Spectateur francais| The project of an existence

Eliodoro S. Rodoni

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LE SPECTATEUR FRANCAIS:

THE PROJECT OF AN EXISTENCE

By

Eliodoro S. Rodoni

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Approved by:

[Signatures]

Chairman, Board of Examiners

Dean, Graduate School

[Date]
Le Spectateur français: The Project of an Existence (110 pp.)

A thorough study of Marivaux's journals and articles and of all available critical works indicates that Le Spectateur français, Marivaux's first journalistic achievement, is the most comprehensive work revealing an explanation of the author's principal esthetic and moralistic theories. The inherent evolution of this particular work clearly demonstrates the intimate relationship that necessarily exists between artistic creation, being and becoming. By not limiting itself exclusively to a biographical, sociological, historical or psychological approach this study is not burdened by a strict one-dimensional view. It is the scope of this study to expose the writer's total vision of the world and to underline those factors upon which the coherence of a work of art depends.

Since this study is concerned with analyzing the nature of a writer's metamorphosis, it includes, in the second chapter, biographical, historical and sociological details that had influence the young Marivaux, how he reacted to his times and why he found in the journalistic form an appropriate medium through which unique responses to vital questions and problems of the early eighteenth century could be expressed. The third chapter deals with Marivaux's more personal reasons for having turned to journalism, how he saw in this unrestricted genre the possibility to experiment with and finally define and defend esthetic values characteristic of his major works. The fourth chapter signals the stage of transition from journalist to novelist. Experimentation with the journal enabled Marivaux to discover himself anew and to set the stage for his upcoming novels. Marivaux's moral philosophy and the significance he assigned to literature is discussed in the fifth chapter.

A study of Le Spectateur has shown how Marivaux had been unduly misunderstood and criticized by his contemporaries. The modernity of his ideas have only recently been discovered and recognized. The essence of Marivaux's philosophy and his vision of the world is indeed contained in Le Spectateur. By interpreting Le Spectateur from an existential point of view Marivaux's most serious concerns can be more easily isolated and more thoroughly evaluated. Thus it can be seen that the act of writing is a way in which an author continually invents and reinvents his existence.
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Marivaux has mainly been remembered as an important literary figure of the eighteenth century because of his contributions to the theater. In all, he authored thirty-six delightful comedies and one tragedy. To a somewhat lesser extent he is also known for his two novels and for his contributions to the romanesque movement of the eighteenth century. Nevertheless, until quite recently, his original style and unique literary achievements had never been fully recognized. Initially rejected by the more influential literary critics of his time, Marivaux's works failed to gain any significant recognition among succeeding generations as well. In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries they were admired by Stendhal and Gide. Marivaux owes his present success and recognition to the meticulous research of Frederic Deloffre, professor at the Sorbonne, and Michel Gilot, "maître-assistant" at the University of Grenoble. These two men are responsible for the most recent publication of many lesser known Marivaudian texts among which are articles that had appeared in Le Mercure de France, and the three periodicals: Le Spectateur français, L'Indigent philosophe and Le Cabinet du philosophe, all of which Marivaux had edited on his own.

Of these, Le Spectateur français gives the most valuable insight into the creative genius of Marivaux and is indispensable to any complete understanding of his plays and novels. It is in this journal that we come into direct contact with the personality of Marivaux the writer
and the man, with his personal philosophy and with his theories of literature. All of Marivaux's periodicals disclose vital information concerning many aspects of Marivaux's evolution as a writer, but *Le Spectateur* reveals the fundamental qualities of his developing art. Through this journal Marivaux makes a personal effort to evaluate and elucidate his literary principles and, in the process, relates his discoveries, not only to himself, but to the reading public of his time. To a much greater extent than his comedies and novels, the periodical is conducive to a more comprehensive understanding of Marivaux the man, what significance he gives to life, how he envisions the world around him, what objects and occasions most directly strike his attention, in short, what motivates him in his sincere quest for understanding and his desire to communicate his observations and convictions. Without intending to expose himself "à nu," without pleading for recognition or sympathy, Marivaux simply wishes to express a state of being. In all modesty he offers an analysis of his reactions to immediate perceptions and feelings within himself.

With *Le Spectateur français* at our disposal, we have less reason to bemoan the nonexistence of letters he may have written to close friends or of other documentation which might have revealed important dates or other information concerning the daily aspects of his life. Having but little biographical information, we are actually free of the temptation to reconstruct his life and as a result, may give wholehearted primacy to his work, that ultimate expression of his existence and vision of the world.

Nevertheless, our curiosity about the man behind the work is most adequately satisfied if we turn to these periodicals. There, "nous pouvons mieux que dans son théâtre ou son roman, prendre contact avec
son esprit et son coeur.\textsuperscript{1} In \textit{L'Indigent philosophe} Marivaux had already noted the extent to which his work faithfully represented his being: "...je viens d'acheter quelques feuilles de papier pour me mettre par écrit, autrement dit, pour montrer ce que je suis, et comment je pense, et j'espère qu'on ne sera pas fâché de me connaître."\textsuperscript{2} Marivaux and his work are one; there is no separation.

In \textit{Le Spectateur français} Marivaux shares with us his most privileged moments and, in so doing, refers us to the source of his inspirations. Here again, we can conclude that the meaning of his life is revealed in terms of the intrinsic meaning of his work, and therefore we must not neglect the presence of the writer as we study \textit{Le Spectateur}. In the final analysis, his work is not merely a one-dimensional "mirror" of society; it is a multifaceted "mirror" which reflects the movement of a structuring consciousness. Seen as a revelation of existence, \textit{Le Spectateur}, in its progression and development, manifests itself as a relation with being with the world and with being with others. This inherent "relation" serves as the basis of Marivaux's moral philosophy, another important element into which his periodicals furnish invaluable insight.

