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THE FUNCTION OF THE NARRATOR
IN LES BIJOUX INDISCRETS

By

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The Function of the Narrator in Les Bijoux indiscrets (67 pp.)

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A close analysis of the narrative technique of Denis Diderot's Les Bijoux indiscrets indicates the author's concern with the paradox of created reality. In this first novel, it is primarily through the use of the narrator that Diderot experiments with created reality. Diderot makes numerous attempts to establish a sense of reality in his novel, yet at the same time he consistently contradicts this same reality. It is through an application of Diderot's ideas as stated in his other works that this contradiction can be understood. Most notably, as he stated in his Eloge de Richardson, a writer must always be aware of the difference between the "lie" which he creates through fiction and the universal "truth" which he wishes to convey to his readers. This is precisely what Diderot accomplishes by his creation and subsequent destruction of the sense of reality in Les Bijoux indiscrets.

This study of the narrative technique of Les Bijoux is divided into five chapters. The first chapter includes the introduction and states the purpose of the thesis, which is to study the narrative technique of Les Bijoux indiscrets and to demonstrate that this technique is intentional and the result of Diderot's experimentation with the illusion of created reality. This first chapter also contains a discussion of the critical reaction to the novel as well as remarks about the outside factors that apparently influenced Diderot. The second chapter deals with the literary techniques themselves as found in Les Bijoux, the narrative technique, the function of the talking bijoux and the role of its three major characters. The next chapter is a detailed analysis of the use of the narrators, a controversial point among several contemporary critics. Chapter IV deals with Diderot's conception of the paradox of created reality, and the manner in which he strove to resolve it in Les Bijoux indiscrets.

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CHAPTER I
BACKGROUND AND INFLUENCES

Denis Diderot published his first novel, Les Bijoux indiscrets, in 1748. In spite of the immediate popularity of the novel, the critical response was unfavorable. Critics attacked it on the grounds that it was a licentious, frivolous tale. Even later critics felt it should only be included in Diderot's complete works because it was one of his works, and not because of its merits.

However, as more recent critics have asserted, many of the elements of Diderot's ideas on literary technique are already found in Les Bijoux indiscrets. For example, there are numerous attempts to involve the reader in the creative process through dialogue and a multiple-narrator approach. Diderot's concern with the creation and illusion of reality is very apparent in this novel, as it continued to be in his later works, most notably in Jacques le fataliste. An examination of the narrative technique in Les Bijoux reveals that it is primarily through the use of the narrator that Diderot experiments with the illusion of reality.

It is true that the novel contains licentious elements, but its other aspects warrant some defense. A study of the structure of the novel and its narrative technique indicates that these are intentional experiments, and not merely flaws

in the work of an inexperienced or inept novelist. The purpose of this thesis is to study the narrative technique in order to demonstrate that this experimentation with the illusion of created reality on Diderot's part was intentional.

This study begins with an introduction which includes a discussion of the critical response to Les Bijoux indiscrets and deals with the outside factors which apparently influenced Diderot. The next chapter studies the more important literary techniques found in Les Bijoux, with a brief explanation of the narrative technique, the function of the talking bijoux, and the role of its three major characters. The third chapter is a detailed analysis of the use of the narrators. Also included in this chapter is a discussion of the omniscience of the narrators, which remains a point of contention among several contemporary critics. Chapter IV deals with Diderot's conception of the paradox of created reality, and the manner in which he strove to deal with it in Les Bijoux indiscrets.

Les Bijoux indiscrets was published when Diderot was 35 years old. The novel was immediately popular and six editions were printed within several months of the first publication. An English edition was published in 1749, and German editions followed in 1776 and 1792. There have been

ten editions of Les Bijoux since 1920 in France alone, making it Diderot's most published work.¹

In her Mémoires, Diderot's daughter, Mme de Vandeuil, relates the circumstances surrounding the writing of Les Bijoux. According to her, her father had written the novel as the result of a wager with his mistress, Mme de Puisieux. As related by Mme de Vandeuil, Diderot and his mistress were discussing the ease with which licentious novels could be written. Diderot asserted that in order to write like Crébillon, one need only to find a pleasant idea, one where the "libertinage de l'esprit" would replace good taste. Thereupon, Mme de Puisieux challenged him to produce such a novel, which he proceeded to do. At the end of only two weeks, Diderot presented his mistress with Les Bijoux indiscrets.²

The story in Les Bijoux takes place in Banza, the capital of the Congo, a mythical country in Africa, which is ruled by the sultan Mangogul. Mangogul is a good and wise sultan who one day becomes very bored and expresses his desire for some amusement to his "favorite," Mirzoza. She suggests that he seek aid from the genie Cucufa. Mangogul accepts her advice and tells Cucufa that he would like to

¹Arthur Wilson, Diderot: The Testing Years, 1713-1759 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1957), p. 86.

²Mme de Vandeuil, Mémoires, cited by J. Assezat and M. Tourneaux, editors, Denis Diderot, Oeuvres complètes, 20 vols. (Paris: Garnier Freres, Libraires-Editeurs, 1875), I: xlii.

amuse himself at the expense of the women of his court. Because he possesses great magical powers, Cucufa produces a magic ring and gives it to the sultan. With this ring, Mangogul can point to any woman, and, to quote Arthur Wilson, "make that part of her anatomy talk, which, if it ordinarily had the power of speech, would be most qualified to answer a Kinsey questionnaire."³

Mangogul makes prompt use of his magic ring, and is soon horrified by the tales related by the bijoux of various women of his court. When he tells his "favorite" that he doubts the existence of even one virtuous and faithful woman, Mirzoza is quick to defend her sex. The two make a wager, and Mangogul promises Mirzoza that if he can find one true and virtuous woman, he will give her his chateau of Amara.

It is at the end of the novel, as a result of the thirtieth experiment with the magic ring, that Mangogul at long last discovers the woman whose existence he had doubted. This woman is, of course, the wise and virtuous favorite, Mirzoza. Mangogul happily concedes victory to her and gives up his chateau.

This quest for the virtuous woman provides Les Bijoux indiscrets with its major theme--the theme of love and fidelity. The quest is also the source for those passages that were so consistently condemned as licentious and frivolous by the critics.

³Wilson, Diderot, p. 84.

The passages that deal with the use of the magic ring and the talking indiscreet bijoux can at times justifiably be termed licentious. Playboy magazine recognized this in its December 1976 issue. In a one-page resumé of Les Bijoux in its "Ribald Classic of the Month" section, the reviewer clearly reveals the licentious elements of the novel.⁴

However, the Playboy resumé is quite simplistic. It singles out and accentuates the licentious aspects of the book, to the exclusion of all aesthetic considerations. Its author has specifically left out the numerous passages in the novel that do not refer to sex.

The major theme of love and fidelity does provide the novel with its often licentious chapters related to the use of the magic ring and the talking bijoux, but the novel also contains secondary themes which Diderot presents as digressive episodes, and which the Playboy reviewer of course neglected. As David Berry points out in an article on Diderot's use of literary digression, the looseness of the form of the novel enabled Diderot to introduce subjects that did not deal with the sexual theme. According to Berry, these digressions were a necessary part of the novel, because even a series of comic and lewd episodes is not sufficient to sustain interest in itself.⁵

⁴Denis Diderot, "The Indiscreet Jewels--Ribald Classic," Playboy, December 1976, p. 206.

⁵David Berry, "The Technique of Literary Digression in the Fiction of Diderot," Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century 118 (1974): 183-194.

When considering these digressive episodes, it is important to keep in mind that Diderot probably intended his novel to be a roman à clef. J. Assézat, editor of the 1875 edition of the Oeuvres complètes of Diderot, asserts that on the basis of certain discoveries he had made, the various characters in the novel represent definite contemporaries of Diderot as well as actual places: the prototype of Mangogul is Louis XV; Mirzoza, Mme de Pompadour; Sélim, le Maréchal de Richelieu; le Congo, La France; Banza, Paris; Circino, Newton; Olibri, Descartes; and la Manimonbanda, the queen Marie Leczinska.⁶

But Assézat continues his discussion, stressing the lack of consistency in Diderot's characterizations. He concludes that the similarities are only vague and should not be taken too literally nor too seriously. However, even a vague similarity between Diderot's characters and his contemporaries is consistent with his propensity for comments on a variety of topics. It can be seen in his later works, as well as in Les Bijoux indiscrets, that Diderot did not limit himself to dealing with one specific topic.

In Les Bijoux, as in his later works, it is primarily through the digressive episodes that Diderot is able to comment on subjects other than sex, love and fidelity. The most important digressions deal with topics that were

⁶Diderot, Oeuvres complètes, ed. Assézat, IV: 137-38.

fashionable in the eighteenth century: Newton versus Descartes, the location of the soul in the body, hypothesis versus experiment, the theater, music (Lulli and Rameau) and the nature of dreams.

When examining the various themes in Les Bijoux, it is important to look beyond the obvious sexual one, beyond licentiousness or fidelity. The critics unfortunately have often failed to do this. Too many have dismissed Les Bijoux indiscrets as an unimportant work because of its pornographic aspect. The harshest attack comes from a contemporary of Diderot, L. Charpentier, who is quoted in a critical and biographical study by A. Wilson in the following terms:

"One cannot deny . . . that his Bijoux frequently say some very sensible things; but they are wrapped up in so many dirty and cynical images and expressions, that their utility can never be comparable to the danger to which the most dispassionate mind would be exposed in reading them."⁷

Another pejorative view comes from John Morley, who, in his book Diderot and the Encyclopaedists (1878), refuses to refer to Les Bijoux indiscrets by name. To support his argument against the work, he quotes another critic, Carlyle,

⁷L. Charpentier, Lettres critiques, sur divers écrits de nos jours contraires à la Religion et aux moeurs, 2 vols. (London, 1751), II: 22, cited by Wilson, Diderot, p. 86-7.

who calls Les Bijoux "the beastliest of all past, present, or future dull novels."⁸

Carlyle's sensitivities were obviously offended as evidenced by the following remark: "If any mortal creature, even a reviewer, be again compelled to glance into that book, let him bathe himself in running water, put on a change of raiment, and be unclean until the even."⁹

Other contemporary critics such as the abbé Raynal, the abbé Voisenon and Pierre Clément all criticized the work. These men found the novel dull and poorly written, and they cared neither for its form nor its content.¹⁰

It is necessary to add, however, that not all of the earlier responses were negative. Lessing, for example, found much to be admired in the work, in spite of its impudent tone. "A wise man," he noted, "often says in jest what he will afterwards repeat in earnest."¹¹

J.A. Naigeon, in his Mémoires historiques et philosophiques sur la vie et les ouvrages de ce genre, reports that an aged Diderot told him, in defense of Les Bijoux, that

⁸John Morley, Diderot and the Encyclopaedists (London, 1878), p. 70, cited by Judith McFadden, "Les Bijoux indiscrets: a deterministic interpretation," Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century 116 (1973): 109.

