DENIS DIDEROT

SELECTED WRITINGS ON ART AND LITERATURE

TRANSLATED WITH AN INTRODUCTION
AND NOTES BY
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PENGUIN BOOKS

1758 *Le Père de famille* (*The Father*) and *Discours sur la poésie dramatique* (*Discourse on Dramatic Poetry*).

1761 *The Father* is performed. *Eloge de Richardson* (*In Praise of Richardson*). *Salon* of 1761.

1765 The last ten volumes of the *Encyclopédie* are printed.

1768 *Salon* of 1767 completed.

1769 *The Father* revived at the Comédie-Française. *Garrick, ou les acteurs anglais* (*Garrick, or English Actors*).

1771 *The Natural Son* performed unsuccessfully at the Comédie-Française. Completes a first draft of *Jacques le fataliste*.

1772 Begins working with Raynal on *L'Histoire des deux Indes* (*The History of the Two Indies*) and completes the first draft of the *Supplément au Voyage de Bougainville* (*Supplement to Bougainville's Account of his Voyage*).

1773 Departure for Russia, via Holland and Germany.

1774 Returns to Paris, again with a stop in Holland. Working on the *Réfutation d'Helvétius*, his political writings for Catherine II and the *Eléments de physiologie*.

1778 *Essai sur la vie de Sénèque* (*Essay on the Life of Seneca*).

1781 Diderot's bust (by Houdon) is placed in the Town Hall of Langres. *Jacques le fataliste* is completed.

1784 Death of Diderot. He is buried in the church of Saint Roch.

Introductory Note

CONVERSATIONS ON *THE NATURAL SON*

The *Conversations* appeared in 1757, the same year as the play they discuss, and that edition is the text on which this translation is based. The play had been written in 1756 at Massy, not far from Paris, where Diderot had gone to take a rest after the publication of the sixth volume of the *Encyclopedia*, at the country home of his publisher, Le Breton. The countryside may have inspired the setting of the walks with Dorval in the *Conversations*. Neither the play nor the *Conversations* had any success. Grandval, the actor whose advice was taken by the Duc d'Orléans, a theatre enthusiast, declared it unactable, and subsequent experts have agreed, but the failure of the *Conversations* is harder to explain. The reforms Diderot proposes were very much in the spirit of the age and a great deal of what he wrote is reflected in plays by Sedaine, Mercier, Nivelle de la Chaussée and Beaumarchais. The character of Dorval is an example of a new kind of hero emerging at that time: the solitary, romantic, introspective, melancholic figure, full of virtue but ill at ease with the world around him, a forerunner of Werther, and, it is claimed, a portrait of Rousseau. In some ways, too, the relationship between the two speakers adumbrates that between the two characters in *Rameau's Nephew*, the conflict between sensibility and rationality.

The reaction of the modern reader is likely to be an alternation between interest in the interplay between the characters and impatience, embarrassment even, at the paths along which Diderot's enthusiasms take him. More than most, this work shows how interesting Diderot can still be and at the same time how dated, but these dated elements too can give us an impression of the sensibility and preoccupations of the time.

The *Conversations* are often difficult to understand without at least a basic idea of the plot of *The Natural Son*, which runs as follows.

The play has four main characters: Dorval, who is the natural son, reserved, melancholy, difficult to get on with, acutely conscious of his illegitimacy and his social isolation, but, for reasons which become clear later on, quite rich; then Rosalie, who is his legitimate half-sister, though, again, this is not revealed until the end of the play; Clairville, Dorval's aristocratic and only friend, who is in love with Rosalie, and in whose house in Saint-Germain-en-Laye the action takes place; finally, Clairville's sister Constance, a young widow who has been sufficiently impressed with the nobility of Dorval's character to fall in love with him.

In the first act we learn that Dorval is, alas, in love with Rosalie. In despair, he plans to leave, not of course because Rosalie is his sister, since he does not yet know this, but because she is more or less engaged to his friend Clairville. We then learn that Clairville too is in despair, because Rosalie no longer seems to love him. It soon becomes clear, first to us, then to Dorval, that Rosalie's affections have turned towards Dorval himself. She writes him a letter, full of guilt and despair, and Dorval begins to write a reply. At this point he is called away to defend Clairville, who is duelling with two men who have had the effrontery to suggest that Dorval is in love with Rosalie. Dorval's intervention saves his life, but while Dorval is away, Constance (in love with Dorval) discovers the half-finished letter to Rosalie and thinks it is addressed to her. Neither she nor Clairville when he hears of it can understand Dorval's reluctance to declare himself.

This is where the play reaches its point of maximum complexity, and maximum gloom. Everyone except Dorval is under a false impression of some kind. Everyone including Dorval is unhappy. The rest of the play's action is spent resolving the situation, and the first development is one which seems to make it even worse. A servant of Rosalie's father (we still do not know that he is Dorval's father as well) arrives with the news that the ship on which he was sailing home with a fortune has been captured by the English (the play was written, and the action takes place, during the Seven Years War). So even if the marriage of Rosalie and Clairville had still

been a possibility, it is now out of the question, since Rosalie's family fortune had been intended to restore the shaky finances of Clairville.

A lesser man might have seen this as his chance to marry Rosalie himself. Dorval, by contrast, performs an enlightened act. Seeing the opportunity to extricate himself from his position of bad faith with the other characters, he decides to renounce his love for Rosalie and secretly to give her his fortune, pretending that the ship on which her father was sailing was actually insured. Dorval and Constance now combine to try to bring Clairville and Rosalie back together, a process which brings Dorval closer to Constance. Rosalie is duly persuaded by Dorval to renounce him for Clairville, and this in the nick of time, for now her father, Lysimond, freed from captivity, arrives to reveal that Dorval is his son and that he has not lost his fortune after all. Dorval's noble stratagem is unmasked: his money, which had come from Lysimond anyway, and his honour are restored. The play ends with a tableau of family happiness and unity as old Lysimond is surrounded by the grateful – and reassorted – couples: Rosalie and Clairville, Dorval and Constance.

CONVERSATIONS ON *THE NATURAL SON*

INTRODUCTION

I promised to say why I did not understand the final scene, and this is why. They had prevailed upon a friend of his, who was about his age, with his build, voice and hair, to take his place in the play.

This old man came into the room, as Lysimond had come in the first time, supported by Clairville and André, and dressed in the clothes which his friend had brought from the prison. But hardly had he appeared there than, this point in the action bringing back to the whole family a man whom they had just lost, and who had been so respected and cherished, not one of them could hold back his tears. Dorval was weeping; Constance and Clairville were weeping; Rosalie stifling her sobs and turning her face away. The old man who was representing Lysimond became upset and he too began to weep. The grief, as it passed from the masters to the servants, became universal, and the play could not be concluded.

When everyone had left, I came out of my corner and returned as I had come. As I went, I dried my eyes and said by way of consolation, for I was sad at heart: 'I must be foolish to get upset like this. All this is only a play. Dorval made the subject up. He wrote the words from his imagination, and today they were amusing themselves acting it out.'

Yet there were some features which troubled me. Dorval's story was known in the district. The performance had been so true to life that, forgetting at some points that I was an onlooker, and an unseen one, I had been about to come out of my place and add a real character to the action. And then, how could I reconcile what had just happened with my ideas? If this was a play like any other, why were they unable to play the last scene? What was the cause of

the deep sorrow which had overcome them at the sight of the old man who played Lysimond?

A few days later I went over to thank Dorval for the delightful, painful evening which I owed to his kindness . . .

'So you were satisfied with it . . .?'

I like to tell the truth. This man liked to hear it; and I answered that the acting had made such an impression on me that I found it impossible to make a judgement on the rest; and, not having heard the last scene, I did not know how it ended; but if he would let me have the work, I would tell him what I thought . . .

'What you think! Do I not know as much now as I want to know? A play is not so much made to be read as to be performed. You enjoyed this performance: that is all I need to know. But here it is; read it and then we will talk about it.'

I took Dorval's work, read it at my leisure, and we discussed it the following day and the two days after that.

Here is what we said. But what a difference there is between what Dorval said to me and what I write! . . . Perhaps the ideas are the same; but the genius of the man is gone . . . In vain do I seek within me the impression made upon me by the spectacle of nature and the presence of Dorval. It will not come back; I cannot see Dorval; I cannot hear him. I am alone, amid the dust of my books and the shadows of my study . . . and the lines I write are feeble, sad and cold.

DORVAL AND I

First Conversation

That day Dorval had been trying without success to conclude a dispute which for a long time had divided two families in the neighbourhood, and which threatened to ruin them both. He was depressed about it and I could see that the mood he was in was going to cast a shadow over our conversation. But I said to him: 'I have read what you have written; but either I am much mistaken or you have not taken care to conform scrupulously to your father's

with Constance in that broad avenue, beneath the old chestnut trees which you can see, when I was finally convinced that she was the only woman in the world for me; for me! who had set out at that moment to explain to her that I was not the right husband for her. At the first sound of my father's arrival, we all went down and rushed to meet him; and the final scene took place in as many different spots as that honest old man stopped, from the front door to the drawing-room . . . If I have confined all the action to one place, it is because I could do so without disturbing the economy of the play and without depriving the events of the appearance of truth.

I. That is admirable. But when you arranged the places, the time and the order of events, you should not have invented some which do not belong to our customs or your character.

DORVAL. I did not think I had done so.

I. Are you going to persuade me then that you had the second scene of the first act with your valet? What? when you said to him: *Fetch my carriage and horses*, and he did not go? He did not obey you? He remonstrated with you and you listened calmly? Stern Dorval, this man who is not even communicative with his friend Clairville, had a familiar conversation with his valet Charles? That is neither true to life nor true.

DORVAL. That must be admitted. I actually told myself more or less what I have put into Charles's mouth. But Charles is a good servant and he is attached to me. If the occasion arose he would do for me everything that André did for my father. He was a witness to it all. I saw so little reason not to bring him into the play for a moment; and it pleased him so much! . . . Because they are our valets, do they cease to be men? . . . If they serve us, there is another whom we serve.

I. But if you were writing for the theatre?[2]

DORVAL. I should leave aside my moral scruples and I should take good care not to give importance on the stage to creatures who are of no account in society. The Davi[3] were the pivots of ancient comedy because they were in fact the initiators of all the domestic

strife. Should it be the customs of two thousand years ago, or our own, that we imitate? The valets in our comedies are always amusing, a certain proof that they are cold. If the poet leaves them in the antechamber where they belong, the action taking place between the main characters will be that much more absorbing and powerful. Molière, who was so good at exploiting them, kept them out of *Tartuffe* and *Le Misanthrope*. These plots involving valets and soubrettes which interrupt the main action are a sure way to destroy the interest. Dramatic action has no points of rest; and mingling two plots means halting the progress first of one and then of the other.

I. If I dared, I should plead for the soubrettes to be spared. I think young people, whose behaviour and speech is always under constraint, have only these women to speak freely with and reveal those intimate concerns which are repressed by custom, decorum, fear and prejudice.

DORVAL. Let them stay on the stage then until our education improves, and mothers and fathers become the confidants of their children . . . What else have you noticed?

I. Constance's declaration . . .

DORVAL. Well?

I. Women rarely make them . . .

DORVAL. True. But suppose a woman has the soul, the nobility and the character of Constance: that she has chosen a man of honour: and you will see that there is nothing to prevent her confessing her feelings. Constance worried me . . . a great deal . . . I felt sorry for her and respected her all the more.

I. That really is amazing! Your interests lay in another direction . . .

DORVAL. What is more, I was no fool.

I. People will find some passages in this declaration quite outspoken . . . The women will do their best to make this character look foolish.

DORVAL. Which women, I should like to know? Fallen women, who betray their shameful feelings every time they say: *I love you*. Constance is not like that; and society would be in a sorry state if there were no women like her.

I. But this tone is surely out of place in the theatre . . .

DORVAL. Leave the boards behind; come back into the drawing-room and admit that Constance's speech gave you no offence when you heard it there.

I. No.

DORVAL. Enough then. But I must tell you everything. When I had finished the play I showed it to all the characters so that each of them could add to their parts, or cut bits out, and portray themselves even more faithfully. But something happened which I was hardly expecting, but which is really quite natural. It was that, being more concerned with their present than their past, they softened an expression here and moderated a feeling there; elsewhere they built up to an incident. Rosalie wanted to seem less guilty in the eyes of Clairville; Clairville to show even greater passion for Rosalie; Constance to express a little more tenderness for a man who is now her husband; and the result was that the characters became less lifelike at some points. One of these is Constance's declaration. I see that the others will not escape your perceptive eye.

I found what Dorval said all the more gratifying because he is not in the habit of giving praise. By way of an answer, I picked out a minor point which I should otherwise have passed over.

I. And the tea party in the same scene? I said.

DORVAL. I know what you mean; it is not a custom of this country. I agree, but I have spent a long time travelling in Holland and I have taken this custom from them, and I have portrayed myself.

I. But on the stage!

DORVAL. It is not there but in the drawing-room that you must judge my work . . . But do not pass over any of the places where you think it offends against the practice of the stage . . . I shall be happy to examine whether the fault lies with me or with the practice.

While Dorval was speaking, I was looking for the pencil marks I

had made in the margin of his manuscript, wherever I had found something to object to.

I noticed one such mark near the beginning of the second scene of the second act, and I said: 'When you saw Rosalie, as you had promised your friend you would do, either she was aware that you intended to leave, or she knew nothing of it. If the first was the case, why did she not say anything about it to Justine? Is it natural for her not to have said a word about an event which must have preoccupied her entirely? She wept, but her tears were for herself. Her grief was that of a sensitive soul which is aware of feelings it can do nothing about and which it cannot condone. *She knew nothing of it*, you will tell me. *She seemed surprised; that is what I wrote, and you saw it.* That is true. But how could she not know what everyone in the house knew? . . .'

DORVAL. It was morning; I was anxious to leave a place where I was causing distress, and to carry out a most unexpected and painful duty, and I saw Rosalie at home as soon as it was light. The scene changed, but without losing anything of its credibility. Rosalie was living in seclusion; she could only hope to conceal her secret thoughts from the keen eye of Constance and the passion of Clairville by avoiding them both; she had only just come down from her rooms; she had not yet seen anyone when she came into the drawing-room.

I. But why was Clairville announced when you were talking to Rosalie? No one has ever been announced in his own home; and this has all the appearance of a specially contrived *coup de théâtre*.