In \textit{Le Spectateur} Marivaux assumes the nonchalant position of an observer of the spectacle of daily existence. His laboratory is the vast society of his time. Man, the principal subject, is the focal point of his observations. Marivaux will observe this thinking creature's rela-


\textsuperscript{2}Marivaux, \textit{L'Indigent philosophe}, in \textit{Journaux et Oeuvres diverses}, p. 276.
tion with his fellow humans. Nothing, concerning the commerce of men, escapes the scrutinizing eyes of Marivaux. And his vision of man will be a realistic one.

By not extracting man from his social context, Marivaux represents man as he is. The "Spectateur" observes others as they dynamically interact; he examines their iniquitous actions, their self-interests and their illusions. Much of Marivaux's originality lies in the fact that he carries this procedure one step further. The realistic vision of man is supported, in Le Spectateur, by a psychological vision of man. As a realist Marivaux studies the social behavior of man from a broad perspective, that of the entire social organism which he has before him and in which "tant de sujets se reduisent en un."³ As a psychologist Marivaux either studies individuals separately or observes a group of individuals who share the same thoughts and illusions. In such instances Marivaux's observations and reflections display their greatest degree of subtlety; they express the functioning of the human mind and how each individual lives by a distorted and illusory self-image. In Marivaux's words: "Je ne dis pas qu'ils pensent très distinctement ce que je leur fais penser; mais tout cela est dans leur tête, et je ne fais que débrouiller le chaos de leurs idées: j'expose en détail ce qu'ils sentent en gros..."⁴

Directly related to Marivaux's psychological and realistic innovations is the writer's moral philosophy. Marivaux's moral lessons are not dogmatic; they are suggestive. They are lessons based on the assump-

³Marivaux, Le Spectateur français, in Journaux et Oeuvres diverses, pp. 132-133.

⁴Ibid., quatrième feuille, p. 126.
tion that man is free to choose and that each individual is largely responsible for the shaping of his destiny. An individual, in the Marivaudian sense, must meet his responsibilities to others if he is to choose to live in society. This does not imply that he should be vulnerable to the evils that naturally surround him. Instead, he must be conscious of these evils as he is of his obligations so that he may rationally defend himself when faced with the harsh realities of life.

Marivaux's entire humanistic philosophy hinges on the idea that life is an adventure that must inevitably be faced, and that from every experience there is a lesson to be learned provided that the individual is perceptive and logical with himself. As a man who chooses to write, Marivaux adheres to this concept strictly. For this reason, Le Spectateur faithfully represents the convergence of life and literature, where literature is the most privileged means of participation in life and the most continuous process of becoming. Whence the title of this study: "The Project of an Existence."

For Marivaux, Le Spectateur is a testing ground. It is a study of the society of his times and of a variety of human existences. It is also a study and elaboration of the writer's esthetic values. It is a basis of experimentation manifesting a desire to attain literary perfection by continually growing and changing. In fact, Marivaux's "Spectateur" is a man who continually rediscovers himself through the direct confrontation with life and literature. Through a meticulous exploration of the self Marivaux ultimately expresses a way of being, a way of inventing and reinventing his existence.

In this study of Marivaux and his Le Spectateur français, I hope to demonstrate the importance of Marivaux as a literary figure of the eighteenth century. In the next chapter we will concentrate on Marivaux's
early years, his education, his move to Paris, his position in the Quarrel of the Ancients and the Moderns, his first literary works and his increasing interest in "journalism." Marivaux's unique style and the conflicts with the critics of his time will also be discussed. The third chapter will deal with the origin of Le Spectateur as well as his reasons for turning to the "journalistic" form. We will find out from whom Marivaux borrowed the idea of his Spectateur and why he thought the journal would enable him to further explore and develop his moral and esthetic principles and values. Le Spectateur most definitely reveals Marivaux's literary theories and actually sets the stage for his upcoming novels. The fourth chapter will take into consideration Marivaux's transition from journalist to novelist, how he develops a new relationship with his readers and characters, all in an attempt to communicate more effectively. The fifth chapter will be concerned with distinguishing Marivaux from other eighteenth century "enlighteners." To do so involves recognizing the peculiarities of his moral philosophy and the meaning that literature has for him personally. To further accentuate the subtleties of his moral philosophy we will concentrate on his views on education, morality, religion and freedom of the individual. In the conclusion we will see that Le Spectateur is indeed "the Project of an Existence."
CHAPTER II

INITIATION TO THE WORLD AND TO LITERATURE

Marivaux's early years and education

Despite the increasing interest and fruitful contributions of many recent critics and scholars, factual information about Marivaux's early life and education remains, for the most part, scanty. We must rely, therefore, on the findings and assumptions of those critics and scholars who have gone to the pain of resolving this mysterious aspect of Marivaux. The following passage underscores the mystery of Marivaux's life and suggests that we must give primacy to the work if we are to expand our knowledge of Marivaux the man:

S'il est des écrivains qu'on aimerait avoir connus par simple curiosité ou par vénalité, sans croire que leur oeuvre en recevrait alors un sens différent, il en est aussi auxquels on aurait voulu demander ce qu'ils ont au juste entendu faire, dont on aimerait savoir quelle espèce d'individus ils ont été, leur oeuvre n'étant ni assez impregnée de leur personne pour que la lecture nous en apprenne sur eux autant et plus qu'une conversation, ni assez indépendante d'elle pour ne pas soulever de questions auxquelles eux seuls auraient pu répondre. Marivaux est de ceux-là. On ne sait pas grand'chose de son existence et de son caractère, et ce que l'on en sait ne permet guère de gloser sur le bon sourire qui éclaire sa face ronde, dans le seul portrait qu'on ait de lui. Crébillon le fils et Voltaire avaient des visages autrement provocants. La vie de Marivaux fut-elle aussi transparente que ce sourire? Que l'homme ait laissé si peu de traces, c'est un indice, peut-être, que l'oeuvre était de bonne foi.¹

The "transparent" mystery of Marivaux's life leaves us with l'oeuvre it-

self as the only reliable testimony of Marivaux the man, how he felt, how he reacted to the exigencies of his time. However, to better understand the evolution inherent in Le Spectateur français we must familiarize ourselves somewhat with its earlier stages, its accroissement, so to speak, as it manifests itself in the author's early years, his education, and literary beginnings in Paris. Reconstructing the life of Marivaux is not the underlying question at hand. The primary concern here is to expose what is known and assumed about it, and then relate it to the work itself as the expression of his character and existence. It is his work ultimately that most faithfully traces the development of his existence as a man and a writer.