⁹Diderot, Critical and Miscellaneous Essays, cited by Otis Fellows, "Metaphysics and the Bijoux indiscrets: Diderot's Debt to Prior," Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century 56 (1967): 511.

¹⁰Fellows, "Metaphysics," pp. 509-10.

¹¹Lessing, Hamburgische Dramaturgie (Stuttgart, 1886): ii, 202, cited by Fellows, "Metaphysics," p. 510.

it is not the bad books that form the bad morals of a country, but rather the bad morals that make the bad books. Diderot admitted to Naigeon that he had made a foolish mistake in writing Les Bijoux, but he also obviously felt that it was not a grave one, since he expressed surprise at not having made a larger one in his younger days.¹²

Naigeon alleges that Diderot himself would have banished Les Bijoux from all editions of his works. But Naigeon not only includes the novel in his edition of Diderot's works, but adds three previously unpublished chapters.

In a passage quoted in the Assézat edition of Diderot's works, Naigeon declares:

J'oserai hasarder un jugement que l'avenir paraît devoir confirmer: à mesure que les livres purement et simplement licencieux perdront de leur célébrité, celui-ci [Les Bijoux indiscrets] pourrait bien en acquérir, parce qu'on y trouve la satire des langues, des sciences, et des beaux-arts, des pages très philosophiques et très sages, des morceaux allégoriques remplis de finesse, avec beaucoup de chaleur et de verve.¹³

This is not, however, a point of view shared by all of the twentieth century critics of Diderot. It appears that early twentieth century authors were quite firm in their rejection of Les Bijoux indiscrets as a literary work. But as the century progresses, critics have begun to perceive a certain degree of value in the novel, particularly when it is placed in the context of Diderot's other works.

¹²Diderot, Oeuvres complètes, ed. Assézat, IV: 134.

¹³Ibid., p. 135.

André le Breton, in his Le Roman au dix-huitième siècle (1898), intentionally omits the title of Les Bijoux indiscrets while indirectly mentioning the novel in a list of Diderot's works published before his death. After listing Les Deux Amis de Bourbonne and L'Entretien d'un père avec ses enfants, he adds, "et aussi une oeuvre de pur dévergondage dont il n'y a pas à se souvenir" --a clear reference to Les Bijoux.¹⁴

It is George Saintsbury who began the twentieth century attack on Les Bijoux. In his History of the French Novel (1917), he writes: "If it is not positively what Carlyle called it, 'the beastliest of all dull novels, past, present, or to come,' it would really require a most unpleasant apprenticeship in scavenging in order to discover a dirtier and a duller."¹⁵

John Palache continued this attack in 1926, when he applied to Les Bijoux Diderot's own criticism of Voltaire's Lettres d'Amabed: ". . . without taste, without finesse, without inventiveness, a collection of blackguardisms."¹⁶

The more recent critics who have commented on Les Bijoux indiscrets have given the work a more favorable judgement.

¹⁴André le Breton, Le Roman au dix-huitième siècle (Paris, 1926), p. 315.

¹⁵George Saintsbury, A History of the French Novel (London, 1917), i: 403, cited by Berry, "Literary Digression," p. 187.

¹⁶John Palache, Four Novelists of the Old Regime (New York, 1926): p. 110.

Many have found certain elements in the work admirable. For example, David Berry finds Les Bijoux important enough to merit an entire chapter in his work on Diderot's use of literary digression.¹⁷

Another example is an article entitled "Metaphysics and the Bijoux indiscrets: Diderot's Debt to Prior." In this article, Otis Fellows stresses the importance of Diderot's metaphysical views in the debate on the location of the soul in the body.¹⁸

Several other critics have also found Les Bijoux worthy of their attention. Ruth Thomas, who concentrates mainly on the subject matter of Les Bijoux and its literary technique, gives recognition to Les Bijoux as an important step in the evolution of Diderot's work.¹⁹ Robert Ellrich asserts that Les Bijoux indiscrets is characteristic of Diderot's empirical enquiry into morality, in this case, into the nature of women and love.²⁰ Irwin L. Greenberg attempts to describe what he feels are the significant similarities between Les Bijoux and Jacques le fataliste.²¹ Judith McFadden proposes

¹⁷Berry, "Literary Digression," pp. 183-94.

¹⁸Fellows, "Metaphysics," pp. 509-540.

¹⁹Ruth P. Thomas, "Les Bijoux indiscrets as a laboratory for Diderot's later novels," Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century 135 (1975): 199-211.

²⁰Robert J. Ellrich, "The Structure of Diderot's Les Bijoux indiscrets," Romanic Review 52 (1961): 279-89.

²¹Irwin L. Greenberg, "Narrative Technique and Literary Intent in Diderot's Les Bijoux indiscrets and Jacques le fataliste," Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century 79 (1971): 93-101.

an interpretation of Les Bijoux which views the work as "a unified whole whose structure and meaning are based on deterministic principles expressed both in the experiments with the ring and in the philosophic essays."²²

Perhaps the most laudatory remarks are those made by Henri Coulet in his work Le Roman jusqu'à la Révolution. In the section on "Le roman et le conte libertins" Coulet writes:

. . . le seul chef-d'oeuvre du genre est le roman déjà nommé de Diderot, Les Bijoux indiscrets: roman informe où s'entassent les anecdotes grivoises, les gaillardises, les portraits satiriques, les dissertations esthétiques ou philosophiques; roman quand même, il renoue à sa façon avec le roman de Rabelais par la verve, la réalisme de l'invention et le sérieux de la pensée sous la gaieté du récit; avec lui le roman libertin éclate; l'imagination et le tempérament puissants de Diderot ne pouvaient pas se laisser emprisonner dans les conventions d'un genre mineur.²³

As brought out by many of these recent critics, an understanding of Les Bijoux indiscrets is strengthened by the understanding of the genre to which it belongs--that genre of very popular novels called le conte licencieux, or the licentious oriental tale. Diderot himself mentions several of his predecessors of the genre in his introduction to Les Bijoux when, addressing himself to his imaginary reader, Zima, he tells her that no one would be surprised to

²²Judith McFadden, "Les Bijoux indiscrets: A Deterministic Interpretation," Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century 56 (1967): 110.

²³Henri Coulet, Le Roman jusqu'à la Révolution (New York: McGraw-Hill--Armand Colin, 1967) p. 387.

find her reading Les Bijoux indiscrets because everyone knows she has Le Sopha, Le Tanzaï and Les Confessions under her pillow.

A brief look at these earlier novels will reveal their probable influence on Diderot. The first two novels referred to by Diderot are the works of Crébillon fils, Le Sopha, written in 1740, and Le Tanzaï (or l'Ecumoire), 1743. Both are oriental tales in which the element of magic plays a significant role.²⁴ Le Sopha probably had the greater influence on Diderot and Les Bijoux indiscrets. Both works fit within the models of the oriental and of the licentious tale. McFadden points out the similarities of the two works in the following passage:

The pretext for the erotic episodes in both is the boredom of the sultan. In Le Sopha Schah-Baham commands one of his courtiers to entertain him with stories. Amanzei tells of his adventures as a wandering spirit--interrupted in his metempsychosis by the Brahama who punishes him for his past sins by commanding him to travel from sofa to sofa until he witnesses the sexual union of a virgin couple. In Diderot's novel, the sultan's boredom with usual gossip news leads him to search for a new source of amusement.²⁵

The other novel mentioned in Diderot's introduction is Les Confessions by Duclos. This novel does not fit the pattern of the oriental conte as such, but can be classified

²⁴The dates given here are taken from the Oeuvres complètes of Crébillon (London, 1772, 1777, 1779), as cited by Coulet, Le Roman, pp. 369-70.

²⁵McFadden, "Les Bijoux," p. 111

with the novels of Crébillon as a licentious conte.²⁶

Still another work that most certainly influenced Diderot is Nocrion, written in 1746 by Caylus. Robert Ellrich asserts that Nocrion is the immediate source for Les Bijoux indiscrets. Caylus himself took the theme for his tale from a fourteenth century fabliau bluntly entitled Du chevalier qui fist les cons parler. In both of these works, as in Les Bijoux, a ring in the possession of a prince gives him the power to make a woman speak "through the most private part of her anatomy."²⁷

But there are some significant differences between Nocrion and Les Bijoux indiscrets. While Diderot presents his reader with thirty trials of the magic ring, Caylus offers him only three. Furthermore, whereas in Nocrion the ring episodes play an important part in the development of the plot, in Les Bijoux they are unconnected, or, to quote Ellrich, they are connected only by the "merest pretext in order to furnish a panoramic scandalous chronicle."²⁸

To conclude this chapter on background and influences then, it can be said that although Diderot was influenced by several precursors, he does add digressive episodes to create a rather original novel. Through the use of the digressive episodes, Diderot presents us with more than a purely licentious novel.

²⁶Ibid., p. 111.

²⁷Ellrich, "Structure of Les Bijoux," p. 280.

²⁸Ibid., p. 281.

CHAPTER II

LITERARY TECHNIQUES IN LES BIJOUX INDISCRETS

In his first novel, Diderot utilizes some seemingly conventional and simple literary techniques. Les Bijoux indiscrets has a traditional narrator who relates the plot, it has a central theme which more or less connects the various episodes, and it contains dialogue, action, description, and much humor.

