

A DECADE OF LITERARY CRITICISM IN THE MÉMOIRES SECRETS
OF BACHAUMONT (1762-1771)

by

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B.A., University of British Columbia, 1937
B.Ed., University of British Columbia, 1943

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfilment of
The Requirements for the Degree of
MASTER OF ARTS
in the Department
of
FRENCH

We accept this thesis as conforming to the
required standard

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

September, 1968

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ABSTRACT

Almost two centuries have passed since the publication began, in 1777, of the Mémoires secrets de Bachaumont. This journal, regarded by many as the mirror of its age, was the outgrowth of a unique and highly successful experiment in group journalism undertaken by the cultured and aristocratic members of an almost-forgotten salon, the paroisse of Madame Doublet. Despite its acknowledged value to students of the Ancien Régime, few studies have been made of this lengthy and complex work.

This thesis examines a limited aspect of the Mémoires secrets: the literary criticism found in the first five of the thirty-six volumes together with that in the corresponding supplements for the years 1762-1771. The decade thus reviewed ends with the death of Bachaumont, a leading paroissien who first conceived the idea of recording for posterity items chosen from Madame Doublet's registers and from whose manuscript these early volumes of the Mémoires are derived.

The first two chapters are devoted to a consideration of the background of the journal, situating it within the nouvelliste tradition and dwelling at some length upon the paroisse that gave it birth. The chapters that follow investigate the treatment afforded by the Mémoires to Voltaire, Rousseau and Diderot, outline the developments in the theatre during the decade in question and offer a general account of the poetry and miscellaneous prose writings reviewed in the

journal together with an inquiry into trends and contemporary attitudes. They provide, then, a general picture of the literary activity of this period as reflected in the Mémoires secrets rather than a complete analysis of the many items in these volumes of interest to the student of French literature.

The most striking feature of the journal is its wealth of content, evidence of the intellectual ferment of the 1760's and of the journalistic zeal of the paroissiens. In general, the critical comments are brief, succinct and often elegantly phrased. The reviews of the more controversial writings must frequently be read in the light of their underlying irony, the careful wording being presumably a deliberate attempt to confuse the censorship authorities. The opinions expressed appear to be the result of group discussion, although the extent to which these volumes of the Mémoires reflect the personal views of Bachaumont or his successor Mairobert remains uncertain. Ideologically, the tenor of the journal appears to be parlementaire and strongly pro-philosophe. As for literature, the Mémoires reveal an awareness of current trends and an acceptance of innovations tempered, however, with a certain conservatism of outlook. Among the writers, Voltaire, understandably, emerges as the dominant figure of the decade.

The limited scope of this investigation precludes any firm assessment of the Mémoires as a whole. Certainly the abundance and diversity of their contents invite

further study. A more adequate index would appear to be a prior necessity for continued investigation of this journal whose pages not only record the advance of the "république des lettres" but also have preserved for us the picture of a vanished society.

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INTRODUCTION

Almost two centuries have passed since the publication began, in 1777, of the Mémoires secrets commonly associated with the name of Bachaumont, a journal regarded by many as the mirror of its age and a useful handbook for students of the Ancien Régime. Despite its admitted value as a source of factual information, it has at times been dismissed as tedious, colourless, or--with La Harpe--as an "amas d'absurdités." We in the second half of the twentieth century are, however, probably much closer than earlier critics to the spirit of pre-Revolutionary France, and consequently the time may be opportune for a reconsideration of the Mémoires secrets.

The subject is one which must, of course, be approached with caution. The richness and apparent disorder of the material contained in the Mémoires, while suggesting many possible areas of investigation, also render any analysis of this journal extremely difficult.

The preface to the Mémoires indicates that Bachaumont regarded literature as reflecting the mood of his age--an age memorable for "l'invasion de la philosophie dans la République des Lettres en France" and for "la révolution qu'elle a opérée dans les esprits." This view, it seemed to me, provided an argument for limiting my inquiry to a survey of the literature discussed in the volumes for the years 1762-1771. This period, ending with the death of Bachaumont, the first editor, links

the Mémoires to their original source, the handwritten news sheets emanating from Madame Doublet's salon, and provides nearly a decade of literary criticism for our evaluation.

As the first step in such an investigation I undertook to catalogue all literary items in these early volumes, using for this purpose the first edition, published in London by Adamson in 1777.¹ Unfortunately, no critical edition exists.¹ Several abridged editions have appeared over the years, and I have been able to consult two of these. The first, by Barrière, included in a volume of memoirs dated 1867, contains in essence very little, being no more than an abridgement that eliminates all that the editor felt to be uninteresting or licentious. The second, by van Bever, dated 1912, appears to be the most recent attempt to edit the Mémoires. A compilation of the chief entries concerning literature and the theatre for the years 1762-1771, it contains a useful preface, some explanatory notes, and an appendix with interesting material from the Arsenal and other Parisian archives. A subsequent volume, the Mémoires de Mairobot, was announced as in preparation, but I have not been able to locate this work.

My reading for this survey has centered about several areas. I have attempted to become familiar with the necessary historical background and with details concerning the specific

¹One apparently begun by J. Ravenal in 1830 ended at volume four of the Mémoires. See Tourneux, M. "Bachaumont", la Grande Encyclopédie, IV, 1076.

authors and items to be discussed. A search for biographical information about Bachaumont and the other members of Madame Doublet's circle led me to inquire into the history of the early manuscript press and to investigate contemporary allusions to the nouvelles on which the Mémoires secrets are based, as well as later appraisals of the Mémoires themselves. In general, I have found that the most useful works to consult, other than encyclopedias, were published in the last half of the nineteenth and in the early twentieth century. An article by the Goncourt brothers,² dated 1856, provides us with the earliest and most basic biography of Bachaumont. I have found Hatin's references in his historical research on the eighteenth-century press (1859, 1866) very helpful, as well as certain references in the correspondence of the Marquis d'Éguilles (1866-67). Bayle and Herblay's informative articles on the Mémoires (1905) and Funck-Brentano's very complete and well-annotated account (1909) of the role of the Mémoires in the growth of the modern press have also been useful. Little was published on the Mémoires from 1910 to 1940 and in the more recent works (1940-65) references to Bachaumont are generally brief. To my knowledge, no special study devoted exclusively to this journal has been undertaken.

Few attempts at a systematic evaluation of critical opinion recorded in the Mémoires have been made. The earliest,

²Full information for this and for other references will be found in the Bibliography section, pp. 111 - 115.

and by far the most pertinent to this survey, may be found in Aubertin's work of 1873. Préaudeau in 1909 gave some additional consideration to the variety of content and diversity of points of view, but apart from passing references such as that by Gooch (1956) characterizing the Mémoires as a "colourless chronicle"³ and Topazio's favourable appraisal (1963) of Bachaumont as an art critic,⁴ little in this area seems to have been attempted since. One common misconception especially worthy of note is the apparent tendency of many eighteenth-century scholars to regard Bachaumont as personally responsible for the entire Mémoires secrets.

I have encountered special problems in the area of factual background since important gaps occur in the available information about Bachaumont and Madame Doublet. There are also many discrepancies in accounts of the composition of her salon and of the dates assigned to the existing manuscript nouvelles. Additional difficulties result from the fact that the registers upon which the Mémoires were based have been lost, as has Bachaumont's manuscript, and circumstances precluded direct consultation of the original material that is preserved in the Parisian archives. The Mémoires swarm with

³Gooch, C. P. Louis XV. The Monarchy in Decline, London, 1956, pp. 263 - 264.

⁴Topazio, Virgil W. "Art Criticism in the Enlightenment", Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century, (ed. Besterman), Vol. XXVII, pp. 1647 - 1648.

contemporary allusions, and I have undoubtedly overlooked or misunderstood some references. I did find an index of names (1866) to be quite useful, although it too contains omissions and some inaccuracies. The lack of a subject index proved a definite handicap to detailed study of the Mémoires.

When one reflects upon the origins of the Mémoires and upon their varied content and views, certain obvious questions come to mind. Foremost among these is the question raised--but not definitely answered--by earlier writers concerning the source of the opinions expressed in these early volumes. Since the exact authorship of this portion of the Mémoires is somewhat in doubt, this problem remains central. The particular bias or general ideological tendency of the opinions expressed seems, however, less difficult to establish. Finally, the true intent of some of the entries seems at times puzzling and one may occasionally suppose that a number of the critical comments are skilfully worded to confuse the censorship authorities or to delight the eighteenth-century reader with subtle irony.

A word about method: My survey will first of all include a study of the background of the Mémoires secrets, attempting as far as possible to eliminate discrepancies and to expand somewhat on the usual accounts given of the paroisse. From such a survey I hope that a more comprehensive portrait will emerge of those contributors who compiled the original nouvelles. Finally, I hope to provide an accurate if somewhat

brief account of the literary material and criticism found in the first five volumes of the Mémoires.

Inevitably, such a study will be incomplete, owing to limitations of time and research materials.⁵ I hope nevertheless that this modest investigation will provide some insight into the general literary content of the Mémoires secrets for the decade reviewed, as well as a panorama of contemporary opinion contained therein and an assessment of the value of this journal to the student of French literature. Hopefully, it may even indicate some additional avenues for future research into this "journal abondant et nourri."

⁵The University of British Columbia possesses two sets of the Mémoires secrets, first edition, as well as a copy of the 1866 index and the Barrière abridgement. Inter-library loan made available much other material. I could not, however, obtain the 1830 Ravenal edition, nor could I examine any of the manuscripts in the Parisian archives, such as Bachaumont's portefeuille (Arsenal), Madame Doublet's early correspondence (Bibliothèque nationale) and Mairobert's dossier (Arsenal).

CHAPTER I

THE MÉMOIRES SECRETS: THEIR GENERAL BACKGROUND

The Mémoires secrets are more than the private "journal d'un observateur", as their subtitle would seem to imply. Rather, they represent the outgrowth of a long journalistic development, that of the early clandestine manuscript press.¹ The nouvelles à la main from which the Mémoires secrets are in part derived differ in origin, however, from their many counterparts. They emanated, not from a commercial enterprise, nor from the eager efforts of an individual nouvelliste de main, but from the intimate gatherings of an elite and highly intellectual circle which assumed somewhat the nature of a cabinet. Brentano traces the history of these cabinets,² defining them in la Bruyère's words as a "rendez-vous à Paris de quelques honnêtes gens pour la conversation" and indicating that gatherings of this type were common in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. This particular cabinet revolved around the now almost forgotten "virtuose",³ Madame Doublet, at whose salon many famous literary and academic figures

¹A comprehensive treatment is found in the excellent work by F. Funck-Brentano entitled Figaro et ses devanciers, Paris, 1909.

²Ibid., pp. 264 - 265.

³The term is that of the Mémoires, V, 310: "C'était une virtuose dont Madame Geoffrin n'est qu'une faible copie."

assembled daily to discuss events and prepare news bulletins which were welcomed for their accuracy and interest.

Born Marie-Anne Legendre in 1677, she was the third of five children of François Legendre, a wealthy farmer-general, and his wife, Marguerite Leroux, of much humbler origin. Charming, cultivated and well-dowered, she married in 1698 Louis Doublet de Breuillepont,⁴ member of a younger branch of the Doublet de Persan family and treasurer to the Duke of Orleans. Evidently of a warm and affectionate nature, she maintained a close association with her family which consisted of one brother, François Legendre, three years her junior, and three sisters,--one married to Antoine Crozat, the banker, one to Durey de Viencourt, "président au grand conseil", and the third to an obscure conseiller d'état, M. de Souscarrière. These connections were later to form the nucleus around which her journalistic activities developed. Indeed, a correspondence between Madame Doublet and her sister, Madame de Souscarrière, reveals the first sign of her nouvelliste tendencies.⁵

⁴Bayle, P., and J. Herblay, "Journalisme clandestin au 18^e siècle", Nouvelle revue, 1905, pp. 214 - 215. These pages give biographical details about Madame Doublet, and genealogical information, quoted from the Mercure de France of 1714, about her husband. Very little more is known of him.

⁵From information in the preface by A. van Bever to his edition of the Mémoires secrets de Bachaumont, Paris, 1912, p. 8.

In 1716, according to a record of the lease, Monsieur and Madame Doublet de Breuillepont took up residence in an apartment in Paris adjoining the convent of the Filles-Jacobines de Saint-Thomas. She seems already, through her charm and artistic talents, to have been welcomed into the society of Coypel, "société délicate où l'esprit sans causticité, les talents sans jalousie, les connaissances sans prétentions et la gaieté sans indécence semblaient se disputer le droit d'en diversifier les amusements."⁶ Here she had met such noteworthy figures as Caylus, Fréret, Mirbaud, Foncemagne, Helvétius, Marivaux, and many others, joining in their gatherings and in their famous "soupers des quinze livres."⁷ Here also was Bachaumont, a family friend, who shared her interest in art and who seems, according to Bayle and Herblay, to have acted as host when she in turn entertained at Breuillepont. These same authors refer to "une chanson d'alors, toute bruissante de la vie qu'on menait à Breuillepont, qui évoque le charme de cette femme tendre, l'attrait de sa grâce, la vivacité de son cœur."⁸ Indeed, she seems to have been endowed with a gift for making and retaining a wide circle of friends.

⁶"Éloge de M. Coypel," in *Bibliographie des romans*, février, 1779; quoted in Bayle and Herblay, *op. cit.*, p. 215.

⁷Bayle and Herblay, *loc. cit.*

⁸*Ibid.*, p. 217.

In 1722 her husband died, leaving her at the age of forty-five with two children: a son, Louis-Antoine-François, in the service of Elizabeth of Orleans, the dowager queen of Spain, and a married daughter, Madame Bombarde de Beaulieu. Towards 1730, Bachaumont came to live at les Filles Saint-Thomas, having resumed his role of host for her social gatherings. These, no doubt attended by many of her former circle, gradually assumed the nature of a cabinet, with a fixed membership, regular meetings, and a set purpose.

Probably reflecting the interest then prevalent in secret societies, the group took the name of la paroisse, perhaps in mocking reference to the nearby convent. Limited to twenty-nine paroissiens, it was directed by la sainte trinité, composed of Madame Doublet, Bachaumont, and Madame's jovial brother, the Abbe Legendre. The members, drawn apparently in part from those who had frequented Coypel's gatherings,⁹ from family connections of the hostess, and from friends of other paroissiens, seem to have formed a fellowship both intellectual and joyous, one that continued for some forty years. Moreover, the presence of so many eminent and influential figures assured the group of a greater degree of freedom of expression than that experienced by the usual nouvellistes of the period.

⁹For example, Mirabaud, Foncemagne, and possibly Marivaux. Our Chapter 3 will discuss the paroisse in detail.

Their activities followed a certain ritual. Daily, at a fixed hour, they assembled around a marble table in Madame Doublet's salle de compagnie, each in his assigned place, a chair upholstered in crimson velvet, beneath a portrait of himself. Nearby were two great registers, one for recording news known to be true, the other for matters requiring verification. As each member gave his contribution, it was discussed and entered in the appropriate book. To complete their information, the members relied on correspondents in other French cities and abroad, as well as on some of the approved nouvellistes in the provinces. Following compilation of the news the sessions closed with a sumptuous meal prepared under the guidance of Bachaumont. Valets then copied and distributed weekly handwritten gazetins based on the registers but with varying emphases--literary, social or political--depending upon the interests of the recipients.¹⁰ Such a reputation for accuracy, as well as piquancy, was gained by these nouvelles that people are quoted as asking, on hearing an item of news, "Does it come from Madame Doublet's?"¹¹

The exact date of formation of the paroisse and of its first journalistic efforts is not clear.¹² The earliest remaining examples of the news bulletins appear to be the letters

¹⁰Funck-Brentano, F. op. cit., pp. 262 - 264.

¹¹Mémoires secrets, V, 311.

¹²Apparent discrepancies are noted in the dates given for the early extant copies of Madame Doublet's nouvelles à

from Madame Doublet to her sister, Madame de Souscarrière, at Breuillepont. A mixture of family news, theatre reviews and Paris gossip, they are somewhat similar in content but much inferior in style to the later Mémoires secrets. From Bachaumont's correspondence one learns that as early as 1740 he was circulating the prospectus for a regular publication of material selected from the registers. There seems to be doubt as to whether this project was carried out,¹³ but it serves to indicate that the nouvelles were a regular feature of Madame Doublet's salon by that date, and that Bachaumont was aware of the historic significance of much of the material in the registers, an awareness that later motivated the Mémoires secrets.

During the life of the paroisse its news bulletins achieved great popularity. The journalistic scene in the

la main. For example, Brentano, op. cit., pp. 267 - 268, refers to the MSS. 13701-13712 in the Bibliothèque nationale for the years 1745-1752. Aubertin, C. Esprit public au 18^e siècle, Paris, 1889, p. 381, gives the same reference. However, Cottin, P., Un protégé de Bachaumont, Paris, 1887, p. xvi, refers to copies in the Bibliothèque nationale for 1733-1739, and in the Arsenal for 1739 and 1740. Hatin, E., Bibliographie de la presse périodique française, Paris, 1866, p. 67, refers to "cinq volumes de cette gazette manuscrite . . . allant de 1738 à 1745." Both the Dictionnaire de biographie and the Grande Encyclopédie refer to the MSS. mentioned above, giving no dates, but suggesting that copies of the register had been in circulation since 1738.

¹³Funck-Brentano, op. cit., pp. 268 - 269, sees the prospectus as announcing "une série de gazetins sous le nom de Correspondance de Bachaumont." Van Bever seems to agree. Hatin and Aubertin imply that the project went no further.

first half of the eighteenth century was dominated by three licensed publications, the Gazette de France, a weekly statement of the government's political views, the monthly Mercure de France and the Journal des savants. Learned and dull, limited in scope, they failed to meet the needs of a public avid for news of everyday matters, nor could they allow for the growing spirit of controversy. The alternative lay in the mediocre gossip-sheets of the commercial nouvellistes, well characterized as "des gens du monde sans argent ou des gens de lettres sans esprit",¹⁴ publications often severely repressed because of their libellous character. Into this vacuum came the nouvelles of Madame Doublet's paroisse. So great became the demand for them that as many as eight or nine "branches" have been traced,¹⁵ directed usually by valets with access to the registers. Less selective, selling cheaply, these bulletins were eagerly read by people of all classes and covered France and much of Europe with a veritable "cascade de nouvelles" that reached far beyond the original subscribers, who were friends of the paroissiens. One wonders if the latter, in the intimacy of their sessions, realized the extent of their influence.