On February 2, 1682 Nicolas Carlet, "officier de marine au Havre, et Marie-Anne Bullet, soeur de Pierre Bullet, 'architecte du roi'' sign−ed their marriage contract. Since the parents of Marie Bullet were both deceased at the time of her marriage, her elder brother Pierre acted as witness:

Pierre Bullet, "en présence, de l'avis et consentement" duquel le contrat a été signé, avait accueilli le futur dans sa demeure, rue de Berry, et il a dû préférer voir sa soeur épouser ce roturier honnête et travailleur plutôt qu'un fils de famille écrivel et bien pourvu: une vingtaine d'années plus tard il parlera de lui comme d'un "fort homme de bien."  

It is not known exactly what influence either Pierre Bullet or his son, Jean-Baptiste had on the young Marivaux, however, it is believed that the latter did spend some time with them when he went to Paris to study law. It was in fact Jean-Baptiste who most probably introduced Marivaux to the

2 Deloffre and Gilot, "Chronologie" in Journaux et Oeuvres diverses, p. vii.

higher circles of Parisian society. Later, in *Les Lettres sur les habitants de Paris*, Marivaux is to indirectly refer to himself as "un architecte né."^4

Six years after his parents' marriage, Pierre Carlet was born, and most likely named after his uncle, Pierre Bullet. Shortly after the birth of his son, Nicolas Carlet had to abruptly leave his family in response to the exigencies of his position. Over a period of eight years, during the War of the League of Augsburg, he was to serve as "trésorier des vivres d'Allemagne"^5 in Germany, leaving his wife, Marie-Anne, with the responsibility of bringing up her son alone. The first nine years of Marivaux's life, then, were spent in Paris, a circumstance which may have allowed him to see much of his uncle and cousin. Young Marivaux's father was virtually a stranger to him when, in 1697, he returned from Germany, subsequently making the theme of family separation a recurring one throughout Marivaux's work:

...c'est peut-être en surmontant de très anciennes nostalgies qu'il a plus tard, au début et à la fin de sa carrière, illustré de tant d'images, émouvantes ou burlesques, le thème de la séparation familiale: des époux aimants, désunis par l'absence, mais bientôt réunis dans la mort (premières pages des *Effets surprenants de la sympathie*); la femme qui souffre de l'éloignement de son mari, dans une longue attente, malaisée, dérisoire (*le Télémaque travesti*); ou fidèle (*la Femme fidèle*); le fils qui part à la recherche de son père, avec la volonté de bien suivre ses traces, tout en se sentant très différent de lui (*Brideron dans le Télémaque travesti*).^6

Toward the end of 1698 the Carlet family, reunited, moved to Riom in Auvergne. Marivaux's father had been initially appointed as "contrôleur-contreguarde" at the mint in Riom and was later promoted to act as director.

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^6Ibid.
Nicolas Carlet's position was not at all a glorious one. He was but a "serviteur du roi," having practically no opportunity to advance. This position literally consumed the last twenty-one years of his life; it was a strenuous and unrewarding obligation which demanded his total responsibility, yet offered him neither prestige nor security. It should be no mystery, therefore, that Marivaux, in his later years, should consider being a writer a more meaningful occupation "Il avait sous les yeux l'image d'une vie sans fantaisie, ni liberté, toute envahie par le travail."^7

Concerning a formal education, Gilot maintains that Marivaux most likely attended "Le Collège de Riom," a prestigious school of the area which was under the direction of "les Oratoriens." The education he received there was a classical one, with most emphasis on religion and classical literature. Aside from Les Fables de La Fontaine and L'Art Poétique de Boileau, no contemporary French works were studied. A solid background in Latin may well have been instrumental in nurturing Marivaux's sensitivity to language and in providing him with a profound knowledge of the meaning of words. Taking this into consideration, it is not surprising that Marivaux would later prove to be an able inventor of neologisms, an attribute of his style for which he was to be severely criticized.8

The "Oratoriens" of Riom were to have professed the art of eloquent speech to their students, stressing the importance of stylized expression, the ability to debate in a persuasive and spontaneous manner. Throughout the academic year they organized debates and other oral exercises to be performed by their students in public. Whether Marivaux par-

7Ibid., p. 35.

8Ibid., pp. 48-57.
ticipated in these events remains unknown. However, it has been point-
ed out that he was very eloquent and poised in his speech and that he
could easily attract the attention and admiration of his audiences as
evidenced in the salons that he later frequented. Clearly, Marivaux's
education at "Le Collège de Riom" influenced the early formation of his
character and literary discipline. It no doubt provided him with dif-
ferent points of reference, moral and Christian, on which he could later
draw and firmly argue for or against the existing dogmas or follies of
his time. In spite of the contradictions of his education at "Le Collège
de Riom," Gilot points out in the following passage that it would be
difficult to deny that Marivaux remained faithful to the moral and Chris-
tian heritage he received in Riom:

Les Oratoriens ne parvenaient certainement pas à surmonter tous les
inconvénients d'une pédagogie "fondée sur la notion de faiblesse
humaine et de péché originel:" elle tendait nécessairement à consti-
tuer un univers clos et à abstraire l'enfant de la société, quitte à s'empe
trer en de multiples contradictions, en voulant concilier l'apprentissage de l'humilité avec la joie aimable, la règle autori-
taire avec la spontanéité, l'espionnage perpetuel avec le sens de
la responsabilité, la formation chrétienne enfin avec la toute
puissance de la culture antique.... Plus que d'autres, Marivaux a
sentî la vanité de s'en remettre à des leçons apprises: C'est bien
l'impression qui se dégage d'une oeuvre de divertissement comme le
Télémaque travesti où il a tant mis de lui-même. Mais il semble
difficile de penser qu'il n'est pas resté fidèle à l'héritage moral
qu'il avait reçu de sa famille et de ses maîtres.9