On an initial reading, the structure of the novel appears rather basic and conventional. It consists of a series of short episodes which simply describe the uses of Mangogul's magic ring. These episodes are poorly connected by a rather weak plot which centers around Mangogul's search for the faithful and virtuous woman. The novel is related to the reader by a narrator who addresses himself to a hypothetical young reader named Zima in the introduction. From the second chapter, this narrator relates the central plot in the first person singular.

A closer examination of the novel, however, reveals that its structure is more complex than it first appears. The complexity stems from the fact that the novel is more than a series of episodes about a magic ring and talking bijoux; it is an opportunity for Diderot to state his opinion on numerous other subjects. Mangogul uses his magic ring

thirty times and each experiment is dealt with in a separate chapter. In the 1968 Garnier-Flammarion edition of Les Bijoux, there are fifty-four chapters. Therefore, twenty-three chapters deal with subjects not directly related to the ring. Quite frequently, in fact, they touch on subjects not in the least connected to the indiscreet "jewels."

The first five chapters chronicle the events that lead up to Mangogul's acquisition of the magic ring. The remaining nineteen contain digressive episodes through which Diderot comments on a variety of topics. A brief look at a few of these episodes will demonstrate Diderot's method.

Chapter IX, entitled "Etat de l'académie des sciences de Banza," is a sarcastic attack on the factions of Olibri and Circino. Olibri is the leader of the vorticoses, which is a group of scientists who believe they are following a clear scientific path to truth only to fall ultimately into error and confusion. The other scientific group in Banza is the attractionnaires, led by Circino. These scientists, in contrast to the vorticoses, begin in darkness but end in enlightenment. According to Assézat, Olibri represents Descartes, while Circino stands for Newton.¹

In this chapter, these two scientific groups of Banza devote themselves to the search for an explanation of the phenomenon of the talking bijoux. Of course neither group is able to arrive at any sensible conclusions. Diderot's

¹Diderot, Oeuvres complètes, ed. Assézat, IV: 137-38.

intent in this chapter is to show that nothing is ever resolved by scientific factualism.

Chapter XXIX, "Métaphysique de Mirzoza--Les Ames," presents the reader with another digression, one that is completely unrelated to the main story. Diderot elaborates here on a discussion that was quite fashionable during the eighteenth century--the location of the soul in the body. In an article entitled "Diderot's Debt to Prior," Otis Fellows points out that Les Bijoux is only an early step in the formulation of Diderot's philosophy concerning the soul, and adds that this chapter remained ignored until very recently when six scholars asserted that Diderot's concept of the soul was in an important stage of evolution when he wrote this particular chapter of Les Bijoux.²

Another of the major digressive episodes is found in Chapter XXXII. Entitled "Le meilleur peut-être, et le moins lu de cette histoire--Rêve de Mangogul, ou Voyage dans la région des hypothèses," it tells of Mangogul's dream about Plato in which he meets the Greek philosopher. In the dream, Mangogul and Plato are in a temple that is being destroyed by a child who grows into a giant as he comes closer to Mangogul. This child is Expérience, or "Experiment." In the dream, it is the experiment that destroys the weak world of hypothesis. It is significant to note that this chapter which makes no reference whatsoever to the talking bijoux

²Fellows, "Metaphysics," pp. 509-518.

was considered by Diderot himself as his best, though the least read.

From this brief look at several of the digressive episodes in Les Bijoux, it is clear that Diderot wanted to touch on a variety of topics of interest to his contemporaries. There are fifty-four chapters in the novel, and at least nine can be considered true digressions. The novel consists, then, of thirty chapters that relate the uses of the ring, and twenty-four that are either semi-related to the bijoux or completely digressive.

As to the narrator, we have already observed that he refers to himself in the first person in the second chapter. It is this narrator that renders the novel, or series of contes, more complex. In his introduction, the author, or the narrator (we are not quite sure who) advises the imaginary Zima not to be overly concerned about reading such a scandalous novel. He gives her this advice:

Encore une fois, Zima, prenez, lisez, et lisez tout: je n'en excepte pas même les discours du Bijou voyageur qu'on vous interprétera, sans qu'il en coûte à votre vertu; pourvu que l'interprète ne soit ni votre directeur ni votre amant.³

This narrator does not make his identity known in the novel, although he does frequently refer to himself in the first person. He often performs the role of editor, giving

³Denis Diderot, Les Bijoux indiscrets (Paris: Garnier-Flammarion, 1968), p. 27. All subsequent page-references in the text refer to this edition.

the reader only the information he chooses and not all of the information at his disposal. At the end of the second chapter, for example, he says: "Je ne m'amuserai point à détailler les qualités et les charmes de Mirzoza; l'ouvrage serait sans fin, et je veux que cette histoire en ait une." (B.i., p. 34)

The only information given about how the narrator learned the story of Mangogul is found in the introduction. The narrator speaks of the woman Algaé who "s'amusait innocemment à m'instruire des aventures de Zaïde, d'Alphane, de Fanni, etc. . . ., me fournissait le peu de traits qui me plaisent dans l'histoire de Mangogul . . ." (B.i., p. 27) However, we slowly learn that the narrator is merely telling a story that he himself obtained from other sources, possibly from translators who were working with a manuscript written by someone known as the auteur africain.

Furthermore, there are indications that this other author, too, has assumed the role of editor, and as the narrator puts it: "L'auteur supprime le reste; il se contente de nous avertir que le prince y eut plus d'égards qu'à celles que lui présentaient ses ministres . . ." (B.i., p. 297)

This narration technique is very confusing at times and will be examined more closely in Chapter III of this thesis. The confusion arises when the reader does not know who the narrator is, who the African author is, nor how the narrator learned the story he is telling.

Confusion arises also from the fact that the reader is not always certain of the identity of the speaker. Some chapters begin or end with the je which clearly stands for the narrator. In such cases the narrator usually explains some situation or event to the reader. But other chapters begin with a simple narration, which often causes the reader to wonder who is speaking--the narrator, the African author, or some other character in the novel.

Another element of the narrative technique found in Les Bijoux, and one which is used again and again by Diderot in later novels, is his attempt to involve the reader in the creative act. This is not found too often yet in Les Bijoux but will become highly developed in Jacques le fataliste where the reader frequently finds himself addressed directly by the narrator.

In Les Bijoux, the first time that the reader is invited to become more than the traditional passive reader is in the fourth chapter. Here, rather than give a description of the genie Cucufa, the narrator asks the reader to imagine what he must look like. The narrator says to the reader, "Figurez-vous un vieux camaldule porté dans les airs par deux gros chatshuants qu'il tiendrait par les pattes: ce fut dans cet équipage que Cucufa apparut au sultan." (B.i., p. 39) The conditional tense in this statement leaves the door open to the reader's rejection of this description.

Another example is the involvement of the reader by the author at the end of the thirtieth chapter, when the

narrator says:

Jamais la patience de Mirzoza ne fut mise à une plus forte épreuve; et vous ne vous seriez jamais tant ennuyé de votre vie, si je vous rapportais tous les raisonnements de Mangogul. Ce prince, que ne manquait pas de bon sens, fut ce jour-là d'une absurdité qui ne se conçoit pas. Vous en allez juger. (B.i., p. 163)

Yet another example of the involvement of the reader is found at the end of Chapter XLIII. In this instance, the narrator anticipates the reader's question when he says:

"Et de son prince, qu'en fait-il? me demandez-vous. Il l'envoie dîner chez la favorite, du moins c'est là que nous le trouverons dans le chapitre suivant." (B.i., p. 236)

Such attempts to create an active reader are found even more frequently in Jacques le fataliste, which was written some twenty-five years later. This technique of narration which was briefly experimented with in the earlier Les Bijoux indiscrets is used continually throughout Jacques. In fact, the very opening lines of Jacques invite the reader to participate with the author in his effort:

Comment s'étaient-ils rencontrés? Par hasard, comme tout le monde. Comment s'appelaient-ils? Que vous importe? D'où venaient-ils? Du lieu le plus prochain. Où allaient-ils? Est-ce que l'on sait ou l'on va? Que disaient-ils? Le maître ne disait rien; et Jacques disait que son capitaine disait que tout ce qui nous arrive de bien et de mal ici-bas était écrit là-haut.⁴

With this technique, Diderot is trying to create a dialogue between himself and his reader. The dialogue is

⁴Denis Diderot, Oeuvres, ed. André Billy (Paris: Editions Gallimard, 1951), p. 475.

an extremely important device for Diderot, and he utilizes various forms of it repeatedly in his works. This author-reader dialogue is found in Les Bijoux in the previously quoted passage when the author anticipates the question of the reader and then answers it.

Later, in Jacques le fataliste, the author will even ask the reader questions, and goes on to answer them. He will at times articulately defend himself against anticipated criticisms of the reader. This technique first used by Diderot in Les Bijoux indiscrets in 1748, is later explained by him at the beginning of the tale "Ceci n'est pas un conte," which he wrote in 1772:

Lorsqu'on fait un conte, à quelqu'un qui l'écoute, et pour peu que le conte dure, il est rare que le conteur ne soit pas interrompu quelquefois par son auditeur. Voilà pourquoi j'ai introduit dans le récit qu'on va lire, et qui n'est pas un conte, ou qui est un mauvais conte, si vous vous en doutez, un personnage qui fasse⁵ à peu près le rôle du lecteur; et je commence.

In this conte, Diderot created the role of a lecteur, who often interrupts and contradicts the narrator during his recital of the story. What began in Les Bijoux with Diderot addressing his imagined reader culminated in "Ceci n'est pas un conte" with the use of that reader as an integral part of the story.

As in his later novels, Diderot already uses the dialogue in Les Bijoux with great frequency. Although the

⁵Diderot, Oeuvres, ed. Billy, 753.

dialogue between author and reader in Les Bijoux is important to the understanding of the evolution of Diderot's narrative technique, it is actually still rather infrequent in this first novel. The dialogue between characters is much more important in this early work.