¹⁴de Préaudeau, Louis. "Bachaumont, père des échos de Paris," Revue hebdomadaire, 22 fév., 1908, p. 542.

¹⁵One of the chief "branches" was that of Madame d'Argental, herself a paroissienne, whose valet Gillet was also directing another "branch." Funck-Brentano, op. cit., pp. 272 - 288, gives a full account of these.

Conflict with the authorities,¹⁶ though long delayed, was inevitable. The first shadow to touch the group, even indirectly, was the arrest and brief exile in 1741 of the Abbé Prévost, denounced by a nouvelliste for his participation in another clandestine journal.¹⁷ Untouched by the harsh repressive measures re-introduced in 1742 and 1745 to counteract the growing audacity of the manuscript press, the paroisse continued its bulletins. One of its members, the Abbé de Chauvelin, was sentenced in 1753 to imprisonment for his violent anti-Jesuit campaigns. In that same year Madame Doublet was herself warned by Berryer, the lieutenant of police, concerning the activities of her paroissiens. Saved, however, from drastic measures by their influential connections, the group, though outwardly submissive, continued the nouvelles as before. In 1762 two indiscreet references to military matters, a result of carelessness or overconfidence, caused Choiseul, minister of war and Madame Doublet's grand-nephew by marriage, the embarrassment of having to discipline his "très chère tante." Threatened with banishment to a convent,

¹⁶Ibid., pp. 271 - 272, 275 - 276; also Bayle and Herblay, op. cit., pp. 233 - 235, 395 - 405.

¹⁷Bayle and Herblay, op. cit., p. 222 list him among the paroissiens as does Boyer d'Éguilles in a letter to be found in "Correspondance inédite du Marquis d'Eguilles," Revue rétrospective, vol. 3, 1885, p. 165. The article "Prévost d'Éxiles," in the Biographie Universelle, XXXIV, 339, gives a more complete account of this incident.

she must have been watched carefully, as her name occurs frequently on police lists from 1762 to 1765.¹⁸

The paroisse was, by this time, drawing to its close. Many were well advanced in years; Madame Doublet was herself approaching the age of ninety. Weary perhaps of the struggle, the remaining active paroissiens seem, in 1767, to have applied for police inspection of their bulletins, hoping thereby at last to legalize their publication. Correspondence concerning this matter has been preserved and indicates that, after some hesitation, the application was refused, the authorities being of the opinion that a sudden approval of these nouvelles after so many years would be a delicate and potentially dangerous affair. The paroissiens were left, then, to continue as before, except that d'Argental, one of the group, was made responsible for the contents of the bulletins. Since he enjoyed diplomatic immunity as secretary to the Duke of Parma, this was merely a token gesture.¹⁹

Old age now rapidly overtook the paroisse. All were, as Voisenon remarked, "en train de mourir."²⁰ In 1768 the Abbé Legendre died, followed three years later by Bachaumont. Madame Doublet, then aged ninety-three and failing in

¹⁸Funck-Brentano, op. cit., pp. 275 - 276.

¹⁹Bayle and Herblay, op. cit., pp. 404 - 405. The correspondence, from material in the Arsenal, is quoted at some length.

²⁰Ibid., p. 403. An interesting account of the declining years of the paroisse (1760-1771) follows on pp. 403 - 408.

mind, asked for her old friend and, on being told that he had left on a journey, became so upset at his failure to bid her farewell that she fell ill and died shortly thereafter, scolding the priest, whom she had desired to embrace, for disarranging her rouge.²¹ With her death, the paroisse ceased to exist.

Of Madame Doublet, whose salon nurtured this unique venture in group journalism, little more is known. Contemporary accounts are few: Grimm speaks of her advanced years and of her long-standing antipathy to religion;²² her obituary in the Mémoires secrets seems a coldly worded "philosophic" tribute, mentioning her journalistic activities and touching ironically upon her apparent final lapse into faith.²³ The most intimate glimpse of her as a warm human personality occurs in the Correspondance of the youthful Boyer d'Éguilles, the youngest paroissien, who frequently speaks of her most affectionately, often as his "chère maman." The long existence of her salon seems also a tribute to her capacity for making and maintaining close friendships. Perhaps a re-reading of her early correspondence might in light of our modern psychological analysis give some fresh insight into the character of this almost-forgotten salonnière.

²¹de Goncourt, E. and J., Portraits intimes du 18^e siècle, Paris, 1856, I, 87 - 88.

²²Grimm, F. M., Diderot, etc. Correspondance littéraire, ed. Tournoux, Paris, 1879, IX, 317 - 318.

²³Mémoires secrets, V, 310 - 312.

It becomes obvious when we consider the Mémoires secrets in detail that the first five volumes are the most closely linked to the paroisse. They contain, in printed form, selections from the registers for 1762-1771, edited by Bachaumont, whose manuscript passed after his death to his secretary Mairobert. The latter in turn undertook to arrange the material for publication, gave the work its rather long title,²⁴ and wrote the preface, setting forth the purpose of the Mémoires. These first volumes, published in London in 1777, are largely non-political, stressing chiefly the cultural and literary trends of the period. Mairobert continued his friend's project until 1779, adding to the Mémoires excerpts from a series of nouvelles à la main which he himself was issuing. After his suicide in 1779, the task of publishing the Mémoires secrets was taken up by Moufle d'Angerville, a lawyer and former paroissien who added volumes 15 to 36. Not content with merely continuing the nouvelles, he inserted items from

²⁴Mémoires secrets pour servir à l'histoire de la république des lettres en France, depuis 1762 jusqu'à nos jours; ou Journal d'un observateur, contenant les analyses des pièces de théâtre qui ont paru durant cet intervalle; les relations des assemblées littéraires; les notices des livres nouveaux, clandestins, prohibés; les pièces fugitives, rares ou manuscrites, en prose ou en vers; les vaudevilles sur la cour; les anecdotes et bons mots; les éloges des savants, des articles, des hommes de lettres morts, etc. etc. etc. par feu M. de Bachaumont (à Londres, chez John Adamson, 1777).

"Les quatorze premiers volumes furent imprimés de 1777 à 1779, les tomes 15-17 en 1781; les tomes 18-36 furent imprimés de 1782 à 1789." (Brentano, op. cit., p. 289 n.)

the manuscripts of Bachaumont and Mairobert, so that the last twenty volumes cover only eight years. They also contain items of political interest that were generally omitted from the earlier volumes. Prolix and wordy, Moufle d'Angerville seems to have been motivated by a desire to publish in quantity, for the Mémoires from the beginning were eagerly sought after and sold well. With the approach of the Revolution, however, interest flagged and the Mémoires secrets end in 1787.

The uneven quality of the series may of course be easily explained by the fact that the Mémoires had three different editors in all. The first five volumes, based most directly upon Bachaumont's manuscript, are considered the best written, but as we have already noted, it is difficult to determine the precise extent to which the style and opinions reflect Bachaumont himself, or again how much is due to the paroisse which formulated the original nouvelles or to Mairobert's editing of Bachaumont's manuscript. Aubertin, who has compared these volumes of the Mémoires secrets with some of the corresponding nouvelles which have been preserved, states that "la forme était à lui; le fond appartenait à la paroisse."²⁵ Brentano, some years later, in comparing the Mémoires with various original sources,²⁶ is more cautious:

²⁵Aubertin, C. op. cit., pp. 382 - 383.

²⁶Funck-Brentano, op. cit., pp. 291 - 295 refers to the documents in the archives of the Bastille, in the Bibliothèque de la Mazarine, and in the library of the city of Paris.

Les Mémoires secrets, qui constituent, pour l'étude de l'Ancien Régime, une source des plus importantes et des plus vivantes, émanent donc des registres de la Paroisse. Ils en donnent l'écho pour une période de neuf années (1762-1771), . . . sans parler ici de la continuation par Mairobert, puis d'Angerville . . . écho amoindri et affaibli, car ni Mairobert ni Moufle d'Angerville n'ont reproduit exactement le texte de Madame Doublet.²⁷

He concludes that the Mémoires secrets are "une déformation de l'original, ils ne sont pas la reproduction du manuscrit lui-même."²⁸ Tourneux, in his article on Bachaumont in the Grande Encyclopédie, states that "son nom reste attaché à une publication dont il a pu fournir l'idée première, mais, qui, postérieure à sa mort, ne renferme vraisemblablement rien de sa main . . ." Van Bever, in the preface to his 1912 edition of volumes 1-5 of the Mémoires, presents them as "un extrait du manuscrit de Bachaumont," but is reluctant to speculate upon the source of the views presented, or upon the various possible effects of Mairobert's editing of Bachaumont's manuscript.

Since definite conclusions in this respect are lacking, a survey of literary criticism in the Mémoires must involve

The most complete, a series of nouvelles copied from Madame Doublet's registers and from the library of the Duke of Penthièvre, are more political than literary and cover the years 1762-1779.

²⁷Ibid., p. 290. It seems, however, that the editors could hardly have based their material after 1771--apart from the excerpts added by Moufle d'Angerville--on "le texte de Madame Doublet," since the registers of the paroisse must have closed at that date.

²⁸Ibid., p. 291.

prior consideration of the salon that gave them birth. More information concerning the paroisse may enable the reader to detect in this chronicle echoes of these aristocratic nouvellistes who for so many years carried out this successful experiment in group journalism.

CHAPTER II

THE MÉMOIRES SECRETS: BACHAUMONT AND THE PAROISSIENS

Any attempt to reconstruct the atmosphere and outlook of Madame Doublet's cabinet must first of all review the dominating figure of Louis Petit de Bachaumont. The Goncourt brothers have given what is apparently the earliest and most complete biographical account,¹ based largely upon an unfinished autobiography contained in Bachaumont's portefeuille and reprinted in full in the Appendix to Van Bever's 1912 edition of the Mémoires secrets.

From these sources one learns that he was born in Paris, June 2, 1690. His father, Charles-Antoine Petit de Bachaumont, died during the child's infancy, leaving gambling debts and a young widow, aged eighteen, who was persuaded to leave the boy in the care of his elderly paternal grandfather, physician to the Dauphin. Bachaumont, a handsome child, grew up as the spoiled darling of the court, with the palace corridors as his playground, the Dauphin and the Princess of Conti as his godparents, and Le Nôtre, his grandfather's friend, as his advisor and guide in matters of art. Unfortunately, there is a gap in our information about his subsequent formative years. His youth was, apparently, spent partly at Versailles, partly at his grandfather's chateau,

¹de Goncourt, E. and J., op. cit., 51 - 88.

but little is known of him from his adolescence until about 1730, when he became a key figure in Madame Doublet's paroisse.

Some additional information may be gathered from his correspondence. In a letter quoted by Edmond and Jules de Goncourt Bachaumont dwells in some detail on his love for art, on his early training therein "sous les meilleurs maîtres de ces temps-là en tout genre," and on his association with other connoisseurs of art such as Coypel, Crozat and members of their circle. He suggests that a serious illness (small-pox) and poor eyesight had prevented his pursuing painting as a career, and adds: "J'ai assez fort de bien, et je n'ai voulu prendre ni charges, ni emplois; j'ai voulu rester libre, et je n'ai aujourd'hui de regret que de n'être pas un bon peintre."² He lived, then, the life of a wealthy, cultured dilettante, a connoisseur of the arts and an epicurean, his motto otio, musis et amoribus. His intimates called him "le cher paresseux," yet he speaks of himself as fully occupied: "Il m'est bien dur de m'arracher aux occupations qui ont rempli tout mon temps jusqu'à present et auxquelles le plus parfait loisir pouvait à peine suffire."³

²Ibid., 84-85.

³Ibid., p. 77. Quoted from a letter dated 1743, in which Bachaumont replies to an unknown lady, refusing the post of "premier président" to which he has been appointed and asking for permission to sell it.

These occupations seem to have been connected with two roles: that of "un édile de Paris," and that of master of ceremonies of Madame Doublet's cabinet. Concerning the first, it is known that Bachaumont was devoted to Paris, to its beautification and to the preservation of its historic aspects. For example, he purchased for 1,500 livres the Colonne Médicis to preserve it for posterity,⁴ and Grimm--who is not generally kind to Bachaumont--mentions approvingly the latter's concern for the Louvre.⁵ He also seems to have acted as consultant to many artists of the day, being renowned for his sound judgements and excellent taste. In 1751 he published an Essai sur la peinture, la sculpture et l'architecture⁶ and, later, accounts of the Salons of 1767 and 1769, these last appearing in the form of letters in the Mémoires secrets.⁷ According to one modern authority, Bachaumont "has recently been judged to be, 'avant Diderot,--le grand critique d'art du début du dix-huitième siècle'".⁸ Apart from two or

⁴An account of this purchase, for which the city later reimbursed him, is found in the article "Bachaumont" by M. Prevost, Dictionnaire de biographie universelle, Paris, 1948, IV, 1050. See also the Mémoires secrets, I, 299 - 300.

⁵Grimm, op. cit., III, 12.

⁶Characterized by Grimm in Ibid., II, 94 as "commun et superficiel."

⁷Mémoires secrets, XIII, 5 - 64.

⁸Wildenstein, G. "Goûter une oeuvre d'art en connoisseur (sic)", in Gazette des beaux arts, avril, 1961, p. 1. Quoted by Virgil W. Topazio, op. cit., p. 1647. Topazio adds:

three items of less significance,⁹ no other work of Bachaumont remains, except the Mémoires secrets which bear his name and for which he furnished at least the initial inspiration.

Grimm, who insinuates that Madame Doublet and Bachaumont had been lovers, speaks of him as senile in his declining years, as having been rich, lazy, idle, irreligious, "n'ayant d'autres affaires au monde que le soin de ses plaisirs, de la bonne chère, et de la sensualité."¹⁰ This implied selfishness is somewhat contradicted by the references of young Boyer d'Éguilles to Bachaumont's generosity and by the records in Bachaumont's correspondence of his attempts to obtain assistance for his young friend in his misfortunes. The preface to the Mémoires secrets, written by Mairobert, also bears testimony to Bachaumont's sense of serious purpose and counteracts Grimm's accusations of frivolity.

The third member of "la sainte trinité" that directed the paroisse was the Abbé François Legendre, Madame Doublet's brother, to whom reference has already been made. Remembered chiefly as a "joyeux vivant, buveur infatigable," he introduced to the sessions at les Filles Saint-Thomas his intimate

"His criticism was consistently sound and enlightened, and detailed enough to make his comments critically meaningful without being excessively descriptive and personal. He was, to our mind, the best critic before Diderot . . ."

⁹Mémoires sur le Louvre (c. 1750); Mémoire sur la vie de M. l'abbé Gedoyn. Prevost, M., op. cit., IV, 1052.

¹⁰Grimm, op. cit., IX, 318.

friend, the poet Piron, the affectionate and witty critic of the jovial Abbé's apparently atrocious literary efforts.¹¹ Neglectful though the latter may have been of his ecclesiastical responsibilities, he remained devoted to good cheer and fellowship and continued a close associate of the paroisse until his death in 1768.¹²

A list of the remaining members of the paroisse is difficult to compile with complete certainty. One source, however, gives some definite information: This is the correspondence, already noted, of Boyer d'Éguilles,¹³ who, in his letters to Madame Doublet and Bachaumont, greets many of the paroissiens by name. From other correspondence and memoirs of the time a few more names can be gleaned, and internal references in the Mémoires secrets reinforce this information. Unfortunately, it is not always clear whether some of the persons mentioned were actually paroissiens or merely casual visitors to the salon. Accordingly, though most lists have a

¹¹Bayle and Herblay, op. cit., p. 220 quote a letter of Piron in which he likens the Abbé's writings to the labours of Hercules except that "celui-ci détruisait les monstres et vous en produisez sans relâche. Je les comparerais même à l'hydre, s'ils avaient pied ou tête"

¹²Ibid., pp. 219 - 220. See also Paul Cottin's introduction to his Un Protégé de Bachaumont: la correspondance inédite du Marquis d'Éguilles, Paris, 1887, pp. xx-xxi. Cottin notes that the Abbé Legendre "avait des connaissances, surtout en alchimie."

¹³Written in 1745 at the time of a secret diplomatic expedition from France to Scotland headed by d'Éguilles.

certain basic similarity, many names occur only in isolated instances. To the names of the members, most references also add brief identifying comments. Interesting though these are, they are generally insufficient to enable a clear assessment of the personal views of the paroissiens. I have attempted to expand on those usually given but a much more detailed investigation of the political interests and literary and artistic connections of Madame Doublet's circle would be required to produce a substantially accurate evaluation of the Mémoires secrets.

Typical of the greetings contained in the affectionate letters sent by young d'Éguilles in Scotland to his friends at les Filles Saint-Thomas is the following: "Mille tendres compliments au cher Président, à Madame Duret [i.e. Durey de Viencourt], à son mari; à l'Abbé Legendre, à Messieurs de Mairan, Falconet, Matha, etc. et puis un article particulier pour les trois braves d'Argentaux."¹⁴ The "cher président" was Durey de Meinières, who presided over the sessions of the paroisse and who, in public life, held the office of "président à la deuxième chambre des Enquêtes du Parlement de Paris." This distinguished magistrate¹⁵ was held in high esteem by the

¹⁴"Correspondance inédite du marquis d'Éguilles," Revue rétrospective, vol. 3, 1885, p. 152.

¹⁵Nancy Mitford, in her Madame de Pompadour, London, 1954, pp. 213 - 217, describes an interview between the President de Meinières and Madame de Pompadour which reveals him as "one of the cleverest and most intransigent of the Parliamentarians."

the other members of the paroisse, which he had probably entered through the marriage of his brother, Durey de Vien-court, to Madame Doublet's sister.