In addition to the formal education provided by "Le Collège," the
spectacle of life and of human interactions in Riom and its surrounding
area attracted the young writer's attentions. Riom, a rural community
gave Marivaux the opportunity to observe the life of the peasants He
was undoubtedly fascinated by their language and crude mannerisms, by
their natural and unrefined behavior and most assuredly saw, at an early

9Ibid., pp. 59-60.
age, the advantages of simplicity on personal freedom. These people were natural and uncultured in their manners as well as in their language, they did not pretend to be what they were not. They had no reason to wear masks or to hide their feelings or intentions behind misleading rhetoric. The paysan is to play an important role in the future works of Marivaux. He appears in his plays, novels and journals as a natural, spontaneous and fundamentally intelligent being in his confrontation of the conventions and forms of Parisian society. The paysan is also an example of common sense, relying on his instincts rather than on reason as he encounters a series of obstacles which challenge his fundamental liberty as a human being.

At the age of twenty-three, when Marivaux finally left Riom, he was more than ready to expand his horizons. Once in Paris, he would actively participate in the issues of his time and distinguish himself as a prominent literary figure.

Paris: The Quarrel of the Ancients and the Moderns

The year 1711 marks the beginning of another important stage in Marivaux's life. It was then that he finally was able to leave Riom to go to Paris to study law. Marivaux arrived in Paris at a time when the social traditions and conventions of the last half of the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries were openly being discussed and attacked. The moment Marivaux entered on the Parisian scene the Quarrel of the Ancients and the Moderns was at its highest pitch. Generally, "centered around the argument as to whether Homer and other ancient poets were equal to, better than, or inferior to the poets of the Age of Louis
the Quarrel was in fact resistance to tradition and a revaluation of every aspect of a changing society, from literature to philosophy and the sciences. Against the desires and ideals of the "classical" seventeenth century intellectuals, time rapidly began taking its toll. The stability of the closed and static world as they had known it began to crumble. The last decades of Louis XIV's reign were no longer years of pure absolutism. There was no feasible way of controlling a movement which found its strength and support outside the court which, up to that time, had been the sole source of ideas and opinions. Encumbered by strict rules and academic regulations, literature was not to be of a historical or social nature; it was to be outside of time and deal only with predetermined concepts of non-changing universals. Man, his passions and the entire objective world around him were apprehended as universal, natural truths which applied to all times. The seventeenth century writer, having to recognize the "purpose" of literature, was aware of his relation to his public. However, as Lionel Gossman indicates in the following passage, the seventeenth century writer was not concerned with changing or improving the "constant" nature of man:

The classical idea of the artist rested on the assumption that he shared with the public and indeed, with reasonable men in all ages certain fundamental principles and values which were true for all time and which could not be changed or improved upon.\(^{10}\)

As a Modern, Marivaux rejected this assumption entirely primarily because it limited his individuality. Without denying the genius of the ancient poets, Marivaux felt that artistic priorities should be depend-


ent upon and have significance for the particular time in which a writer lives. For example, in the seventh feuille of Le Spectateur français Marivaux explains that one must adopt "le goût de son siècle" and not imitate other cultures:

J'adopte seulement, le plus qu'il m'est possible, les usages et les moeurs, et le goût de son siècle, et la forme que cela fait ou faisait prendre à l'esprit;...

Est-ce le génie des auteurs grecs qu'il faut que ce jeune homme imite? Non, leurs idées ont une sorte de simplicité noble qui naît du caractère des actions qui se passaient alors, et du genre de vie qu'on menait de leur temps. Ils avaient, pour ainsi dire, tout un autre univers que nous: le commerce que les hommes avaient ensemble alors ne nous paraît aujourd'hui qu'un apprentissage de celui qu'ils ont eu depuis, et qu'ils peuvent avoir en bien et en mal. Ils avaient mêmes vices, mêmes passions, mêmes ridicules, même fond d'orgueil ou d'élevation; mais tout cela était moins déployé, ou l'était différemment. Je ne sais lequel des deux c'est. Quoi qu'il en soit, l'homme de ce temps-là est étranger pour l'homme d'aujourd'hui, et en nous supposant comme nous sommes, c'est-à-dire en étudiant le goût de nos sentiments aujourd'hui, il est certain qu'on verra que nous avons des auteurs admirables pour nous, et qui le seront à l'avenir pour tous ceux qui pourront mettre au vrai point de vue de notre siècle.12

Marivaux, therefore, proposed to write for the people of his century, and for anyone in the future who could relate to the true point of view of his time. In Marivaux's opinion, the same held true when considering the ancient poets. He believed that their works had a universal quality and that they could be profitable to whomever was able to recognize the flavor of the particular era in which they had been written. In opposition to the writers of the seventeenth century, however, Marivaux recognized that certain principles and values were certainly susceptible to change and thus wished to formulate his ideas in accordance with the values and principles characteristic of his day and age. By imitating the ancients, Marivaux believed that writers disregarded the vital characteristics and

12Marivaux, Le Spectateur français, septième feuille, pp 147-148.
concerns that linked them with their public. For this reason, Marivaux chose to directly confront current issues in order to establish a more practical and mutual relationship with his public. He proposed to communicate with them as an equal, a man who shared certain problems and who was sensitive to the actual nature of their habits.

To do this, Marivaux, along with the rest of the Moderns, had to turn to new literary genres to express his new ideas. In respect to the style and language of the Ancients, Gossman comments: "For the Anciens styles, genres and languages were as fixed as the meanings they convey: for each subject matter there was always an appropriate language, an appropriate genre, an appropriate style." To the Moderns and, in particular, to Marivaux the novel, a hitherto inferior genre, appeared as having far-reaching possibilities for it provided the writer with the least limitations, both stylistically and linguistically. The novel was open to experimentation.