DORVAL. That was how it was and how it had to be. If you see it as a *coup de théâtre*, very well; it happened of its own accord.

Clairville knew that I was with the woman he loved; it would not be natural for him to come in in the middle of a conversation which he himself wanted to take place. Yet he could not resist his impatience to know the result. He called me to him. Would you have acted differently?

Dorval stopped here for a moment; then he said: 'I should much

prefer tableaux on the stage, where there are so few, and where they would produce such a pleasing and reliable effect, to these *coups de théâtre* which are brought about in such an artificial way and are based on so many peculiar suppositions that, for one of these combinations of events which is felicitous and natural, there are a thousand which must displease a man of taste.'

I. But what do you see as the difference between a *coup de théâtre* and a tableau?

DORVAL. It would be quicker if I gave you examples rather than definitions. The second act of the play opens with a tableau and ends with a *coup de théâtre*.

I. I see. An unforeseen incident which takes place in the action and abruptly changes the situation of the characters is a *coup de théâtre*. An arrangement of these characters on stage, so natural and so true that, faithfully rendered by a painter, it would please me on a canvas, is a tableau.

DORVAL. More or less.

I. I would almost be prepared to bet that in the fourth scene of the second act every word is true. It shattered me in the drawing-room, and I immensely enjoyed reading it. What a fine tableau, for I think it is one, is made by Clairville leaning on his friend's breast as though this were the only refuge left to him . . .

DORVAL. You may well think of his troubles, but what about mine! How cruel that moment was for me!

I. I know, I know. I remember how you shed tears over him while he was giving vent to his grief and misery. Those are situations which are not easily forgotten.

DORVAL. You must admit that this tableau could not have taken place on the stage; that the two friends would never have dared to look each other in the face, turn their backs to the audience, come together, move apart and come together again; and that everything they did would have been very stilted, very stiff, very mannered and very cold.

I. I think so.

DORVAL. Can people possibly not realize that misfortune has the

effect of bringing men closer together; and that it is ridiculous, especially in moments of turmoil, when passions are carried to extremes, and the action is at its most violent, to stand in a circle, separated, at a certain distance from one another, and in a symmetrical pattern?

Dramatic action must still be very far from perfection, since one sees hardly any scenes on the stage from which one could make a tolerable composition for a painting. How can this be? Is truth less essential here than on the canvas? Could there be a rule that the closer an art form is to reality the further one must move away from it, and put less of real life into a living scene which involves actual human beings than into a painted scene where, so to speak, only their shadows are visible?

My own view is that if a dramatic work were well made and well performed, the stage would offer the spectator as many real tableaux as the action would contain moments suitable for a painting.

I. But what about the proprieties?

DORVAL. That word is all I ever hear. Barnwell's mistress comes into her lover's prison cell in a dishevelled state. The two lovers embrace and fall to the ground. Philoctetes once upon a time rolled on the ground at the entrance to his cave. He uttered inarticulate cries of grief.[4] Those cries did not make for harmonious verse, but they rent the hearts of the spectators. Do we have more subtlety and genius than the Athenians? . . . Can there really be anything more passionate than the behaviour of a mother whose daughter is being sacrificed? Let her rush on to the stage like a woman possessed or deranged; let her fill her palace with her cries; let even her clothes reveal her disorder: all these things are appropriate to her despair. If the mother of Iphigeneia showed herself for one moment to be the queen of Argos or the wife of the Greek general, she would only seem to be the lowest of creatures. The true dignity which seizes my attention and overwhelms me is that of mother love in all its truth.

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As I looked through the manuscript, I came across a little pencil mark which I had missed. It was at the point in the second scene of the second act, where Rosalie says of the person who has won her heart that *she thought to see in him the truth of all the ideals of perfection she had imagined*. This thought struck me as a little advanced for a child: and *the ideals of perfection* somewhat removed from her simple way of speaking. I made this observation to Dorval. By way of an answer he referred me to the manuscript. I examined it carefully and saw that these words had been added afterwards, in Rosalie's own hand; and I went on to talk of other things.

I. Do you not like *coups de théâtre*?
DORVAL. No.
I. But here is one, and it is very well brought about.
DORVAL. I know, and I mentioned it to you.
I. It is the basis of your whole plot.
DORVAL. I agree.
I. And it is a bad thing?
DORVAL. Most definitely.
I. Why did you use it, then?
DORVAL. Because it is not fiction but fact. It would have been much better for the play if things had come about differently.
I. Rosalie declares her love for you. She hears that she is loved in return. She neither hopes nor dares to see you again. She writes to you.
DORVAL. That is quite natural.
I. You answer her.
DORVAL. I had to.
I. Clairville has promised his sister[5] that you would not leave without seeing her. She loves you. She has told you so. You are aware of her feelings.
DORVAL. She has to try to discover mine.
I. Her brother goes to fetch her from a friend's house, where she has gone because of some unfortunate rumours which have been circulating about Rosalie's fortune and her father's return. Your departure was known about and caused surprise, and you were

accused of encouraging his sister's love and being in love with his mistress.[6]
DORVAL. All that is true.
I. But Clairville does not believe it. He defends you vigorously and gets involved in a fight. You are called to his aid just as you are answering Rosalie's letter. You leave your reply on the table.
DORVAL. You would have done the same, I think.
I. You rush to the aid of your friend. Constance arrives. She thinks she is expected, then sees she is abandoned. She finds this incomprehensible. She notices the letter that you were writing to Rosalie, reads it and thinks it is meant for her.
DORVAL. Anyone else would have made the same mistake.
I. No doubt; she has no inkling of your passion for Rosalie, nor of Rosalie's for you; the letter is in answer to a declaration of love and she has made one.
DORVAL. Add to that that Constance has discovered the secret of my birth from her brother, and that the letter is from a man who would think himself false to Clairville if he had designs on the person whom Clairville loves. So Constance believes, must believe, that she is loved; hence all the difficulties you saw me in.
I. How can you find fault with that? There is nothing false about it.
DORVAL. Nor anything which has the ring of truth. Do you not see that it takes centuries to bring so many circumstances together? Let artists preen themselves as much as they like on their talent for contriving such coincidences; I can see inventiveness there, but no real discernment. The simpler a play is in its development, the more beautiful it is. A poet who thought up that *coup de théâtre* and also the situation in the fifth act where, going over to Rosalie, I show her Clairville at the other end of the room, on a sofa, in an attitude of despair, would not be very sensible if he preferred the *coup de théâtre* to the tableau. One is almost like a children's game, the other is a stroke of genius. I speak without partiality. I invented neither of them. The *coup de théâtre* is a fact; the tableau, a happy circumstance created by chance which I was able to take advantage of.
I. But when you knew about Constance's misunderstanding, why

Second Conversation

The next day, I went to the foot of the hill. It was a lonely, wild place. The view was of a few hamlets spread out over the plain; beyond, a range of irregular, jagged mountains which formed a part of the horizon. We were shaded by some oak trees, and the muted sound could be heard of an underground stream flowing nearby. It was that season when the earth is covered with the fruits it grants to the toil and sweat of men. Dorval had arrived first. I went up to him without him noticing me. He had abandoned himself to the spectacle of nature. His chest swelled out and he was breathing deeply. His eyes were fixed keenly on everything around him. I could see on his face the various impressions of what he saw, and I was beginning to share in his rapture when I cried out, almost involuntarily: 'He is under the spell.'

He heard me and replied in a troubled voice: 'It is true. Here it is that nature can be seen. This is the sacred abode of enthusiasm. If a man has been granted the gift of genius he quits the town and its people. He takes pleasure, as his heart inclines him, in mingling his tears with the crystal waters of a spring, in bearing flowers to a grave, in walking lightly across the tender grass of a meadow, in wandering slowly through fertile fields, in contemplating the work of men, in fleeing to the depths of the forests. He loves their secret horror. He wanders on. He seeks a cavern to inspire him. Who is it that mingles his voice with the torrent falling from the mountain-side? Who feels the sublime nature of a wilderness? Who listens to his heart in the silence of solitude? It is he. Our poet dwells on the banks of a lake. He casts his eyes over the waters and his genius takes flight. There he is gripped by that spirit, now tranquil, now violent, which lifts his soul or calms it as it will . . . O nature, all that is good has its place in your breast! You are the fertile source of every truth! . . . In this world, only virtue and truth are worthy to fill my thoughts . . . Enthusiasm is born of some object in nature. If the mind has perceived it in striking and varied forms, it becomes absorbed, agitated, tormented. The imagination is stirred, passions

are roused. One is successively astonished, moved, indignant, angered. Without enthusiasm, either the true idea of things will not come, or, if it does by chance appear, it cannot be pursued . . . The poet can feel the moment when enthusiasm comes; it follows a period of meditation. He feels it first in a trembling which starts in his breast and spreads, voluptuously and rapidly, to the extremities of his body. Soon it is no longer a trembling but a strong, steady heat which sets him ablaze, makes him gasp, consumes him and lays him low; but which gives spirit and life to everything he touches. If this heat grew any stronger, phantoms would gather together before his eyes. His passion would almost develop into a fury. He would find relief only in pouring forth a torrent of ideas, all pushing, jostling and fighting to come out.'

Dorval was at that moment experiencing the state he was describing. I did not answer him. There followed a silence between us during which I could see that he was calming down. Soon he asked me, like a man emerging from a deep sleep: 'What did I say? What did I have to say to you? I cannot remember.'

I. A few ideas which the scene with Clairville in despair had suggested to you about the passions and their expression, and declamation and mime.

DORVAL. The first is that you should never make your characters say witty things; you should rather put them in situations which inspire wit in them . . .

Dorval realized, from the rapidity with which he had spoken these words, that his brain was still disturbed. He stopped, and to allow time for calm to return, or rather, to counter his confusion with a more violent, but fleeting emotion, he told me what follows.

DORVAL. A peasant woman from the village you see between those two mountains, with the roofs of its houses showing above the trees, sent her husband to see her parents, who lived in a neighbouring village. This unfortunate man was killed there by one of his brothers-in-law. The following day, I went to the house where the incident had taken place. I saw a spectacle and heard words which I

have never forgotten. The dead man was lying on a bed. His naked legs hung over its side. His dishevelled wife was on the floor beside him. She was holding her husband's feet, and she said as she broke down in tears, tears which drew more from everyone present: 'Alas! when I sent you here, I did not think that these feet were taking you to your death.' Do you imagine a woman from another class would have said anything more moving? No. The same situation would have inspired the same words. Her mind would have been absorbed in that moment; and what the artist must look for is what anyone would have said in the same circumstances; what nobody will hear without immediately recognizing it in themselves.

Great concerns, great passions. They are the source of great words, true words. Nearly all men speak well when they are dying.

What I like in the Clairville scene is that it contains strictly nothing but what passion inspires at its most extreme.

Mime, which we have so neglected, is used in this scene, and you have seen yourself how successfully!

We speak too much in our plays, and consequently our actors do not act enough. We have lost an art whose resources were well known to the Ancients. Then the mime would act every condition in society, kings, heroes, tyrants, the rich, the poor, townspeople, country people, selecting from each condition what is peculiar to it, from each action, what is most striking. The philosopher Timocrates, present one day at such a performance, from which his austere character had always kept him away, said: *Quali spectaculo me philosophiae verecundia privavit!* Timocrates had a false sense of shame, and it deprived that philosopher of a great pleasure.[7] The cynic Demetrius attributed its effect entirely to the musical instruments, the voices and the decorations, and a mime who was present replied: 'Watch me act alone: and then say what you like about my art.' The flutes fell silent. The mime performed, and the philosopher, quite carried away, cried: *Not only do I see you, I hear you. You speak to me with your hands.*

What effect could this art not produce if it were accompanied by speech? Why have we separated what nature joined together? Does

not gesture correspond to speech the whole time? I was never so much aware of it as when I was writing this play. I tried to remember what I had said, what the answer had been, and recalling only movements, I wrote in the names of the characters, and underneath, their movements. I said to Rosalie, in Act II, scene ii: *If it ever happened . . . that your heart, despite you . . . were overcome by an inclination . . . which your reason told you was wrong . . . I have known this cruel state! . . . How I would pity you!*

She answered: *Pity me then* . . . And pity her I did, but with a gesture of sympathy; and I do not think a man of feeling would have acted otherwise. But how many other circumstances are there, where we are forced to silence? If someone asked your advice and it involved him in risking his own life if he took it, or his honour if he did not, you would not act cruelly or ignobly. You would indicate your confusion with a gesture; and you would leave the man to make up his own mind.

What I also saw in this scene was that there are points where you must almost leave the actor to his own devices. It is up to him to arrange the scene on the page, to repeat certain words, to return to certain ideas, to remove some and to add others. In the *cantabile* the composer allows the singer to do as his taste and talent dictate: he confines himself to indicating the main intervals in a song. The poet should do the same, once he is familiar with his actor. What is it that affects us in the spectacle of a man fired by some great passion? Is it his words? Sometimes. But what is always moving are cries, inarticulate words, moments when speech breaks down, when a few monosyllables escape at intervals, a strange murmuring from the throat or from between the teeth. When the violence of an emotion stops the breath and brings disorder to the mind, the syllables of words come separately, a man jumps from one idea to another, he begins to say a number of things and does not finish any of them; and, apart from a few feelings which he conveys at the first onset of his passion and to which he constantly returns, the rest is nothing but a succession of weak, confused noises, sounds fading away, stifled tones which the actor understands better than the poet.

kind of state which all the wisdom of philosophy could never analyse.

'Poets, actors, composers, painters, fine singers, great dancers, passionate lovers, the truly devout, all those who possess enthusiasm and passion, have powerful feelings, and few thoughts.

'They are not guided and enlightened by principles but by something else more immediate, intimate, obscure and certain. I cannot tell you how much I admire a great actor or a great actress. How vain I should be if I had that talent! Once, alone in the world, master of my fate, without preconceived ideas, I wanted to be an actor; and if the success of Quinault-Dufresne can be guaranteed, then I will be one tomorrow. Only mediocrity turns one away from the theatre, and in whatever station in society, only low morals bring dishonour. Beneath Racine and Corneille, I see Baron, Desmares, de Seine; beneath Molière and Regnard, Quinault the Elder and his sister.[9]

'It used to sadden me when I went to the theatre and compared the great value it has with the scant attention paid to recruiting actors. Then I would cry out: "Ah! my friends, if ever we go to Lampedusa[10] and, far from the mainland, amidst the waves of the sea, found a little community of happy people! they will be our preachers; and we shall be sure to choose them according to the importance of their ministry. All peoples have their sabbath days, and we shall have ours. On these solemn days, a great tragedy will be performed, to teach men to fear the passions; and a good comedy, to teach them to know and love their duty."