A review of the life and works of Mairan (1768-1771), mentioned next in d'Éguilles' greeting, impresses the reader with his versatility. A wealthy man, he began as a student of ancient languages, from which he passed to mathematics and physics. In 1718 he was admitted to membership in the Academy of Sciences, publishing numerous papers on astronomy, physics, geometry and natural history. In 1740, he replaced Fontenelle as secretary, but returned three years later to devote the rest of his long life to scientific investigation. He was also apparently a skilled musician and had a good appreciation of art and sculpture. Of a kindly and gentle disposition, he was long attached to the paroisse and his death is recorded in the Mémoires secrets.¹⁶

Camille Falconet (1671-1762) was also eminent in several fields. From Lyons, where his medical office had been a centre of intellectual gatherings, he moved to Paris, becoming a court physician and "inspecteur de la naissance des Enfants de France."¹⁷ He was admitted to membership in the Academy of Inscriptions, and became famous for his extensive library. Many of his books, bequeathed to the Bibliothèque

¹⁶Mémoires secrets, V, 260.

¹⁷Bayle and Herblay, op. cit., 223 - 224.

du Roi, have become part of the collection of the Bibliothèque nationale.¹⁸

The next paroissien mentioned, Matha, is apparently not widely known.¹⁹ However, "les trois braves d'Argentaux" to whom the Marquis sends a special greeting are of wide interest to students of the paroisse. Charles-Augustin de Ferriol, comte d'Argental, was for forty years (1721-1768) a member of the Parlement of Paris, a close friend of Choiseul, and representative in France of the Duke of Parma. He is perhaps best remembered for his lifelong friendship with Voltaire, whose correspondence reveals the utmost confidence in d'Argental's taste and critical judgement.²⁰ Although he published little himself,²¹ he was noted for his protection of writers of talent and, according to la Harpe, for "un goût

¹⁸Here also one can find a portrait of Falconet sketched by Madame Doublet and engraved by Caylus. Cottin, op. cit., p. xxii n.

¹⁹Cottin (Ibid., p. xxiv) says only that Matha was "de la famille de l'évêque d'Aire." No reference is made to him in Michaud's Biographie universelle.

²⁰A few examples from Voltaire's correspondence will illustrate this point. In 1739, he writes to d'Argental concerning Zulime: "Je travaille, mais guidez-moi" (Correspondence, VIII, 290, No. 1738); the same year he suspends an attack on Desfontaines: "J'ai suspendu mes procédures, puisque vous me l'avez ordonné . . ." (Ibid., 347, No. 1778). Years later, in 1760-61 his correspondence with Lekain indicates the same reliance on d'Argental; for example: Ibid., XLIII, 176, No. 8503; XLIV, 88, No. 8589; XLV, 23, No. 8912.

²¹He is credited with collaboration in writings generally attributed to his aunt, Madame de Tencin.

naturellement juste et un esprit orné, nourri de la politesse de ce beau siècle de Louis XIV, dont il avait vu la fin . . ."²² He was also noted for his happy marriage to Mademoiselle Jeanne Bosc de Boucher, an intimate friend of Madame Doublet, described by Bayle and Herblay as a "personnalité rare par l'esprit et le coeur, nature fine, prompte et séduisante."²³ Endowed with considerable business acumen as well as journalistic zeal, she was active in the distribution of the nouvelles à la main based on Madame Doublet's registers. Pont de Veyle, d'Argental's older brother, intendant des classes de la marine, was also a man of letters, a friend of Madame du Defand and an active paroissien. D'Argental outlived both his wife and brother as well as many other paroissiens, dying in January 1788, ten years later than his good friend Voltaire.

Another letter of d'Éguilles refers to other "trop heureuses gens qui . . . une fois le jour, pouvés aller à la Paroisse de ma chère maman . . ."²⁴ Among these are "tous les Voisenons." The reference here is undoubtedly to Madame Doublet's granddaughter and her husband, the Comte de Voisenon, lieutenant-general in the royal army. A wealthy and highly esteemed man, he found his wife a great trial

²²Quoted by Lazare, G. in the article "Argental," Dictionnaire de biographie française, Paris, IV (1948), 563.

²³Bayle and Herblay, op. cit., p. 225.

²⁴"Correspondance inédite du Marquis d'Éguilles," Revue rétrospective, vol. 4, 1886, 124.

because of "ses galanteries, son esprit et ses caprices," the latter including a tendency to meddle in medical affairs.²⁵ However, much better known and frequently mentioned in the Mémoires secrets is his brother, the notorious Abbé de Voisenon, Madame Doublet's godson (1708-1775), who seems to have been both the "enfant terrible" of the paroisse and her great favourite. Worldly and dissipated, he was granted, at his own request, a purely nominal post in the church, and was thereby free to indulge his wit and taste for pleasure and frivolity. Voisenon had many influential friends, among them Voltaire, Madame de Châtelet, Choiseul, and Madame de Pompadour. Despite his rather slight literary production, consisting of a number of plays and of some contes libertins, he was admitted to the Académie Française in 1762.²⁶ His relationship with the actress Madame Favart, whose husband's plays Voisenon was suspected of writing, is recorded in Favart's Mémoires et correspondance.²⁷ These "facéties indécentes" were also, apparently, recorded at Voisenon's request in

²⁵An account of her mock installation as president of the Paris College of Medicine is given in the Biographie universelle (Michaud) XLIV, 48.

²⁶His admission, according to Bayle and Herblay (op. cit., p. 399) was a direct result of efforts of the paroisse in his favour. It is worth noting, however, that Piron, although a paroissien, was unsuccessful in his bid for membership. Louis XV refused to ratify the election.

²⁷"Voisenon," Biographie universelle (Michaud), XLIV, 42 - 49.

Madame Doublet's nouvelles and were food for gossip over a long period. His charm, generosity, and encouragement of new writers seem to have won him general affection, despite his obvious weaknesses.

Of what other names may one be certain? D'Éguilles greets as paroissiens the Abbé Xaupi and the better-known Abbé Prévost, author of Manon Lescaut. Several references to "la jolie tête" seem to designate the Abbé de Chauvelin, a grotesquely ugly man, known especially for his fierce attacks upon the Jesuits, in which the members of Madame Doublet's circle rejoiced. A militant Jansenist, he was also interested in the arts and theatre, especially Voltaire's tragedies. Préauudeau characterizes him as "parfaitement libertin et peut-être athée."²⁸

In marked contrast to the frivolous Voisenon and the aggressive Chauvelin, one finds among the paroissiens several men highly esteemed for their erudition and their uprightness of character. These are Fonce-magne (1694-1779), modest and devout, famous as an historian and for his long controversy with Voltaire over the Testament politique of Richelieu; his friend Sainte-Palaye²⁹ (1697-1781), noted for his research

²⁸Préauudeau, op. cit., p. 537.

²⁹With Sainte-Palaye, as a shadow, appeared always his twin brother La Curne, whose devoted care made Sainte-Palaye's monumental research possible. See, for example, the article "Sainte-Palaye" in Biographie universelle, XXXVII, 295.

into the history, language and literature of the Middle Ages, and Jean-Baptiste de Mirabaud (1675-1760), the translator of Tasso's Jerusalem Delivered. All three were eminent academicians and all lived to be well over eighty, active and alert until the end. Both Sainte-Palaye and Mirabaud had connections with the family of the Duke of Orleans, as did Madame Doublet's husband. We have already noted Foncemagne's presence at earlier gatherings of the Coypel circle.

Other paroissiens mentioned by the Marquis d'Éguilles have been identified, but some remain merely names. "Les Montesquiou" whom he greets are, no doubt, the other granddaughter of Madame Doublet and her husband, Pierre de Montesquiou, who held an appointment in the army. Cottin, in his introduction to the Marquis' correspondence³⁰ suggests that the names Baïle and Nicolaï refer to "Nicolas Baille, conseiller du roi en son grand conseil," and Guillaume Nicolaï, a compatriot of the young Marquis. He gives no explanation for the names of de Montlaur, Pétrrocini, le Coudray, Bachelier, de Leitre, de Nestier, de Mirabelle and de Valori, and this present survey has not attempted any research into this area.

The list, however, is by no means complete. It seems certain that the Abbé de Bernis (1715-1794), who had a long and distinguished career as poet, academician, minister of

³⁰Cottin, op. cit., pp. xxii-xxiv.

foreign affairs under Louis XV, ambassador and cardinal, attended the gatherings of Madame Doublet's paroisse.³¹

We have already noted the presence of Piron, friend of her brother, famous for his gay parodies and epigrams, for his Métromanie, and for his intense hatred of Voltaire. A letter to the lieutenant of police from de Mouhy, quoted by Brentano, and dated 1762, gives us the additional names of two doctors, Devaure and Firmin, and mentions also three ladies, Mesdames Rondet de Villeneuve, de Besenval and du Boccage.³² Of these, the best known is Madame du Boccage (1710-1802), the poetess, greeted with such enthusiasm by her contemporaries in France and abroad as forma Venus, arte Minerva, but remembered today chiefly for her letters. Member of several literary societies, friend of Fontenelle and Mairan, acclaimed by Voltaire, she must have been a charming addition to the paroisse. Concerning the other ladies we have less information.³³

³¹Mitford, Nancy, op. cit., gives much valuable information about the life and character of de Bernis, known by Voltaire as "Babet la Bouquetière." See especially pp. 47 - 48, 195 - 200, 236 - 239, 254.

³²Funck-Brentano, op. cit., p. 274.

³³It seems probable that Madame de Besenval is the lady mentioned in a note accompanying Rousseau's Confessions, Pléiade ed., I, 1381, as "la comtesse Catherine Bielinska, parente du roi Stanislaus," who had married Baron Jean-Victor de Besenval during his sojourn in Poland as French envoy to that country. I have not been able to find any information about Madame Rondet de Villeneuve.

These, then, are the persons whose participation in Madame Doublet's paroisse seems reasonably certain. Yet, in attempts to reconstruct the membership, scholars have included many other figures of the day. Préaudeau, for example, lists along with some of those already cited the names of Carmon-telle, the younger de Troy, the Count de Caylus and the Abbé Crozat, as well as Monsieur du Boccage and the Baron de Besenval. Van Bever's study of 1912, apparently the most recent, gives a careful list of twenty-nine paroissiens, but includes therein Coypel, Rigaud, Largillière, Helvétius and Marivaux. These may well have been friends of Madame Doublet, but were not necessarily members of her paroisse. Cottin³⁴ includes the Marquis d'Argens and even Voltaire. Bayle and Herblay³⁵ add to their list such unlikely members as the Chevalier de la Morlière and the police-spy de Mouhy.³⁶

No review of the paroisse is complete without special reference to Mairobert, who continued the nouvelles à la main.³⁷ Said by the gossip of the day to be the son of Madame Doublet and Bachaumont, Mairobert appears to have become a frequent

³⁴Cottin, op. cit., p. xxiii.

³⁵Bayle and Herblay, op. cit., p. 224.

³⁶Brentano, op. cit., p. 273, seems quite correct in pointing out the impossibility of de Mouhy's ever having been "un disciple assidu de la paroisse."

³⁷Consideration of the later contributions of Mairobert's successor, Moufle d'Angerville, lies well beyond the scope of the present study.

visitor to the paroisse from an early age. Precise dates are lacking, however, and his early career seems rather shadowy. In 1749, aged twenty-two, he was imprisoned in the Bastille for reciting seditious verses. At that time, he is recorded as "épris de littérature et d'indépendance, très frondeur, attaquant les ministres, Madame de Pompadour, le roi lui-même; il est fier de nouer les relations avec les écrivains en renom; il colporte leurs oeuvres . . .",³⁸ and the same source quotes a police report which sums him up as "un des garçons qui aient la plus mauvaise langue de Paris." He held various posts, working for a time in the Archives de la Marine, and was no doubt a welcome source of information for Madame Doublet's bulletins. Just when this "diminutif de Beaumarchais"³⁹ became Bachaumont's secretary is not clear, but a letter of Voltaire dated 1754 mentions "un nommé Mérobert qui trotte pour Monsieur de Bachaumont"⁴⁰ and Brentano quotes a note to the police which indicates that Mairobert was working at Madame Doublet's nouvelles in 1766.⁴¹ The extent of his influence on the early Mémoires secrets bears considering.

³⁸Brentano, op. cit., p. 282.

³⁹Moufle d'Angerville in his Vie Privée de Louis XV says that Mairobert "vif et souple, intrigant et hardi, parleur caustique, oracle des foyers de la comédie, courtisan des lieutenants de police, habile à changer de masque et à se faufiler chez les grands, nous figure assez bien un diminutif de Beaumarchais." Funck-Brentano, op. cit., p. 284.

⁴⁰Voltaire, Correspondence, XXIV, 105, No. 5052.

⁴¹Funck-Brentano, op. cit., p. 281.

What conclusions can be readily drawn from even a cursory survey of the paroisse? With Grimm, one can marvel at the longevity enjoyed by most members: "tout ont atteint le terme le plus reculé de la vie humaine . . ." ⁴² But there, perhaps, the uniformity of their lives ends and one is almost overwhelmed by a sense of their diversity. Around Madame Doublet's table there met daily some thirty people, with varied interests--political, artistic, religious, and literary. Holding each other in tolerant and affectionate esteem, despite at times their conflicting points of view, they succeeded in transforming their lively interest in affairs of their day into an amazingly successful journalistic enterprise.

Finally, before passing to a consideration of the literary criticism found in the first five volumes of the Mémoires secrets, one should remember that, although this work is the legacy of the paroisse, it represents a derivative editing of Bachaumont's own editing of Madame Doublet's registers and that echoes of the original paroisse may well have become rather confused and faint. Furthermore, the period covered, 1762-1771, represents the paroisse in its declining years when, saddened by the deaths of their friends, the members may have become less militant than before. In this period also, police supervision of the group was more strict, and comments may have been carefully worded to confuse the

⁴²Grimm, op. cit., IX, 317.

ensor. Nevertheless, these volumes, so eagerly sought at the time of their publication, remain an interesting and valuable record of contemporary opinion and constitute for the modern reader "un des plus précieux miroirs de la société du dix-huitième siècle."⁴³

⁴³Hatin, E. Bibliographie de la presse périodique française, p. 67.

CHAPTER III

THE MÉMOIRES SECRETS AND VOLTAIRE

The dominant figure in the literary scene reviewed in the early volumes of the Mémoires secrets is certainly Voltaire. The first two entries in the journal concern him and, during the ensuing decade (1762-1771), some two hundred and fifty items record the interest of the paroisse in his many activities. In part, the numerous references reflect the general curiosity that he aroused; in part, they are evidence of his prolific pen. However, there are more definite bonds linking the paroisse and the philosophe de Ferney.

The most obvious link between the great writer and Madame Doublet's salon was the friendship, already noted, that existed between Voltaire and d'Argental, his "ange gardien." Voltaire's attendance at paroisse gatherings is not recorded but he may well have been an occasional visitor. In any case, his awareness of the existence of the paroisse and of the publicity value of the registers is shown in his correspondence. In a letter to Madame Solar, dated 1742, he speaks of having sent an item to "Monsieur le président de Meinière pour en orner le grand livre de Madame Doublet,"¹ and in 1750, referring to some verses imputed to him, he

¹Voltaire, Correspondence, XII, 104 - 105, No. 2479.

wrote to d'Argental: "Protestez donc, je vous en prie, dans le grand livre de Madame Doublet, contre les impertinents qui m'attribueraient ces impertinences . . ."² Voltaire seems to have known Bachaumont, and makes several references to him. The Besterman Correspondence even includes a letter to our paroissien thanking him for a personal favour and referring to Bachaumont's young protégé, Boyer d'Éguilles.³ Indeed, Voltaire numbered several other paroissiens among his friends,⁴ and certainly the Mémoires give abundant proof that the paroisse was well informed with regard to events at Ferney.

Voltaire in this period was still active in most areas of literature although his efforts were by no means evenly distributed among all the various genres. Since the time of his greatest productivity in historical writing was past, we find correspondingly little criticism in the Mémoires devoted to this area, the entries being confined mainly to the years 1763, 1768, and 1769. When the second volume of his Histoire de Pierre le Grand appeared in 1763 the Mémoires, although they are pleased to note "des étincelles de génie" at

²Ibid., XVIII, 166, No. 3653.

³Ibid., XV, 209, No. 3196.

⁴We have already mentioned Voisenon and Madame du Boccage, but his correspondence reveals connections with other paroissiens. For example, he seems to have known Madame de Besenval (Ibid., I, 304 - 305); he consulted Mairan about physics, calling him the "philosophe aimable" (Ibid., VII, 363), and at one time considered leasing Sainte-Palaye's house (Ibid., XXXIII, 244; XXXIV, 25).

intervals, find the work "extrêmement croqué."⁵ Reacting to his 8-volume Nouvelle Histoire générale, they praise his usual brilliant style, but find that it lacks "la profondeur, et surtout l'exactitude sur laquelle est fondée la véracité, première qualité d'un historien."⁶ Later in the same year, referring to his Histoire universelle, they again accuse Voltaire of superficiality: "Il veut tout embrasser, n'approfondit rien, et traite tous les événements de la manière la plus vague, la moins circonstanciée, et souvent la plus éronnée."⁷ Passing comment only is given to the Siècle de Louis XV, which appeared in 1768, the Mémoires merely recording the adverse reaction of the Parlement, although they had hoped for a favourable reception of this work. The following year, 1769, Voltaire produced his Histoire du Parlement de Paris. The wisdom of such a production is questioned as likely to antagonize the Parlement, thereby inviting punishment, especially of the colporteurs. Later, in a brief survey, the second volume is judged to be off the topic but general praise is given to Voltaire's skilful use of simple prose: "Il est à portée du grand nombre des lecteurs et sera plus connu que s'il était profond, savant,

⁵Mémoires secrets, I, 241. Spelling has been standardized in all quotations from the Mémoires and other contemporary texts.

⁶Ibid., I, 243.

⁷Ibid., I, 284.

exact et austère."⁸ The final reference implies that the work is far from objective, since the Parlement is arranging for publication of certain facts that Voltaire has "omis exprès."