When Marivaux arrived in Paris the Quarrel was not at all in its earliest stages; it had already been going on for some thirty years. At the time of Marivaux's arrival the Moderns were gaining recognition. Having already experimented with different forms of prose, they had established newspapers, journals and gazettes which provided them with an immediate and influential access to the public with whom they were trying to establish closer and more intimate ties. The reading public was now being invited to directly participate by accepting and supporting the more humble function assigned to literature. Three genres were at Marivaux's disposal at this juncture: the novel, the theater and journalism. He experi-

mented quite successfully with all three.

Marivaux most likely gained entry to the salons and other prestigious circles through his cousin, Jean-Baptiste de Chamblain. It was there, as Ronald Rosbottom writes, that Marivaux became acquainted with the Moderns and their influential leaders:

Jean-Baptiste Bullet de Chamblain, his cousin and uncle, member of Louis XIV's prestigious Académie d'Architecture, would provide an entry for the young provincial into the closed circles of Parisian high society. It was there that Marivaux probably met and became intimate with the group of Moderns headed by Fontenelle and La Motte.\(^1\)

Fontenelle, who effectively recruited for the Moderns, more than likely recognized Marivaux's potential to serve them well.\(^2\) The supposed reason for his having gone to Paris was to study law. However, his first interest was literature and it is quite possible that the first chapters of Les Effets surprenants de la sympathie were written even before his arrival to Paris, in Riom. If we are to attribute Marivaux's first literary achievements to his sojourn in Paris we may also safely assume that his first works contained many ideas and approaches of the very influential Moderns. On that account these earlier works are less original than his later and more mature efforts.\(^3\)

As important as his encounter with "les beaux esprits," Fontenelle, La Motte, Madame de Lambert and Madame de Tencin, is Marivaux's encounter with the great spectacle of Parisian society. His début as a "Spectateur" did not just begin in 1721 when he began writing the first feuille of Le Spectateur français, his earliest experiences in Paris had already inspired him to become a careful spectator and observer of human beings. Intriguingly, Marivaux's first literary achievements were written even before his arrival to Paris, in Riom. If we are to attribute Marivaux's first literary achievements to his sojourn in Paris we may also safely assume that his first works contained many ideas and approaches of the very influential Moderns. On that account these earlier works are less original than his later and more mature efforts.

\(^1\)Rosbottom, Marivaux's Novels, p. 26.

\(^2\)Ibid.
gued by the living example of human comedy in Paris, Marivaux set out to decode with subtle detail, le jeu that governs all human relationships. Marivaux proceeded, at this point, not only to discover the world, but also to discover himself, his inner feelings and, above all, his capabilities. In the city crowds one could imagine the writer feeling detached and more dependent on himself. At the same time he was more free to be himself. He evaluated his relationship to those who surrounded him and began to write not simply on behalf of himself, but on behalf of his fellow men. To quote Gilot on this score:

A Paris, Marivaux, métaphysicien concret, rencontre le génie humain. Bon gré mal gré, nous nous ressemblons, et chacun de nous est lié à tous: peut-être faut-il voir dans cette conviction une des raisons profondes de l'accueil que l'écrivain a réservé à l'œuvre de Malébranche, dénonciateur passionné des complicités humaines; mais on n'en a jamais fini avec les autres, avec ces hommes, paradoxaux et divers, toujours inégaux à eux-mêmes. Dans sa transparence et son immanence, également immédiates et mystérieuses, la vie de la grande ville a certainement permis à Marivaux d'approfondir sa vocation.16

We can see then that the Parisian scene was responsible, on two separate levels, for having impelled Marivaux to become a writer. On one level, "le peuple," that living example of the life force in all its impressive diversities, on another "les beaux esprits: écrivains et philosophes," the intellectual circles aroused Marivaux's personal genius and gave impetus to his creative spirit. Both aspects of Parisian society were instrumental in the shaping of Marivaux's sensitivity and art. "Le génie du peuple" provided him with one particular dimension of the human comedy while "le génie des beaux esprits" provided another. The direct and unpretentious manner of the common man made a deep impression on Marivaux when he compared it to the convoluted and contrived mannerisms of "cultured" society. Having access to both in Paris, Marivaux learned to

16Gilot, Lés Journaux de Marivaux, p. 82.
appreciate the importance of sincere and open communication. He saw how easily man could be betrayed by the heart and mislead by his vanity, his amour-propre. As a result, Marivaux became obsessed with the problem of communication, with the deficiencies of language and with the misunderstandings that arise from the confusion of intentions. He noted then, that the principal obstacle to sincere communication is the jeu: man playing a role to satisfy a social stereotype.

At this time the problem of communication was especially important. The Moderns were trying to reach their public in a more current language common to both parties. In the process language had to be freed of traditional forms and regenerated. To rejuvenate language, neologisms had to be infused into it. Marivaux did precisely that, and thus aided the cause of the Moderns. Undoubtedly having recognized the newness of his enterprise, Marivaux felt the need to contrive new terms to express new concepts. Marivaux himself, in Le Cabinet du philosophe (his third and last journal), expounds the following hypothesis concerning the need for new words to adequately express a high degree of "finesse d'esprit":

S'il venait en France une génération d'hommes qui eût encore plus de finesse d'esprit qu'on n'en a jamais eu en France et ailleurs, il faudrait de nouveaux mots, de nouveaux signes pour exprimer les nouvelles idées dont cette génération serait capable: les mots que nous avons ne suffiraient pas, quand même les idées qu'ils exprimeraient auraient quelque ressemblance avec les nouvelles idées qu'on aurait acquises: il s'agirait quelquefois d'un degré de plus de fureur, de passion, d'amour, ou de méchanceté qu'on apercevrait dans l'homme; et ce degré de plus, qu'on n'apercevrait qu'alors, demanderait un signe, un mot propre qui fixât l'idée qu'on aurait acquise. 17