I. Dorval, I hope we shall not see ugly people in roles which call for beauty.

DORVAL. I think not. Goodness, are there not enough strange fictions which I am forced to accept in a dramatic work without the illusion being even further removed by those which conflict with my senses?

I. To tell you the truth, I have often regretted the disappearance of the masks of the Ancients; and I think I would have been more ready to accept the praises given to a fine mask than to a displeasing face.

DORVAL. And have you been any less offended by the contrast between the moral standard of the play and that of the person acting it?

I. There have been times when the spectator could not help laughing, and the actress blushing.

DORVAL. No, I know of no profession which should demand more refined behaviour and higher moral standards than the theatre.

I. But our stupid prejudices do not allow us to be very particular.

DORVAL. But we have drifted a long way from my play. Where were we?

I. The scene with André.

DORVAL. I ask your indulgence for this scene. I like it because it is totally honest and severe in its impartiality.

I. But it holds up the progress of the play and weakens our involvement.

DORVAL. I shall always enjoy reading it. May our enemies come to know it, admire it, and never read it without pain! How happy I should be, if the opportunity to depict a domestic misfortune were also the occasion to rebuff the insults of a jealous people, in such a way that my country could recognize itself in it, and the enemy nation would not even feel at liberty to take offence.[11]

I. It is a moving scene, but a long one.

DORVAL. It would have been more moving and longer, if I had listened to André. 'Sir,' he said, when he had read it, 'this is all very good, but there is a slight fault in it: it is not exactly as it happened. You say, for instance, that when we arrived in the enemy harbour and they separated me from my master, I called out several times *Master, Master*: that he fixed his eyes on me, let his arms fall to his side, turned round and, without speaking, followed the men surrounding him.

'That is not what happened. You should have said that, when I called *Master, my dear master*, he heard me, turned round and fixed his eyes on me; that his hands went to his pockets and, finding nothing there, for the greedy English had left him nothing, he sadly let his arms fall to his side; that he bowed his head to me in a cool

expression of sympathy, turned round and, without speaking, followed the men surrounding him. That is how it was.

'In another place you take it upon yourself to leave out one of the things which best shows the kindness of your father; that is very bad. In the prison, when he felt that his bare arms were wet with my tears, he said: "You are weeping, André! Forgive me, my friend; it was I who brought you to this: I know. You have been dragged into this misfortune by me . . ." And now you are weeping! Was it not a good thing to put in?

'At another point, you have done something even worse. When he said to me: "My child, take heart, you will escape from here: but I can feel by my weakness that I shall have to die here", I abandoned myself to my grief and made the cell echo with my cries. Then your father said to me: "André, stop this complaining, respect the will of heaven and the misfortune of those here with you, who are suffering in silence." And where is all that?

'And what about the agent? You have made such a mess of that bit that I cannot make head or tail of it. Your father told me, as you have set it down, that this man had acted on his behalf, and that my presence with him was certainly the first of his good offices. But then he added: "Oh! my child, if God had only given me the consolation of having you beside me at this cruel time, how much would I have to thank him for!" I see nothing of that in what you have written. Sir, is it forbidden to speak God's name on the stage, that holy name which was so often on your father's lips? – I do not think so, André. – Were you afraid that people might know that your father was a Christian? – Not at all, André. Christian morality is such a fine thing. But why do you ask this question? – We do say amongst ourselves . . . – What? – That you are . . . a sort of . . . freethinker: and from the bits you have cut out, I would think there might be something in it. – André, that would oblige me to be all the better a citizen and all the more decent a man. – Sir, you are a good man; but don't go thinking you're as good as your father. You may be one day. – André, is that all? – There is one more thing I should like to say, but I dare not. – You may speak. – Since

you allow me, you pass rather quickly over the kind offices of the Englishman who came to our assistance. Sir, there are decent people everywhere . . . But you have changed a lot from what you were, if what they still say about you is true. – And what are they still saying? – That you were full of enthusiasm for those people. – André! – That you regarded their country as a haven of liberty, the home of virtue, invention and originality. – André! – Now it annoys you to hear that. Well then, let us say no more about it. You said that the agent, seeing your father naked, took off his own clothes and dressed him in them. That is very good. But you should not have forgotten that one of his servants did the same for me. Not to mention this, Sir, would reflect on me, and give me an appearance of ingratitude which I do not want at all.'

You see that André was not entirely of your opinion. He wanted the scene as it happened: you want it to be in keeping with the work; and I alone am in the wrong for displeasing you both.

I. *Who left him to die in the depths of a prison cell, lying on the clothes his valet had discarded,* is a hard thing to say.

DORVAL. It was an outburst of spite; it escaped from a melancholic who has practised virtue all his life, who has not yet known a moment of happiness, when he hears of the misfortunes of a good man.

I. Add to that that this good man is perhaps his father; and that these misfortunes wreck the hopes of his friend, cast his mistress into poverty, and add a new source of bitterness to his situation. All that will be true. But what of your enemies?

DORVAL. If they ever come to know of my work, the public will be their judge and mine. I will quote a hundred examples from Corneille, Racine, Voltaire and Crébillon, where character and circumstance bring about more extreme situations which have never outraged anybody. They will find no answer; and we shall see what they are anxious not to reveal, that it is not the love of good which motivates them, but hatred for the man who devours them.

I. But what sort of man is this André? I find he speaks too well for a servant; and I confess that there are passages in his story which would not be unworthy of yourself.

DORVAL. I have already told you; there is nothing like misfortune to make a man eloquent. André is a fellow who has had some education but who was, I think, a little dissolute in his youth. He was sent to the Indies, where my father, who was a good judge of men, took him on, put him in charge of his business affairs, and was glad to have done so. I think I see a little mark beside the monologue at the end of the act.

I. That is so.

DORVAL. What does it mean?

I. That it is very fine, but unbearably long.

DORVAL. Well then, let us shorten it. Let us see: what do you want to cut out?

I. I have no idea.

DORVAL. But it is long.

I. You can embarrass me as much as you like, but you will not remove this impression.

DORVAL. Perhaps not.

I. You would be doing me a great favour.

DORVAL. I would simply ask you how you liked it in the drawing-room.

I. Very well; but I would ask you in turn how it is that what seemed short when it was performed seems long when I read it.

DORVAL. It is because I did not write in the mime, and because you do not remember it. We still do not know how much influence mime can have on the composition of a dramatic work, and on its performance.

I. That may well be so.

DORVAL. And then, I wager you are still seeing me on the French stage, in the theatre.

I. Do you think, then, that your work would not succeed in the theatre?

DORVAL. It would be difficult. Either the dialogue would have to

be cut in certain places, or else the action and the set would have to be changed.

I. What do you mean by changing the set?

DORVAL. Taking away everything which clutters up a space which is already too confined; putting in scenery; being able to perform different set pieces from those we have seen for the last hundred years; in a word, transporting Clairville's drawing-room into the theatre, just as it is.

I. Is it important, then, to have a set?

DORVAL. Definitely. Remember that French theatre contains as many kinds of scenery as the opera, and would offer more pleasing ones, because the world of magic can amuse children, and only the real world can appeal to reason . . . Without scenery, nothing will ever be imagined. Any man of genius will grow tired of it; indifferent authors will succeed by means of slavish imitation; more and more importance will be attached to trivial proprieties; and national taste will deteriorate . . . have you seen the theatre in Lyon?[12] All I would ask for is a similar edifice in the capital, to bring forth a mass of new works, and perhaps give rise to some new genres.

I. I do not understand: I should be grateful if you would explain what you mean.

DORVAL. I shall be happy to.

If only I could convey everything that Dorval said to me, and the way in which he said it! He began on a sober note, then he gradually became more heated; his ideas tumbled out and he moved towards his conclusion so rapidly that I could scarcely follow him. This is what I have remembered.

'I should very much like', he began by saying, 'to persuade those cautious spirits who know of nothing beyond what is already there, that if things were otherwise they would be just as happy with them; and that since the power of reason is nothing to them compared with the power of time, they would approve of what they now find fault with, just as they have often found fault with

what they used to approve of . . . To be a good judge of the fine arts, one needs a combination of several rare qualities . . . Fine taste demands fine judgement, long experience, honesty, sensibility, an elevated mind, a somewhat melancholic temperament, finely tuned reactions . . .' A moment later, he went on:

DORVAL. All I would ask, to change the face of drama, is a very extensive stage which could display, when the subject of the play called for it, a large square with its adjacent buildings, such as the columned front of a palace, the entrance to a temple, various places set out in such a way that the spectator could see all the action, but with an area hidden from the actors.

Such was, or may once have been, the scene of Aeschylus's *Eumenides*. On one side there was a space in which the unleashed Furies sought Orestes, who had hidden from them while they were asleep. On the other side one saw the guilty man, wearing a headband, his arms round the feet of the statue of Minerva, imploring her aid. Here, Orestes is uttering his complaint to the goddess; there, the Furies are in action, running in all directions. At last one of them cries out: 'Here is a trace of blood left by the parricide . . . I smell it, I smell it . . .' She goes forward. Her pitiless sisters follow her: they move from the place where they were into Orestes' refuge. They surround him, uttering cries, trembling with rage, brandishing their torches. What a moment of terror and pity that must be when one hears the pleas and groans of the victim above the cries and dreadful movements of the merciless creatures who seek him out! Shall we ever perform anything to compare with that in our theatres? There, only one action can ever be displayed, whereas in reality there are nearly always several at a time which, performed simultaneously, each reinforcing the other, would produce a terrifying effect. Then we should tremble at the thought of going to the theatre, yet be unable to prevent ourselves. Then, instead of those shallow, passing emotions, that cool applause, those occasional tears which are enough to satisfy the author, he would overwhelm us and fill our minds with confusion and horror. Then we should see revived in our midst those wonders of ancient

tragedy, which it is so possible to create and which are so little believed in. To come into being they await a man of genius who is capable of combining mime with speech, of intermingling spoken scenes with silent ones, of getting the best out of the collision of two scenes and most of all of the build-up to that collision which, whether awful or comic, would always be made. After the Eumenides have rushed about on the stage they arrive in the sanctuary where the guilty man has taken refuge, and then the two scenes become one.

I. Two scenes alternately silent and spoken. That I understand. But would there not be some confusion?

DORVAL. A silent scene is a tableau, a stage-set in motion. When you are at the opera, does the pleasure of what you see interfere with the pleasure of what you hear?

I. No . . . but is that how we should interpret what we are told of these ancient plays, where music, speech and mime were sometimes combined and sometimes separate?

DORVAL. Sometimes. But this discussion would lead us astray; let us keep to our subject. Let us see what would be possible today; and let us take an ordinary example from domestic life.

A father has lost his son in a duel; it is night. A servant who has witnessed the fight comes to announce the death. He comes into the room where the unhappy father is asleep. He paces up and down. The sound of a man's footsteps awakens the father. He asks who it is. – It is me, Sir, the servant replies in a troubled voice. – Well, what is it? – Nothing. – What, nothing? – No, Sir. – This cannot be. You are trembling, you are turning your face away and avoiding my eyes. Now, what is it? I want to know. Speak! I command you. – I tell you, Sir, it is nothing, the servant again replies as his tears begin to fall. – You wretched fellow, the father cries, jumping up from the bed where he has been lying; you are deceiving me. There has been some great disaster . . . Is my wife dead? – No, Sir. – My daughter? – No, Sir. – Then it is my son? . . . The servant says nothing; the father hears his silence; he throws himself on the ground and fills the room with his grief and his cries. He does and

says all that despair might arouse in a father who loses his son, the only hope of his family.

This same man rushes to the mother, who is also asleep. She is awoken by the noise of the curtains being violently drawn aside. What is it? she asks. – Madam, the greatest of misfortunes. Now is the time to show your Christian virtue. You no longer have a son. – Oh God! this mother cries in her distress. And taking up a cross from her bedside, she clasps it in her arms, she presses her lips to it, her eyes dissolve in tears and these tears pour over her God nailed to a cross.

There is the tableau of the pious woman: soon we shall see that of the tender wife and the grieving mother. When religion dominates the natural reactions of a person, it needs a more violent shock to draw out their true voice.

Meanwhile the corpse of his son had been carried into the father's room. There a scene of despair took place, while in the mother's room there was a silent display of piety.

You see how mime and speech alternate between one place and another. That is what should be substituted for our *asides*. But now the moment is drawing near for the two scenes to come together. The mother, led by the servant, is approaching her husband's room . . . I would ask you what happens to the spectator during this time? . . . A mother's eyes are about to be presented with the sight of a husband, a father, lying across the dead body of his son! Now she has crossed the space between the two scenes. Pitiful cries have reached her ears. Now she sees. She falls back. Her strength abandons her and she falls lifeless into the arms of the man beside her. Very soon she will be overcome with weeping. *Tum verae voces.*

That is tragedy. But for this type of drama we need authors, actors, a theatre, and perhaps a public.

I. What! you would want in a tragedy to have a bed, a mother and a father asleep, a crucifix, a corpse, and two scenes alternately silent and spoken! And what about the proprieties?

DORVAL. Ah! cruel proprieties, how proper and how feeble you

make our plays! . . . But (Dorval added with a coolness which surprised me) is what I suggest not possible any more, then?

I. I do not believe we could ever achieve that.

DORVAL. Well then, all is lost! Corneille, Racine, Voltaire and Crébillon have received the greatest applause to which men of genius could aspire; and tragedy has with us reached its highest degree of perfection.

While Dorval was speaking I had a strange thought: how, by turning a domestic incident into a play, he had established the rules for every type of drama, and yet was induced by his melancholy temperament to apply them only to tragedy.

After a moment's silence, he said: 'But there is one resort: we must hope that one day a man of genius will realize how impossible it is to come near to those who have preceded him along a much-travelled path, so that, out of despair, he will take another. That is the only eventuality which can free us from a number of prejudices that philosophy has failed to overcome. We no longer want ideas but a finished work.'

I. We have one.

DORVAL. What?

I. *Sylvie*, a prose tragedy in one act.[13]

DORVAL. I know it: it is *Le Jaloux*, a tragedy. It is the work of a man of thought and feeling.