Voltaire's merits as a literary critic are reviewed by the Mémoires chiefly on the occasion of his edition of the works of Corneille, which appeared in 1764. The commentary is generally unfavourable and accuses Voltaire of pettiness concerning minor points of grammar, of being repetitious, and of showing preference for Racine over Corneille. And so the Mémoires conclude: "En un mot, rien d'approfondi, point de vues générales, et nulle analyse réfléchie d'aucune de ces tragédies. On sent facilement que ce travail lent et coûteux ne sympathisait pas avec l'imagination fouguese de Monsieur de Voltaire."⁹

Critical expressions of opinion concerning Voltaire as a playwright, though generally equally concise, are somewhat more numerous. The second entry in the Mémoires concerns, for example, Voltaire's Zulime. At first, full comment is withheld until the play has completed its run of nine performances. Then follows a detailed criticism of its illogical plot and unlikely psychological structure. Only the stubbornness of the author in believing in the worth of this

⁸Ibid., IV, 329.

⁹Ibid., II, 43, 50.

"monstrueux drame," despite its failure twenty-three years earlier, could have encouraged, we are told, such an unfortunate production. We are even favoured with a couplet to summarize the general sentiment:

Du temps qui détruit tout, Voltaire est la victime;
Souvenez-vous de lui, mais oubliez Zulime.¹⁰

Certainly, one cannot accuse the Mémoires of expressing favouritism for a friend.

At about the same date, a new "comédie philosophique en vers," l'Écueil du Sage, evokes the cutting remark that "Monsieur de Voltaire, pour consoler ses envieux, après avoir échoué dans le tragique, a voulu sans doute échouer aussi dans le comique." The brief summary that follows is largely unfavourable but whatever is praiseworthy is also noted, the critical judgements being phrased in a manner typical of the earlier volumes of the Mémoires: "Les deux premiers actes sont une farce, une parade digne des boulevards; le troisième se monte sur le haut ton, le quatrième le soutient, et le cinquième est des plus détestables. Il y a pourtant quelques scènes qui décèlent le grand maître, et c'est en cela que ce Drame est supérieur à la dernière tragédie de l'auteur."¹¹ A detailed review of this same play is promised but not included

¹⁰Ibid., I, 44.

¹¹Ibid., I, 24 - 25.

in the original Mémoires. It appears, however, in the supplements, where a lengthy item is inserted, giving many more details of this "tissu tout à fait romanesque," but again praising Voltaire's skill in making his characters speak "avec une onction qui ne va qu'à lui; il n'est point de prédicateur aussi insinuant, aussi pénétrant" ¹²

His remaining plays are briefly reviewed. Voltaire's Olympie is dismissed as a "tragédie très médiocre d'un grand appareil de spectacle." ¹³ The more controversial Saül, then circulating (1763) in manuscript form, provokes several comments which we will discuss later in this chapter in the more general context of reactions to Voltaire's anti-religious writings. A revised Mariamne meets with two brief references only. ¹⁴ Two years later, a successful revival of Voltaire's earlier tragedy, Adélaïde du Guesclin, is attributed to the change in public tastes, now receptive to innovations such as the famous coup de canon. ¹⁵ Another historical tragedy, le Triumvirat, dated 1766, inspires very favourable comment: "L'ordonnance de cette tragédie est imposante, le style en est fort et soutenu, la versification belle et majestueuse. On y trouve beaucoup de vers heureux et faciles. En un mot,

¹²Ibid., XVI, 140 - 144.

¹³Ibid., I, 246 - 247.

¹⁴Ibid., I, 302, 303.

¹⁵Ibid., II, 255.

on la juge de M. de Voltaire."¹⁶ Less well received are Pandore, which Voltaire, "toujours jaloux de briller dans tous les genres," had had set to music¹⁷ and Charlot, a "drame tragi-comique en trois actes et en vers." Of the latter, the Mémoires comment that "quoique sa touche comique n'ait jamais été merveilleuse, elle est du plus mauvais goût dans cet ouvrage très froid, très triste, et dont aucun caractère n'est développé qu'aux noms des acteurs."¹⁸ A bourgeois pastoral, les Scythes, which Voltaire had sent to Cardinal de Bernis, receives a generally unfavourable review, although some "morceaux de la plus grande force" are found therein. Especially deplorable is the dedication to Choiseul and Praslin made, we are told, in a tone "le plus bas et plein d'adulation la plus outrée."¹⁹ Voltaire's tendency to indulge in such servile flattery is pointed out on several occasions as one of his less desirable attributes. Performances of his established plays, Tancrede, Sémiramis and Brutus, draw no added comment, and the last entry of this nature is an account of the embarrassment of the Comédiens who, having refused le Dépositaire as "basement intriguée"

¹⁶Ibid., III, 139. An additional note concerning this play will be found in my Chapter 5.

¹⁷Ibid., III, 152, 166.

¹⁸Ibid., III, 283 - 284.

¹⁹Ibid., III, 189 - 190.

and "platement écrite," discovered the author to be Voltaire. Fortunately, his friends withdrew it from the actors before they could perform it out of a sense of obligation.²⁰

The Mémoires do not contain extensive criticism of Voltaire's plays for the period, nor do they discuss at length his poetry. Scattered throughout the volumes one finds some examples of his "vers galants," and a number of his witty epigrams are presented with relish, especially those directed against Pompignan and Fréron.²¹ There are references to various didactic works in verse form: a "fable en vers," a "conte en vers," and an "épître en vers," the latter being an attack on atheism--judged to be somewhat illogical--but Voltaire is admitted to be "accoutumé à prêcher le pour et le contre."²² All these pieces are criticized, however, for their content rather than for their lack of poetic qualities. The only direct references to Voltaire as a poet are two that occur in the supplements. One concerns an ode to St. Genevieve, composed by Voltaire in his youth and published in 1764 by Fréron, no doubt out of spite. It is admitted to be very

²⁰Ibid., V, 78 - 79.

²¹As for example, the following:
 "Un jour loin du sacré vallon
 Un serpent mordit Jean Fréron.
 Savez-vous ce qu'il arriva?
 Ce fut le serpent qui créva." (Ibid., I, 182).
 See also Ibid., I, 320, 349.

²²Ibid., IV, 143, 151, 248.

poor and the Mémoires add, "Il en faut conclure qu'il avait peu de disposition pour la poésie lyrique et sacrée."²³ The second concerns a pindaric ode to the Empress of Russia, dated 1768, in which Voltaire, apparently desiring to out-do Pindar, receives this direct comment: "Ce grand homme, dans différents genres, a toujours échoué dans celui-ci, et il voudrait effacer du temple de mémoire les noms des grands maîtres de l'ode."²⁴

Thus far the general tenor of most of the allusions to Voltaire's writings reveals a decidedly negative attitude on the part of the contributors to the Mémoires. His historical works, while commended for simplicity of style and clarity of expression, are accused of being at the same time superficial, sketchy and warped. His edition of Corneille is unfavourably reviewed. Finally, his dramatic works produced during the decade in question receive only scant praise; except for le Triumvirat, they are seen as illogical in plot and weak in characterization. One gathers that Voltaire is considered to have exhausted his best efforts and he is seen as foolishly trying to excel in all areas. His light and sparkling verse is obviously admired as an excellent vehicle for his sharp wit, but in general it is conceded that poetry is not his strong point.

²³Ibid., XVI, 240.

²⁴Ibid., XIX, 4.

What expecially emerges from a study of the opinions on Voltaire expressed in the Mémoires secrets for this decade is a picture of the immense vitality of his mind, of the almost feverish output of his pen, and evidence of the eagerness with which all his activities were followed. Details of his personal life are frequently reported: his health, his whereabouts, his quarrels, his communions. In addition to the writings already noted, an almost bewildering variety of pamphlets, letters, contes, epistles, brochures, as well as larger works such as his Dictionnaire philosophique are catalogued as pointing to his tireless efforts to combat "infamous superstition." Since more than half the Voltairian entries are devoted to this last aspect of his work, no complete study will be possible in our brief survey. A sampling of typical comments may, however, enable us to draw some general conclusions about the opinions expressed.

The Mémoires appear to take the view that one cannot separate Voltaire from his writings, especially in the area of his didactic works. They are therefore quick to judge his personal as well as his literary qualities nor do they hesitate to express both admiration and severe criticism in this regard. Certain of his personal traits, evidenced in his writings and his actions, receive acclaim. Chief of these is his humanity, revealed in various works such as the Sermon du Rabin-Akib, an attack on the last auto-da-fé in Lisbon, and in his activities on behalf of victims of religious

intolerance. The Mémoires record with approval his efforts in aid of such persons: his offers of financial aid and his letters on their behalf, written "avec cette onction, ce pathétique qui coulent si naturellement de la plume de ce grand écrivain lorsqu'il prêche l'humanité et défend les droits de l'innocence opprimée."²⁵ The final rehabilitation of the Sirven family is attributed "aux soins et aux réclamations de M. de Voltaire," with the added note that it will assure "de plus en plus à ce poète philosophique une place parmi les bienfaiteurs de l'humanité."²⁶ Likewise, despite the adverse criticism of his Corneille, the Mémoires readily admit his generosity towards Mlle Corneille, for whom the proceeds are destined. They also record other little acts of kindness, and express appreciation of his hospitality for men of letters at Ferney--hospitality which was at times abused.²⁷

Apart from such tributes to his personal qualities, the Mémoires favourably appraise his techniques and style. Voltaire's talent for clarity and simplicity of expression is noted especially as a powerful aid to popularization of his thought. The Mémoires record also the public's predilection for his "lettres courtes et légères" and they praise

²⁵Ibid., III, 212.

²⁶Ibid., V, 33.

²⁷Ibid., II, 271; IV, 3.

"la légèreté, la bonne plaisanterie, le sentiment pur et pénétrant" characteristic of much of his work. One senses the enjoyment of the paroissiens as they witness his practical jokes and his frequent disavowals of works that are obviously his: "On ne peut trop rire des mouvements que se donne sans cesse M. de Voltaire pour jouer le public et le persifler."²⁸ They relish his witty assaults upon an opponent: "Il voltige autour de lui, il le harcèle légèrement, il le couvre de ses sarcasmes, et le laisse en cet état exposé à la risée publique."²⁹ Concerning Voltaire's contes perhaps no better brief appraisal could be found than that in the Mémoires: "On y trouve toujours cette touche délicate, qui n'appartient qu'à lui: quoiqu'ils ne soient pas également bons, ils se font lire avec plaisir."³⁰

Despite such high regard for Voltaire's humanitarian qualities and such obvious admiration for his wit and clarity, the Mémoires frequently criticize his shortcomings, both literary and personal. We are told that his wit and sarcasm, while enjoyable, tend often to be carried to excess, even in the Calas and Sirven affairs where "l'auteur continue à se servir de l'ironie et à traiter en plaisantant, des matières qui paraissent mériter un ton plus sérieux."³¹ On numerous

²⁸Ibid., II, 250.

²⁹Ibid., IV, 128.

³⁰Ibid., II, 48.

³¹Ibid., III, 91.

occasions Voltaire is accused of treating serious topics with "mille plaisanteries, dont il ne peut s'abstenir, et qui donnent un air de farce à ses ouvrages les plus sérieux."³² This same passage goes on to point out his frequent inconsistencies and contradictions. In the supplement for 1767, we learn that, "sous prétexte de tolérance, il frappe toutes les religions de la manière la plus intolérante,"³³ and in an entry for 1770 a similar comment notes that "l'apôtre de l'humanité oublie son rôle et prêche la guerre, le carnage et la destruction avec une véhémence bien opposée à tout ce qu'il a écrit depuis quelque temps, mais ce ne sera malheureusement pas la dernière de ses contradictions."³⁴ An earlier note on Voltaire's Honnêtetés littéraires suggests that his inconsistencies also extend to his choice of words, since "il donne lui-même le modèle des grossièretés qu'il reproche aux autres"; the note goes on to characterize him as "un champion qui d'abord entre en lice en riant, s'échauffe ensuite, éprouve enfin les mêmes fureurs convulsives de son adversaire."³⁵

The Mémoires deplore not only his frequent contradictions but also his virulent attacks upon all who differ

³²Ibid., IV, 248.

³³Ibid., XVIII, 336.

³⁴Ibid., XIX, 222.

³⁵Ibid., III, 244.

with him in any way. Obviously no admirers of those who opposed the philosophes, the Mémoires follow approvingly the bitter exchanges between Voltaire and Fréron. They do not, however, approve of Voltaire's attacks on Rousseau,³⁶ and they see in his Questions sur l'Encyclopédie a repertoire of insults, adding that the number of his enemies grows daily "par la raison que tout homme qui prend la liberté de critiquer ses ouvrages est à l'instant réputé infâme, abominable, exécration, etc."³⁷

Other personal failings are also emphasized: A comment dated 1771 reiterates an earlier criticism and adds the charge of servility.³⁸ A brochure sent to the Czarina of Russia is termed "digne de l'Apôtre de la tolérance," but the review adds an attack on Voltaire's excessive use of sarcasm and his tendency to be too prodigal with "éloges qu'on pourrait suspecter de flatterie."³⁹ The charge is repeated on other occasions and we may safely assume that the paroissiens considered such criticism of Voltaire's character to be of central importance. Nor do the Mémoires fail to remark upon the great philosophe's love of money: "L'avarice est encore la passion favorite des gens de Lettres, et sans en chercher des exemples bien loin, personne n'ignore

³⁶Ibid., III, 201.

³⁷Ibid., V, 316 - 317.

³⁸Ibid., V, 265 - 266.

³⁹Ibid., XIX, 6.

avec quelle ardeur M. de Voltaire, en courant la gloire, a poursuivi la fortune."⁴⁰

Irascible, petty, inconsistent, vain, service, avaricious--all these things he may be, but the Mémoires are most harsh in their criticism of another failing, that of his repetitiousness. Voltaire, we are frequently told, has "moins que jamais des idées neuves"; his Lettres sur les miracles "ne font que remâcher la même chose, et M. de Voltaire lui-même ne fait que répéter ce qu'il a déjà dit--et ce que tant d'autres avaient dit avant lui."⁴¹ All such comments may be well summed up in one dated 1767: "Malgré les prétentions de M. de Voltaire à rire et à faire rire, les gens sensés ne voient plus en lui qu'un malade attaqué d'une affection mélancolique, d'une manie triste qui le rappelle toujours aux mêmes idées, suivant la définition qu'on donne en médecine de cet état vaporeux: Delirium circa unum et idem objectum."⁴² Admiring him as the "apostle of tolerance," the Mémoires seem to fear that Voltaire's growing intensity and rigidity will defeat his own purposes.

Obviously, difficulty of interpretation surrounds some of the comments, especially those dealing with Voltaire's

⁴⁰Ibid., VI, 45.

⁴¹Ibid., II, 253. See also Ibid., II, 62; IV, 247 - 248; V, 319; XIX, 106.

⁴²Ibid., III, 236.

anti-religious works. Can, for example, the remarks on Saül be taken seriously? "Ce n'est pas une pièce ordinaire, c'est une horreur dans le goût de la Pucelle mais beaucoup plus impie, plus abominable. On n'en peut entendre la lecture sans frémir: c'est un tissu d'impiétés rares, d'horreurs à faire dresser les cheveux. Cette tragédie est toujours très recherchée et très peu répandue . . ."43 Surely such a review would be an excellent recommendation, its tone of shocked horror appeasing the censor while intriguing the public. A later comment on the same play, now printed, maintains a careful apparent impartiality, remarking only that some find it "détestable et dans le fond et dans la forme; ils en reprobent le style emphatique et simple tour à tour; les autres le regardent comme un chef-d'oeuvre d'impiété, mais comme un ouvrage pittoresque et philosophique."44 Judgments of this type occur frequently and tend to puzzle the reader, for they appear to be contrary to the generally latitudinarian spirit of the journal. Further examples are numerous. In 1764 after producing a list of anti-religious works by various authors, the editors comment: "On ne peut regarder que comme tres redoutable un recueil d'autorités et de raisonnements aussi forts contre la religion."45 A work attributed to

43 Ibid., I, 191.

44 Ibid., I, 296.

45 Ibid., II, 126.

Voltaire, entitled Doutes sur la religion, an analysis of a treatise by Spinoza, is described as: "une discussion assez sèche, mais dangereuse, de l'authenticité des livres de l'Écriture Sainte," with the added note that "c'est toujours un projet abominable que d'avoir mis à portée du commun des lecteurs . . . l'énorme dissertation de cet athée, dont le poison se trouvait noyé dans un fatras de verbiages . . ."⁴⁶

The key is perhaps found in the Mémoires themselves when, speaking of Voltaire's denials of his own works, they add, "Rien de plus plaisant--et de plus propre à en imposer à ceux qui ne connaissent pas le dessous des cartes."⁴⁷ Only in the light of their underlying irony can we fully appreciate such remarks or the following, pertaining to Voltaire's commentary on the life of St. Paul, and his Dissertation sur St. Pierre, both said to be "nourris d'une érudition profonde et soutenue, d'une logique contre laquelle il est difficile de résister, sans la grâce spéciale d'une foi vive et aveugle."⁴⁸ Such faith we are told, was only for "les esprits les plus frivoles."⁴⁹ Blind acceptance of any faith is not a characteristic of enlightened minds.

⁴⁶Ibid., III, 287.

⁴⁷Ibid., III, 132.

⁴⁸Ibid., V, 192.

⁴⁹Ibid., V, 195 - 196.

When we weigh the total effect of the opinions concerning Voltaire that are encountered in the Mémoires we are somewhat surprised to find that so much of the criticism appears to be hostile. Yet, underlying this apparent harshness the reader detects a sense of admiration and affectionate regard for his very worthwhile contributions. "De fades adulateurs, des écrivains mercénaires ne cessent d'élever des trophées à la gloire de M. de Voltaire, comme si ses propres ouvrages n'étaient pas un monument supérieur à tous ceux qu'on pourrait lui consacrer."⁵⁰ Of such adulation the Mémoires secrets will have no part; friendship does not blind the paroissiens to the weaknesses of "ce grand homme." Despite the brevity of the comments, the picture of Voltaire that emerges from the journal seems in general an accurate one even today. Perhaps also it is Voltaire's influence that the Mémoires secrets themselves reflect. "Je vois avec plaisir," they report the Patriarche as saying in September 1767, "qu'il se forme dans l'Europe une République immense d'esprits cultivés . . ."⁵¹ In a journal designed to record the history of this République des Lettres⁵² Voltaire worthily occupies a dominant place.