Throughout his entire literary career Marivaux was concerned with inventing new terms and with applying new meaning to already existing

terms, a procedure that met with immediate and oppressive objections from the part of his contemporaries. Felicia Sturzer, in a brilliant article entitled "'Marivaudage' as Self-Representation," designates the consequences of Marivaux's "peculiar" style, how it was looked down upon by many eighteenth century writers and critics:

Marivaux ultimately acquired the dubious distinction of having a style of writing named after him - the infamous "marivaudage." In the eighteenth century the term was identified with a style of writing which was difficult to understand, for it seemed to express ideas in an obtuse way. What appeared to be trivialities were pursued ad infinitum and the ultimate meaning of these "verbal acrobatics," maintained the critics, remained elusive and ill-defined.18

The following eighteenth century "definition" of "marivaudage" substantiates Sturzer's comment:

C'est le mélange le plus bizarre de métaphysique subtile et de locutions triviales, de sentiments alambiqués et de dictions populaires: jamais on n'a mis autant d'appret à vouloir paraître simple; jamais on n'a retourné des pensées communes de tant de manières plus affectées les unes que les autres...19

Voltaire too could not resist attacking Marivaux's style for its apparent "préciosité." He accused Marivaux of having "pesé des œufs de mouches dans des balances de toile d'araignée,"20 a reproach which is not completely devoid of truth. Especially in his psychological analyses Marivaux could be so refined and subtle that it is not at all surprising that even the most lucid eighteenth century thinkers could not fully grasp what he was trying to say. Although Marivaux wholeheartedly professed the desire

18 Felicia Sturzer, "'Marivaudage' as Self-Representation," The French Review, XLIX (December 1975), 212.


20 Voltaire, quoted in Paul Chaponnière, "Les Prédécesseurs et Contemporains de Marivaux," Bibliothèque universelle et revue suisse, LXI (February 1911), 225.
to portray "le naturel" or "la nature," he was criticized for being "un-natural." "La nature," as Marivaux saw it, was certainly not surface level. It took a special language and his superior intellect to reveal its true complexities. In "l'Avertissement" to Les Serments Indiscrets, a comedy which appeared for the first time in June of 1732, Marivaux defends "son style naturel":

...ce n'est pas moi que j'ai voulu copier, c'est la nature, c'est le ton de la conversation en général que j'ai tâché de prendre: ce ton-là a plu extrêmement et plait encore dans les autres pièces, comme singulier, je crois; mais mon dessein était qu'il plût comme naturel, et c'est peut-être parce qu'il est effectivement qu'on le croit singulier, et que, regardé comme tel, on me reproche d'en user toujours 21

Although Marivaux is referring here to the style used in his comedies, this same rule can be easily applied to his novels and journals as well.

In any case, Marivaux's contemporaries were simply unable to relate to the newness of his approach and the uniqueness of his intentions. Confused by his uncommon style, they could not penetrate the fertility of his ideas. As a consequence, they based their arguments on the style alone and totally disregarded the thought behind the style.

Oscar A. Haac observes in a fruitful study on "Literary Criticism and Marivaux" that Marivaux, in spite of his inclinations to the side of the Moderns, "stood essentially alone" throughout his long literary quest. Haac based his study on a detailed inspection of a variety of articles which appeared in Le Mercure de France from 1721 to 1723 and dealt specifically with literary criticism:

I found a chorus of critics so utterly self-confident, so convinced that they are able to strike the just balance between merit and faults, that they hold court like schoolmasters, distributing praise and blame, attempting, in each case, to list a number of points on both sides. They assume that a work of art can be thus dissected,

that it can be judged according to a uniform, pre-established code without reference to what the author meant or intended.\(^{22}\)

Such was the nature of criticism as Marivaux had known it. For Le Mercure, a fundamentally Modern newspaper, to promote such biased criticism indicates precisely to what degree Marivaux was alone in his enterprise.

Given Marivaux's extreme sensitivity, it seems most unlikely that he was able to endure the continual pressure of unjust criticism with a grain of salt. At one point in Le Spectateur français he admits that his "vanity" had been afflicted by the reproaches from his critics and that, for this reason, he had refrained from writing the successive feuille until some four months later. "Souffrez donc que je recommence"\(^{23}\) is his reply to them as he resumes his undertaking:

...je compte encore sur vos mépris, et je vais m'en servir, comme d'une recette contre cette vanité dont je croyais être défaill, et qui reparaît metamorphosée en dégoût Messieurs! c'est pour une bonne oeuvre que je vous sollicite; j'étais tout triste de vous déplaire, parce que cela m'était l'honneur d'avoir de l'esprit avec vous. Que je vous aie l'obligation de ne me plus soucier de cet honneur-là! Allons, ne vous relâchez pas; critiquez bien, critiquez mal, n'importe lequel des deux: mon profit, ou le vôtre, s'y trouvera toujours. Si c'est bien, je dirai que le Ciel vous le rende; je vous regarderai comme mes bienfaiteurs; j'avertirai le public de la justesse de vos préceptes. Si c'est mal, je tâcherai de vous induire à penser plus juste; j'y contribuerai de toutes mes forces; j'arrêterai le progrès de vos erreurs, afin de vous épargner le plus de torts que je pourrai: voilà ma charge.\(^{24}\)

It is precisely this attitude that distinguishes Marivaux from his contemporaries. He is open to what they have to say, yet will not pass up the opportunity to counter-attack in his subtle and suggestive manner. He ul-

\(^{22}\)Oscar A. Haac, "Theories of Literary Criticism and Marivaux," Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century, LXXXVIII (1972), 711-712.

\(^{23}\)Marivaux, Le Spectateur français, septième feuille, p. 143.