The majority of the chapters begin with a brief description of specific events by the narrator, usually one or two paragraphs in length. With such a description, the narrator sets the stage for the following dialogues which comprise most of the novel. The majority of dialogues in the first half of the book are between Mangogul and Mirzoza. In the second half they involve Mangogul, Mirzoza and Sélîm.

To a large extent the novel is recounted by the various bijoux themselves. Thirty of the chapters involve the thirty uses of the magic ring, and in each of these chapters, a woman's bijou speaks and becomes the story-teller. In these chapters the principal narrative device is the monologue presented by the bijou, rather than the dialogues that are found throughout the rest of the novel.

There is little description of action in the novel, as most of what happens to the characters is related through dialogue. What little does appear is brief and to the point. Concerning physical descriptions, the narrator himself explains, "Je ne suis pas grand faiseur de portraits. J'ai épargné au lecteur celui de la sultane favorite; mais je ne me résoudrai jamais à lui faire grâce de celui de la jument du sultan." (B.i., p. 165)

At this point, the narrator proceeds with a description of the sultan's mare, and in so doing, underscores the overall meagerness of character description in the novel. What little detail is made known to the reader generally comes from the talking bijoux.

In such a context, the bijoux are actually principal characters in the novel. They may be considered characters because they are represented as separate entities from the women to whom they belong. They are important also because they give the novel its substance--thirty chapters of usually amusing tales of sexual exploits--and because they are the reason the novel was so popular with the reading public.

As for the other characters, Diderot's characterization is somewhat weak. The novel is clearly not meant to be either a character study or a psychological novel. Other than the talking bijoux, only three major characters appear throughout the story. These characters are Mangogul, Mirzoza and Sélim.

Mangogul, the sultan, is led to the phenomenon of the talking bijoux mainly out of boredom, and only secondarily by his search for the virtuous woman. The narrator states that Mangogul has acquired the reputation of grand homme by the great amount of good he has done for the public and by his gentle nature. He is "doux, affable, enjoué, galant, d'une figure charmante, aimant les plaisirs, fait pour eux." (B.i., p. 34) This is the only detailed description of Mangogul offered by the narrator. As the story progresses,

however, Mangogul's character is not always consistent with that initial description. One wonders if a man who wishes to amuse himself "aux dépens des femmes" (B.i., p. 40) of the court totally deserves such a dignified reputation.

Mirzoza, the sultan's favorite, is described only to the extent that the narrator declares that he will not list her charms because otherwise the novel would never end. In contrast with Mangogul's erratic actions, Mirzoza's are consistent and befit her description as a wise and just woman.

Sélim is the third major character in the novel. He is an elderly courtisan who has served Mangogul's father before the reign of the present sultan. Sélim is not introduced until the middle of the story (p. 156) when he is suddenly presented to the reader. The purpose of his presence seems to be to tell the stories of his youth and his innumerable sexual exploits.

The roles of these three characters are not difficult to understand. Mangogul with his boredom is essential to the conception of the story, Mirzoza serves the function of provoking the wager which gives the story its plot, and by her gentleness and patience, offers a contrast with Mangogul who can be noseiy and impetuous. Sélim, the third character, is less easily defined. First of all, his sudden appearance on page 156 does not appear to have been planned by Diderot, which is understandable if the novel was as hastily written as *Mme de Vandeuil* would have us believe. Nonetheless,

Sélim's major function seems to be to offer relief from the talking bijoux. Sélim relates more stories about sexual adventures, and adds a man's point of view to that of the bijoux.

Another probable role of Sélim and Mirzoza is that of listeners. They sit attentively through all of Mangogul's stories. They both provide the important additional members in discussions with the sultan. These dialogues are very important to the novel because it is through them that the stories about the bijoux are related.

Another important element of the literary technique in Les Bijoux is Diderot's use of humor. Les Bijoux is a light-hearted novel. Many of the stories related by the bijoux are funny, although bordering on the obscene.

A good example of this humor appears in a passage in which all of the frightened women of Banza scurry to buy muzzles for their overly talkative bijoux. Another humorous story is the one related in French, English, Latin and Italian by the well-traveled bijou of Cypria. This multilingual bijou very frankly tells of its many sexual adventures in other countries. (B.i., pp. 260-262)

Not only are most of the bijoux episodes comical, but Diderot has inserted numerous other passages that are also satirical. Diderot uses satire in the novel to ridicule certain conventional French ideas and customs. When he lists Mangogul's achievements, for example, Diderot tells us that among many other things, the sultan has won battles,

enlarged his empire, restored its finances, and has immortalized himself. Finally, and, "ce que son université ne put jamais comprendre, il acheva tout cela sans savoir un mot de latin." (B.i., p. 34)

Many of the digressive episodes also contain examples of Diderot's use of such satiric humor. In Chapter XXIX ("Métaphysique de Mirzoza--Les Ames") Diderot presents some of his contemporaries' ideas on the location of the soul in the body and ridicules the most outrageous ones. Mirzoza very methodically explains why she believes that one's soul resides in the feet until the age of two or three, and how it moves up past the knees to the thighs by the age of fifteen. To Mirzoza, the position of the soul in the body determines individual personality. As she explains it, "Ainsi, la femme voluptueuse est celle dont l'âme occupe le bijou, et ne s'en écarte jamais." (B.i., p. 158)

Another example of Diderot's satire appears in the thirteenth use of the magic ring. In this episode, Mangogul turns the ring toward his mare and becomes angry when his secretary refuses to transcribe what he hears on the grounds that he cannot understand the mare's words. Mangogul dismisses this secretary, and hires another who, more anxious to please, carefully records the "words" of the mare's bijou.

The tale continues, with Diderot's comments about interpreters and foreign language professors who, like scientists, are unable to agree on a precise translation of the

noises of this bijou. In this case, many different translations are offered by the overzealous experts. One professor asserts that the mare's organ has articulated a scene from some Greek tragedy, another theorizes that it is an important fragment on Egyptian theology, another still that it is the introduction to the funeral oration of Hannibal in Carthaginian, and yet another claims that it is a Chinese prayer devoted to Confucius! (B.i., p. 166)

It is not difficult to understand the lightheartedness of Les Bijoux indiscrets. It was written very hastily and probably with the hope that it would earn the author some money quickly. Humorous, lighthearted novels are usually well received by the reading public. But the humor of Les Bijoux should not be viewed in that light alone. As quoted previously, Lessing had noted that "a wise man often says in jest what he will afterwards repeat in earnest."⁶ A statement by Diderot himself is reminiscent of this view. In a chapter entitled "Des Auteurs et des critiques" of his Discours sur la Poésie Dramatique, Diderot states that "le rôle d'un auteur est un rôle assez vain; c'est celui d'un homme qui se croit en état de donner des leçons au public."⁷

Did Diderot try to teach the public something in Les Bijoux indiscrets? Very probably so. In the novel he

⁶Lessing, Hamburgische Dramaturgie, ii, 202, cited by Fellows, "Metaphysics," p. 510.

⁷Diderot, Oeuvres, ed. Billy, p. 1275.

offers the public important lessons and does it mainly through the digressive chapters. Furthermore, by presenting them humorously, he avoids a sermonizing tone.

CHAPTER III
THE NARRATORS

A discussion of the narrators in Les Bijoux indiscrets is complicated not only because there is more than one narrator, but because the identity of the narrator is often unknown. This ambiguity may be explained by two circumstances: first, the novel was written quickly and therefore could contain certain "flaws," and second, Diderot was experimenting with narrative technique in this first novel, and the ambiguity of the narrators is an intentional result of this experimentation.

Both hypotheses are probably correct. If Diderot's daughter is to be believed, the entire novel was completed in only two weeks, and consequently may have suffered from lack of attention to detail.¹ On the other hand, the confusing use of narrators does appear intentional: Diderot uses similar narrative techniques in this early work as in works written several decades later.

In order to fully understand Diderot's aesthetic concerns in Les Bijoux, it is necessary to examine his use of the narrators in the novel. Since the identity of a narrator is so frequently ambiguous, for the sake of consistency in this thesis the first narrator to establish his identity

¹Diderot, Oeuvres, ed. Assézat, I: xlii.

will be referred to as the Narrator, while the "original" author will be referred to as the African author.

The first indication of a narrator in Les Bijoux indiscrets comes at the very beginning of the novel, when one announces his presence. In the introduction, this narrator refers to himself in the first person when he addresses the young Zima: "Encore une fois, Zima, prenez, lisez, et lisez tout: je n'en excepte pas même les discours du Bijou voyageur . . ." (B.i., p. 27) At this point, there is no real need to differentiate between the narrators because thus far only one is present.

It is in this introduction too that the narrator admits to friendship with a woman named Algaé, and confesses that it was she who told him certain stories that appear in the novel. Up to this point there is no confusion, as it is clear that the narrator is merely addressing an imagined or even real reader which he names Zima. Nor is there any confusion in the first few chapters of the novel. The first chapter begins simply with a narrative which relates the history of the Congo. The reader might well wonder here, however, about the identity of its narrator, who addresses the reader directly: ". . . le pauvre homme ne savait non plus lire aux astres que vous et moi: on l'attendait avec impatience." (B.i., p. 30)

At the beginning of the second chapter, a first person references makes it clear that there is an active narrator in the story, although even here his identity remains

unknown. Also at this point, the narrator establishes his omnipotence through such editorial comments as: "Je passerai légèrement sur les premières années de Mangogul."

(B.i., p. 33)

This editorial role is maintained when the narrator concludes the same chapter by saying, "Je ne m'amuserai point à détailler les qualités et les charmes de Mirzoza; l'ouvrage serait sans fin, et je veux que cette histoire en ait une." (B.i., p. 34) The still unidentified narrator assumes a new role in the first paragraph of Chapter III, when he becomes a commentator. At this point, the narrator not only reports, as an eye-witness, but adds his own speculations about the possible thoughts of Mangogul and Mirzoza:

Ces suppositions singulières: «Si le ciel qui m'a placé sur le trône m'eût fait naître dans un état obscur, eussiez-vous daigné descendre jusqu'à moi, Mirzoza m'eût-elle couronné? . . . Si Mirzoza venait à perdre le peu de charmes qu'on lui trouve, Mangogul l'aimerait-il toujours?» ces suppositions, dis-je, qui exercent les amants délicats, et font mentir si souvent les amants les plus sincères, étaient usées pour eux. (B.i., p. 35)

At this point in the novel the identity of the narrator becomes extremely important to the reader. If the narrator were to relate the story entirely in the third person, his identity would not be essential. But being editor and commentator as well, he becomes more than the narrator of the story--he becomes its creator. Thus far in the novel, however, the identity of the narrator remains unknown.