⁵⁰Ibid., III, 50.

⁵¹Ibid., III, 261

⁵²Pierre Gaxotte in Le Siècle de Louis XV, Paris, 1933, (éd. Livre de poche), pp. 243 - 245 gives an account of the République des lettres and Voltaire is again quoted: "Courage! Faites un corps, messieurs . . . Ameutez-vous, et vous serez les maîtres. Je vous parle en républicain, mais aussi il s'agit de la république des lettres!"

CHAPTER IV

THE MÉMOIRES SECRETS: ROUSSEAU AND DIDEROT

The value of the Mémoires secrets lies not only in its factual content but also in the insight it affords into contemporary opinion. In the case of Voltaire, we have already noted the fairly sophisticated range of appraisal contained in its pages. With regard to Rousseau and Diderot, however, the entries reveal in varying degrees less awareness of the true stature of these two great writers.

The first two volumes of the Mémoires give Rousseau, then at the peak of his relatively brief literary career, even more publicity than they grant to his great rival Voltaire. Rousseau's Nouvelle Héloïse had already scored an immediate and outstanding success,¹ to which, unfortunately, no detailed reference is made in the Mémoires. On May 22, 1762, the chronicle records the appearance of Émile, followed a month later by le Contrat social; from then until the end of the year some thirty entries in close succession record the fortunes of these two works and their author. Frequent comment continues until 1765. Thereafter, interest centers

¹"C'est à beaucoup près, si l'on en excepte Voltaire, le plus grand succès de librairie du siècle. Seul Candide pourrait fournir des chiffres équivalents." (70 editions, 1761-1800.) Mornet, D. Rousseau, Paris, 1950, p. 88.

chiefly about Rousseau's tribulations and wanderings, and items concerning him gradually become fewer.

No close link seems to connect Rousseau and Madame Doublet's paroisse, as in the case of Voltaire and d'Argental. That Rousseau was, however, acquainted with some of the paroissiens is indicated in his Confessions, for he reports having met the Abbé de Bernis at the home of Madame Dupin² and also records the friendly interest shown him by Madame de Besenval and her daughter: "Dès lors j'osai compter que Mme la baronne de Beuzenval et Mme la marquise de Broglie prenant intérêt à moi ne me laisseraient pas longtemps sans ressources, et je ne me trompai pas . . ." ³ He seems also to have known the Abbé Prévost, whose novels he greatly admired.⁴ Choiseul, too, had shown him kindness, although his wife, Madame Doublet's grand-niece, had found "le sauvage citoyen de Genève" too uncultured for her tastes.⁵ She could,

²Rousseau, Jean-Jacques. Oeuvres complètes, Pléiade ed., I (1959), 289 - 290.

³Ibid., I, 291.

⁴Claire-Eliane Engel, in her work entitled le Vritable Abbé Prévost, Monaco, 1957, p. 107 notes: "Prévost est depuis longtemps en rapports avec son grand émule et disciple, Jean-Jacques Rousseau et, par miracle, ils ne se brouillent pas."

⁵Rousseau, op. cit., p. 1544 contains an interesting note about Mme Doublet's grand-niece: "Sainte-Beuve (Lundis, XIV, 225) cite ce mot de la duchesse de Choiseul: 'Je me suis toujours méfiée de ce Rousseau, avec ses systèmes singulières, son accoutrement extraordinaire et sa chaire d'éloquence portée sur les toits des maisons: il m'a toujours paru un charlatan.'"

apparently, admire philosophes only when they were of her own class.

The paroissiens quite obviously shared the prevailing interest in Rousseau and his works and we note that the Mémoires secrets allot to Émile what we would term excellent news-coverage: preliminary announcements, criticisms of content and style, reports of public reaction, details of ensuing controversies and items of personal interest about the author. Such thorough treatment of this important work enables us to arrive at a fairly precise appreciation of the paroissiens' view of Rousseau.

Approval of Rousseau's style is implicit in the very first announcement of Émile ou de l'éducation, which is described as an attractive and well-printed book that is currently arousing much curiosity. Reference at the same time is made to the author's "art séduisant."⁶ A few days later a preliminary critical comment terms this work "singulier, comme tout ce qui sort de la plume de ce philosophe" and, noting its bold attacks against religion and government, prophesies that "ce livre, à coup sûr, fera de peine à l'auteur." The entry concludes with a remark typical of the Mémoires: "Nous y reviendrons, quand nous l'aurons mieux digéré."⁷ Four days

⁶Mémoires secrets, I, 92. The entry is dated May 22, 1762.

⁷Ibid., I, 94 - 95.

later, the journal records that "le livre de Rousseau occasionne du scandale de plus en plus. Le glaive et l'encensoir se réunissent contre l'auteur, et ses amis lui ont témoigné qu'il y avait à craindre pour lui."⁸ In rapid succession we learn of the burning of the book in Paris and Geneva and the flight of the author, "décrété de prise de corps."⁹

From these preliminary details, the Mémoires turn to the promised review of the content and style of this controversial work. In it, they claim to give "un résultat des jugements sur ce livre, qui ne sont point aussi divers qu'on pourrait le présumer à l'égard d'un ouvrage aussi singulier." Three objections are given to the material presented by Rousseau. First, if the precepts in this work are, by the author's admission, "d'une exécution impossible," what is the practical value of such a work, "lorsqu'on sait qu'il ne servira de rien?" Secondly, the author draws heavily upon other sources, especially Locke, whom he has professed to scorn. Finally, "l'auteur ne fait dans tout son livre que détruire l'objet pour lequel il écrit" since, instead of training a child in his duties to God and man, "on anéantit toute religion, on détruit toute société." As a result, a child raised by Rousseau's system, although presumably

⁸Ibid., I, 95.

⁹Ibid., I, 100. The journal also records the ban imposed on Sauvigny's Mort de Socrate at the Comédie française "à cause de l'affaire Jean-Jacques." (Ibid., I, 103 - 104.)

virtuous and talented, "finit par être un misanthrope dégoûté de tous les états, qui n'en remplit aucun, et va planter des choux à la campagne et faire des enfants à sa femme."¹⁰

Following this conservative reaction to Rousseau's theories of progressive education, the review proceeds to analyse the contents of each volume of Émile separately, most attention being given to the first and fourth volumes. In the former, Rousseau's views on infant rearing are touched upon, his inconsistencies noted, and the substance summed up as "peu de chose, si l'on s'en tenait aux simples maximes usuelles qu'il y débite." The appeal of this volume is seen as lying not in its content, but in its style: "C'est donc par un talent rare qu'il a le secret d'enchaîner son lecteur et de l'empêcher de voir le vide de ce livre. Son éloquence mâle, rapide et brûlante, porte de l'intérêt dans les plus grandes minuties." Volume four, containing "une dissertation sur la manière d'éduquer les filles" finds more favour, as being both more reasonable--"un chef-d'oeuvre d'autant plus séduisant qu'il ne paraît point hors de la nature"--and at the same time more emotionally touching: "on est attendri jusqu'aux larmes dans ce morceau de détails les plus intéressants." Again, the Mémoires predict trouble with the auth-

¹⁰Ibid., I, 105 - 106.

orities, for they note that Émile contains "des assertions très dangereuses contre les puissances."¹¹

In general, the opinions expressed in this review are typical of those elsewhere in the Mémoires concerning Rousseau. Like the great contemporary reading public, the paroissiens detected in his works new and fascinating trends which they did not always fully understand. Many of the specific theories in Émile pass unnoticed, or at least receive little comment, and modern readers, aware of past developments in education, may smile to learn that "ce livre, plein de belles spéculations, ne sera d'aucun usage dans la pratique." Its appeal is that of a curiosity, a visionary's dream: "On le lit, et on le lira sans doute avec avidité, parce que l'homme aime mieux le singulier que l'utile." In addition, they feel that the author possesses to a supreme degree "la partie du sentiment," adding, "Eh! Que ne pardonne-t-on pas à qui sait émouvoir?"¹²

The Contrat social, which appeared a few weeks later, is less carefully analysed, although the Mémoires present sufficient details to arouse the interest of their readers. The first announcement indicates the difficulty of obtaining copies.¹³ Shortly thereafter, a brief outline of the main

¹¹Ibid., I, 106 - 108

¹²Ibid., I, 108 - 109.

¹³Ibid., I, 115. "Le Contrat social se répand peu à peu. On en fait venir par la poste de Hollande. On écrit seulement les noms de ceux à qui sont adressés les exemplaires."

theme of the work appears, preceded by a carefully worded statement, in itself a subtle recommendation to enlightened minds: "Le Contrat social se répand insensiblement. Il est très important qu'un pareil ouvrage ne fermente pas dans les têtes faciles à s'exalter: il en résulterait de très grands désordres. Heureusement que l'auteur s'est enveloppé dans une obscurité scientifique qui le rend impénétrable au commun des lecteurs. Au reste, il ne fait que développer des maximes que tout le monde a gravées sur son coeur; il dit des choses ordinaires d'une façon si abstraite qu'on les croit merveilleuses."¹⁴

Both the Contrat social and Émile provoked a storm of controversy. The Mémoires record some of the accusations levelled at Rousseau and his attempts to refute them.¹⁵ One item in this battle is "une lettre singulière d'un auteur toujours singulier: intitulée Lettre de Jean-Jacques Rousseau à Christophe de Beaumont. Cet auteur y discute le mandement de M. l'Archevêque, et défend son Émile avec sa force et sa chaleur ordinaire."¹⁶ In reference to this letter, obviously

¹⁴Ibid., I, 133.

¹⁵One can detect a growing note of approval in the Mémoires as Rousseau continues to attack his critics. From "Jean-Jacques Rousseau," as he is called early in 1762, he becomes "le moderne Diogène" (I, 240; 244 - 245; 276 - 277), "l'immortel Rousseau" (I, 305 - 306), and "le célèbre proscrit" (II, 56).

¹⁶Ibid., I, 237.

studied with care by the paroisse, the Mémoires later add:
 "Nous venons de la lire: même simplicité, même force de
 logique, même énergie dans le style que dans ses autres
 ouvrages.¹⁷

Weaknesses in attempts to discredit Rousseau are well
 publicized. With amused delight the journal announces the
 first volume of the verbose Abbé Yvon's Réponse à la lettre
de J. J. Rousseau à Christophe de Beaumont, Archevêque de
Paris which contains a lengthy preface and the first of fif-
 teen letters proposed: "C'est-à-dire que, pour réfuter une
 brochure très mince, ce champion volumineux se dispose à
 donner au public une suite de trois ou quatre volumes in-12.
 Quant au style, personne n'osera le mettre en parallèle avec
 la plume brûlante de Rousseau."¹⁸ In another instance the
paroissiens give ironic praise to the censor Marin who, "dans
 une sage production, a voulu faire quelques efforts pour
 repousser les dangereux sophismes du philosophe de Genève."
 Since his success was that of "le pot de terre contre le pot
 de fer," the Mémoires ask, "Pourquoi donc vouloir être

¹⁷Ibid., 241. This praise for Rousseau's logic did
 not, however, prevent their commenting, at a still later
 date, on the inconsistency of Rousseau's religious views as
 expressed in this letter. (Ibid., 250 - 251.) This incon-
 sistency was noted by Voltaire, who apparently was delighted
 and felt that Rousseau could again be counted among the
philosophes. "He swears he is a Christian, and makes our
 holy religion as ridiculous as could be imagined." (Torrey,
 N. L. Spirit of Voltaire, New York, 1938, p. 112.)

¹⁸Mémoires secrets, I, 250 - 251.

brisé?"¹⁹ Another controversy followed the appearance of the Lettres écrites de la campagne, an attempt by M. Tronchin, procuror-general at Geneva, to justify the actions of the authorities there against Rousseau. This work provoked in reply Rousseau's Lettres écrites de la montagne, recorded first in the Mémoires for January 1, 1765.²⁰ Once again both content and style are evaluated, the whole work summarized as: "Toujours même énergie de style, même vigueur de sentiments, même paradoxes."²¹

In addition to reviews of Rousseau's chief works, already indicated, scattered references are found to some of his other writings. The first volume of the Mémoires speaks of "un roman nouveau, intitulé Édouard," news of which has reached the paroisse, but of which no more is said.²² Of Rousseau as a poet, only one comment is found, dated 1763, concerning the reprinting of l'Allée de Silvie: "Ce n'est pas assurément le meilleur de ses ouvrages: on sent bien que la galanterie n'est pas son fait; on y trouve cependant une façon de penser libre qui fait plaisir et qui donne un caractère original à cette production, toute médiocre qu'elle

¹⁹Ibid., I, 312 - 313

²⁰Ibid., II, 150 - 151.

²¹Ibid., II, 153. See also p. 156.

²²Ibid., I, 94. "Ce sont les aventures d'un Anglais qui joue un rôle dans le roman de Julie."

soit."²³ As for his music, one reference notes the unsuccessful production in 1765 of a little "motet à voix seule" that failed to reveal the talent of Rousseau's Devin du village;²⁴ another notes a rehearsal of Neuf muses, "d'où on a conclu que cet opéra n'était pas jouable."²⁵ Of more importance is his Dictionnaire de musique (1767), which the Mémoires in a concise and rather severe review see as incomplete, somewhat inaccurate, and not too well organized. Despite these shortcomings, however, the chronicler notes the amazing depth of knowledge revealed in some areas: "On ne conçoit pas comment un homme qui a autant senti, autant pensé, peut avoir acquis à ce degré la théorie d'un art, aussi aride et dégoûtant dans ses principes, qu'agréable dans ses effets."²⁶

One final review²⁷ is of interest, as it concerns a work which in some ways prefigures modern literary experiments.

²³Ibid., XVI, 199 - 200. This poem, composed in 1747, was first published in the Mercure de France of September, 1750. See Rousseau's Oeuvres complètes, Pléiade ed., II, 1898. The poem itself can be found on pages 1146 - 1149 of the same work.

²⁴Ibid., XVI, 267.

²⁵Ibid., III, 332.

²⁶Ibid., III, 310 - 311.

²⁷Rumours of Rousseau's Confessions, anticipated with misgivings in some quarters, had evidently reached the paroisse. The only reference is, however, the notation that "il paraît faux que ce grand homme fasse imprimer à present ses mémoires . . ." Ibid., IV, 62 - 63.

This was Rousseau's Pygmalion, "ouvrage d'un genre unique, en un acte, en une scène, et n'ayant qu'un acteur." Written "en prose, sans musique vocale" but with orchestral accompaniment, it was a great success both at Lyons where it was first performed and later at Paris. The Mémoires outline the plot and have warm praise for "la prose brillante, telle que les endroits les plus vifs d'Héloïse." They add: "Il y règne autant de sentiment que de philosophie éloquente qui anime, qui réchauffe, qui embrasse toute la nature . . ." ²⁸ The "sauvage citoyen de Genève" seems, in short, to have captivated the hearts of the intellectual paroissiens.

Of the roughly one hundred and twenty-five entries concerning Rousseau in the first five volumes of the Mémoires, only half deal with his writings. The rest are news jottings, reports of rumours or speculation about the man himself--his quarrels and wanderings, his health, his sufferings, his personal qualities, his occupations, his income. His relations with Voltaire are touched upon in several items, one a reference to a caricature "où tous deux sont tournés en ridicule," ²⁹ and another a reference to Rousseau's contribution of two louis towards the cost of a statue being erected to Voltaire: "acte de générosité bien humiliant pour ce dernier; façon bien noble de se venger de la sortie indécente et cruelle que

²⁸Ibid., V, 243 - 244.

²⁹Ibid., I, 144 - 145.

l'autre a faite contre ce grand homme . . . et de s'élever infiniment au-dessus de lui auprès de tous ceux qui connaissent la vraie grandeur."³⁰ The Mémoires do not strongly take sides in the controversy between Rousseau and his former friends of the philosophe party but they deplore what they see as Voltaire's pettiness³¹ and their sympathy is with Rousseau, an admittedly difficult man to get along with, but persecuted for his beliefs.

The entries about Rousseau, while fewer in number than those concerning Voltaire, are often longer and more detailed, a fact which serves perhaps as an accurate measure of the relative interest aroused by Jean-Jacques. In general, the comments are clear and straightforward, although at times the same careful ambiguity of wording already noted in connection with much of Voltaire's work also occurs. The adjective most often applied to both Rousseau and his work is "singulier"; both the author and his ideas are seen as requiring discussion and lengthy consideration. Occasionally resistant to or unimpressed by his theories, always alert to his inconsistencies, the Mémoires nevertheless admire his

³⁰Ibid., V, 168.

³¹Ibid., III, 201. Referring to Voltaire's poem La Guerre de Genève, "une satire horrible contre J.J.R.," the entry concludes: "L'humanité seule réclame contre cet abominable ouvrage."

boldness of expression and appreciate his sweeping sentiment and forceful prose, sensing therein a new trend.

* * *

As for Diderot, the other great writer under consideration, in this chapter, little information is given about either the man or his work and a careful search reveals only some twenty items for this entire decade.³¹ The picture of him that emerges from the Mémoires is, therefore, sketchy and rather disappointing to the twentieth-century reader. Some information of interest is given: we read, for example, of his friendship with the Empress of Russia, of her invitation to him to visit her court and of her purchase of his library.³² The journal also records Paoli's request that Rousseau and Diderot draw up a code of laws for Corsica. This request, viewed as logical in the case of the author of the Contrat social, is questioned in Diderot's case: "On ne voit pas en quoi il a pu mériter une distinction aussi flatteuse."³³ In addition, the Mémoires contain a brief reference to Diderot's friendship with Damilaville³⁴ and a letter

³¹His connection with the paroisse does not seem to have been close. Voltaire's correspondence indicates that d'Argental must have known Diderot quite well, as he is asked to receive from Diderot certain papers and articles belonging to Voltaire. (Correspondence, XXIII, 110, 118, 145, 149.)

³²Mémoires secrets, I, 150; II, 195; III, 130 - 131. These items, as well as that in II, 233 - 234 also imply praise of the "bienfaisance" of this enlightened monarch.

³³Ibid., II, 132 - 133.