\(^{24}\)Ibid.
Ultimately uses their criticisms as a pretext to display his intellectual superiority over them. Haac suggests that "the frequent negative comments directed at his work produced strong reactions and are largely responsible for the statements which develop his theory of literature."²⁵ All in all, Marivaux recognized in his critics, as in all men, the frivolousness of their comportment thus allowing him to conclude in an ironic tone: "Je me joue des hommes en général, et je n'attaque personne."²⁶

Those critics who maintained that the meaning of Marivaux's "verbal acrobatics" remained elusive and ill-defined obviously approached Marivaux and his work from a biased point of view without making any effort whatsoever to search beyond his "style" or to read his works "à fond." In many articles and especially in his journals, Marivaux openly discusses his manner of literary approach and, in the process, exposes and defines his personal theory of literature. Sainte-Beuve is so right in emphasizing that: "Marivaux n'a pas seulement un talent fin et une rare fertilité d'idées qu'il rend avec imprévu, il a la théorie de son talent et il sait le pourquoi de sa nouveauté; car, de tous les hommes, Marivaux est celui qui cherche le plus à se rendre compte."²⁷ Despite the paralyzing effect that criticism had on Marivaux's works, he refused to betray the singularity that distinguished him from all other writers of his time, Moderns and Ancients alike. He persistently pursued his mission which, astonishingly enough, he had already clearly described in the lengthy "Avant-Propos" of his first novel, Les Effets surprenants de la sympathie. In this pre-

²⁵Haac, "Theories of Literary Criticism and Marivaux," p. 713.

²⁶Marivaux, Le Spectateur français, septième feuille, p. 147.

face Marivaux "protests against the 'art' of rhetoric and proposes to avoid 'les lois stériles de l'art' and speak 'sans art' but 'avec beaucoup de sentiment'." From here on, "à travers l'épreuve des textes," Marivaux is to experiment with style and language. In his later and more mature works "le marivaudage" will reveal itself as a highly sophisticated language which "ultimately becomes the vehicle for revealing a social and esthetic system based on deception." "Le marivaudage" is the name given to a stylistic procedure devised by Marivaux to "copier la nature," that is, to copy the nature of a thought process in an individual's becoming. Seen in this light, "le marivaudage" loses the pejorative meaning originally assigned to it. Marivaux's unique style is not without foundation. In his articles and journals Marivaux establishes a theoretical basis for "marivaudage." Le Spectateur français will play an important role in this aspect of Marivaux's development. It will serve as "un fond d'observation et une base d'étude" ultimately resulting in the practical application of his theories.

Marivaux's Early Works

"Il n'est pas d'écrivain, Balzac et Proust non exceptés," writes Michel Gilot, "pour qui l'apprentissage littéraire ait compté davantage." If the work of Marivaux is to be seen as a continual process of becoming, his first works (les oeuvres de jeunesse) should be considered as works of particular significance. They are works of preparation, works in which the

30Gilot, Journaux de Marivaux, p. 95.
young author experiments with new forms, develops an esthetic system and discovers himself and his capabilities. The years 1712-1717 were, for Marivaux, productive years of apprenticeship, years of self indulgence. The progressive succession of each work marks a new relation of the writer to his work. The stages of conversion (the passage of one work to another) are manifested as acts of elaboration and renewal. "L'écrivain, dans son oeuvre, se nie, se dépasse et se transforme..." 31

From 1712 to 1717, the following works appeared, moulding the future artist:

1712. Publication du Père prudent et équitable.

Le 14 avril, Marivaux présente en personne à Paris le manuscrit des trois premiers livres d'un roman, les Effets surprenants de la sympathie, en vue d'une approbation, qui sera accordée le 10 juillet.

Le 8 décembre, le manuscrit (partiel?) du Pharsamon est présenté en vue d'une approbation. Plusieurs fois annoncé, ce roman ne paraîtra qu'en 1737, quoiqu'une première approbation soit accordée en janvier 1713.

1713. Janvier ou février, publication des trois premiers livres des Effets surprenants de la sympathie.

Le 11 mai, le manuscrit de la Voiture embourbée est présenté en vue d'une approbation, qui sera accordée le 31 août.

Le 24 août, le Bilboquet est présenté en vue d'un privilège, mais n'obtient qu'une permission simple (26 octobre).

1714. Vers janvier, publication de la Voiture embourbée, puis des livres IV et V des Effets surprenants de la sympathie.

Publication du Bilboquet.

Composition du Télémaque travesti et de l'Iliade travestie.


20 novembre. L'Iliade travestie est présentée en vue d'une approbation.

1716. L'Iliade travestie est "approuvée" le 10 juin par Fontenelle. Elle paraît dans les derniers jours de 1716 ou au début de 1717.


Michel Gilot attributes the success and originality of Marivaux's later journalistic achievements to its long preparation throughout "les oeuvres de jeunesse." Gilot underscores the importance of Marivaux's earliest literary efforts to the making of the mature artist:

Pour affronter la peinture de la réalité, "le Spectateur" a dû trouver des moyens d'expression, adopter et modifier un certain type de phrase, et surtout se donner une psychologie dont l'affirmation coïncide avec la mise en place progressive d'un système de mots. Mais on peut voir dans ses "oeuvres de jeunesse" comment en écrivant il prend connaissance des hommes, épier ses curiosités, ses découvertes, ses acquisitions, ses nouveaux désirs. Comme s'il tenait à nous faire assister à une marche réglée, à chaque étape de son évolution le jeune écrivain accueille des influences particulières.

It is quite clear that "les oeuvres de jeunesse" find their greatest importance in serving as works of experimentation, discovery and demythification.

...il ne serait pas très utile de relever toutes les réflexions, semées et développées dans Pharsamon, qu'il reprendra de façon ou d'autre dans ses journaux. Il cultivera dans le Spectateur français le même virtuosité et la même passion; mais après Pharsamon et le Télémaque et l'Homère travestis, il lui aura fallu être un certain Marivaux à visage découvert, et, après tout un obscur apprentissage, subir, encore une fois, l'épreuve des textes.

As works by themselves they may appear imperfect and crude. However,


33Gilot, Journaux de Marivaux, p. 97.

34Ibid., p. 125.
if they are considered as an essential part of the whole, which indeed they are, they take on new significance and add to the intrinsic meaning of the compendium of his work. Before Marivaux could ever have attained the perfection of his later works, it was necessary that he first experiment with his unique style and with language in order to slowly discover his natural bent as a moralist and to expand his vision in a continual effort of developing a "science du coeur" or psychology.