The first mention of the African author comes in Chapter VI. Prior to this, the novel has been related by a single narrator who gives no hint of his identity nor of his discovery of the events which he is relating. Then, in the middle of a paragraph describing the first use of the magic ring, the narrator says: "Ici mon auteur dit que toutes les femmes pâlirent, se regardèrent sans mot dire, et tinrent un sérieux qu'il attribue à la crainte que la conversation ne s'engageât et ne devint générale." (B.i., p. 46) With this sudden appearance of the "auteur," the ambiguity begins. It appears then that all of the previous first person references were made by a narrator who is retelling a story written by another author. It is now necessary to refer to the Narrator and his African author. The ambiguities become more complex--not only does one wonder who this Narrator is, but also who his auteur is.

A partial answer to this question is given by the Narrator himself when, thirty pages later, he tells the reader that the author was a historian: "L'auteur africain qui s'est immortalisé par l'histoire des hauts et merveilleux faits d'Erguebzed et de Mangogul, continue en ces termes . . ." (B.i., p. 76)

The confusion between the two narrators stems primarily from the fact that even with the knowledge of the existence of the author-historian, the reader is no longer certain which of the narrators is speaking. For example, Chapter IX begins with the words, "Mangogul avait à peine abandonné les

recluses entre lesquelles je l'avais laissé . . . " (B.i., p. 57) Je here could be either the Narrator or the author-historian.

Some illumination, however, is given two pages later, when the Narrator says: "Ici, l'ignorance des traducteurs nous a frustrés d'une démonstration que l'auteur africain nous avait conservée sans doute. A la suite d'une lacune de deux pages ou environ, on lit . . . " (B.i., p. 59)

In this single paragraph, the reader learns that the previously mentioned author is an African, and that his story was translated by translators who, in the opinion of the Narrator, were ignorant. What is presented to the reader here is a story at least twice-removed from the original story teller's, a story passed from the African author to the translators before ultimately reaching the Narrator. In several passages of his novel Diderot does specifically identify a narrator. For example, several times the Narrator quotes the African author directly, and thus makes it clear which words are the African author's and which are the Narrator's. The first example comes in the first two paragraphs of Chapter XXII where he writes:

Quoique les bourgeoises de Banza se doutassent que les bijoux de leur espèce n'auraient pas l'honneur de parler, toutes cependant se munirent de muselières. On eut à Banza sa muselière, comme on prend ici le deuil de coeur.

En cet endroit, l'auteur africain remarque avec étonnement que la modicité du prix et la roture des muselières n'en firent point cesser la mode au sérail. « Pour cette fois, dit-il, l'utilité l'emporta

sur le préjugé.» Une réflexion aussi commune ne valait pas la peine qu'il se répêât: mais il m'a semblé que c'était le défaut de tous les anciens auteurs du Congo, de tomber dans des redites, soit qu'ils se fussent proposé de donner ainsi un air de vraisemblance et de facilité à leurs productions; soit qu'ils n'eussent pas, à beaucoup près, autant de fécondité que leurs admirateurs le supposent. (B.i., p. 121)

The first of these paragraphs is clearly a combination of statements by both the African author and the Narrator; the first sentence is the work of the African author, the second, a commentary by the Narrator.

The second paragraph contains a direct quote of the African author. This method of attribution is used by the Narrator because he wishes to comment on what he considers to be ignorant statements by the African author. In this manner, the Narrator disassociates himself from any comments made by the latter.

In these two paragraphs the Narrator is acting as commentator. In the first, even without quotation marks, it is obvious who is speaking. In the second, the Narrator has set the words of the African author apart with quotation marks because he does not agree with what the African author has to say and because he wants to disassociate those ideas from his own.

Another example of quotations marks for the purpose of separating the ideas of the African author and the Narrator's appears at the end of Chapter XLVII:

L'auteur africain finit ce chapitre par un avertissement aux dames qui pourraient être tentées de se faire traduire les endroits où le bijou de Cypria s'est exprimé dans les langues étrangères.

«J'aurais manqué, dit-il, au devoir de l'historien, en les supprimant; et au respect que j'ai pour le sexe, en les conservant dans mon ouvrage, sans prévenir les dames vertueuses, que le bijou de Cypria s'était excessivement gâté le ton dans ses voyages; et que ses récits sont infiniment plus libres qu'aucune des lectures clandestines qu'elles aient jamais faites. (B.i., p. 263)

But passages in which the identity of the speaker is clearly indicated are rather rare in Les Bijoux. A lack of consistency in the use of narrators is prevalent throughout the novel, and the reader is often left unenlightened about the identity of the narrator in many passages in the novel.

For example, after reexamination of the earliest first person references made in the text, the identity of the speaker still remains unclear. The je of the introduction could refer to either the Narrator or the African author. It refers very likely to the African author since it would be he who knew the woman Algaé and could thus retell her stories. However, the reader cannot be certain.

If the first je refers to the African author, then all of the subsequent first person references are also to him, except for the obvious statements made by the Narrator. This idea is reinforced by the first person references at the beginning of Chapter V: "J'ai oublié de dire qu'outre la vertu de faire parler les bijoux des femmes sur lesquelles

on en tournait le chaton, il avait encore celle de rendre invisible la personne qui le portait au petit doigt."

(B.i., p. 41)

Without the knowledge of the existence of the African author, it could just as easily be assumed that it is the Narrator who made the preceding statement. But further consideration reveals that it is not the Narrator who is speaking. There is no indication of any editing or commenting on the part of the Narrator, the statement is merely a translation of the original words of the African author.

The quotation from the beginning of Chapter V is a perfect example of the ambiguity between narrators that appears throughout the novel. It is usually impossible to determine which of the narrators made the statement, even upon close examination of the passage.

Chapter XVII opens with another example of confusion. The reader must stop to wonder about the identity of the speaker who, upon relating an argument between Mirzoza and Mangogul, says: "Je ne sais si Mirzoza resta ou s'en alla; mais Mangogul, reprenant le discours, lut ce qui suit . . ."

(B.i., p. 96)

If the reader follows the assumption that all of the first person references are to the Narrator, the above statement would make sense. However, it would make much more sense if the Narrator himself had admitted that he didn't know how Mirzoza really acted because the African author had failed to mention it.

It is possible, on the other hand, that it was the African author who was unaware of Mirzoza's activities because he was not paying attention to them, or perhaps because he was not there at all and is merely retelling the story related to him by someone else. This latter case is certainly plausible had the African author written the introduction and admitted he was not present at all of the events which he is relating.

Chapter XLI begins with a similar situation. In this instance, the Narrator explains that the African author does not relate what happened to Mangogul, and the Narrator speculates on what the sultan actually did. Thus the confusion of the previous example does not exist. The first paragraph of the chapter opens with the avowal that "L'auteur africain ne nous dit point ce que devint Mangogul, en attendant Bloculocus. Il y toute apparence qu'il sortit, qu'il alla consulter quelques bijoux, et que . . ." (B.i., p. 217) It is clearly the Narrator who is speaking here, because he specifically refers to what he considers to be a flaw in the African author's work, and adds his own speculation as to what events might have occurred.

Several other examples of the ambiguity between the narrators contrast with those previously discussed in which the Narrator uses quotation marks to stress the African author's statements. None of these new examples are totally incomprehensible, but they are confusing to the point that the reader must pause to wonder why the African author's

statements are not separated from the rest of the text by quotation marks.

For example, Chapter XLV begins with a simple narrative in the third person. Suddenly, in the third sentence of the chapter, the first person subject appears: "Je ne finirais point, dit l'auteur africain dont j'ai l'honneur d'être le caudataire, si j'entraais dans le détail des niches que leur fit Mangogul." (B.i., p. 249)

The first je is obviously the African author referring to himself, as is the third je. The second je is the Narrator who tells us that he has the honor of being the caudataire of the African author. The result of this arrangement is to cast further doubt upon the already confusing conclusions reached concerning the identity of the narrator in the novel. Because of the quotation from page 249 in which the Narrator separates the words of the African author from the rest of the text by attributing them to a specific speaker, the logical conclusion would be that all of the other first person statements are made by the Narrator.

This idea is strengthened in the first two paragraphs of Chapter XLIX. The first opens as follows: "L'auteur africain, qui avait promis quelque part le caractère de Sélim, s'est avisé de le placer ici; j'estime trop les ouvrages de l'antiquité pour assurer qu'il eût été mieux ailleurs. Il y a, dit-il, quelques hommes à qui leur mérite ouvre toutes les portes, qui, par les grâces de leur figure

et la légèreté de leur esprit . . . " (B.i., p. 275) The paragraph continues with comments by the African author.

The second paragraph proceeds in the same manner, and the speaker is clearly identified when the Narrator attributes the words to the African author: "Je demande à présent, continue l'auteur africain, si cet homme avait raison de s'inquiéter sur le compte de sa maîtresse, et de passer la nuit comme un fou? car le fait est que mille réflexions lui roulèrent dans la tête, et que plus il aimait Fulvia, plus il craignait de la trouver infidèle. «Dans quel labyrinthe me suis-je engagé! se disait-il à lui-même; et à quel propos? Que m'en reviendra-t-il, si la favorite gagne un château?" (B.i., p. 275) The paragraph concludes with Sélim's anxieties.