³⁴Ibid., IV, 215.

in which Voltaire remarks upon the poor treatment Diderot has experienced at the hands of Rousseau.³⁵

Although these items are of interest, they do little to reveal Diderot as the major literary figure he is judged to be today. In this respect, however, information is also sparse. The Mémoires refer to Diderot's dislike of Goldoni, resulting from Fréron's suggestions of plagiarism.³⁶ His important role as director of the Encyclopédie is barely touched upon in these early volumes, the Mémoires noting only his intervention in a booksellers' dispute which has attracted to him "l'indignation générale des gens de lettres" and "le ridicule universel."³⁷ Even his contributions as a philosophe appear to pass largely unremarked, except for one enthusiastic reference to an Essai sur les préjugés ou de l'influence des opinions sur les mœurs et sur le bonheur des hommes par M. D. D.³⁸ The initials would indicate that the essay was (mistakenly) attributed to Diderot. In any case, it is termed "la meilleure preuve qu'on puisse fournir des progrès de la raison humaine depuis quelques années."³⁸

³⁵Ibid., III, 176.

³⁶Ibid., I, 191; II, 108 - 109; II, 185.

³⁷Ibid., V, 365, 376 - 377.

³⁸Ibid., V, 21 - 23. The initials may, of course, be a typographical error from which the first edition of the Mémoires secrets is by no means free. Barbier, in his Dictionnaire des ouvrages anonymes, Paris, 1872, II, 262 - 263 gives the initials M. D. M., noting: "les initiales placées sur le frontispice ont fait attribuer cet ouvrage à Dumarsais . . ." In reality, says Barbier, the essay was by d'Holbach.

Only his dramas receive any detailed consideration and even here the author seems to be largely overlooked, attention being focussed upon the plot and the trend to sentimentality and pathos developing in this "age of reason."

In the case of le Père de famille the reviews are interesting for their portrayal of its overwhelming effects upon audiences of the day. Everyone wept, we are told; "on comptait autant de mouchoirs que de spectateurs,"³⁹ and at one performance in December 1769, a woman was so overcome "au moment où le jeune homme défend l'épée à la main sa maîtresse qu'on veut enlever," that she was seized with convulsions and had to be assisted from the theatre. Its emotional appeal is indicated by "la fureur avec laquelle le parterre, lorsqu'on est venu annoncer la reprise d'Hamlet . . . s'est récrié: 'Point d'Hamlet! le Père de famille!; et cela à plusieurs fois."⁴⁰

A different reception, however, attended the performance in September, 1771, of le Fils naturel, "ce drame imprimé il y a vingt ans, et qui fit beaucoup de bruit à sa naissance par sa singularité, par les prétentions de son auteur, et par l'éclat avec lequel ses partisans le prônent." The question of plagiarism is raised again, and the near-

³⁹Mémoires secrets, III, 333 - 334.

⁴⁰Ibid., V, 36 - 37. The Hamlet was an adaptation by J. F. Ducis of Shakespeare's play. See Lancaster, op. cit., pp. 571, 615.

failure of this performance, "d'une froideur insoutenable," is recorded as a humiliating experience for Diderot, attributable possibly to his current unpopularity in the booksellers' affair already mentioned.⁴¹ These volumes of the Mémoires give no direct criticism of the drame as a literary genre other than noting its popular appeal⁴² and recording an instance in which an author acknowledges his debt to the "sensibilité" he has found in Diderot's plays.⁴³

The limited view of Diderot afforded in the Mémoires secrets, is, of course a reflection of the limited knowledge of his work then available, since his major literary productions were to appear posthumously. To his contemporaries in general he was only the hard-working director of the Encyclopédie and the author of several dramas bourgeois. To the paroissiens he was also of interest as a member of the philosophe company. Appreciation of his qualities as an art critic, as a dramatic theoretician and as a novelist is not recorded in these volumes.

A study of Rousseau and Diderot as portrayed in the Mémoires secrets illustrates both the limitations and values of such a journalistic record. Contemporary judgements are

⁴¹Ibid., V, 384. See also the earlier reference in footnote 37.

⁴²In general, as will be shown in my Chapter V, the paroissiens appear to disapprove of the drame.

⁴³Mémoires secrets, III, 118.

of necessity incomplete: the Mémoires do not foresee the potentially widespread future influence of Rousseau's writings, any more than they reveal a full appreciation of Diderot's true greatness. They provide, nevertheless, valuable factual information that reinforces or supplements knowledge available from other sources concerning public opinion of the day and the problems encountered by these two great men who addressed their writings as much to posterity as to their own contemporaries.

CHAPTER V

A DECADE OF THEATRE IN THE MÉMOIRES SECRETS

The wealth of material recorded in the Mémoires secrets enables the reader to trace not only the activities of individual authors but also the evolution of opinion regarding various literary genres. Of these, the theatre receives the most extensive treatment and entries concerning it can be found on almost every page. Such profusion is indicative of the ferment then occurring in this area as the theatre, caught up in the spirit of the age, continued to move away from its traditional forms and preoccupations.

Members of Madame Doublet's circle obviously shared the interest in the theatre common to cultured society of the time and discussion of current plays must have been a prominent feature of the gatherings at les Filles Saint-Thomas. Furthermore, a number of the paroissiens had themselves long been associated with the theatre. No doubt it is to them that we owe much of the serious comment in the Mémoires as well as the spicier items of backstage gossip that enliven the chronicle and give credence to the reputation for piquancy claimed for Madame Doublet's nouvelles.

Of the group, the Abbé de Voisenon was probably at the time the most active participant in theatrical affairs. He had achieved a certain reputation both as the author of

a number of light comedies¹ and as the acknowledged lover of Madame Favart, the actress. Rumour also suggested that he was the unacknowledged author of many of her husband's plays--a view strongly supported in the Mémoires secrets.² Piron, too, beloved of the paroisse for his witty epigrams, was an experienced playwright who in his younger days had gained fame with his comedy Métromanie (1738) and had shown originality and talent in the field of tragedy.³ Pont de Veyle also had apparently ventured into the field of drama as author of a little one-act play, le Fat puni, performed first in 1738 and several times thereafter.⁴ As for the beautiful and cultured Madame du Boccage, her classical tragedy les Amazones (1749), though coldly received, won her the distinction of being the only feminine playwright to have a play performed at the Comédie-Française during the last the last twenty-five years of Louis XV's reign.⁵ We have

¹Gaiffe, F. in le Drame en France au 18^e siècle, Paris, 1907, p. 23 refers to Voisenon as "un des singes de Marivaux."

²The Mémoires secrets, II, 277 note "l'opinion très fondée que Favart fait les carcasses des pièces et que l'abbé de Voisenon habille la poupée." The article "Voisenon" in Michaud's Biographie universelle, XLIV, 45 deals more fully with Voisenon's relations with Favart.

³Lancaster, H. C. in his French Tragedy in the Time of Louis XV, Baltimore, 1950, pp. 152 - 162 discusses Piron's Callisthène (1730), Gustave (1733) and Fernand Cortez (1744).

⁴Ibid., pp. 241, 265.

⁵Ibid., pp. 294 - 297.

already noted the presence of Marivaux in Madame Doublet's earlier gatherings, as well as the importance of d'Argental as friend, critic and dramatic agent of Voltaire.

Through connections such as these the paroisse undoubtedly gained its intimate knowledge of the world of the theatre, including a wealth of factual information and many items of trivial gossip which, recorded in the Mémoires, testify to the unchanging weaknesses of human nature. To illustrate the wide variety of material recorded, one has only to refer to some of the more outstanding items. For example, the chronicle announces the merger of the Opéra-Comique and the Comédie Italienne,⁶ adding that "on augure mal de cette jonction."⁷ It reviews in some detail the state of each of the three theatres in 1762⁸ and gives particulars concerning the destruction by fire of the Opéra in April, 1763,⁹ the problems of rebuilding¹⁰ and the move of the Comédie-Française to the salle des Tuileries following the installation of the Opéra in its new permanent location.¹¹

⁶Mémoires secrets, I, 21, 28.

⁷Ibid., I, 40.

⁸For the Comédie Italienne see Ibid., I, 55. The Comédie Française is reviewed in I, 31, 35, 38 and the Opéra in I, 17 - 19.

⁹Ibid., I, 221 - 224.

¹⁰Ibid., I, 227, 235 - 236, 249 - 250; II, 11, 12 - 13, 20, 59; V, 68 - 70.

¹¹Ibid., V, 121 - 122.

The high-handed conduct of the comédiens draws comment,¹² as does the unexpected success of the Italiens,¹³ a success attributed to the frivolous tastes of the general public. Many specific plays and performances are mentioned, including those given privately or at court as well as those appearing at the regular theatres, some being merely touched upon while others receive more extensive treatment.¹⁴ A perusal of the Mémoires also impresses the modern reader with the difficulties under which playwrights and actors worked, notably those due to the pervading domination of the four Gentlemen of the Chamber and the necessity of submitting to the censors' intervention. From such extensive coverage emerges a confused but living portrait of the Parisian theatre of the day.

A detailed examination of all the many dramatic authors and plays reviewed in the Mémoires is beyond the scope of the present survey. This was, however, a decade of continued evolution in traditional tragedy and comedy during which writers experimented with both style and content in

¹²Ibid., I, 96, 124; III, 326.

¹³Ibid., I, 215; II, 55, 208.

¹⁴The supplements added by Moufle d'Angerville contain an abundance of material on the theatre taken presumably directly from the paroisse registers. This material seems to have been either summarized or omitted altogether by Bachaumont in preparing his manuscript for the Mémoires. Although the supplements, published some fifteen years after the events they record, must have made dull reading, they provide information that might otherwise have been lost.

an attempt to replace outworn formulas and express current views.¹⁵ We shall, therefore, attempt to explore some of these trends and discover, as far as possible, the attitude of the paroissiens towards them.

In tragedy, the innovations begun by Voltaire continued, and seem to have become generally well accepted. For example, exotic characters and settings necessitating the use of elaborate scenery evoke little direct comment in the Mémoires. The role of the "sauvage" in le Blanc's Manco Capac, premier Inca du Pérou (1763) is seen as a potentially fine vehicle for Rousseau's theories, the play being condemned not for its exotic elements but for its weaknesses of structure and characterization.¹⁶ Similarly, in Sauvigny's Hirza ou les Illinois (1766), the references to Niagara and Labrador, the outlandish names of the characters and the lavish setting¹⁷ pass unremarked and the play receives brief and rather cool praise in the Mémoires.¹⁸ The attitude of the chroniclers to such use of exotic elements is clearly

¹⁵For the influence of the drame on the traditional forms, see Gaiffe, F. op. cit., pp. 182 - 185.

¹⁶Mémoires secrets, I, 254 - 256. This play, given a lengthy review, is termed "détestable," "une pièce des plus mal faites."

¹⁷Lancaster, H. C., op. cit., pp. 545 - 546, discusses the exotic elements of this play, quoting the long description of the setting given by Sauvigny at the beginning of Act I.

¹⁸Mémoires secrets, III, 220 - 221, 228.

revealed in a phrase referring to Lemierre's Guillaume Tell (1766) where, following a brief description of the scenery and costumes, they note that "tous ces accessoires essentiels n'ont pas empêché de trouver cette tragédie pitoyable."¹⁹ The innovations of the first half of the century have become normal and accepted features of the tragedy of the 1760's.

Even those authors who attempted plays closer to the classical style, with characters drawn from antiquity, felt the need to add features unknown to Racinian tragedy. One such playwright was Dormont de Belloy, who in Zelmire (1762) relied heavily upon coups de théâtre and elaborate spectacle to compensate for his lack of psychological insight. The Mémoires record the success of this play, remarking that "c'est un sujet de pure invention, plein d'absurdités et d'événements incroyables, mais les situations sont si séduisantes que la raison se laisse facilement subjuguer."²⁰ A subsequent note remarks again upon its sheer absurdity and poor versification.²¹ Yet its popularity continued, evidence of contemporary tastes. Another play with a traditional

¹⁹Ibid., III, 135.

²⁰Ibid., I, 85. See also pp. 86 - 87, 95.

²¹Ibid., I, 100. Lancaster, H. C. op. cit., pp. 472 - 478 reviews Zelmire, noting that "it shows decided cleverness in its appeal to an audience that had been surfeited with logic and deprived of excitement and spectacle. It is, except for its style and formal unity and its happy ending, a forerunner of tragedies by Alexandre Dumas and Victor Hugo."

classical theme was Sauvigny's Mort de Socrate (1762). Whether or not the author intended the play as a justification of Rousseau and an attack on Palissot, the implications were there and the Mémoires record the delays that ensued as the author was forced to delete some passages and rewrite others.²² The underlying bias was, of course, approved by the paroissiens: "M. de Sauvigny nous a lu la tirade contre Palissot qui devait être insérée dans le Socrate. Ce morceau contre le moderne Aristophane est nerveux et peint à merveille ce scélérat. Il est fâcheux que la police ait couvert de son égide ce vil personnage."²³ The Mémoires regard the final version, however, as lacking in warmth. Without emotional appeal or intellectual piquancy, it remained merely "un succès médiocre."²⁴

Voltaire had already introduced into tragedy characters with well-known French names and allusions to French heroes,²⁵ but it remained for de Belloy in 1765 to write a play drawn from national history with a strong patriotic tinge. The Mémoires secrets record the phenomenal success of this play, le Siège de Calais (1764), revealing awareness of its nationalistic appeal which, they feel, has blinded

²²Mémoires secrets, I, 103 - 104, 187, 213, 309.

²³Ibid., I, 309.

²⁴Ibid., I, 332.

²⁵Zaire (1733); Adélaïde du Guesclin (1734, 1765).

the public to its many other weaknesses.²⁶ Along with this increase of patriotic interest, an awakening curiosity about other nations led to growth of historical tragedy in general. English history inspired la Harpe's early success, le Comte de Warwick (1763), praised by the chronicler of the Mémoires both for its content and for its simple, clear style.²⁷ La Harpe's later tragedy, Gustave Wasa (1766)²⁸ depicted events from Swedish history; Lemierre's Guillaume Tell, already mentioned, was based on a Swiss legend. Lemierre also ventured into what was considered to be almost contemporary history with his controversial Barnevelt, which treats of events surrounding the execution in 1619 of a Dutch statesman. Written in 1766, it was not performed until 1790 as its themes of patriotism and virtue and discussions of peace and religion were not acceptable to the French authorities until then.²⁹

Such tendencies to didacticism, along with the growing emphasis on emotional appeal and the occasional cautious introduction of non-aristocratic heroes, prepared the way

²⁶Mémoires secrets, II, 171 - 172. See also pp. 172 - 173 and 176. For the 1769 revival of the play see Ibid., XIX, 55 - 56, 57, 58, 60 - 61, 75, 83 - 84.

²⁷Ibid., I, 324 - 325.

²⁸La Harpe was attempting to improve on Piron's Gustave. For a review, see Lancaster, H. C. op. cit., 563 - 565. The Mémoires secrets, III, 5 - 6, record the failure of its one performance.

²⁹Lancaster, H. C. op. cit., 447 - 452. The play is mentioned in the Mémoires secrets, II, 314, 323.

for the tragédie bourgeoise,³⁰ a form very close to the drame. Such a play was Saurin's Béverlei, and the accounts in the Mémoires are worthy of some attention, for they seem to indicate that the paroissiens viewed plays of this type with somewhat mixed feelings. Announcing the forthcoming performance of Saurin's play, an adaptation of Moore's Gamester,³¹ the Mémoires add: "Ce genre, à coup sûr, n'aurait pas réussi jadis; mais le Français commence à regarder avec intrépidité les scènes atroces, et si son âme n'a pas plus d'énergie qu'autrefois, son oeil en supporte au moins davantage dans l'action théâtrale."³² The writers must, however, have fallen under the emotional spell of the performance, for the next entry notes that "ce drame . . . a eu un très grand succès, et il le mérite."³³ A generally favourable review follows, although the action is felt at times to be excessively violent. A few days later the journal published two poems concerning this play, both anonymous and inserted without comment. The first and longest, interesting as an expression of conservative opinion,

³⁰The hero of le Siège de Calais is the mayor of Calais not the King of England, and Lemierre's Tell is a Swiss peasant. Lancaster, H. C. op. cit., p. 618.

³¹A sentimental and moralistic middle-class tragedy first performed in London in 1753. "Diderot en avait esquissé une traduction assez libre et l'avait confiée à Saurin pour la composition de Béverley." Gaiffe, F. op. cit., p. 53.

³²Mémoires secrets, IV, 25.

³³Ibid., IV, 30.

criticizes Béverlei as a "drame tantôt bas, tantôt exalté," a "tissu mal construit et de tout point bizarre" while also condemning the prevailing anglomania which influenced Saurin to attempt such an "affreuse horreur."³⁴ The second poem is a little vers galant praising Madame Saurin as the model for the devoted virtuous spouse portrayed in the play.³⁵ On the one hand, the paroissiens seem to deplore the threatened passing of Racinian tragedy; yet they too seem to yield to the appeal of pathos and sensibilité.

In the Mémoires one can trace a corresponding reaction to the evolution in comedy which was in the process of developing great diversity of style and content, being particularly influenced by the drame.³⁶ The traditional comedy of Molière evidently no longer appealed to the popular taste.³⁷

³⁴Ibid., IV, 34 - 35.

³⁵The paroissiens may have known her, for Saurin himself was a secretary to the Duke of Orleans and on friendly terms with Voltaire and Helvétius. Lancaster, H. C. op. cit., p. 313.

³⁶Gaiffe, F. op. cit., p. 183 observes: "A côté du drame proprement dit fleurissent les comédies sérieuses, moitié souriantes, moitié touchantes, admettant les émotions douces et le rire tempéré, si voisines du genre de Diderot que la limite est souvent malaisée à établir."

³⁷The Mémoires contain very few references to performances of Molière's comedies. One entry (II, 89) remarks, upon the prevailing "scrupuleuse exactitude sur les bien-séances" as detrimental to the enjoyment of Molière. Another (IV, 226) notes that "les dispositions actuelles des spectateurs à s'attendrir et pleurer à nos pièces comiques" may cause the financial failure of an excellent production of le Bourgeois Gentilhomme.