I. It opens with a charming tableau: the inside of a room whose walls are completely bare. At the far end of the room, on a table, are a lamp, a water jug and a loaf of bread: that is the place and the food to which a jealous husband has condemned, for the rest of her days, an innocent woman whose virtue he has suspected.

Now imagine this woman at the table, in tears: Mademoiselle Gaussin.

DORVAL. And you can judge the effect of tableaux by the one you describe to me. There are other details in this play which I liked. It is enough to awaken the ideas of a genius: but it needs another kind of work to convert the public.

*

At this point Dorval cried out: 'You who possess all the fire of genius at an age when others are barely left with cold reason, why can I not be at your side, your Fury? I should spur you on unceasingly. You would create this work. I should remind you of the tears we shed over the scene of the prodigal son and his manservant,[14] and, when you disappeared from our midst, you would not leave us to bemoan the loss of a new genre of which you could have been the founder.'

I. And what will you call this genre?

DORVAL. Domestic bourgeois tragedy. The English have *The London Merchant* and *The Gamester*, prose tragedies.[15] Shakespeare's tragedies are half verse and half prose. The first poet to make us laugh with prose introduced prose into comedy. The first poet who can make us weep with prose will be the one to introduce prose into tragedy.

But in art, as in nature, everything is connected. If you can draw near to truth from one angle, you will draw near it from many others. Then it is that we shall see on the stage natural situations, which have been banished from our theatre by propriety, that enemy of genius and great effects. I shall never cease crying out to the French: Truth! Nature! the Ancients! Sophocles! Philoctetes![16] The poet showed him on the stage, lying at the entrance to his cave, covered in rags. He is rolling about, beset with grief, crying out and uttering inarticulate sounds. The scene was wild; the play lacked any kind of decoration. Natural clothes, natural speeches, and a simple, natural plot. Our taste would be very degraded if this spectacle did not affect us more than that of a richly dressed man, done up in his finery . . .

I. As if he had just come out of his dressing-room.

DORVAL. Walking with measured tread across the stage and assaulting our ears with what Horace calls

. . . ampullas, et sesquipedalia verba,[17]

'clever sayings, bulging bottles, words a foot and a half long'.

We have spared no effort to corrupt the drama. We have

retained from the Ancients the emphatic versification which was so suitable for languages with strong measures and heavy stresses, for spacious theatres, for a declamation which was scored and accompanied by instruments; and we have abandoned their simplicity of plot and dialogue, and the truth of their tableaux.

I should not want to have back on the stage the great clogs and high buskins, the voluminous clothes, the masks, the speaking-trumpets, even though all these things were necessary components of a theatrical system. But were there not certain affectations in this system? and do you think it would be advisable to add further obstacles to genius, just when it was deprived of a great resource?

I. What resource?

DORVAL. The presence of a large audience.

Properly speaking, there are no longer any public spectacles. What comparison is there between our theatre audiences on the most popular days and those of Athens or Rome? The theatres of antiquity held as many as eighty thousand citizens. The theatre of Scaurus was decorated with three hundred and sixty columns and three thousand statues. When these theatres were built, they made use of every possible means to do justice to the instruments and the voices. *Uti enim organa in æneis laminis, aut corneis echeis ad chordarum sonitus claritatem perficiuntur: sic theatrorum, per harmonicen, ad augendam vocem, ratiocinationes ab antiquis sunt constitutæ.*[18]

At this point I interrupted Dorval and said to him: 'I shall have a little story to tell you about our theatres.' 'I shall ask you for it,' he replied; and he went on:

DORVAL. You can judge the power of a large gathering of spectators from what you know yourself about the influence that men exert on one another and the way in which emotions are communicated in popular risings. Forty or fifty thousand men do not restrain themselves out of a sense of propriety. And if some republican dignitary were to shed a tear, what effect do you think his grief would have on the other spectators? Is there anything more moving than the grief of a venerable man?

Anyone whose feelings are not intensified by the great number of those who share them has some secret vice; there is something unsociable in his character which I find displeasing.

But if a large gathering of men should add to the excitement of the spectators, what an effect it would have on the authors, and the actors! What a difference there is between an entertainment, given on a certain day, between certain times, in a small, gloomy place, for a few hundred people, and holding the attention of a whole nation on its feast days, occupying its most sumptuous buildings and seeing these buildings surrounded and filled with a multitude without number whom it depends on our talent either to entertain or to fill with tedium!

I. You attach a great deal of importance to purely local circumstances.

DORVAL. I attach the importance they would have for me; and I believe my feeling is right.

I. But to hear you speak, one would think these circumstances are what have sustained and perhaps even introduced poetry and energetic declamation into the theatre.

DORVAL. I do not insist on the truth of this supposition. I ask that it be examined. Is it not quite likely that the need to be heard by large audiences above the dull murmur they create, even when they are paying attention, led actors to raise their voices, to space out the syllables, to sustain their delivery, and to become aware of the value of versification? Horace says of dramatic verse:

Vincentem strepitus, et natum rebus agendis,[19]

'It is an appropriate vehicle for the plot, and can be heard above the noise.' But was it not necessary at the same time and for the same reason for this exaggeration to affect the progress, the gestures and all the other aspects of the action? From that came an art which was called declamation.

However it may be: whether poetry gave birth to theatrical declamation, or whether the need for this declamation introduced and maintained on the stage the poetry and its emphatic delivery, or

whether this system, having developed little by little, was able to last because its various elements complemented each other, there is no doubt that wherever dramatic action is larger than life, these effects all come into being and disappear at the same time. The actor leaves and takes up the exaggeration on the stage.

There is a kind of unity which one looks for without realizing it, and which one sticks to once it is found. This unity decides dress, tone, gesture, posture, everything from the throne placed in the temple to the trestles set up at the crossroads. Look how a quack behaves on the Place Dauphine; he is decked out in all sorts of colours, his fingers are covered with rings, his hat is hung round with big red feathers. He has brought a monkey or a bear with him, he stands as tall as he can, gesticulates in the wildest possible way: and all these things fit in with the place, the speaker and his audience. I have made something of a study of the dramatic art of the Ancients. I hope I shall be able to talk to you about it one day, give you an impartial explanation of its nature, its good and bad points, and show you how those who have attacked it had not examined it closely enough ... Now what was this adventure you were going to tell me, about our theatres?

I. This. I had a rather dissolute friend. He got into some serious trouble in the provinces. He had to avoid the possible consequences by taking refuge in the capital, and he came to stay with me. One day when the theatres were open, and I was looking for something which might amuse my prisoner, I suggested we should go. I forget which of the three it was.[20] It has no importance for my story. My friend agreed. I took him along. We reached the theatre, but at the sight of all the guards, the dark little wicket-gates which serve as entrances, and the hole protected by an iron grille through which the tickets are distributed, the young man thought he was at the gate of a prison and that an order had been obtained to shut him away. Being a brave man, he stopped there and then, put his hand on the hilt of his sword, and, turning indignantly towards me, he cried, in a tone of mingled rage and contempt: *Oh, my friend!* I realized what

he meant and reassured him; and you will readily admit that his error was not misplaced . . .

DORVAL. But what point did we reach in our examination? As you are the one who led me astray, you will no doubt undertake to put me back on the right path.

I. We have reached your scene with Constance in the fourth act . . . I can see only one pencil mark, but it goes from the first line to the last.

DORVAL. What did you not like?

I. First of all the tone; it seems to me beyond the capacity of a woman.

DORVAL. Of an ordinary woman, perhaps. But you will be meeting Constance, and then perhaps the scene will seem beneath her.

I. There are expressions and ideas which are more yours than hers.

DORVAL. That is inevitable. We take our expressions and ideas from the people with whom we talk and live. According to the opinion we have of them (and Constance has a high opinion of me), our character is more or less influenced by them. Mine must have affected hers, just as hers affected Rosalie's.

I. What about the length of it?

DORVAL. Ah! now you are back on the stage. It is a long time since that happened to you. You are seeing Constance and me up on the boards, standing very straight, looking at each other in profile and alternately reciting our questions and answers. But is that how it happened in the drawing-room? Sometimes we would be sitting, sometimes standing; occasionally we would walk up and down. Often we would stop, being in no hurry to see the end of a conversation which concerned us both equally. What did she not say to me? What did I not reply? If only you knew what she was like when her fierce spirit closed itself to reason and allowed sweet illusions and tranquillity to enter! *Dorval, your daughters will be honest and seemly, your sons will be noble and proud. All your children will be delightful* . . . I cannot convey to you how much magic there was in those words, spoken with a smile full of tenderness and dignity.

I. I can understand. I can hear those words from the lips of Mademoiselle Clairon, and I can see her before me.[21]

DORVAL. No, only women possess this secret art. We have only cold, dry reason.

'Is it not better', she said to me, 'to risk ingratitude than to miss the chance of doing good?

'Parents have a love for their children which is timid and unsure of itself and which spoils them. There is another kind of love, attentive and composed, which makes good people of them; that is the true love of a father.

'A distaste for everything which amuses ordinary people is the consequence of a genuine love of virtue.

'There is a tact in moral matters which extends to everything and which the wicked do not possess.

'The happiest man is he who has given happiness to the greatest number of others.

'"I wish I were dead" is a frequently expressed wish which proves, sometimes at least, that there are more precious things than life.

'An honest man is respected even by those who are not, even if he were on another planet.

'The passions destroy more prejudices than philosophy. And how could untruth resist them? Sometimes they even undermine the truth.'

Another thing she said, simple enough, it is true, was so close to my own situation that it frightened me. It was that 'there was no one, however good, who, when subject to a violent passion, did not deep in his heart desire the reputation of virtue and the benefits of vice'.

I remembered those ideas well, but not the way they were linked together, and so they were not included in the scene. Those that are there and what I have told you about them is enough, I think, to show you that Constance is not unaccustomed to thought. That was how she captivated me while her reason scattered like dust every argument which my ill-humour suggested.

I. I see there is something I have underlined in this scene, but I cannot remember why.

DORVAL. Read it out.

I. 'Nothing is more persuasive than the example of virtue, not even the example of vice.'

DORVAL. I know. The maxim did not ring true.

I. Exactly.

DORVAL. I do not practise virtue enough, but no one thinks more highly of it than I do. I see truth and virtue as two great statues raised upon the surface of the earth, motionless amidst the devastation and ruin of all that surrounds them. These tall figures are sometimes hidden in clouds. At such times men move about in darkness. These are the times of ignorance and crime, of fanaticism and conquests. But there comes a moment when the clouds open up; then men bow down as they see the truth and pay homage to virtue. All things pass, but virtue and truth remain.

I define virtue as a love of order in matters of morality. The love of order in general governs us from our earliest childhood; it was there in our hearts, Constance said to me, before any conscious thought; and in saying this she set me in opposition to myself; it is active within us without our being aware of it; it is the source of good behaviour and good judgement; it inclines us towards the good whenever it is not disturbed by the passions; it follows us even when we go astray; at such times it arranges things to give the best possible advantage to evil. If it could ever be stifled, there would be those who felt remorse for virtue, just as others feel remorse for vice. When I see a scoundrel who is capable of a heroic action, I am firmly convinced that good men are more truly good than evil men are really evil; that goodness is a more integral part of us than wickedness and that, in general, there is more goodness left in the heart of a wicked man than there is wickedness in the hearts of the good.

I. I feel moreover that one should not examine the moral standards of a woman as though they were the maxims of a philosopher.

DORVAL. Oh! if Constance could hear you! . . .

I. But are these moral standards not a little too elevated for the dramatic genre?

DORVAL. Horace said that a poet should seek his knowledge in the works of Socrates:

Rem tibi Socraticae poterunt ostendere chartae.[22]

Now, I think that in any kind of work the spirit of the age should be evident. If morals become more refined, if prejudice grows weaker, if there is a more general inclination towards good works, if a love for the public good becomes widespread, if the people show an interest in the work of the minister, then such things must be made evident, even in a comedy.

I. In spite of everything you say, I stick to my point. I think the scene is very fine and very long; I do not respect Constance any the less; I am delighted that there is a woman in the world like her, and that she is your wife . . .

(The pencil marks are beginning to thin out now, but here is another.)

Clairville has placed his fate in your hands; he comes to discover what you have decided. You have made the sacrifice of your love and decided upon that of your fortune. Clairville and Rosalie are once again rich because of your generosity. Conceal this fact from your friend if you like, but why amuse yourself tormenting him, pointing out obstacles which no longer exist? This does introduce a passage in praise of commerce, I know, and it is full of good sense and makes the work more instructive and useful; but it does prolong the scene, and I would leave it out.

. . . ambitiosa recidet
Ornamenta . . .[23]

DORVAL. I can see that you were born with a happy disposition. After a violent effort there comes a feeling of well-being which is impossible to resist, and which you would know if the practice of virtue were difficult for you. You have never felt the need to get your breath back . . . I was delighting in my triumph. I was causing

my friend to feel the most elevated sentiments; I saw him as more and more worthy of what I had just done for him. And this action does not seem natural to you! On the contrary, you should discern in these signs the difference between an imaginary event and a real one.

I. You may be right. But, tell me, would Rosalie not have added this passage in the first scene of the fourth act later on? 'My lover who was once so dear to me! Clairville whom I still hold in esteem, etc.'

DORVAL. You have guessed.

I. I have hardly anything but praise to give you now. I cannot tell you how happy I am with the third scene of the fifth act. I was saying to myself, before I read it: He intends to break Rosalie's ties with him. It is an absurd plan which did not succeed with Constance and will succeed no better with the other. What can he say which will not further increase her esteem and her love? But let us see. I read it, and I was convinced that no woman in Rosalie's place, if she was still possessed of the least vestiges of honour, would not have felt her affection turn from you to her lover; and I realized that there is nothing that cannot be worked upon the human heart with the help of truth, goodness and eloquence.

But how can it be that your play is not invented and yet the smallest incidents are prepared for?

DORVAL. Dramatic art only prepares incidents in order to link them together, and it only links them in plays because they are linked in reality. Art even imitates the subtle way in which nature hides from us the connections between its effects.

I. I should think that mime could sometimes prepare for things in a very natural and subtle way.

DORVAL. For sure, and there is an example in the play. While André was telling us of the misfortunes which had come upon his master, I repeatedly had the feeling that he was talking about my father, and I showed this uneasiness by movements which would have made an attentive observer suspect the same thing.

I. Dorval, I am concealing nothing from you. I noticed from time to time certain expressions which are not used in the theatre.

