, il ouvre une porte ; il ferme une fenêtre ; il tire des rideaux ; il observe le maître et la maîtresse ; il est immobile, les bras pendants ; les jambes parallèles ; il écoute ; il cherche à lire sur des visages ; et il ajoute : Voilà ma pantomime à peu près la même que celles des flatteurs, des courtisans, des valets et des gueux (p.105-6).

And then he begins to smile, to imitate the admiring man, the man in supplication, the complaisant man; he has his right foot in front, the left at the back, his back bent, the arms out towards some object; he is waiting for an order, he gets it; he goes off like an arrow; he comes back, the order is done; he give account of it. He is attentive to everything; he picks up what falls, he places a pillow or a foot stool under feet; he holds a saucer, he moves a chair forward, he opens a door; he closes a window; he pulls some curtains; he observes the master and mistress; he is immobile, his arms hanging; his legs in parallel; he listens; he tries to read faces; and he adds: "That is my pantomime about the same as those of flatterers, of courtiers, of valets and of beggars".