Marivaux, who died in 1763, had written no new plays for many years and his "esprit fin et maniéré,"³⁸ praised by the paroissiens, had had no successful imitators. Tears and moralizing were in vogue, rather than frank laughter or subtle psychology.³⁹ Writers, feeling free to experiment in this genre, produced an even greater range in comedy than in tragedy; certain similarities in development can, however, be detected.

The patriotic interest of de Belloy's tragedy le Siège de Calais found its counterpart in two comedies written by Favart for the peace celebrations of 1763. The first of these, l'Anglais à Bordeaux, won immediate enthusiastic acclaim; the Mémoires attribute its success, derived from its delicacy and sparkling wit, to Voisenon, who is also reported as having rewritten the second comedy, les Fêtes de la paix, thereby saving it from utter failure.⁴⁰ A patriotic theme, however, did not automatically ensure acceptance of a play and we can trace in the Mémoires the interesting story of Collé's la Partie de chasse de Henri IV which was

³⁸Mémoires secrets, I, 193 - 194.

³⁹The Mémoires, II, 25 - 26 quote from a review of Le Philosophe sans le savoir in the Journal Encyclopédique for March 15, 1766: "A la troisième représentation le public . . . se ressouvint que la comédie n'était plus un tableau des ridicules, qu'elle était toujours bonne dès qu'il y pleurait, et il applaudit en pleurant."

⁴⁰Ibid., I, 208 - 209, 210, 213 - 214, 270, 267 - 268, 269 - 270.

long withheld from the state theatres as unflattering to royalty.⁴¹

A wide range of other themes became popular. Many little comedies, often mingled with ariettes, had a serious or at least a moralizing tone.⁴² Allied to this, we find the tendency to didacticism already noted in the tragedy of the period, a tendency which led at times to some rather curious results which the Mémoires are quick to report. For example, les Moissonneurs by Favart is felt to be quite incongruous for two reasons: first, it presents the Biblical story of Ruth, Boaz and Naomi as a 3-act comedy with ariettes,⁴³ secondly, this "drame chantant" contains also "des morceaux philosophiques sur l'agriculture, trop embellis, d'un esprit étranger à la chose." Influenced by the growing taste for allusions to nature, or by the philosophy of Rousseau, the

⁴¹Ibid., I, 167 notes that "on n'ose pas mettre un de nos rois si récent sur la scène." See also Ibid., II, 330; III, 43, 57, 61, 188; IV, 358 - 359. The references also illustrate the valuable role of the private theatres in permitting productions of the more "experimental" plays such as this. It was finally performed at the Comédie-Française in 1774, and in the years 1781-1790 was exceeded only in popularity by le Mariage de Figaro (Gaiffe, F. op. cit., pp. 189 - 190).

⁴²Gaiffe, F. op. cit., pp. 456 - 457 informs us that les Contes moraux de Marmontel étaient le grand grenier où les auteurs dramatiques venaient s'approvisionner." The Mémoires refer to a number of plays derived from Marmontel's stories: Annette et Lubin, I, 45, "une bagatelle très jolie"; la Bergère des Alpes, I, 213; and Heureusement, I, 164.

⁴³The play was performed by the Italiens, January 27, 1768.

audience apparently received the play with transports of enthusiasm despite its inconsistencies.⁴⁴

Another curious development was the blending of elements of sensibilité and pathos derived from the drame with ariettes from the Opéra-comique. A comedy of this type, Tom Jones (1765) by Poinsinet, receives lengthy study in the Mémoires where it is judged to be "absolument raté" and to contain such an "amas de mauvaises choses" that even the music of Philidor cannot redeem it.⁴⁵

The writers of the Mémoires do not appear to approve of another tendency, that of introducing, even into comedy, heroes drawn from the world of commerce. Marin's play Julie ou le triomphe de l'amitié, based on an event in the life of the financier Samuel Bernard, is briefly summarized and curtly dismissed as "jouée pour la première et dernière fois."⁴⁶ Another comédie sérieuse, this time setting forth the virtues of a négociant, was le Bienfait rendu ou le marchand by the Marquis de Dampierre. This play, very close in style to the drame, was apparently "un demi-succès." It finds little praise, however, in the Mémoires, whose writers consider it "une satire amère et lourde de la noblesse," "mal écrite, avec dureté," its better speeches tinged with "une amertume basse et ignoble."⁴⁷

⁴⁴Mémoires secrets, III, 339 - 340, 352.

⁴⁵Ibid., II, 177 - 178.

⁴⁶Ibid., I, 57 - 58.

⁴⁷Ibid., 228 - 229.

Also close to the drame was Collé's Dupuis et Desronais, said by Gaiffe in his study le Drame en France au dix-huitième siècle to be "un modèle de comédie sérieuse beaucoup plus réussi et même plus conforme, sur certains points, au théories de Diderot que les pièces de Diderot lui-même."⁴⁸ The Mémoires, while noting a tendency on the part of the players to over-act, remark upon the success of the performance: "Ce drame, tout simple, tout peu intrigué qu'il soit, a fait très grand plaisir par les détails et par une peinture de nos moeurs très affligeante mais très vraie."⁴⁹

Despite their approval of this particular play, the paroissiens are not generally sympathetic in their treatment of those productions that we now recognize as models of the drame. The Mémoires use this term loosely and it is clear that critics were only just becoming aware of the emergence of this new genre. As we have seen, the journal reviews Diderot's Père de famille and notes its influence but makes no reference to Diderot's role as the originator and theoretician of the drame. As for Beaumarchais' Eugénie, to which the term was first officially applied, the Mémoires note merely that "ce drame tant prôné a été donné aujourd'hui et n'a pas eu le succès dont l'auteur se flattait."⁵⁰ The play

⁴⁸Gaiffe, F. op. cit., p. 164. He outlines this "charmante pièce" more fully on pages 336 - 337.

⁴⁹Mémoires secrets, I, 182 - 183.

⁵⁰Ibid., III, 159.

was regarded as a failure and Beaumarchais was labelled a "parvenu," "un homme fort répandu sans avoir aucune considération."⁵¹ Much more is said of his life than of his plays; the journal, after announcing his marriage to the widow of "un nommé Levêque," adds that M. Caron de Beaumarchais is "plus renommé encore pour ses intrigues que pour ses talents littéraires."⁵² A review of his later play, Deux Amis ou le bienfait rendu, dated January, 1770, seems, however, to indicate some slight modification of opinion. While condemning the theme of a double bankruptcy as "défectueux en lui-même," adding that "ce sujet a encore plus révolté par la manière dont il a été présenté," the chronicler admits that "on y a pourtant trouvé des scènes heureuses et produisant le plus tendre intérêt."⁵³ Disapproval of the upstart Beaumarchais does not completely obscure appreciation of his literary skill.

As for Sedaine, who, in his Philosophe sans le savoir, "donne à tous les écrivains de profession . . . un modèle de ce que devrait être le drame et, malgré les railleries des beaux esprits, fait un chef-d'oeuvre sans le savoir,"⁵⁴ the Mémoires are exceedingly harsh. Describing him as "ce maçon devenu poète--mais plus habile encore à tracer le plan d'un

⁵¹Ibid., III, 140 - 141, 159.

⁵²Ibid., IV, 14.

⁵³Ibid., V, 55, 61.

⁵⁴Gaiffe, op. cit., p. 185.

édifice que celui d'un drame--,"⁵⁵ they give scant praise to his Philosophe. This "espèce d'épisode bourgeois" is said to be badly constructed, though redeemed somewhat by having "des caractères assez soutenus, et beaucoup de naturel dans le dialogue" and by presenting "des images naïves de ce qui se passe dans l'intérieur des familles."⁵⁶ Its unexpected success continued,⁵⁷ however, and the Mémoires remark after the twenty-eighth and final performance that "ce bizarre succès serait étonnant dans un autre siècle que celui-ci."⁵⁸ Four years later, in 1769, they still deplore the popular taste for Sedaine's dramas: "On jouait le Déserteur, pièce nouvelle, toujours mauvaise quoique fort courue . . ."⁵⁹

The journal, as we might expect, reflects to some degree the bias of its writers, notwithstanding their claim to impartiality stated in the introduction.⁶⁰ In a sense we must be grateful that a certain human quality colours the

⁵⁵Mémoires secrets, IV, 67.

⁵⁶Ibid., II, 293 - 295. See also pp. 271 - 272.

⁵⁷Ibid., II, 321.

⁵⁸Ibid., II, 331.

⁵⁹Ibid., IV, 266 - 267.

⁶⁰"Quant aux notices des écrits nouveaux, des pièces de théâtre, des assemblées littéraires, elles sont encore distinguées par une précision unique et surtout par une impartialité qu'on attendrait en vain d'un critique affiché pour tel . . ." See the avertissement, Ibid., I, pp. v, vi.

reviews and breathes life into long-past events. That the paroissiens were not immune from errors of judgement is shown by their treatment of les Triumvirs. Supposing the play to be by Chabanon, they heap scorn upon it, only to give it high praise later when they find it to be by Voltaire.⁶¹ They do not approve of the Comédie-Italienne. Commenting upon the mediocrity of the offerings at this theatre, they remark that it has become "l'égoût des autres; il n'est point d'absurdité qui ne puisse y être admise."⁶² They rejoice when attendance there is poor, hoping that "ce début pourrait bien être l'époque de la décadence que tous les amateurs du vrai bien lui présagent et lui souhaitent."⁶³ Despite the fact that they find some actors satisfactory⁶⁴ and regard Riccoboni as an asset,⁶⁵ the Mémoires record with obvious satisfaction an occasion when, "par un retour du bon goût ou de la mode," the profits at the Comédie-Française are at last far in excess of those of les Italiens.⁶⁶

⁶¹Lancaster, H. C. op. cit., p. 360 points out their error. One may compare these opposing views in the Mémoires secrets, II, 75 - 76 and III, 139.

⁶²Mémoires secrets, I, 282.

⁶³Ibid., I, 76 - 77.

⁶⁴Ibid., I, 55 - 56, 306.

⁶⁵Ibid., I, 141.

⁶⁶Ibid., IV, 242.

In general, the Mémoires reveal a tendency to conservatism, tempered by an acceptance of certain innovations. The factual information bequeathed by the journal has been of very real assistance to students of the theatre.⁶⁷ Though many of the reviews are brief, they supplement information given in other sources such as Grimm, and the anecdotes and gossip add to our appreciation of the personalities involved. We may indeed be grateful to the paroisse for this comprehensive record of the eighteenth-century theatre.

⁶⁷For example, Lancaster (op. cit., p. 535) acknowledges his debt to the Mémoires for information concerning Chabanon's lost play Eponine.

CHAPTER VI

A DECADE OF POETRY AND PROSE IN THE MÉMOIRES SECRETS

In addition to their reviews of major works of the period, the Mémoires secrets provide us with a multitude of lesser items that appear at first sight to defy simple classification. This miscellaneous material offers nevertheless much that is significant for our study. In these references to long-forgotten works we can detect trends in certain literary genres and sense as well the evolution of that curious blend of polished wit and intellectual unrest that typified the age. Perhaps of even more importance still is the insight that these entries afford into the daily preoccupations of Madame Doublet's paroissiens and the "bias" of their journal.

In view of the eighteenth-century predilection for prose, a surprising number of items relate to announcements or reviews of poetry. This genre, while far from dead, seems in many respects to have been decidedly stagnant, as accounts of the public sessions of the Académie royale des inscriptions et belles lettres show only too clearly.¹ The subjects discussed and the poetry reviewed at these sessions indicate a fairly lifeless but almost total preoccupation with traditional

¹These twice-yearly sessions are reported in some detail. See, for example, the Mémoires secrets, I, 224 - 225 and II, 55 - 56.

Greek or Roman themes.² In line with this concern we find in the Mémoires numerous reviews of translations or adaptations of classical poetry, the ode--serious or otherwise--being a favourite form.³ Some departure from this almost total absorption with traditional themes can, however, be detected in the interest shown in translations of poetry from other European countries. Several entries deal with renderings of German poems and the journal notes that "depuis quelques années les Allemands marchent à grands pas dans la carrière de la belle poésie," producing, apparently, "des ouvrages dignes de nos meilleurs poètes."⁴ Other entries refer briefly to translations of Petrarch⁵ and of English poetic works such as Ossian⁶ and Thomson's The Seasons.⁷

The Mémoires show great interest in poetry of a didactic or satiric nature and in 1765 cite approvingly, for example, "deux poèmes héroïques . . . qui ramènent la poésie

²By 1770, however, a trend to more exotic subjects seems to have set in. Ibid., V, 285 - 288.

³For de Rochefort's translations of Homer see Ibid., I, 163; II, 140, 151 - 152; III, 39 - 40. The Abbé de Lisle's rendering of the Georgics is reviewed in Ibid., I, 164.

⁴Ibid., II, 69.

⁵Ibid., II, 192 - 193.

⁶Ibid., II, 231.

⁷Ibid., IV, 239 - 240. St. Lambert's adaptation les Saisons, a pastoral, though it indicates a revival of interest in nature poetry, is found dull and disappointing by the paroissiens.

à son ancienne institution, de chanter la vertu, d'exciter le zèle patriotique."⁸ The most essential mark of poetry, it seems, is its "philosophie"--described as "nécessaire, même aux poètes."⁹ Even the Poésies sacrées by Voltaire's enemy, Lefranc de Pompignan, are highly praised as outstanding in this respect: "Cet auteur, tant mystifié, tant bafoué par M. de Voltaire, a cependant un mérite spécifique: il y a dans ses odes des strophes dignes de Rousseau; ses discours tirés des livres sapientiaux sont pleins d'une philosophie sublime, enrichie d'une poésie vive, nerveuse et pittoresque."¹⁰ As for satiric poetry, the journal abounds in light verses and epigrams of the type used so effectively by Voltaire and Piron. We also find longer and more malicious compositions such as the series of noëls featured in the opening volumes.¹¹ In all this there is little to suggest that the paroissiens ever thought of poetry as a creative outlet for strong emotional feeling. Rather, the critical comments in the Mémoires seem to indicate that it was valued chiefly as a vehicle for noble public sentiments expressed in lofty form or for the exchange of wit in endless literary or personal vendettas.

⁸Ibid., II, 245.

⁹Ibid., II, 98 - 99.

¹⁰Ibid., I, 297.

¹¹Ibid., I, 354 - 359; II, 4, 9 - 10, 13, 16 - 18, 21 - 25, 37 - 38.

If it could also rise to heights of philosophie, so much the better.

Decidedly more varied in scope and usually superior in quality are the prose writings of this period. The journal in fact reviews a fascinating variety of books and pamphlets which, treating the widest imaginable range of topics, illustrate the prevailing spirit of inquiry into all aspects of human activity. For example, the Mémoires note in March, 1766, that a book on hairdressing has been published, apparently of quite a scientific nature.¹² A few weeks later, they record the appearance of "une absurdité" in the form of a published work attacking the practice of bleeding.¹³ In July, 1769, we find a review of le Pornographe, a history of prostitution together with a proposed plan for its regulation, proving, says the chronicler, "à quel point d'égarement l'esprit philosophique prétendu nous a conduit lorsqu'on voit un auteur grave, érudit, sage, honnête et profond, traiter une matière sur laquelle il aurait eu honte dans un autre temps de porter même ses regards."¹⁴ In addition to notations concerning curiosities of this sort, we also find reviews of many publications relating to the scientific,

¹²Ibid., III, 11.

¹³Ibid., III, 54.

¹⁴Ibid., IV, 318 - 319.

military and economic issues of the day,¹⁵ as well as historical treatises of various types. Eighteenth century cosmopolitanism is well illustrated in the accounts of books of travel¹⁶ as well as in the reviews of translations of foreign prose works.¹⁷

Strangely enough, in all this profusion the novel passes almost unremarked and comparatively few examples are cited by the paroisse during the decade 1762-1771, indicating no doubt the usual respectable lack of interest in this genre. French adaptations of English novels are noted, however, and in general the Mémoires review such works favourably, especially if the style is found to be tasteful and elegant.¹⁹

¹⁵The latter, we may add, appear to be particularly distasteful to the paroissiens (Ibid., II, 225).

¹⁶Ibid., II, 109 - 110 reviews the accounts of travels in England, Holland and Italy found in les Oeuvres de Madame du Bocage (1764). Although she was a paroissienne, the Mémoires dismiss the work as "rien de neuf, ni du côté historique ni du côté philosophique. C'est ce qui s'appelle écrire pour écrire." A travel book by Bailly de Fleury is, on the other hand, highly praised for its erudition and interest (Ibid., II, 259).

¹⁷For an interesting and perceptive comment on German literature exemplified in Lessing's Fables see Ibid., II, 144 - 145.

¹⁸In the previous year (1761) Diderot had published his Éloge de Richardson and Rousseau his Nouvelle Héloïse which also reflects the influence of Richardson.

¹⁹Among such novels in the English style are the Mémoires en forme de lettres, de deux jeunes personnes de qualité (1765) by the Marquise de Champféry (Mémoires secrets, II, 158), Amélie (1762) by Mme Riccoboni (Ibid., I, 63) and Lettres de Julie de Mandeville (1764) by M. Bouchant (Ibid.,

Also well received are the sentimental, moralizing novels then in vogue, such as Mme Benoit's Élisabeth, of which the chronicle states merely: "Il affecte le coeur."²⁰ As for the shorter, more sophisticated and artificial conte, the Mémoires find none to equal those of Voltaire, whose superiority in this genre has already been mentioned.²¹ Le Bret's Contes moraux et dramatiques are felt to be decidedly mediocre²² and Semperavi's l'Optique ou le Chinois à Memphis cannot be compared to Zadig or Candide.²³

One novel did, however, receive more attention from the paroisse than all the others combined, a fact which directs our attention to certain specific interests of the group. This novel is Marmontel's famous Bélisaire, in which the journal finds at first little to praise, criticizing it upon its appearance in mid-February 1767 as "une dissertation très froide, très longue, très rebattue sur des objets de morale et de politique."²⁴ On such a note the entries concerning this

II, 75). Concerning a novel translated from the English by Abbé Prévost the journal adds: "Il a pourtant une grande vogue pour les aventures extraordinaires et compliquées dont il est rempli; c'est le livre du jour." (Ibid., I, 83.)