DORVAL. But which no one would dare to criticize if a well-known author had used them.

I. And those other expressions which are on everybody's lips and in the works of the best writers and which it would be impossible to change without destroying the sense; but you know that the language of drama becomes more refined as morals grow more corrupt, and that vice creates an idiom of its own which gradually takes hold and which must be recognized, because it is dangerous to use the expressions of which it has once taken possession.

DORVAL. What you say is very perceptive. We still need to know what the limits are of this kind of complacency we must have where vice is concerned. If the language of virtue grows poorer as that of vice extends, we shall soon be reduced to being unable to speak without saying something foolish. For my part, I think there are a multitude of occasions when a man would do honour to his own discernment and standards of behaviour by showing contempt for this licentiousness with which we seem to be overrun.

I have already noticed that in polite company, if anyone should think to react too squeamishly, people blush for him. If the French theatre follows this example, will it wait until its dictionary is as limited as that of the opera and the number of decent expressions is equal to the number of musical phrases?

I. That is all I had to say to you about the details of your play. As for its construction, I find one fault; perhaps it is inherent in the subject: you can judge for yourself. The centre of interest changes. From the first act to the end of the third it deals with the misfortunes of virtue; and in the rest of the play, virtue triumphant. You should have sustained this disorder, which would have been easy to do, and prolonged the trials and distresses of virtue.

For example, let everything remain the same from the beginning of the play until the fourth scene of the third act: that is the moment when Rosalie learns that you are to marry Constance, faints from grief, and says to Clairville in her anger: 'Leave me . . . I

hate you . . .'; then Clairville should become suspicious and you should become vexed with a troublesome friend who is breaking your heart without realizing it; and there the third act should end.

And now here is how I should organize the fourth act. I should leave the first scene more or less as it is, except that Justine would tell Rosalie that a messenger has come from her father, that he has seen Constance in secret and that she has every reason to believe that he has brought bad news. After this scene I should transfer the second scene from the third act, the one where Clairville throws himself at Rosalie's feet and tries to win her round. Then Constance comes in, bringing André with her, and he is questioned. Rosalie learns of the misfortunes which have befallen her father: you can see roughly how the rest proceeds. By inflaming the passions of Clairville and Rosalie, they would have created perhaps even greater problems for you than you had already had. From time to time you would have been tempted to confess everything. At the end you might even have done so.

DORVAL. I see what you mean; but that is not what happened to us. And what would my father have said? And are you really sure that the play would have gained from it? By bringing me to a dreadful plight, you would have made a very complicated play out of a quite simple incident. I should have become more theatrical . . .

I. And more ordinary, it is true. But the work would have been an undoubted success.

DORVAL. I think it would, and in very shallow taste. There was certainly less complication in my version; but I think there would have been less real truth and beauty if the disorder had been maintained than if things had proceeded in an atmosphere of calm. Remember that at such a time the sacrifices of virtue begin and then follow one after the other. Look at how the elevated speech and powerful scenes take the place of the emotion which arises out of circumstances. And yet, in the midst of this calm the fate of Constance, Clairville, Rosalie and myself remains uncertain. My intentions are known but there is little prospect of their succeeding.

Indeed, they do not succeed with Constance, and there is much less likelihood of my being more fortunate with Rosalie. What event of sufficient importance could have replaced these two scenes in the plan which you have just outlined to me? None.

I. I have one question left to put to you, on the genre of your play. It is not a tragedy, it is not a comedy. What is it then, and what name can be found for it?

DORVAL. Whatever you wish. But tomorrow, if you like, we can work together to find a suitable one.

I. And why not today?

DORVAL. I must leave you. I promised to see two local farmers and they may already have been at home for an hour waiting for me.

I. Another lawsuit to settle?

DORVAL. No, it is a rather different matter. One of these farmers has a daughter, the other has a son: these children are in love, but the girl is rich and the boy has nothing . . .

I. And you want to reconcile the parents and make the children happy. Goodbye, Dorval. Until tomorrow, at the same place.

Third Conversation

The next day the sky became overcast; a cloud bringing a storm and bearing thunder hung over the hill and covered it in darkness. From the distant point where I stood, the lightning seemed to flash and die away within this darkness. The tops of the oak trees were swaying backwards and forwards, the noise of the wind mingled with the murmuring of the waters, the thunder rumbled through the trees, and in my imagination, preoccupied with obscure associations, I saw, in the midst of this shadowy scene, Dorval, just as I had seen him the day before, carried away by his enthusiasm; and I seemed to hear his melodious voice above the winds and the thunder.

Meanwhile the storm died away, the air grew more pure and the sky more serene. I should have gone to find Dorval under the oak trees, but I thought the ground would be too soft and the grass too

wet. Though the rain had not lasted long it had been heavy. I went to his house. He was waiting for me, for he too had not thought that I should go to yesterday's meeting place. So it was in his garden, on the sandy banks of a broad canal, that he finished explaining his ideas to me. After a few generalities about the activities of life, and the way they are imitated in the theatre, he said:

DORVAL. In every moral object we distinguish a middle and two extremities. It would seem then, since all dramatic action is a moral object, that there should be an intermediate genre and two extreme genres. The latter we have; but man is not always in a state of grief or joy. There is therefore an intermediate point within the gap which separates the comic genre from the tragic.

Terence wrote a play on the following subject. A young man gets married. Hardly has he done so than he is called away on some business. He spends some time away. On his return he believes he sees definite proof of his wife's infidelity. In his despair he wants to send her back to her parents. Imagine the state of the father, the mother and the daughter. But there is a Davus, in himself an amusing character. What does the poet do with him? He keeps him off the stage for the first four acts and only brings him in to enliven the conclusion.[24]

I would ask what genre this play belongs to. The comic genre? There is nothing to laugh about. The tragic genre? Fear, pity and the other great passions are not aroused. Yet there is a centre of interest; and there will be one, without there being anything funny to laugh at or anything dangerous to tremble at, in any dramatic composition where the subject is important, where the poet adopts the tone we use for serious matters and where the action advances in the midst of confusion and difficulties. Now it seems that since these activities are the most common ones in our lives, the genre which deals with them must be the most valuable and the most practised. I shall call this genre the *serious genre*.

Once this genre is established there will be no station in society,

no important activity in life which cannot be related to some part of the dramatic system.

Should you wish to give this system its fullest possible range and include within it truth and fantasy, the imaginary world and the real world, then add the burlesque below the comic genre and the fantastic above the tragic.

I. I understand: The burlesque . . . the comic genre . . . the serious genre . . . the tragic genre . . . the fantastic.

DORVAL. A play never fits exactly into one category. There is no work in the tragic or comic genres without parts which would not be out of place in the serious genre; and there will equally well be some aspects of this genre which bear the stamp of the comic or the tragic.

The advantage of the serious genre is that, set as it is between the other two, there are possibilities for it whether it moves upward or downward. It is not the same for the comic or tragic genres. All the gradations of the comic are contained between this genre and the serious genre; and all those of the tragic between the serious genre and tragedy. The burlesque and the fantastic both go beyond nature and nothing can be taken from them which would not spoil the effect. Painters and poets are free to risk anything, but this freedom does not extend to mingling different types in the same character. To a man of taste it is as absurd to see Castor raised to the rank of a god as to see the *bourgeois gentilhomme* turned into a mamamouchi.[25]

The comic and tragic genres represent the true limits of dramatic composition. But, if it is impossible for the comic genre to call on the burlesque without debasing itself, and for the tragic genre to encroach upon the fantastic without losing the ring of truth, it follows that, being placed at the extremes, these genres are the most effective and the most difficult.

The serious genre is the one which a man of letters should try first if he feels he has a talent for drama. A young pupil who is destined to be a painter is first taught to draw the nude. Once he has become familiar with this basic aspect of the art he can choose a subject. He can take it from the ordinary ranks of society or from a

more elevated one, he can clothe the figures as he wishes, but one must always be aware of the nude beneath the drapery. If someone has made a lengthy study of man through practising the serious genre, let him put on the buskin or the clog, according to his talent, let him throw a royal cloak or a lawyer's gown over his character's shoulders, but the man must never disappear beneath the costume.

If the serious genre is the easiest of all, it is, on the other hand, the least subject to the contingencies of time and place. Take the nude to whatever place on earth you like: it will arouse interest if it is well drawn. If you excel in the serious genre, you will give pleasure at all times and amongst all peoples. Any small differences which it borrows from a neighbouring genre will be too insignificant to disguise it; they will be small pieces of drapery which cover only a few areas and leave the main expanses naked.

You can see that tragi-comedy cannot be a good genre, because it brings together two genres which are far apart and separated by a natural barrier. It does not progress by imperceptible gradations; instead you come up against contrasts at every step, and the unity is lost.

You can see that this type of drama, in which the most amusing aspects of the comic genre are juxtaposed with the most moving aspects of the serious genre, and in which you jump constantly from one genre to another, is certain to be found wanting in the eyes of a severe critic.

But if you really want to be convinced about the dangers of crossing the barrier which nature has set between the genres, then carry things to extremes. Bring together two very distant genres such as tragedy and burlesque. You will see, one after the other, a staid senator at the feet of a courtesan, playing the part of the lowest kind of debauchee, and a group of conspirators planning the downfall of the republic.[26]

Farce, parade[27] and parody are not genres but types of comedy or burlesque with a particular intention.

The poetics of the comic and tragic genres have been written a

hundred times. The serious genre has its own poetics, which would also be very extensive, but I will simply tell you the things that came into my mind as I worked at my play.

Since this genre lacks the lively colour of the extreme genres on either side of it, nothing must be neglected which can give body to it.

The subject must be an important one and the plot must be simple, domestic and close to real life.

I do not want any valets: decent people do not admit them to a knowledge of their affairs, and if all the scenes are between their masters, that will only make them more interesting. If a valet speaks on the stage as he does in company he will appear slovenly: if he talks in any other way, he will seem false.

If features borrowed from the comic genre are too evident, the play will arouse laughter and tears, and both unity of interest and unity of tone will be lost.

The serious genre permits monologues, from which I conclude that it leans more towards tragedy than comedy, a genre in which they are infrequent and short.

It would be dangerous to borrow features from the comic and tragic genres in the same work. Be well aware of the direction your subject and your characters are taking and follow it.

The moral element should be one of general interest and strongly emphasized.

No episodic characters, or, if the plot demands one, he must have unusual qualities which make him stand out.

Much attention must be paid to mime. Abandon the *coups de théâtre* with their momentary effects, and create tableaux. The more you see of a fine tableau, the more pleasure it gives.

Movement almost always detracts from dignity; therefore your main character should rarely be the activator of the plot in your play.

And above all bear in mind that there is no general principle: I know of none, among those which I have just mentioned, which cannot be successfully offended against by a man of genius.

I. You have anticipated my objection.

DORVAL. The comic genre concerns types and the tragic genre concerns individuals. Let me explain. The hero of a tragedy is such and such a man: he is either Regulus, or Brutus, or Cato, and no other. The main character in a comedy, on the other hand, must represent a large number of men. If one were to give him so distinctive an appearance that there was only one person in society who resembled him, comedy would revert to its infancy and degenerate into satire.

Terence seems to me to have made this mistake once. His *Heautontimorumenos* is a father who is distressed at the terrible straits to which he has brought his son by his own undue severity, and punishes himself by putting on ragged clothing, eating poor food, avoiding human society, dismissing his servants and condemning himself to cultivating the soil with his own hands. This father cannot be called natural. A large city would hardly provide one example in a hundred years of such a strange affliction.

I. Horace, who had an uncommonly fastidious taste, seems to have noticed this defect and criticized it with a very light touch.

DORVAL. I do not remember this passage.

I. It is in the first or second satire of the first book, where he sets out to show that, in order to avoid one excess, a fool will often fall into the opposite. Fufidius, he says, is afraid of being taken for a spendthrift. Do you know what he does? He lends money at five per cent a month and takes payment in advance. The deeper a man is in debt, the more demanding he is: he knows by heart the names of all the sons of good families who are beginning to go out in society and who have strict fathers. But if you were to think that this man spends in proportion to his income you would be quite wrong. He is his own worst enemy, and the father in the comedy who punishes himself because his son has run away is not torturing himself any worse:

. . . non se pejus cruciaverit . . .[28]

DORVAL. Yes, nothing is more typical of this author than to have given two meanings to this word *worse*, one of which applies to Terence and the other to Fufidius.

In the serious genre, people's characters will often be as general as in comedy, but they will always be less individual than in tragedy.

People sometimes say: *Something very amusing happened at court*, or *There was a great tragedy in town*. It follows that both comedy and tragedy belong to all levels of society, but with the difference that grief and tears are more often to be found in the homes of the people than pleasure and gaiety in the palaces of kings. It is not so much the subject-matter which makes a play comic, serious or tragic, as the tone, the passions, the characters and the interest. The effects of love, jealousy, gambling, dissoluteness, ambition, hatred or envy can arouse laughter, reflection or fear. A jealous man who goes out of his way to make certain of his dishonour is an object of ridicule; a man of honour who has suspicions of someone he loves is plunged into grief; a man of violent passions who is certain of his dishonour may be led into crime. A gambler will take his mistress's portrait to a usurer; another gambler will endanger or destroy his fortune, plunge his wife and children into poverty and himself fall into despair. What more can I say? The play we have been talking about has almost been written in all three genres.

I. Really?

DORVAL. Yes.

I. That seems very strange.

DORVAL. Clairville is a good man, but he is impetuous and thoughtless. When all his wishes were fulfilled and he was sure of Rosalie's love he forgot about the troubles he had been through; he saw our story as nothing more than a commonplace incident. He made jokes about it and even went so far as to write a parody of the third act of the play. It was an excellent piece of work. He threw a thoroughly comic light on all my problems. I laughed about it, but secretly I was offended at the way Clairville had held up to ridicule what was one of the most important events in our lives, for after all there was one moment which could have cost him his fortune and the woman he loved, Rosalie her innocence and integrity, Constance her peace of mind, and myself my honour and perhaps my life. I took my revenge on Clairville by making a tragedy of the last three

acts of the play, and I can assure you that I made him weep longer than he made me laugh.

I. And might one see these pieces?

DORVAL. No. This is not a refusal. But Clairville burnt his act, and I only have the outline of mine.

I. And what about this outline?

DORVAL. You will have it, if you ask me for it. But think carefully. You are a man of sensibility. You are fond of me, and this outline may leave you with an impression which will be hard to forget.