There is one more passage in the novel that is important to our discussion of the narrators. It deals with the twenty-third use of the magic ring and appears in Chapter XLII. It too does not illuminate the discussion, but rather confuses the issue even further. The first paragraph is typical of the opening paragraphs of most of the chapters. It is a simple description in the third person. However, the first sentence of the second paragraph introduces a new element: "Mangogul était aujourd'hui, dit l'auteur africain dont nous traduisons le journal, à neuf heures et demie chez Fanni." (B.i., p. 227)

This contradicts the earlier statement by the Narrator, when he separated himself from the translators: "Ici,

l'ignorance des traducteurs nous a frustrés d'une démonstration que l'auteur africain nous avait conservée sans doute." (B.i., p. 59) The Narrator is clearly including himself with the readers of the novel, thus the nous. What explanation can then be given for the above statement from page 227, and which appears to be uttered by the translators themselves? A possible answer is given by Vivienne Mylne and Janet Osborne in an article entitled "Diderot's Early Fiction: Les Bijoux indiscrets and L'Oiseau blanc." The two critics assert that the work written by the African author has been handled by several different translators with the Narrator being the last in the series. In that event, the Narrator could also be the translator referred to on page 227.²

In spite of this possible solution, the general confusion in the novel remains. The logical question, then, is: What was the purpose of the confusing use of the narrators? This is the question which will be treated in depth in Chapter IV of this thesis. But at this point in the discussion of the narrators, a brief look at an issue of contention between several critics might be helpful. Several modern critics have expressed conflicting views regarding the narrator's omniscience. This is not surprising in view of the confusion surrounding the narrators in Diderot's work.

²Vivienne Mylne and Janet Osborne, "Diderot's Early Fiction: Les Bijoux indiscrets and L'Oiseau blanc," Diderot Studies XLV (1971): 143-66.

Mylne and Osborne discuss the role of the narrators in a co-authored article on "Diderot's Early Fiction: Les Bijoux indiscrets and L'Oiseau blanc." The two maintain that "the various narrators in these two works are omniscient. They all relate, at some point, or other, details which could have been known to no-one except an eye-witness."³

Nola M. Leov, on the other hand, asserts that the author is not omniscient at all, and that Diderot has tried to eliminate the narrator altogether in Les Bijoux indiscrets. Leov writes:

. . . Instinctively, Diderot was breaking away from the traditional method in which the story is told by an omniscient, ever present author, preferring to dissimulate himself behind characters to whom he has granted fictitious autonomy. One step in this direction had already been taken in the Memoir novel, in which the author is replaced as narrator by his protagonist, and the letter novel in which the same role is performed by a group of characters.⁴

Leov adds that Diderot was not entirely successful in trying to eliminate the narrator because he intervenes in his own person thus destroying the illusion that his characters have an independent existence.

The views expressed by these critics are not entirely in opposition to each other. For although Mylne and Osborne state that the narrator is omniscient, and Leov states that

³Ibid., p. 146.

⁴Nola M. Leov, "Literary Techniques in Les Bijoux indiscrets," Australasian Universities Modern Language Association XIX (1963): 104.

Diderot breaks away from the conventional omniscient narrator, Leov does add that Diderot was only partly successful in his endeavor because his characters "fluctuate between relative individuality and autonomy."⁵

A discussion of the possible omniscience of the narrators will help explain the conflict between the statements made by Mylne-Osborne and Leov. According to the Funk and Wagnalls New Standard Dictionary of the English Language, "omniscience" means: "1. Knowledge of all things, unlimited or infinite knowledge: an attribute of God . . . 2. Loosely, very extensive knowledge."⁶

With this definition in mind, it is necessary to establish whether the narrators in Les Bijoux indiscret possess limited or infinite knowledge of the characters and events in the novel. Although the novel has two narrators, it is not necessary to discuss the Narrator and his possible omniscience, because he is only retelling the story originally told by the African author, and he even openly admits to lapses of information.

It is the role of the African author that is important. He is usually consistent with his role of historian, relating certain events that occur simultaneously, without attributing them to any source. By retelling a story derived from a variety of sources, the historian is omniscient in a literary

⁵Ibid., p. 104.

⁶Funk and Wagnalls New Standard Dictionary of the English Language, 1963 éd., s.v. "omniscience."

sense, because he does possess the "knowledge of all things." He is able to relate events without himself ever witnessing them and can present those events from more than a single perspective.

There are several specific examples which emphasize the African author's omniscience. One of them appears at the beginning of Chapter L, where the author is speaking about Sélím and Mirzoza, and says, "Un jour qu'il [Sélím] était seul avec elle, Mirzoza le mit sur ce chapitre et lui demanda . . ." (B.i., p. 281) The author then continues to relate the subsequent conversation as though he had been present, which is impossible since he had already announced that Sélím and Mirzoza were alone. The African author has been omniscient throughout this episode and is therefore able to relate the conversation to the reader.

René Wellek and Austin Warren define the omniscient author in Theory of Literature as "the novelist [who] can . . . tell a story without laying claim to having witnessed or participated in what he narrates. He can write in the third person, as the 'omniscient author.' This is undoubtedly the traditional and 'natural' mode of narration."⁷

It is clear that Diderot, according to this definition, has followed the traditional literary technique and used his African author as the "omniscient author." In a few instances, however, Diderot does deviate from this technique, and in

⁷Austin Warren and Rene Wellek, Theory of Literature (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, Inc., 1956), p. 222.

such cases the Narrator emphasizes that the African author was present. As a result, Diderot is moving away from the traditional use of the omniscient narrator by this insistence on the attendance of the African author at points when the reader assumes that the author was relying on his omniscience, not on his omnipresence.

The first example of this insistence on the presence of the African author comes at the end of Chapter XX. As in other chapters it appears from the outset that the African author is retelling the story in conformity with his role as historian. This assumption is incorrect, however, because after relating a dialogue between several citizens of Banza, the Narrator says, "Frénicol partit; cependant Zelide embrassait son amie et la remerciait de son expédient: et moi, dit l'auteur africain, j'allai me reposer en attendant qu'il revînt." (B.i., p. 117) This sudden insertion of a first person quote emphasizes that the African author was actually present. This presents a contradiction to the assumption that the African author was relating the episode through his omniscience.

Another example of Diderot's insistence on the African author's presence is found at the end of Chapter XLIV. As in the previous example, the Narrator tells us suddenly that the African author was present when it had appeared that he was not. In this instance, the African author again is not relying on his assumed omniscience to relate the events of a masked ball, he was actually at the ball:

Mangogul et Sélîm avaient déjà leurs dominos; le favorite prit le sien; le sultan lui donna la main, et ils se rendirent dans la salle de bal, où ils se séparèrent, pour se disperser dans la foule. Sélîm les y suivit, et moi aussi, dit l'auteur africain, quoique j'eusse plus envie de dormir que de voir danser . . . " (B.i., p. 248)

Despite the several deviations from the traditional use of the omniscient author, Mylne and Osborne are correct in asserting that the various narrators are omniscient. However, they would be more precise if they limited their comments to the omniscience of the African author alone. For as to the Narrator, he conceals himself behind this all-knowing author who is able to report events through his literary omniscience.

The occasional instances in which Diderot has deviated from the traditional use of the omniscient author have little effect on the overall omniscience of the African author. They are merely consistent with Diderot's desire to experiment with traditional literary techniques, a subject which will be discussed in the next chapter.

It is difficult to agree with Leov when she says that Diderot has tried to eliminate the narrator altogether, even with the qualification that he was only partly successful. Had Diderot wanted to eliminate the narrator (because of his instinct for dramatization of narrative, according to Leov), he could have done it without the numerous insertions in the first person which necessitate the existence of a narrator.

Leov criticizes the literary technique adopted by Diderot in the Bijoux as follows: ". . . he seems to oscillate between two alternatives, now giving rein to his creative imagination and gift for narrative, now breaking off to explore some interesting avenue of thought, without attempting to forge any extensive links between the two activities."⁸ She further asserts that these flaws suggest an uncertainty in Diderot's intentions. She attributes these flaws to inexperience, casualness, and to "that curious inability in Diderot to sustain character and action without lapse through the length of a novel."⁹

Leov's criticisms are partially justified, for Diderot does oscillate between presenting us with an imaginative narrative and interesting digressive episodes. The result, according to Leov, is "not only a loss of unity, but also of the mutual enrichment of story and idea which he achieves in his later fiction."¹⁰

But Diderot's two alternatives do not necessarily indicate uncertain intentions, as Leov suggests. The story relating tales of the bijoux indiscrets and the often unrelated digressions could be an intentional result of Diderot's experimentation with narrative technique.

⁸Leov, "Literary Techniques," p. 105.

⁹Ibid., p. 105.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 105.

If Diderot is indeed experimenting with narrative technique, as a look at his later novels suggests, then other aspects of the narrative technique too could be intentional. For example, Diderot's confusing use of the narrators could be the result of his experimentation with the illusion of created reality. If we accept that Diderot is experimenting with the illusion of reality in his novel, his use of the narrators and the resulting confusion may be regarded as an intentional technique, and not as a flaw of his narrative style.

CHAPTER IV

LES BIJOUX INDISCRETS AND THE ILLUSION OF REALITY

Many eighteenth-century French novelists were concerned with creating an illusion of reality in their works. Many tried to establish an illusion of actuality in order to give a sense of reality to their novels. Marivaux, for example, in La Vie de Marianne, has his heroine address her memoirs to a friend. The reader is thus led to believe that Marianne and her past are real, when in fact the character exists only in a world of imaginary reality between the covers of a book.

Another eighteenth century writer, Prévost, used a different technique. In Manon Lescaut, he makes a special effort at the beginning of the novel to inform us of the source of the narrator's story. The narrator informs us that he has learned of the events which he is about to relate from a man he had met personally at an inn. The narrator then proceeds to relate the story in which he himself does not participate. This technique of separating the narrator from the story has the effect of establishing a feeling of actuality concerning the story related by the narrator.

Another variation used by eighteenth century writers to create the illusion of reality was the epistolary novel. Instead of resorting to the traditional omniscient narrator,

the author presents the reader with a collection of letters which relate the events of the novel. Laclos used this device most effectively in Les Liaisons dangereuses, where the letters make the reader believe that the events actually took place. The complex web of intrigues in the novel, and the letters proving the characters' ignorance of these intrigues, convince the reader that intrigues such as these could occur in real life.