²⁰Ibid., II, 308.

²¹See supra Chapter IV.

²²Mémoires secrets, II, 218.

²³Ibid., I, 334.

²⁴Ibid., III, 165.

work might have ended, had it not contained a plea for tolerance which offended the authorities. A week later its privilège was withdrawn and a long and heated controversy ensued. The chronicle leaves us no doubt as to the views of the paroisse in this affair. Sympathetic to the author and to the principle involved, they publicize at length the attacks on this work²⁵ and also draw attention to the support it is receiving from the enlightened monarchs of northern Europe "qui font le plus grand éloge du livre et traitent les sages maîtres comme des cuistres."²⁶ The chroniclers even enter the battle themselves. From a warning on February 21, 1768, that "le plus méchant livre proscrit en devient plus recherché,"²⁷ they pass on March 6 to the printing in their journal of a Vers au Bélisaire that strongly attacks the Sorbonne theologians.²⁸ A year later, when the ban imposed on the book was upheld, the Mémoires ironically recorded the final statement of the churchmen who in fact disposed of this work in support of tolerance in the most intolerant terms,

²⁵See Ibid., III, 167 - 168, 169, 174 - 175, 181 - 182, 205, 249, 305 - 306, 312 - 314, 323 - 324, 342 - 343, 344 - 345.

²⁶Ibid., III, 314 - 315.

²⁷Ibid., III, 168.

²⁸Ibid., III, 177 - 178. The concluding lines indicate its general tone:

"Que ce blasphémateur soit puni par le feu;
N'a-t-il pas dû savoir qu'il causait du scandale
Quand, malgré la Sorbonne, il faisait aimer Dieu."

condemning it as "contenant des propositions fausses, captieuses, téméraires, scandaleuses, impies, erronnées, respirant l'hérésie et hérétiques."²⁹

This strong reaction to the suppression of Bélisaire serves to reinforce the impression we have already gained of the pro-philosophe sympathies of the paroissiens. In this respect, of course, they show themselves to be very much part of a movement that dates back to the earlier years of the century. It is interesting to note, however, that Bachaumont, long active in the field of journalism, waited until 1762 to begin his manuscript devoted to recording the steady advance of the age of reason. In that year the forces of the enlightenment, symbolized largely in the radical writings of the day, were felt to have scored a signal victory over the Jesuits. Early in the first volume we read the notation: "Enfin le dernier coup est porté aujourd'hui à la compagnie de Jésus. La Société est dissoute . . . Cette époque, on le répète, est d'une grande importance dans la littérature."³⁰ The paroisse, we must remember, had more than a detached intellectual interest in this affair, since one of its members, the Abbé de Chauvelin, had struck the final blow that brought down "cette statue aux pieds d'argile."³¹

²⁹Ibid., III, 344 - 345.

³⁰Ibid., I, 123. The entry is dated August 8, 1762.

³¹Bayle and Herblay, op. cit., pp. 399 - 400 relates how the Abbé de Chauvelin, with the help of a letter found

As we might expect, a large proportion of the entries for the years 1762-1764 are obviously anti-Jesuit propaganda, ranging from the usual letters, pamphlets and books to lampoons and satires, blended with triumphant reports of curtailment of the Order's activities. Seldom are the Jesuits in any way defended. Rather, the paroisse appears to delight in publishing witticisms that discredit the Society and in revealing the weaknesses in its attempts at rebuttal.³² Mingled with this jubilation at the overthrow of the Jesuits one discerns, however, a certain note of regret at the decline in quality of the Journal de Trévoux: "Il n'est plus ni aussi bien écrit, ni aussi savamment discuté . . . On regrettera longtemps ce journal qui dégénère et qui dégénérera de plus en plus."³³ Despite its contrary views the paroisse thus seems to have appreciated at least the erudition and wit of this Jesuit journal and of its editor, Père Berthier.

accidentally by Falconet and with the approval of the President de Meinières, led the attack in the Parlement of Paris that resulted in the overthrow of the order. Hence the couplet, quoted in the Mémoires secrets, I, 124:

"Que fragile est ton sort, société perverse!
Un boîteux t'a fondée, un bossu te renverse."

(Chauvelin was grotesquely deformed). The journal also praises Chauvelin as "ce redoutable écueil contre lequel sont venus se briser l'orgueil, l'astuce et la politique des Jésuites." (Ibid., I, 64.)

³²For example Mémoires secrets, I, 82, 90, 116, 122 - 123, 126, 135.

³³Ibid., I, 119. See also Ibid., I, 233, II, 73.

Logically allied to this anti-Jesuit bias we find a corresponding sympathy in the Mémoires for the parlements,³⁴ well illustrated by the following rather immoderately enthusiastic note dated September 1, 1763:

La littérature essuye des modes, ainsi que tout le reste: depuis quelque temps les génies se sont tendus vers la finance et la politique: les calamités de l'État ont fait naître des écrits vigoureux, presque dignes des beaux jours des républiques d'Athènes et de Rome . . . On sait bien que nous voulons parler des belles remontrances que nos divers parlements ne cessent de faire en ce temps orageux: celles de Bordeaux ne sont point inférieures à celles de Paris et de Rouen, elles enchérissent même, et n'approchent cependant point encore à ce qu'on assure de celles de Grenoble.³⁵

Such keen interest in the activities and publications of the parlements no doubt also reflects the direct influence of "le cher président" of the paroisse, Durey de Meinières.

Even more abundant than the anti-Jesuit writings recorded in the Mémoires is the mass of material that proceeded from the religious controversies of the period.³⁶

³⁴As this study is literary rather than political in scope, I shall not attempt reference to passages that deal with such matters as the struggle between the King and the parlements and the controversies over the functions of the latter. Such aspects would merit separate investigation.

³⁵Mémoires secrets, I, 300 - 301. See also Ibid., I, 304 where the chronicler praises the Remonstrances de Grenoble as "un chef d'oeuvre de liberté" in which "les Cicéron, les Demonsthène . . . se trouveront revivre."

³⁶In this area, of course, Voltaire was pre-eminent. "Les seuls écrits de Voltaire égalent en nombre le reste des publications anti-religieuses de ce temps-là." (Aubertin,

In general, the anti-religious works win approval and are judged to be symptoms of the advance of reason which, it is felt, will eventually prevail over such "extravagances humaines" as Christianity.³⁷ Frequently the praise is of that inverted type already noted in connection with Voltaire's anti-religious writings in which condemnation obviously serves both to deceive the censors and recommend the work to enlightened minds.³⁸

The exact position of the paroisse as regards religion is not, however, completely clear. Grimm describes the group as totally irreligious; of Madame Doublet's salon he remarks: "On y était janséniste, ou du moins très parlementaire, mais on n'y était pas chrétien; jamais croyant ni dévot n'y fut admis, si ce n'est peut-être M. de Fonce-magne."³⁹ Yet this interpretation may be too strong. It should be remembered that, while the Mémoires review with apparent approval so many anti-religious publications and are quick to note the weaknesses in the counter-attacks by the churchmen,⁴⁰ they

op. cit., p. 393.) For examples of other writers reviewed in this field, see the Mémoires secrets, I, 21, 52; II, 272 - 273, IV, 124 - 126, 131 - 132.

³⁷The central idea of Voltaire's Vie de Jésus, Ibid., V, 208 - 211.

³⁸Ibid., II, 272; III, 51 - 52.

³⁹Grimm, op. cit., IX, 317. We may also add the name of Boyer d'Éguilles, whom Cottin, in his work Un Protégé de Bachaumont, p. xxvii, terms "profondément religieux."

⁴⁰Mémoires secrets, V, 184 - 186, 246 - 249.

seem also to have fleeting moments of sympathy for a work such as Méditations chrétiennes, described as "le fruit des retraits de l'auteur," in which they praise "le ton de douceur, de candeur, de raison et de charité."⁴¹ Aubertin, in his Esprit public au dix-huitième siècle claims to find in this journal only "les faibles traces d'une résistance timide, étouffée dans la clameur publique et tuée aussitôt par le ridicule."⁴² Perhaps a closer study of the Mémoires, one not limited to their literary aspects, would help to clarify this issue. Certainly, unless one accepts the many pious and shocked protestations at their face value, there seems to be little evidence in the journals to suggest that the paroissiens had any strong religious sympathies.⁴³

In reflecting upon the diversity of material contained in these "mémoires d'Argus,"⁴⁴ we cannot fail to be impressed by the intellectual alertness of the paroissiens, despite their advanced years. In their sympathy for the

⁴¹Mémoires secrets, II, 73 - 74.

⁴²Aubertin, op. cit., p. 395.

⁴³Perhaps even the name paroissiens was chosen with a certain ironic intent?

⁴⁴de Goncourt, E. and J., op. cit., pp. 72 - 73. It is perhaps unnecessary to point out that Argus was a prince who according to legend, possessed one hundred eyes, fifty of which remained always open.

cause of the enlightenment,⁴⁵ they show themselves to be among the progressive spirits of their day. Yet they are also very much part of their aristocratic milieu, disturbed by the rise of commercialism--especially in the realm of literature⁴⁶--and distressed at what they feel to be a growing tendency in journalism to pander to the frivolous tastes of the general public.⁴⁷ Interested in new trends, aware of current problems, they are none the less loyal to the aristocratic standards of elegance, wit and refinement, which--like so much of the material they reviewed--were destined shortly to disappear.

⁴⁵Here again we should not, I feel, be misled by apparent attacks on the philosophes, such as the entry dated September 22, 1768 which begins: "Il s'est élevé depuis quelques années en France une secte de philosophes audacieux qui semble avoir eu le système réfléchi de porter une clarté fatale dans les esprits, d'ébranler toute créance, de renverser la religion et de la saper jusque dans ses fondements . . ." Mémoires secrets, IV, 124 - 126.

⁴⁶L'École littéraire tirée des meilleurs écrivains, is, for example, said to be a failure because "le sordide intérêt qui fait agir toutes nos plumes littéraires" has motivated the production of an inferior work. Ibid., II, 32.

⁴⁷Ibid., II, 292 - 293. "On peut juger de la futilité de notre goût et de notre paresse par la liste des almanachs nouveaux . . ."

CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION

An analysis of the material in the Mémoires secrets, even within the limited scope of this present investigation, has proved to be an undertaking of some complexity. Only by a selective approach could the profusion of details that crowd the pages of this "volumineux recueil"¹ be brought within the narrow compass of a brief report. Accordingly, this survey has tended to be fairly general in nature, confined, of necessity, to a study of the principal authors and genres. In addition, I have tried to catch a glimpse of the various literary trends, to note contemporary reaction and--as far as possible--to assess the ideological bias of the journal. Obviously, this investigation is in no way an exhaustive study of the literary material in the Mémoires even for the decade in question, nor is it a complete catalogue of authors and works of the period.

¹Barrière, in the preface to his Extrait des mémoires de Bachaumont, Paris, 1867, p. 212 remarks--perhaps not altogether justly--that "il n'y a point de lecteur, fût-il infatigable, dont ce volumineux recueil ne rebutât la patience." Perhaps it was this confusion of details that caused Mme du Deffand, speaking of the Mémoires, to remark that she had made "une sottise emplette." (Lettres de la marquise du Deffand à Horace Walpole (1766-1780), Mrs. P. Toynbee ed., London, 1912, III, 368, 373.) But then, might not the re-reading of several years' back issues of Time produce a similar reaction?

Certainly, the most striking feature of the Mémoires secrets is their richness of content, a feature so well described more than a century ago by the Goncourt brothers, who saw in Madame Doublet's salon "le rendez-vous des échos, le cabinet noir où l'on décachetait les nouvelles," adding: "Pêle-mêle y tombait le dix-huitième siècle heure à heure, bons mots et sottises, querelles, procès, sifflets, bravos, morts et naissances, livres et grands hommes, un je ne sais quoi sans ordre, une moisson à pleine brassée de paroles et de choses . . ."² In keeping with the stated purpose of the journal, the greater part of the entries concern the world of letters and it is with some regret that I have had to leave other areas unexplored. Within the confines of the literary material, however, the same abundance and variety exists, testimony to the intellectual activity of the day and to the journalistic fervour of the paroissiens.

In addition to their wealth of content, these early volumes of the Mémoires secrets are characterized by a style that is concise, clear and at times almost epigrammatic in quality. Consequently, lengthy critical reviews are the exception rather than the rule; in general, we find a neat summary of what are seen to be the salient points of a work. The style of these early volumes constitutes, one feels, the most direct evidence we have of the influence of Bachaumont.

²de Goncourt, E. and J. op. cit., pp. 72 - 73.

To quote Aubertin: "Tout y porte la marque d'un observateur instruit et d'un homme de bonne compagnie. La solidité du sens, la justesse de l'expression donnent du prix aux moindres fragments."³ After January 1, 1770, the point at which Bachaumont's manuscript apparently ended,⁴ the entries appear to be rather less elegantly phrased. The extent to which the style and content of items after that date (as well as the general tone of the journal) reveal the influence of his successor Mairobert is, however, a matter for further investigation.

One of the chief problems posed by the Mémoires secrets is the question of their authorship. We have already mentioned the error of some modern scholars who consider Bachaumont as personally responsible for the entire journal. Such a view is obviously incorrect. We may no doubt safely assume that he furnished the basic inspiration for the series and was chiefly responsible for the selection and editing of material from the registers, at least for the years 1762-1770. Apart from this, we must, I think, agree with Cottin that "les

³Aubertin, C. op. cit., p. 385. A comparison of similar entries occurring in both the journal and the supplements indicates very clearly the superior stylistic qualities of the former. One can compare, for example, the concise review of l'Écueil du sage (1762) found in the Mémoires secrets, I, 24 - 25 with the lengthy account probably derived directly from the registers and published in the supplements, Ibid., XVI, 140 - 144.

⁴See the Avertissement, Ibid., I, vi.

véritables auteurs de ce précieux répertoire furent les paroissiens."⁵ I have consequently been careful to avoid using the name of Bachaumont in connection with any of the critical opinions expressed and I remain fairly certain that the bias of the journal is most probably the bias of the paroisse with which, of course, Bachaumont was no doubt largely in sympathy.⁶

As far as one can gather from a study of the purely literary items, Grimm appears to have been accurate in his assessment of the paroisse as "janséniste, ou du moins très parlementaire." That the members were Jansenist (in the political rather than the religious sense) is evident from their anti-Jesuit leanings; that they admired the parlements can be seen even in the literary reviews. Grimm was, however, of the opinion that the habitués of Madame Doublet's salon were decidedly irreligious and, indeed, seems to stress this point.⁷ Perhaps it would be more accurate to regard

⁵Cottin, Correspondance inédite du marquis d'Éguilles, p. xviii. The same author credits Durey de Meinières with a personal contribution to the Mémoires: "Les articles des Mémoires relatifs à la magistrature peuvent être regardés comme son oeuvre." (Ibid., p. xx.) Verification of this statement is, however, beyond the scope of this investigation.

⁶A possible exception to the theory of group authorship lies in the entries concerning painting and sculpture. In view of Bachaumont's pre-eminence in the field of art, the critical comments in this area would seem in all likelihood to be his personal contribution.

⁷Grimm, op. cit., IX, 317 - 318. See the passage already referred to in my Chapter 6.

them as merely indifferent in this respect, inclined to consider religion as generally incompatible with reason. Certainly it seems doubtful that they were, as a group, militant atheists.

In the attitude of the paroissiens to the philosophe's cause both Aubertin and the Goncourt brothers note this same spirit of detachment, the former commenting upon the "spirituelle paresse"⁸ of the paroissiens and the latter insisting that they were "ni philosophes, ni jansénistes; . . . ils étaient des indifférents."⁹ Yet if the Mémoires were written as a record of the progress of the enlightenment, as its introduction would imply,¹⁰ one must nevertheless remember the source of the items therein. It seems unlikely that the paroissiens could have been unaware of the power of the press and of the publicity value of the nouvelles that emanated from les Filles Saint-Thomas. Rather, the many entries in the journal devoted to the progress of the enlightenment and the warmth of approval implied in the carefully worded comments reflect the involvement of the group in the philosophe cause and seem to indicate that this band of aristocratic journalists was quite consciously promulgating the gospel of the age of reason.

⁸Aubertin, op. cit., pp. 377 - 378.

⁹de Goncourt, E. and J., op. cit., pp. 86 -87.

¹⁰Mémoires secrets, I, iii - vi.

As for literature, the journal reveals on the whole an awareness of current trends and an acceptance of certain innovations, although it occasionally manifests a certain nostalgia for vanishing standards and deplures what it sees as a general decline in good taste. A completely objective attitude is seldom attained but most of the critical reviews try to temper harsh criticism with words of praise whenever possible.

The conclusions that can be drawn about the Mémoires secrets from an investigation limited to one area and one decade must, of necessity, be considered as purely tentative. Other avenues remain to be explored before any firm appraisal of the journal can be reached. Among these, one might suggest a study of the relationships of the paroissiens with the literary, religious and political figures of the day; a comparison of the Mémoires with other journals of the period; a study of the content of the later volumes; a further attempt to gauge the influence of Mairobert. For all such investigations a more adequate index¹¹ appears to be a prior necessity. Though undoubtedly a complex undertaking, a

¹¹The present index, consisting of a table of names appearing in the Mémoires, has many limitations. Some names are omitted (for example, that of Mme du Boccage) and entries are overlooked if the author is referred to indirectly rather than by name. Dates also are at times inaccurate, although these errors may be typographical. Above all, a subject index is essential if the material in the Mémoires is to become more readily accessible to the student.

detailed index would be an invaluable tool for further study of this fascinating chronicle.

I would like to end my study by expressing the hope that this limited investigation has provided a general view of the journal and its creators, as well as some insight into the literary activity of the decade. The Mémoires are, obviously, rich in material of interest to the student of French literature. Additional rewards, however, await the reader who carefully peruses their crowded pages. To him will be granted the privilege of glimpsing a vanished society through the eyes of Madame Doublet's cultured associates, from whose daily meetings developed "cette source intarissable, cette chronique vivante: les Mémoires secrets pour servir à l'histoire de la république des lettres en France."¹²

¹²de Goncourt, E. and J. op. cit., 53.

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