I. Give me the outline of the tragedy, Dorval, give it to me.

Dorval took a few loose pages out of his pocket and gave them to me with his head turned away, as if he was frightened to look at them. This is what they contained:

Rosalie, having learnt in the third act of the marriage between Dorval and Constance, and convinced that Dorval is a treacherous friend, a man without honour, makes an extreme decision: to reveal all. She sees Dorval and treats him with the utmost contempt.

DORVAL. I am not a treacherous friend, not a man without honour. I am Dorval. I am an unhappy man.

ROSALIE. A wretched man rather . . . Did he not lead me to believe he loved me?

DORVAL. I did love you, and I love you still.

ROSALIE. He loved me! he loves me! And he is marrying Constance. He gave his word to her brother and this union is being consummated today! . . . Come now, you are depraved: be gone from here and make way for innocence to dwell in this place from which you have banished it. Peace and virtue will return here when you have gone. Go! Shame and remorse, which never fail to seek out the wicked, await you at that door.

DORVAL. I am crushed! I am dismissed! I am a villain! Virtue! this, then, is your final reward!

ROSALIE. No doubt he was confident that I would say nothing . . . No, no . . . everything will be known . . . Constance will take pity on my inexperience, my youth . . . she will find in her heart the means to excuse and forgive me . . . O Clairville! how much I must

love you, to expiate my unjust behaviour and repair the ills I have done you! . . . But the time is near for this evil man to be known.

DORVAL. Incautious young woman, stop, or you will be guilty of the only crime I shall ever have committed, if it is a crime to cast far away a burden one can no longer bear. One more word, and I shall think that virtue is nothing but an empty vision, life nothing but an unhappy gift of fate, happiness nowhere to be found, and peace, only in the grave; and my life will end.

Rosalie has gone: she no longer hears what he is saying. Dorval is despised by the only woman he loves or has ever loved; exposed to the hatred of Constance and the indignation of Clairville; about to lose the only two people who kept him in this world and to descend into the solitude of the universe . . . where will he go? . . . to whom will he go for help? . . . whom will he love? . . . who will love him? . . . Despair enters his soul: he is weary of life and desires death. That is the subject of a monologue which closes the third act. From the end of this act onwards he no longer speaks to his servants; he gives them orders with a wave of his hand, and they obey.

Rosalie carries out her plan at the beginning of the fourth act. Imagine the surprise of Constance and her brother! They dare not see Dorval, nor Dorval either of them. They all avoid each other. They all flee from each other's presence, and Dorval suddenly and quite naturally finds himself in that state of general abandonment which he feared. His destiny is fulfilling itself. Realizing it, he is now resolved to face the death which is drawing him on. Charles, his valet, is the only being in the world who remains to him. Charles discovers his master's fatal plan. He fills the whole house with his fears. He seeks out Clairville, Constance and Rosalie and tells them everything. They are dismayed, and immediately all their selfish concerns disappear. They try to approach Dorval, but it is too late. Dorval no longer loves or hates anyone, no longer speaks or sees or hears. His mind, as if it were stupefied, is incapable of feeling. He fights briefly against this state of darkness, but in short bursts, with neither strength nor effect. That is how he is at the beginning of the fifth act.

This act opens with Dorval alone, walking about on the stage, saying nothing. His intention to end his life is visible in his dress, his

movements and his silence. Clairville enters and pleads with him to live; he casts himself at his knees, embraces them and urges him with the most honest and tender arguments to accept Rosalie. It only serves to make him more cruel. This scene hastens Dorval's fate. Clairville extracts only a few monosyllables from him. During the remaining action Dorval is silent.

Constance arrives and joins her efforts to those of her brother. She says the most moving things she can think of about resignation to events, about the power of the supreme Being, a power which it is criminal to evade, about Clairville's offers, etc. . . . As Constance speaks, she is holding one of Dorval's arms in her own, and his friend is holding him round the waist, as though he were frightened he might escape him. But Dorval, wrapped up in himself, is unaware of his friend holding him and hears nothing of what Constance is saying to him. All he does is occasionally to throw himself on them to weep. But his tears refuse to flow. Then he withdraws, sighing profoundly, making a few slow, terrible gestures. Across his lips there flickers a brief smile, more terrifying even than his sighs and gestures.

Now Rosalie comes. Constance and Clairville withdraw. This scene is one of shyness, naivety, tears, grief and repentance. Rosalie sees all the harm she has done. She is overwhelmed by it. Weighed down by the love she feels, the concern she has for Dorval, the respect she owes to Constance and the feelings she cannot deny Clairville, what touching things she says! At first Dorval appears neither to see nor to hear her. Rosalie cries out, takes his hands and makes him stand still: and a moment comes when Dorval's distraught eyes rest on her. His gaze is like that of a man emerging from a drugged sleep. This effort is too much for him. He slumps into a chair as though he had been knocked down. Rosalie leaves him, sobbing aloud, moaning, tearing her hair.

Dorval remains for a moment in this death-like state. Charles stands before him, saying nothing . . . His eyes are half closed, his long hair hangs over the back of the chair; his mouth is half open, his breath comes quickly and his chest is heaving. This troubled state slowly passes and he emerges from it with a long, painful sigh, and a plaintive moan. He rests his head in his hands and his elbows on his knees. He gets up with difficulty and walks slowly up and down. He

comes across Charles, takes his arm, looks at him for a moment, takes out his purse and his watch and gives them to him together with a sealed, unaddressed paper and signs to him to leave. Charles throws himself at his feet, pressing his face to the ground. Dorval leaves him there and carries on walking about. As he does so his feet touch Charles lying on the floor, he turns away . . . Then Charles gets up suddenly, leaving the purse and the watch on the floor, and runs to get help.

Dorval follows him slowly . . . he leans aimlessly against the door . . . he notices a bolt . . . looks at it . . . closes it . . . draws his sword . . . leans the hilt on the floor . . . points the tip at his breast . . . leans his body sideways . . . lifts up his eyes . . . looks down again . . . stays still for a moment . . . utters a deep sigh and falls forward.

Charles arrives and finds the door bolted. He calls for help and people come and force the door open. They find Dorval bathed in his own blood, dead. Charles goes back, uttering cries of grief. The other servants stay round the body. Constance appears. Overcome by this spectacle, she cries out, rushing wildly about the stage without knowing what she is saying or doing, or where she is going. They take Dorval's body away. Meanwhile Constance, looking at the place where this bloody event occurred, sits motionless in a chair, her face covered with her hands.

Now Clairville and Rosalie come in. They find Constance in this state. They question her. She does not answer. She says nothing. They question her again. Her only answer is to uncover her face, turn her head away and point her hand towards the spot which is stained with Dorval's blood.

Now all that can be heard are cries, weeping, silence, and more cries.

Charles gives Constance the sealed packet: it contains the history of Dorval's life and his last wishes. But hardly has she read out the first few lines than Clairville storms out; Constance follows him. Justine and the servants carry away Rosalie, who feels unwell, and the play ends.

'Ah!' I cried, 'either I know nothing about it or that is tragedy. In truth, it is not virtue put to the test, but virtue brought to despair. Perhaps it would be dangerous to show a good man reduced to

these terrible straits, but one can none the less feel the power of the mime alone, and the mime combined with speech. They are the beauties which we are losing because we lack the stage, and the courage, because we slavishly imitate our predecessors, and, abandoning nature and truth . . . But Dorval does not speak . . . But then can there be any words more striking than his action and his silence? . . . It may be that one could give him a few words to say at intervals, but one must not forget that those who talk a lot rarely kill themselves.'

I got up and went to find Dorval. He was wandering among the trees and seemed to be absorbed in his own thoughts. I thought it would be all right to keep his notes and he did not ask for them back.

'If you are convinced', he said, 'that this is tragedy, and that there is between tragedy and comedy an intermediate genre, then there are two branches of this genre which are still uncultivated and which are only waiting for the right men. Write comedies in the serious genre, write domestic tragedies, and have no doubt that applause and immortality await you. Be sure to avoid *coups de théâtre*; concentrate on tableaux: get close to real life and first of all have an area big enough to allow complete freedom for mime . . . They say that there are no great tragic passions left to move us, and that it is impossible to portray elevated feelings in a new and striking way. That may be so of the kind of tragedy which has been written by the Greeks, the Romans, the French, the Italians, the English and every people on earth. But domestic tragedy will have a different kind of action, a different tone, and a sublimity all its own. I can feel that sublimity; it is in the words of a father who said to the son who supported him in his old age: "My son, our debts are settled. I gave life to you, and you have restored it to me." And in these of another father who said to his son: "Always speak the truth. Never make a promise which you do not intend to keep. I entreat you by these feet which I warmed in my hands, when you were in your cradle."'

I. But will this kind of tragedy engage our interest?

DORVAL. I ask the same question of you. It is closer to ourselves. It represents the misfortunes which are all around us. What! can you not imagine the effect upon you of a real background, authentic dress, speeches adapted to actions, simple actions, dangers which you cannot fail to have feared for your relations, your friends, yourself? A sudden change in fortune, the fear of public disgrace, the consequences of poverty, a passion which leads a man to ruin, from ruin to despair, from despair to violent death, these are not infrequent events; and do you think they would not move you as much as the fictitious death of a tyrant, or the sacrifice of a child on the altars of the gods of Athens or Rome? . . . But your mind is wandering . . . you are dreaming . . . you are not listening to me.

I. I cannot stop thinking about your sketch for a tragedy . . . I see you walking about on the stage . . . turning your feet away from your prostrate valet . . . closing the bolt on the door . . . drawing your sword . . . The thought of this mime makes me shudder. I do not believe one could bear such a spectacle. Perhaps all this kind of action should be narrated.

DORVAL. I do not think an unlikely event should be either narrated or shown to the audience, and in the case of events which are likely to have happened, it is easy to decide which should be portrayed and which should be banished from the stage. I will have to use tragedies which are already familiar to illustrate my ideas; I cannot take examples from a genre which does not yet exist amongst us.

When an action is simple, I think it is better to portray it than to narrate it. The spectacle of Mahomet with his dagger raised over the breast of Irene,[29] hovering between his ambition which urges him to plunge it in and the passion which stays his arm, is a striking tableau. My soul will be troubled by the compassion which always puts us in the place of the victim, and never of the villain. It will not be over Irene's breast but my own that I shall see the dagger poised in uncertainty . . . This action is too simple to be badly

represented . . . But if the action grows more complex, if the incidents grow more numerous, there may easily be some which will remind me that I am in an auditorium, that all these characters are actors, and that this is not a real event which is taking place. The narrative, on the other hand, will transport me beyond the stage; I shall follow its every detail. My imagination will bring them to life just I have seen them in nature. There will be nothing that does not ring true. The poet says, for example:

> *Entre les deux partis, Calchas s'est avancé,*
> *L'oeil farouche, l'air sombre, et le poil hérissé,*
> *Terrible, et plein du dieu qui l'agitait sans doute . . .*[30]
>
> [Between the two sides Calchas came forward, fearsome of eye, sombre of mien, the hair bristling on his skin, terrible, and full of the god who undoubtedly moved him . . .]

or

> *. . . les ronces dégouttantes*
> *Portent de ses cheveux les dépouilles sanglantes.*[31]
>
> [. . . the dripping briars bear the bloody remains of his hair.]

Where is the actor who can portray Calchas as he is in these lines? Grandval[32] will step forward, noble and proud, between the two sides; he will have the sombre mien, and perhaps the fearsome look in his eye. I shall discern in his acting, his gestures, the presence within him of a demon tormenting him. But, however awesome he is, the hair on his head will not stand on end. Dramatic imitation does not go that far.

The same can be said of most of the other images which enliven this account; the air darkened by the flight of arrows, an army in a state of tumult, a young princess with a dagger plunged into her breast, the winds unleashed, the thunder resounding

in the upper air, the sky lit with flashes of lightning, the foaming and roaring of the sea. The poet has painted all these things; we can see them in our imagination; they cannot be imitated by art.

But there is something else: an overriding desire for order, of which I have already spoken, constrains us to put things in proportion. If we are presented with some circumstance which goes beyond ordinary nature, it magnifies everything else in our minds. The poet said nothing of Calchas's stature. But I can see him, and I make his stature fit his actions. This mental exaggeration moves out from here to embrace everything near him. The real spectacle would have been a small, feeble, mean thing, either a travesty or a failure; it becomes great, powerful and true, colossal even, in the telling. In the theatre it would have fallen well below nature; I imagine it as being somewhat above. In this way, in epic poetry, the figures of poetry grow a little greater than the figures of reality.

They are the principles; now apply them yourself to the action of my outline of a tragedy. Is the action not simple?

I. It is.

DORVAL. Is there any circumstance which could not be imitated on the stage?

I. None.

DORVAL. Will its effects be awesome?

I. Only too much so, perhaps. Who can tell whether we should go to the theatre to seek such powerful impressions? We want to be moved, touched, frightened; but only up to a point.

DORVAL. If we are to make a sensible judgement, we must be clear what we mean. What is the purpose of a dramatic composition?

I. It is, I believe, to inspire in men a love of virtue and a horror of vice . . .

DORVAL. So to say that they must only be moved up to a certain point amounts to claiming that they must not come away from a play too much taken with virtue or too much averse to vice. There

would be no poetic theory possible for so craven a people. What kind of taste would there be and what kind of art would come about if one were to resist its energy and set arbitrary limits upon its effects?

I. I have a few more questions to ask you about the nature of domestic bourgeois tragedy, as you call it; but I can already guess what you are going to reply. If I were to ask you why, in the example you have given of it, there are no alternate silent and spoken scenes, you would no doubt reply that not every subject admits of this kind of beauty.

DORVAL. That is true.

I. But what will the subject-matter be of this serious comedy, which you regard as a new category in drama? In human nature there are, at the most, only a dozen or so truly comic, boldly delineated characters.

DORVAL. I think so.

I. The minor differences which can be discerned in men's characters cannot be handled as successfully as the distinctive characters.

DORVAL. I think so. But do you know what follows from that? . . . That, properly speaking, it is not characters which should be placed on the stage, but conditions. Until now, character has been the main object and condition has been an accessory; now condition must be the main purpose and character an accessory. The whole plot used to arise out of character. The usual practice was to concentrate on the circumstances which emphasized it and to link these circumstances together. A man's condition, with its duties, its advantages, its difficulties, must provide the basis of a dramatic work. I believe this source is more productive, more extensive and more valuable than that of character. If there was the least bit of exaggeration in a character, a spectator could say to himself: that is not me. But he cannot avoid noticing that the station in life being portrayed before him is his own; he cannot be unaware of his own duties. He must necessarily apply what he hears to himself.