In these novels, the illusion of reality is created rather easily because they deal with more or less normal people in plausible situations. But the illusion of reality in Les Bijoux indiscrets differs greatly from the reality of the novels of Marivaux, Prévost and Laclos because Diderot presents us with a world of pure fantasy. Unlike the realistic everyday events of a novel like La Vie de Marianne, Diderot's talking bijoux are certainly in the realm of pure imagination. However, the following examination of Les Bijoux reveals that Diderot did attempt to establish the idea of reality in several different ways. As most Diderot scholars would agree, Diderot would not be Diderot if there were no contradictions and occasional confusion in his work. Therefore in Les Bijoux even as he establishes a certain reality, he continues to contradict that reality. The following examination of the illusion of created or contradicted reality in Les Bijoux indiscrets will illustrate Diderot's method and help to establish its apparent purpose.

As soon as Mangogul visits the genie and receives the magic ring, the reader is aware that Les Bijoux is pure fantasy. In spite of this, it is possible to discuss the illusion of reality. In order to create this illusion, Diderot's methods are indispensable, as is the imagination of the reader. Temporarily setting aside Diderot's contradictions, the reader, with the help of his imagination, is able to believe that the Narrator is relating a true story.

Diderot accomplishes this by using several different techniques. To begin with, the Narrator, like the narrator in Manon Lescaut, separates himself from the original story. However, unlike Prévost's narrator, he does not tell the reader how he learned of his story. But despite this difference, Diderot makes the story appear true in other respects. For example, in the introduction of the novel, the author (probably the African author and not the Narrator) informs Zima that it was the wise Algaé who told him many of the stories. This introduction, addressed to an imaginary girl who apparently is familiar with the imaginary country and the imaginary Algaé, establishes an air of reality at the very beginning of the novel. As in the memoir novel, the narrative is addressed to a specific reader and therefore appears real.

The confusion at the beginning of the novel in regard to the narrators, which was dealt with in Chapter III, is cleared up somewhat in the tenth chapter of Les Bijoux where Diderot blatantly tries to convince his reader of the veracity

of his story. The Narrator says, "Ici, l'ignorance des traducteurs nous a frustrés d'une démonstration que l'auteur africain nous avait conservée sans doute. A la suite d'une lacune de deux pages ou environ, on lit . . ." (B.i., p. 59) With this statement, the Narrator is telling the reader that he is reading a story which was originally written by an African author and was then translated by some ignorant translators. It appears that the Narrator is handling the incomplete, yet extant, work of these translators. The gap in the manuscript is caused either by the ignorance of the translators or by the age of the manuscript itself. These two sentences are designed to establish the idea that the novel is real. Thus, in Chapter XIII, in a passage describing the sixth use of the magic ring, the Narrator gives the reader a strong sense of realism when he relates the events at the Opera of Banza:

On entendait d'un côté, oh! vraiment ma commère, oui; de l'autre, quoi, douze fois! ici, qui me baise? est-ce Blaise? Là, rien, père Cyprien, ne vous retient. Tous enfin se montèrent sur un ton si haut, si baroque et si fou, qu'ils formèrent le cheour le plus ridicule qu'on eût entendu devant et depuis celui des . . . no . . . de . . . on . . . (Le manuscrit s'est trouvé corrompu dans cet endroit.) (B.i., p. 72)

The incomplete manuscript makes it clear that we are reading something that actually existed in the reality of the novel. Diderot not only stresses the reality of the novel by insisting that its source was a manuscript, but furthermore, an incomplete manuscript.

Two other passages in the novel also indicate that the manuscript from which the Narrator (or the translators) was working was incomplete. The first, in the middle of Chapter XLI, and in which Mangogul with his ring addresses Callipiga's bijou, contains a somewhat skeptical remark by the author which heightens the sense of realism in this scene. The bijou speaks first:

« Que me demandez-vous? je ne comprends rien
« à vos questions. On ne songe seulement pas à
« moi. Il me semble pourtant que j'en vauz bien
« un autre. Mirolo passe souvent à ma porte, il
« est vrai, mais . . .

(Il y a dans cet endroit une lacune considérable. La république des lettres aurait certainement obligation à celui qui nous restituerait le discours du bijou de Callipiga, dont il ne nous reste que les deux dernières lignes. Nous invitons les savants à les méditer et à voir si cette lacune ne serait point une omission volontaire de l'auteur, mécontent de ce qu'il avait dit, et qui ne trouvait rien de mieux à dire.)

« On dit que mon
« rival aurait des autels au-delà des Alpes. Hélas!
« sans Mirolo, l'univers entier m'en élèverait. »
(B.i., p. 219)

A similar passage appears at the end of Chapter XLVI in which the Narrator suddenly stops his narrative and attributes it to the African author because he wants to separate himself from the incomplete remarks of the author. The Narrator says:

L'auteur africain nous apprend ici que le sultan, frappé de l'observation de Mirzoza, se précautionna d'un antisomnifère des plus violents: il ajoute que le médecin de Mangogul, qui était bien son ami, lui en avait communiqué la recette et qu'il en avait fait la préface de son ouvrage;

mais il ne nous reste de cette préface que les
trois dernières lignes que je vais rapporter ici.

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

Again these references to an incomplete manuscript give the reader a heightened sense of reality, even though the reader knows by now that the novel is not true.

Diderot also attempts to create the illusion of reality when the African author (or perhaps the Narrator, it is unclear which) tells the skeptical reader to look up the speech made by the mare's bijou in the archives of the Congo if he wishes to assure himself of the precise wording. Within the pages of his novel, Diderot has created a country that is complete with its own historian and its own archives to support the events related by the historian (the African author).

The reader's perception of the reality of the novel is also affected by other aspects of Diderot's technique. Not only is the story presented as an incomplete manuscript, but many of the events related in it are very close to the experience of its contemporary readers. Most of the digressive episodes, for example, are obvious references to certain eighteenth-century figures. The episode about Olibri and Circino represents the factionalism of the followers of Descartes and Newton, and the dispute between the followers

of two celebrated musicians of the Congo, Utmiutsol and Uremifasolasiututut, represents the disagreements between Lulli and Rameau.¹

Diderot refers to real people and events in other episodes as well. Not only do these digressions give him an opportunity to discuss subjects other than the talking bijoux, but they offer the reader an immediate reference to a familiar reality. Since the reader is able to quickly recognize these thinly veiled references to current events, he becomes more comfortable with the novel, and is more apt to accept it as real.

Although the reader is constantly aware that the world of Les Bijoux indiscrets is pure fantasy, Diderot establishes such a strong illusion of reality that the reader tends to accept it as fact rather than fiction. He accomplishes this most successfully by disguising the novel as a manuscript written by an African author, translated by interpreters and edited by the Narrator.

It is at this point in the discussion that Diderot's use of the narrators becomes important. Had Diderot used a single, omniscient narrator to relate his story, a drastically different idea of reality would have emerged. Not only does the ambiguous identity of the narrators force the reader to be constantly aware of the action that is taking place, but it contributes to the creation of a more life-like situation. As E.M. Forster puts it in his Aspects of

¹Diderot, Oeuvres complètes, ed. Assézat, IV: 137-38.

the Novel, the "power to expand and contract perception (of which the shifting viewpoint is a symptom)"² is one of the greatest advantages of the novel because it has a parallel in our perception of life.

Forster adds that the reason why in real life we are not always aware of the thoughts of others is because we can penetrate their minds only at moments when our own minds are not tired or in need of rest. In his view, this intermittent knowledge is what gives variety and color to our experiences, and the shifting viewpoint is what most closely approximates this variety in the novel.³

These comments show that Forster and Diderot share similar ideas about the reader's viewpoint. Diderot indeed uses a shifting viewpoint throughout his novel, and in this manner adds variety and color to the experience of reading Les Bijoux.

Forster also asserts that if an author is caught shifting his viewpoint he must be censured.⁴ He would surely censure Diderot for his method in Les Bijoux, because the latter's constant shifts in viewpoint are extremely obvious to the reader.

With the shifts of viewpoint the novel becomes even more confusing. But it appears that Diderot's use of

²E.M. Forster, Aspects of the Novel (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Company, 1927), p. 123.

³Ibid., p. 123.

⁴Ibid., p. 123.

confusion is intentional. By consistently confusing the reader and reminding him that the novel is in fact only a novel and not a history, Diderot repeatedly destroys the illusion of reality, while he simultaneously attempts to maintain it. The reality of the novel thus becomes as much an illusion as the fantasy of the novel.

At the beginning of Chapter V, for example, the Narrator (or perhaps the African author) says, "J'ai oublié de dire qu'outre la vertu de faire parler les bijoux des femmes sur lesquelles on en tournait le chaton, il avait encore celle de rendre invisible la personne qui le portait au petit doigt." (B.i., p. 41) Because this sentence appears before the introduction of the African author, the Narrator appears to be creating the story and adding facts as he is telling it. This comment by the Narrator is inserted so abruptly into the narrative that it destroys the feeling of real life and returns us to a world of the novel with a creator.

A similar situation occurs at the beginning of Chapter IX, when the Narrator says, "Mangogul avait à peine abandonné les recluses entre lesquelles je l'avais laissé, qu'il se répandait à Banza que toutes les filles de la congrégation du coccyx de Brama parlaient par le bijou." (B.i., p. 57) Here the reader is reminded that the author (or the Narrator) is omnipotent, and that his is the power to lead or abandon Mangogul whenever or wherever he desires. By thus asserting his power, the author may not entirely destroy the

reader's illusions about the reality of the novel, but he certainly reminds the reader that the author is in control of the events in this book.