I. I believe several of these subjects have already been treated.

DORVAL. That is not the case. Make no mistake about it.

I. Do we not have financiers in our plays?

DORVAL. Certainly there are some. But we have yet to see the true financier.

I. One would be hard put to find a play without the father of a family in it.

DORVAL. Agreed, but we have yet to see the true father. In short, I am asking whether the duties of the various conditions, their advantages and their disadvantages, their dangers, have been put on the stage. Whether they form the basis of the plot and the moral import of our plays. And whether these duties, advantages, disadvantages and dangers do not daily reveal to us the spectacle of men in very difficult situations.

I. So you would want to see the characters of the man of letters, the philosopher, the trader, the judge, the lawyer, the politician, the citizen, the magistrate, the financier, the great noble, the intendant.

DORVAL. Add to that all the family relationships: father, husband, sister, brothers. The head of a family! What a subject, in an age such as ours where it seems no one has the least idea what it means to be a father!

Remember that new functions in life are created every day. Remember that there is perhaps nothing which we know less about, and nothing which should concern us more than these functions. We each of us have our station in society, but we have dealings with men of all stations.

The conditions! What a source they are of interesting facts, public and private activities, unfamiliar truths and novel situations! And are there not the same contrasts between people's conditions as there are between characters? and might the poet not make these comparisons?

But these subjects belong only to the serious genre. It is up to the genius of the man who takes them up to make them either comic or tragic.

The laughable and the vicious qualities of people undergo such changes that I think one could write a new *Misanthrope* every fifty years. And is it not the same for many other characters?

I. I rather like these ideas. I declare I am quite prepared to hear the first comedy in the serious genre, or the first bourgeois tragedy which is put on. I am happy for the scope of our pleasures to be broadened. I applaud the possibilities you are offering, but let us keep what we have. I confess I have a great affection for the fantastic genre. I hate to see it taken together with the burlesque genre and dismissed from the worlds of nature and drama. Quinault set beside Scarron and Dassouci: oh Dorval, Quinault of all people![33]

DORVAL. No one reads Quinault with more pleasure than I do. He is a writer full of elegance, with a moving, flowing and often elevated style. I hope one day to show you the extent of my knowledge and esteem for the talents of this unique man, and what good use might have been made of his tragedies, just as they stand. But what I disapprove of is the genre in which he writes. You are, as I see it, abandoning the world of the burlesque. And do you know the world of fantasy any better? What can you compare with the things it portrays, if no model exists in nature for them?

There is no aesthetic for the burlesque and the fantastic, and there cannot be one. If, on the operatic stage, one tries out some novel idea, it is just an absurdity which can only be sustained by a more or a less distant comparison with another absurdity of the past. The reputation and the talents of the author have some influence too. Molière lights candles all round the *bourgeois gentilhomme*'s head; it is a ridiculous extravagance, as everybody agrees, but they laugh. Another imagines men getting smaller the more stupid things they do; there is a sensible allegory in this invention, but he gets hissed. Angélique makes herself invisible to her lover by means of a ring which leaves her visible to everyone in the audience;[34] and this absurd device shocks no one. Put a dagger in the hand of a villain so that he strikes at his enemies and only injures himself: this is a common enough result of wickedness, but nothing is less certain than whether this miraculous dagger will be a success.

All I can see in these dramatic inventions are stories like those we tell to children to send them to sleep. Can people believe that, by

being embroidered upon, they will become convincing enough to interest sensible men? The heroine of Bluebeard is at the top of a tower; at its foot she hears the terrible voice of her captor; she will perish if her deliverer does not appear. Her sister is by her side; she is looking into the distance for this deliverer to come. Can anyone think that this situation is not just as beautiful as any in the operatic theatre, and that the question, *My sister, do you not see anyone coming?* is without the power to move? Why then does it not touch the emotions of a man of good sense, as it brings tears to the eyes of little children? It is because there is a Bluebeard ruining the effect.

I. And you think that there is no work in either the burlesque or the fantastic style which is without a few hairs from this beard?

DORVAL. I believe so. But I do not care for that expression of yours; it is burlesque, and the burlesque offends me wherever I find it.

I. I shall try to make up for this error by making a more weighty comment. Are not the gods of the operatic theatre the same as those of the epic? And why, pray, should Venus not be as becoming when she is lamenting the death of Adonis on the stage as when she is screaming because of the little scratch she has received from Diomedes' sword in the *Iliad*, or sighing when she sees the place on her lovely white hand where the bruised skin is beginning to darken? Is that not a charming scene in Homer's poem, where this goddess weeps on the bosom of her mother Dione?[35] Why should this tableau be any less pleasing in an operatic composition?

DORVAL. A cleverer man than I will tell you that the ornaments of the epic, which were suitable for the Greeks, the Romans, and the Italians of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, are unacceptable to the French; and that the gods of fable, the oracles, the invincible heroes and the fabulous adventures are a thing of the past.

And I would add that there is a big difference between portraying a thing for the benefit of my imagination and acting it out before

my eyes. You can make my imagination accept anything you like; all you have to do is to take hold of it. The same is not true of my senses. Remember the principles I set out just now on the things, including those which are true to life, which one can reasonably show to the audience and those which must be hidden from them. The same distinctions I was making apply even more rigorously to the fantastic genre. In short, if this system cannot possess the kind of truth appropriate to the epic, how could it engage our interest on the stage?

If elevated conditions are to be made moving, they must be put into powerful situations. Only by this means is it possible to draw from these cold, constrained characters the accent of nature, without which no great effects are possible. This accent becomes weaker the more elevated they are. Listen to Agamemnon:

> *Encor si je pouvais, libre dans mon malheur,*
> *Par des larmes, au moins, soulager ma douleur;*
> *Tristes destins des rois! esclaves que nous sommes,*
> *Et des rigueurs du sort, et des discours des hommes!*
> *Nous nous voyons sans cesse assiégés de témoins;*
> *Et les plus malheureux osent pleurer le moins.*[36]

> [If only I could at least have the freedom in my misfortune to relieve my suffering with tears; sad destiny of kings! for we are slaves of the rigours of fate and the utterances of men! We see ourselves always surrounded by witnesses, and the most unfortunate are the ones who can least dare to weep.]

Should the gods be less mindful of their dignity than kings? If Agamemnon, whose daughter is to be sacrificed, fears for the dignity of his rank, what kind of circumstance will cause Jupiter to descend from his?

I. But ancient tragedy is full of gods; and it is Hercules who resolves the famous tragedy of *Philoctetes*, where, according to you, there is not a word to be altered.

DORVAL. Those who first put their minds to a consistent study of human nature first of all concentrated on distinguishing between the passions, on understanding and defining them. One man worked out the abstract concepts: he was a philosopher. Another gave the concept flesh and motion: he was a poet. A third fashioned this likeness in marble: he was a sculptor. A fourth made the sculptor prostrate himself at the foot of his creation: he was a priest. The pagan gods were made in the image of man. What are the gods of Homer, Aeschylus, Euripides and Sophocles? The vices of men, their virtues, the personifications of the great phenomena of nature, these are the true theogony, this is the perspective in which we should see Saturn, Jupiter, Mars, Apollo, Venus, the Fates, Love and the Furies.

When a pagan was torn with remorse he really thought that a fury was working within him: and how he must have been troubled at the sight of this phantom crossing the stage bearing a torch in its hand, its head alive with serpents, offering to its guilty victim's sight its hands stained with blood! But what of us who know the vanity of all these superstitions! What of us!

I. Well, all we have to do is substitute our devils for the Eumenides.

DORVAL. There is too little faith on our earth . . . And then, our devils have such a gothic look . . . in such bad taste . . . Is it surprising that it should be Hercules who resolves Sophocles' *Philoctetes*? The whole plot of the play is based on his arrows; and this same Hercules had a statue in the temples before which the people prostrated themselves every day.

But do you know what the result was of the union of national superstition and poetry? It was that the poet could not provide his heroes with clear-cut characters. It would have meant duplicating his characters, representing the same passion in the form of a god and in the form of a man.

That is the reason why Homer's heroes are nearly all historical figures.

But when the Christian religion had banished the pagan gods from people's minds and forced the artist to seek other sources of

illusion, the poetic system changed; men took the place of the gods and were given more unified characters.

I. But is not strict unity of character something of an illusion?

DORVAL. Very probably.

I. So truth was abandoned?

DORVAL. Not in the least. Remember that in a play there is only one action, one event in life, a very short interval during which it is likely that a man will preserve the same character.

I. And in the epic, which encompasses a large area of life, a prodigious number of different events, situations of all kinds, how must men be presented there?

DORVAL. I think there is a lot to be said for representing men as they are. What they ought to be smacks too much of system and is too vague to serve as a basis for an imitative art. There is nothing so rare as a completely wicked man, unless it be a completely good man. When Thetis steeped her son in the Styx, he emerged like Thersites, as far as his heel was concerned. Thetis is the image of nature . . .[37]

At this point Dorval stopped; then he resumed.

DORVAL. There are no lasting forms of beauty save those which are founded on relationships with the phenomena of nature. If one imagined phenomena in a rapid process of change, with every painting representing just a fleeting moment, all imitation would be superfluous. Beauty has in the arts the same basis as truth in philosophy. And what is truth? The conformity of our judgements with phenomena. What is beauty in the imitative arts? The conformity of the image with the thing itself.

I am very much afraid that neither the poets, nor the composers, nor the set designers, nor the dancers have yet understood what the theatre really is. When the lyric genre is bad, it is the worst of all genres. When it is good, it is the best. But can it be good if it does not aim at the imitation of nature, and nature in its most powerful forms? What good is there in putting into poetry something that was not worth the trouble of inventing? or of putting into song

what was not worth reciting? The more you put into a subject, the more important it is that it should be a good one to start with. Does it not amount to prostituting philosophy, poetry, music, painting, dancing, if you occupy them with absurdities? Each of these arts on its own has the imitation of nature as its purpose; so why should their combined magic be expended on a fiction? And is not the illusion of reality already far enough removed? And what is there in common between metamorphoses and magic spells and the universal order of things which must always be the basis of poetic reason? In our own time men of genius have restored the philosophy of the intelligible world to the real world. Will there not now be one who renders the same service to lyric poetry and brings it down from the world of marvels to the earth on which we live?

Then it will no longer be said of a lyric poem that it gives offence, either in its subject, which goes beyond nature, or in its main characters, who are imaginary, or in its plot, which often observes neither the unity of time, nor the unity of place, nor the unity of action, and where all the imitative arts seem only to have been combined in order that each might weaken the effect of the others.

A wise man used once to be a philosopher, a poet and a composer. By becoming separate, these talents have degenerated: the field of philosophy has narrowed, poetry has run out of new ideas, song has lost its power and energy; and wisdom, deprived of these means of expression, has no longer exerted the same influence on the people. A great composer and a great poet would put everything right.

There then is an ambition to be achieved. Let him come forward, this genius who is destined to set true tragedy, true comedy on the operatic stage. Let him cry out, like the prophet of the Hebrew people in his moment of rapture: *Adducite mihi psaltem*, 'Bring me a minstrel', and he will bring him into being.[38]

The operatic genre of a neighbouring nation no doubt has its faults, but far fewer than one imagines. If the singer disciplined himself to imitate, in his cadences, only the inarticulate accents of

passion in emotional songs, only the main phenomena of nature in descriptive songs, and if poets were to realize that their ariettas should act as a conclusion to a scene, the reform would be well advanced.

I. And what would become of our ballets?

DORVAL. The dance? The dance still awaits a genius; it is everywhere bad, because people have barely realized that it is an imitative art. The dance is to mime as poetry is to prose, or rather as natural declamation is to song. It is rhythmical mime.

I should be glad if someone would tell me what meaning all these dances have, such as the minuet, the passe-pied, the rigadoon, the allemande, the saraband, which follow a set pattern. This man is performing movements of immense gracefulness; in every one of them I see ease, gentleness and nobility; but what is he imitating? This is not singing, it is just running through the scales.

A dance is a poem. This poem should therefore have a performance of its own. It is an imitation by means of movements, which demands the collaboration of the poet, the painter, the composer and the mime. It has its own subject-matter; this can be set out in acts and scenes. The scene has its recitative, either obbligato or improvised, and its arietta.

I. I confess I only half understand you and that I would not understand you at all if it were not for a pamphlet which appeared a few years ago. The author, unhappy with the ballet which concluded the *Devin du Village*,[39] proposed another, and I am very much mistaken or his ideas are very similar to your own.

DORVAL. That may be.

I. An example would clear the matter up.

DORVAL. An example? Yes, one could be imagined. I will think about it.

We did several turns around the paths in silence with Dorval thinking about his example of the dance and me going over some of his ideas in my mind. This is more or less the example

he gave me. 'It is a very ordinary one,' he said, 'but I can illustrate my ideas with it as easily as if it were closer to nature and more affecting':

Subject. – A peasant boy and girl are coming home from the fields in the evening. They meet in a little wood near their village and decide to rehearse a dance which they have to perform together the following Sunday, beneath the great elm tree.

ACT ONE

Scene I – Their first reaction is one of pleasant surprise. They show their surprise to each other by means of a *mime*.

They draw near and greet each other; the peasant boy suggests to the girl that they rehearse their steps: she replies that it is late and she is afraid of being scolded. He persuades her and she accepts; they lay the tools they are carrying on the ground: there is a recitative. The steps which they walk and the mime, which is without rhythm, are the recitative of the dance. They repeat their dance and memorize the movements and steps; they correct themselves and start again, they do it better and feel pleased with themselves; they go wrong and get annoyed: this is a recitative which might be interrupted by an arietta of pique. Here the orchestra must speak: it is for them to render the words and imitate the actions. The poet has laid down what the orchestra must say; the composer has written it; the painter has created the scenery: it is for the mime to form the steps and movements. From which you can easily understand that if the dance is not written like a poem, if the poet has botched the words, if he has failed to invent pleasing tableaux, if the dancer cannot act, if the orchestra cannot speak, all is lost.

Scene II – While they are busy practising, dreadful sounds are heard; our children are frightened; they stop and listen; the noise stops and they calm down; when they continue they are immediately interrupted and frightened by the same sounds: it is a *recitative* interspersed with a little *song*. It is followed by a mime of the peasant girl trying to run away while the peasant boy holds her

back. He explains, but she will not listen; this makes a lively *duet* between them.

This *duet* has been preceded by a short piece of recitative made up of the little movements of the faces, bodies and hands of these children as they point out to each other where the noise came from.

The peasant girl has been persuaded and they were getting on very well with their dance rehearsal when two older peasants, wearing terrifying and comic disguises, come slowly forward.

Scene III – These disguised peasants, accompanied by a subdued orchestral passage, perform every kind of action which might horrify the children. Their approach is a *recitative*; their words are a *duet*.

The children are terrified and trembling in every limb. Their terror increases as the spectres draw nearer and they do everything they can to get away. They are held back, then pursued, and the disguised peasants with the frightened children form a lively *quartet* which concludes with the children's escape.

Scene IV – Then the spectres take off their masks; they begin to laugh and mime the whole performance of rascals delighted with the trick they have played. They express their satisfaction in a *duet*, and leave the stage.

ACT TWO

Scene I – The peasant boy and girl had left their bags and crooks on the stage; they come back to get them, the boy first. First of all his nose appears; he takes a step forward, draws back, listens, looks around, comes forward a little further, goes back again, gradually gets bolder and walks in all directions; he is no longer afraid: this monologue is an *obbligato recitative*.

Scene II – The peasant girl appears, but stays in the background. Although the peasant boy encourages her she will not come any nearer. He throws himself at her feet and tries to kiss her hand. – 'What about the ghosts?' she says. – 'They have gone away, they

have gone away.' This is another *recitative*, but it is followed by a *duet* in which the peasant boy tells her of his desire in the most passionate way and the girl gradually lets herself be drawn back on to the stage to start again. This *duet* is interrupted by expressions of fear. There is no noise, but they think they hear it. They stop, listen, calm down and carry on with the *duet*.

But this time it is not a mistake; the frightening noises have started up again; the peasant girl has run to get her bag and crook and the boy has done the same.

They try to run away.

Scene III – But they are surrounded by a crowd of phantoms who cut off their flight in every direction. They move about amongst these phantoms, looking for a way out but not finding one. And you can imagine that this scene is a *chorus*.

Just when their consternation is at its height the phantoms take off their masks and reveal friendly faces to the peasant boy and girl. Their naive amazement makes a very pleasing tableau. Each of them picks up a mask; they examine them and compare them to their faces. The peasant girl has a hideous man's mask, the boy a hideous woman's mask. They put these masks on and look at each other, making faces: and this recitative is followed by an ensemble *chorus*. During this *chorus* the peasant boy and girl play all kinds of childish tricks on each other, and the play ends with the *chorus*.

I. I have heard a spectacle like that described as the most perfect thing imaginable.

DORVAL. You mean Nicolini's troupe?[40]

I. Exactly.

DORVAL. I have never seen it. Well then, do you still think the last century has left this one with nothing to do?

To create domestic and bourgeois tragedy.

To perfect the serious genre.

To substitute the conditions of men for their characters, perhaps in all genres.

To associate mime closely with dramatic action.

To alter the stage; and to substitute tableaux for *coups de théâtre*, a new source of invention for the poet and of study for the actor. For what use is it if the poet imagines tableaux and the actor remains faithful to his symmetrical positioning and his stilted acting style?

To introduce real tragedy into the operatic theatre.

Finally to subject the dance to the discipline of real poetic form, to be written down, and distinguished from any other imitative art.

I. What kind of tragedy would you want to establish on the operatic stage?

DORVAL. Ancient tragedy.

I. Why not domestic tragedy?

DORVAL. Because tragedy, and in general any work intended for the operatic theatre, must be metrical, and I do not think domestic tragedy can be versified.

I. But do you think this genre would provide the composer with all the resources which his art requires? Every art has its advantages; it would seem that the same applies to them as to the senses. All the senses are a form of touch, and all the arts are a form of imitation. But the touch of each sense, and the imitation of each art, is proper to itself.

DORVAL. There are, in music, two styles: one is simple, the other figurative. What will you say if I show you, still within the field of dramatic poetry, pieces in which the composer can choose to display all the energy of one or all the wealth of the other? When I say the *composer*, I mean someone who possesses all the genius of his art, which is not the same as someone who can only do a series of modulations and combine various notes.

I. Dorval, one such piece, please.

DORVAL. With pleasure. It is said that Lulli himself noticed the one I am going to quote, which might go to prove that this artist lacked only a different kind of poem, and felt that his genius was capable of the greatest things.

Clytemnestra, whose daughter has just been taken from her to be

sacrificed, sees the sacrificial knife raised over her breast, sees the blood flow from her and a priest consulting the gods in her palpitating heart. Distressed at these sights, she cries out:

> *. . . O mère infortunée!*
> *De festons odieux ma fille couronnée,*
> *Tend la gorge aux couteaux par son père apprêtés.*
> *Calchas va dans son sang . . . Barbares! arrêtez;*
> *C'est le pur sang du dieu qui lance le tonnerre . . .*
> *J'entends gronder la foudre et sens trembler la terre.*
> *Un dieu vengeur, un dieu fait retentir ces coups.*[41]
>
> [O unhappy mother! my daughter, her head festooned with hateful garlands, offers her breast to the knives prepared by her father. Calchas, in her blood . . . Barbarians, stay your hands. This is the pure blood of the god who casts the thunderbolt . . . I hear the roaring of the thunder and feel the trembling of the earth. A vengeful god is making these sounds ring out.]

Neither in Quinault, nor in any other poet, do I know of more lyrical verses nor a situation more suited to musical imitation. Clytemnestra's plight must draw from her heart the very cry of nature, and the composer will bring it to my ears in all its nuances.

If he composes this piece in the simple style, he will steep himself in the grief and despair of Clytemnestra and he will only begin his work when he feels himself borne down by the terrible sights which obsessed her. What a fine subject those first lines are for an obbligato recitative! How well the different phrases could be separated by a plaintive ritornello . . . *O God!* . . . *O unhappy mother!* . . . first break for a ritornello . . . *my daughter, her head festooned with hateful garlands* . . . second break . . . *Offers her breast to the knives prepared by her father* . . . third break . . . *By her father* . . . fourth break . . . *Calchas, in her blood* . . . fifth break . . . In how many

different ways this symphony can be treated! I feel I can hear it . . . it portrays the lament . . . the grief . . . the fear . . . the horror . . . the fury . . .

The aria begins with *Barbarians, stay your hands.* The composer can declaim the *Barbarians, stay your hands* in as many ways as he likes; he will be surprisingly unimaginative if he does not find these words an inexhaustible source of melodies . . .

A lively rendering: *Barbarians; barbarians, stay, stay your hands . . . this is the pure blood of the god who casts the thunderbolt . . . this is the blood . . . this is the pure blood of the god who casts the thunderbolt . . . stay your hands! I hear the roar of the thunder . . . I feel the trembling of the earth . . . stay your hands . . . A god, a vengeful god is making these sounds ring out . . . stay, barbarians . . . But nothing holds them back . . . Ah! my daughter! . . . ah, unhappy mother! . . . I see her . . . I see her blood flow . . . she is dying . . . ah, barbarians! O God! . . .* What a wealth of feelings and images!

Let these verses be left to the talents of Mademoiselle Dumesnil;[42] unless I am much mistaken, that is the kind of disorder she will spread amongst them, those are the feelings which will unfold in her heart, that is what her genius will inspire in her, and it is her delivery that the musician must have in mind and set down. Let this be tried, and we shall see nature inspiring the same ideas in the actress and the composer.

But what if the composer adopts the figurative style? a different delivery, different ideas, different tunes. He will give the voice to do what the other reserved for the instrument; he will make the thunder roll, he will send it down and make it break; he will show me Clytemnestra frightening the murderers of her daughter with the image of the god whose blood they are about to shed; he will present this image to my imagination, already shaken by the emotional force of the poetry and the situation, with as much truth and power as he is capable of. The first was entirely concerned with Clytemnestra's singing; this time it will be a matter of what she is saying. I no longer hear the mother of Iphigeneia, but the roaring of the thunder, the

trembling of the earth, the terrifying noises resounding in the air.

A third composer will try to unite the best of both styles. He will seize the cry of nature in its violent and inarticulate expression and make it the basis of his melody. Over this melody, played by the strings, he will make the thunder roll and cast down the thunderbolt. He may try to render the vengeful god, but he will certainly make the cries of a tearful mother stand out amongst the different aspects of this description.

But however powerful the genius of this artist, he will never achieve one of these objects without sacrificing something of the other. Everything he gives to the descriptive passages will be lost to the emotional impact. The whole will have more effect on the ear, and less on the heart. This composer will be more admired by artists, and less by men of discernment.

And do not imagine that it is those words which attach themselves to the lyrical style, *cast . . . roll . . . tremble . . .*, which make this piece so moving! It is the passion which informs it. And if the composer were to neglect the cry of passion and spend his time putting sounds together round these words, the poet would have set a cruel trap for him. Does faithful delivery depend on such ideas as *cast, roll, tremble,* or these, *barbarians . . . stay your hands . . . it is the blood . . . it is the pure blood of a god . . . of a vengeful god . . .*?

But here is another piece in which this composer will show just as much genius, if he has any, where there is no *cast,* no *victory,* no *thunder,* no *flight,* no *glory,* or any of these words which will give trouble to the poet as long as they remain the sole, feeble resource of the composer.

OBBLIGATO RECITATIVE

Un prêtre environné d'une foule cruelle . . .
Portera sur ma fille . . . (sur ma fille!) *une main criminelle . . .*

Déchirera son sein . . . et d'un oeil curieux . . .
Dans son coeur palpitant . . . consultera les dieux! . . .
Et moi qui l'amenai triomphante . . . adorée . . .
Je m'en retournerai . . . seule . . . et désespérée!
Je verrai les chemins encor tout parfumés
Des fleurs dont sous ses pas on les avait semés.

ARIA

Non, je ne l'aurai point amenée au supplice . . .
Ou vous ferez aux Grecs un double sacrifice.
Ni crainte, ni respect ne m'en peut détacher.
De mes bras tout sanglants il faudra l'arracher.
Aussi barbare époux qu'impitoyable père,
Venez, si vous l'osez, la ravir à sa mère.[43]

[A priest in the midst of a cruel mob will lay upon my daughter . . . (*upon my daughter!*) his criminal hand . . . will tear open her breast . . . and with his inquisitive gaze will . . . in her throbbing heart . . . consult the gods. And I who led her triumphant . . . adored . . . will walk back . . . alone . . . and in despair! I shall see the paths still scented with the flowers which had been strewn beneath her feet.]

[No, I shall not have led her to her death . . . Or else you will make a double sacrifice to the Greeks. Neither fear nor respect can separate me from her. She will have to be dragged from my bleeding arms. Come then, you who are as barbarous a husband as you are a pitiless father, come, if you dare, and take her from her mother.]

No, I shall not have led her to her death . . . No . . . neither fear, nor respect can separate me from her . . . No . . . barbarous husband . . . pitiless father . . . come and take her from her mother . . . come, if you

dare . . . Those are the main ideas in the mind of Clytemnestra, and which will be in the mind of the composer.

There are my ideas. I am all the more happy to tell them to you because, even if they are never of any real use, they cannot possibly be harmful, if it is true, as one of the first men of our nation claims, that nearly all the great literary genres are exhausted and that there are no great things left to be done, even for a genius.[44]

It is for others to decide whether this type of poetic scheme which you have drawn from me contains any worthwhile ideas or whether it is just a collection of wild fancies. I should be inclined to believe what Monsieur de Voltaire says, but only if he were to support his views with a few illuminating arguments. If ever I were to recognize an authority as infallible, it would be his.

I. If you like, we can tell him your ideas.

DORVAL. I agree to that. I may find pleasure in the praise of a clever, sincere man, and I cannot find his criticism hurtful, however bitter it is. I set out, long ago, to find happiness in something more solid, and more in my control, than literary fame. Dorval will die content if, when he is no more, he can deserve the words: *His father, who was a good man, was not a better man than he.*

I. But if you were almost completely indifferent to the success or failure of a work, what objection could you have to your own being published?

DORVAL. None. There are so many copies of it anyway. Constance never refused them to anyone. All the same, I should not like my work to be offered to the actors.

I. Why not?

DORVAL. It is uncertain whether it would be accepted, and even more uncertain whether it would be a success. A failed play is rarely read. And since I want to increase the usefulness of this one, I might risk destroying it altogether.

I. But look here . . . There is a great prince who is fully aware of the importance of drama and who is concerned with the development

of national taste. He could be approached . . . and might offer . . .

DORVAL. I think so; but let us reserve his protection for *The Father*.[45] He is not likely to refuse it, having shown so courageously what a good father he is himself . . .[46] This subject is tormenting me; I know I shall need to deliver myself sooner or later of this fancy, for a fancy it is, such as all men have when they lead solitary lives . . . What a fine subject the father is! . . . It is the universal vocation of all men . . . Our children are the source of our greatest pleasures and our greatest grief . . . With this subject my eyes will be firmly fixed on my own father . . . My father! . . . I shall complete the portrayal of good Lysimond . . . I shall learn in the process . . . If I have children, I shall not be unhappy to have made commitments towards them . . .

I. And what genre will *The Father* be in?

DORVAL. I have been thinking about it, and my feeling is that this subject is of a different kind from *The Natural Son*. *The Natural Son* has tragic tendencies; *The Father* will lean towards the comic.

I. Have you made enough progress with it to know that?

DORVAL. Yes . . . go back to Paris . . . Publish the seventh volume of the *Encyclopedia* . . .[47] Then come here and take a rest . . . and be sure that *The Father* will either not be done or that it will be finished before the end of your holiday . . . But I am told that you are leaving soon.

I. The day after tomorrow.

DORVAL. What, the day after tomorrow?

I. Yes.

DORVAL. That is a little sudden . . . but do as you wish . . . you must absolutely meet Constance, Clairville and Rosalie . . . Would you be prepared to come over this evening and beg a supper from Clairville?

Dorval could see that I consented and we set off straight away towards the house. What a welcome they gave to a man introduced by Dorval! I immediately became one of the family. The talk,

before and after supper, was of government, religion, politics, literature, philosophy; but however varied these subjects were, I was always able to recognize the personality which Dorval had given to each of his characters. He was marked by melancholy, Constance by reason, Rosalie by openness, Clairville by passion, and myself by good nature.