An additional example appears at the beginning of Chapter XXXV, when the reader is again forced to realize that the existence of the characters in this novel is limited to Diderot's creation. The Narrator tells us that the sultan asks himself, "Que fait-on là? se dit-il à lui-même (car il conservera dans ce volume l'habitude de parler seul, qu'il a contractée dans le premier)." (B.i., p. 183)

Another example appears at the end of Chapter XLIII, where Diderot again makes a special effort to refute the reality of the novel by addressing himself directly to the reader through the Narrator with the exclamation: "Et son prince, qu'en fait-il? me demandez vous. Il l'envoie dîner chez la favorite, du moins c'est là que nous le trouverons dans le chapitre suivant." (B.i., p. 236) By thus referring to the following chapter Diderot makes it clear that the work is but a novel, and that Mangogul exists within its context only and not at all in the real world.

One more important aspect of Les Bijoux indiscrets is the use of the roman à clef. As was pointed out earlier in this chapter, the reader is familiar with the thinly veiled references to such figures as Descartes and Newton which establishes a certain sense of reality about the novel.

An opposing point of view regarding these references is equally true. By the very obviousness of the references,

the reader is constantly reminded that the novel is merely imitating the reality of the world of Descartes and Newton. The obvious references, such as the country of the Congo (France), the city of Banza (Paris), and the Academy of Sciences, can and do offer further contradictions to the illusion of reality. By being so poorly disguised they are a constant reminder to the reader that the novel is outside the realm of fact.

There are also references in the novel that are not quite so blatant as those to the scientists and musicians. Assézat, for example, asserts that Mangogul represents Louis XV; Mirzoza, Mme de Pompadour; and so forth. But Assézat does add that such assertions are insufficiently supported and that the references that do exist are not generally consistent.⁵ Because of their inconsistency, these vague references are not too important in either establishing or contradicting the reality of the novel.

Our discussion of the attempts by Diderot to create an illusion of reality in Les Bijoux, and the subsequent discussion of his contradictions to that reality, raises the following question: Why did Diderot try to create a certain conventional reality in Les Bijoux, only to destroy it by his own efforts?

⁵Diderot, Oeuvres complètes, ed. Assézat, IV: 137-38.

In an article on "Narrative Technique and Literary Technique in Diderot's Les Bijoux indiscrets and Jacques le fataliste," Irwin Greenberg touches briefly on this question and offers us a possible answer. He maintains that in both of these works Diderot has attacked the conventional illusion of reality by his constant reminders of the omnipotence of the narrator, by his constant intrusions of the narrator into the story, by his insistence on the participation of the reader, and by his demonstration that the characters and the narrator (the African author in Les Bijoux) can exist independently in the same world. Although Greenberg uses some questionable ideas to reach his conclusion, there can be no disagreement with it that Diderot used strikingly similar narrative techniques in each of his two novels which were written twenty-five years apart.⁶

One question, however, still remains: What were Diderot's intentions in contradicting the conventional reality? An answer is found by examining certain statements that appear in his other works. Lenore Kreitman, in her article on "Diderot's Aesthetic Paradox and Created Reality," helps clarify Diderot's aesthetic philosophy. Beginning her article with a discussion of De la poésie dramatique, which Diderot wrote in 1758 and in which he stressed the importance of emotions and imagination in art, she maintains

⁶Irwin Greenberg, "Narrative technique and literary technique in Diderot's Les Bijoux indiscrets and Jacques le fataliste," Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century 79 (1971): 93-101.

that Diderot considered the essential faculty of man to be the imagination. As a consequence, Diderot asserted that imagination must never be hindered by the arbitrary rules or miserable conventions that can pervert man.⁷

In a subsequent discussion of Le Paradoxe sur le comédien, Kreitman observes that Diderot acknowledges the inevitability of paradox in all art forms because art can only imitate reality. In the Paradoxe, for example, Diderot states that the actor must himself create the illusion that he is indeed the character which he portrays. He does not need to become the character, but only to create the illusion that he is the character. This is accomplished by rigid self-control on the part of the actor. By analogy then, it can be concluded that in Les Bijoux indiscrets Diderot was aware that his novel could only imitate reality, and that he, as an author, was always aware of his technique.

Kreitman continues the article with a discussion of how Diderot's ideas relate to creation in the plastic arts. She maintains that to Diderot art is not a natural reality even though it must give a semblance of an authentic reality. Thus the truly great artist is able to produce an illusion of total "authenticity." This is precisely what Diderot does in Les Bijoux indiscrets. He creates an illusion that maintains a semblance of reality, while he reminds the reader that the novel is merely a creation.

⁷Lenore R. Kreitman, "Diderot's Aesthetic Paradox and Created Reality," Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century 102 (1973): 157-72.

In a discussion of Diderot's views on fiction, Kreitman asserts that "Diderot's doctrine of created credible reality, combating the conventional false realism, is manifested in all of his fictional works."⁸ She points to a variety of techniques which Diderot uses in his fiction to combat this conventional realism, and cites "Ceci n'est pas un conte" as an example. Kreitman claims that Diderot's most common techniques are found in this story. The introduction of a character who assumes the role of the reader, the discussions between the author and the hypothetical reader, and the unique use of time are successfully used in this story to deny the conventional idea of realism.

Kreitman concludes her article with the statement that Diderot is so successful with his experiments that the illusion he creates is able to compete with natural reality.⁹

The existence of these ideas in Diderot's other works suggests that Les Bijoux indiscrets already contained many of the elements that Diderot considered important to the creation of an illusory reality. First of all, Diderot had allowed himself to use his imagination freely. He then freed himself of the literary conventions of the eighteenth century expressing the importance of this emancipation in De la poésie dramatique when he said: "O faiseurs de règles générales, que vous ne connaissez guère l'art, et que vous

⁸Ibid., p. 167.

⁹Ibid., p. 171.

avez peu de ce génie qui a produit les modèles sur lesquelles vous avez établi ces règles, qu'il est le maître d'enfreindre quand il lui plaît!"¹⁰ This statement about freedom from conventions helps clarify the contradictions found in Les Bijoux indiscrets. Diderot had strived to establish a certain reality that is similar to the reality that was established by his contemporaries--Marivaux in the memoir novel, Laclos in the epistolary novel and Prévost through the once-removed narrator. The reality of Les Bijoux is established by the introduction that is addressed to Zima, by the passages that refer to the incomplete, yet extant manuscript, and by the references to the archives and historians of the Congo. But at the same time, Diderot repeatedly contradicts this reality when he inserts reminders that Les Bijoux is the creation of an author and that the characters exist only within the framework of the novel.

Diderot's remarks about the aesthetics of creation help clarify his purpose in Les Bijoux indiscrets. When his aesthetic principles are applied to the novel, it is clear that the contradictions are intentional and are not merely flaws in the work of an inexperienced or inept author.

In the Paradoxe sur le comédien, for example, Diderot asserts that an actor must always be aware that he is acting, and at the same time he must create the illusion that

¹⁰Diderot, De la poésie dramatique, cited by Kreitman, "Diderot's Aesthetic Paradox," p.159.

the emotions of his character are really his own. What is important to the actor is that he make the audience "feel" what he is portraying, yet in order to accomplish this he must remain completely detached from the character he is playing.

Just as Diderot stresses the importance to the actor of the viewer's perception of the character portrayed, he would certainly stress the importance to the author of the reader's perception of the novel. In the case of Les Bijoux indiscrets, it is obviously the reader's perception of the reality of the novel that is important to Diderot. In Le Paradoxe, Diderot states that the author must always be conscious of technique in order to create the proper illusions. If Diderot the novelist, like his comédien, has assumed this self-conscious role as the creator of Les Bijoux indiscrets, then it can be assumed that he was always conscious of the techniques he used in the novel. This consciousness of the creative technique lends credibility to the statement that the confusion and contradictions in Les Bijoux are indeed intentional on the part of Diderot.

Diderot himself reinforces this idea when in his Eloge de Richardson, he praises the author of Clarissa for his ability to differentiate between lie and truth, between creation and reality. Diderot writes:

C'est que Richardson a reconnu que le mensonge ne pouvait jamais ressembler parfaitement à la vérité, parce qu'elle est la vérité, et qu'il est le mensonge.¹¹

In his own novel, written some thirteen years before the Eloge de Richardson, Diderot has made certain that his reader is able to make the distinction between artifice and reality. While many of the aspects of Les Bijoux indiscrets create an illusion of reality, contradictions exist to remind the reader that the novel is a "lie" and a mere imitation of reality.

¹¹Diderot, Oeuvres, ed. Billy, p. 1062.

CHAPTER V
CONCLUSION

Diderot expressed concern about reality and creation in many of his works. He recognized the inevitability of paradox in all art forms because art can only imitate reality. In stating that the actor must always consider the viewer's perception of the realism of the acting, he inferred that the author must have the same considerations. This is why Diderot praised Richardson and his ability to recognize the distinction between artifice, or creation, and reality in his novel.

The reader's perception of the reality of Les Bijoux indiscrets appears to be an important aspect of the novel. Like many of his contemporaries, Diderot creates an illusion of reality in the novel. The imaginative reader who is able to overlook the fantasy in Les Bijoux is often led to believe that the novel is "real." This reality is established by an introduction addressed to a specific reader, by the numerous "gaps" in the manuscript, and by the avowed existence of the country of the Congo, its archives and its historians.

Yet Diderot contradicts his own efforts to create this illusion of reality by constantly reminding the reader that the work is merely a creation, or an imitation of reality.

By telling the story of the indiscreet bijoux, Diderot chose a subject that could only be a fantasy and have an existence only in fiction. To ultimately assure the reader's awareness of this, Diderot destroys the illusion of reality with specific reminders that the characters' existence is entirely contingent on the novelist as master, creator.

The Narrator of Les Bijoux indiscrets is essential to the creation and the contradiction of the illusion of reality. Diderot's Narrator and the African author make persistent demands on the reader to participate. To prevent the reader from becoming too passive, Diderot and his Narrator constantly keep him confused, to the point that he must always wonder about the identity of the speaker of a specific passage. The ambiguity of the narrators guarantees an active, if not always illuminated, reader. Because the apparent purpose of Diderot's narrative technique in Les Bijoux is the reader's perception of the novel's reality, an active reader is extremely important. The active reader is often able to accept the reality of Les Bijoux, but he always remains aware of the fact that the novel is merely the creation of an author.

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