Despite unfavorable criticism by his contemporaries, Marivaux never became totally discouraged. To him the vital importance of his early works, concerning his relation to them and to his own becoming, was obvious for they did give him the self confidence needed to continue and to finally openly defend his art, as he does later in *Les Lettres sur les habitants de Paris* and other articles and journals. He could envision and feel in his early works the project of an existence, a sort of project of becoming and maturing as an artist and as a man. In *Les Lettres sur habitants de Paris*, Marivaux brilliantly confirms this belief when he defines a true artist's relation to his work:

> Le bel esprit, il est vrai, ne s'est pas fait de la géométrie une science particulière; il n'est point géomètre ouvrier, c'est un architecte né, qui, méditant un édifice, le voit s'élever à ses yeux dans toutes ses parties différentes; il en imagine et en voit l'effet total par un raisonnement imperceptible et comme sans progrès, lequel raisonnement pour le géomètre contiendrait la valeur de mille raisonnements qui se succéderaient avec lenteur. Le bel esprit, en un mot, est doué d'une heureuse conformation d'organes, à qui il doit un sentiment fin et exact de toutes les choses qu'il voit ou qu'il imagine; il est entre ses organes et son esprit d'heureux accords qui lui forment une manière de penser, dont l'étendue, l'evidence et la chaleur ne font qu'un corps; je ne dis pas qu'il ait chacune de ces qualités dans toute leur force; un si grand bien est au-dessus de l'homme; mais il en a ce qu'il en faut pour voler à une sphere d'idées, dont non seulement les rapports, mais la simple vue passe le géomètre.

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35Marivaux, *Les Lettres sur les habitants de Paris*, p. 34.
The act of artistic creation to Marivaux is essentially a matter of vision, the ability of an artist to perceive intuitively the rationally "imperceptible." As Marivaux progresses in his art, his "oeuvre," like "l'édifice de l'architecte né," evolves in perfect proportions.

Although quite conscious, even at a very early stage in his career, of his intentions as a writer, Marivaux needed these early years of preparation to develop a language, to discover his gifts and to experience life. Les Lettres sur les habitants de Paris marks a turning point in Marivaux's literary enterprise. In this work he establishes himself as a mature writer who is to have many prolific years before him. The journals and articles he is to leave us subsequently demonstrate the expansion of his art and constant becoming. We can then see how "un homme, en devenant l'auteur de cette oeuvre, se fait autre qu'il n'était aupara-vant."36

Path To Journalism

With the publication of Les Lettres sur les habitants de Paris there begins a new stage in the work and life of Marivaux. The now more mature writer directs his attention and thoughts to the reality of his own times, leaving behind him the vivacity and illusions of his youth. Perhaps not satisfied by the minor success of his first works, the young writer considers a different approach to literature and to the development of his ideas by turning to Le Mercure, a highly popular newspaper of the time, as a more suitable medium to further stylistic experimentation. His aim is to establish a more direct relationship with his readers and his times. The fact that Marivaux has taken a new direction here does not imply, in

36Starobinski, La relation critique, p. 23.
any way, that he abandons his earlier principles and ideas. He is simply seeking a more natural and more direct narrative method. For example, in Les Lettres sur les habitants de Paris, Marivaux finds an effective way of withdrawing himself from the "author's pedestal" by appearing, not so much as a writer, as an ironic observer of society and as an individual free to observe, reflect and learn. Life itself becomes his new "maître" and source of material. Les Lettres sur les habitants de Paris is a study of the many different "characters" that compose Parisian society. Marivaux does not yet assign roles to his characters, that is to come in his com­edies. First he must observe human beings and discern the roles that these "real" people impose upon themselves.

By resorting to an empirical method Marivaux resembles his fellow enlighteners. However, out of a certain disillusionment with them, Mari­vaux searches to decode the games that they too play. In so doing, he de­fends and defines his art and distinguishes himself from any school or movement.

Before being able to evaluate his moral and esthetic principles, Marivaux must first set out to define them. In Les Pensées sur différents sujets, published in 1719, he tries to explain both to himself and to his readers "la difficulté qui existe à exprimer dans sa plénitude une pensée fine ou subtile."37 Professing the art of "la suggestion," Marivaux "remet en question toute la doctrine classique."38

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37 Deloffre and Gilot, "Notice" to Pensées sur différents sujets, in Journaux et Oeuvres diverses, p. 49.

38 Deloffre and Gilot, "Notice" to Les Lettres sur les habitants de Paris, p. 5.
différents sujets are, in effect, an enlargement of Marivaux's personal esthetic system, a system which is to be at the basis of his comedies and novels. Specifically, an understanding of his esthetic system is essential to definition of his art and of his relation to his work and readers. In the Pensees Marivaux makes the distinction between "sublime de pensée" and "sublime de sentiment," and underscores the supremacy of the latter in the act of literary creation:

Le sublime de pensée, c'est l'image des efforts de l'esprit auteur: ce sublime nous peint ce qu'un auteur se fait devenir; il est l'effet des impressions qu'il appelle à lui, qu'il cherche.

Par le sublime de sentiment, au contraire, l'auteur nous peint ce qu'il devient; il est l'effet des impressions qu'il reçoit et qui le surprennent.\(^{39}\)

The "sublime de pensée" is the active effort made by an author to become, to "se faire devenir" by researching, accumulating and analyzing impressions. The "sublime de sentiment" does not concern the active participation of the author; it is the true source of inspiration and creation – another aspect of becoming. It becomes more and more evident as we read and study these Pensees that Marivaux continually develops a more profound sense of literature and that, together with Le Spectateur français, we may have the key to "le système marivaudien."

Toward the end of 1719, a few months after the appearance of the Pensees, Marivaux gives us Les Lettres contenant une aventure. This work marks a new beginning for "le roman" de Marivaux. In this work Marivaux develops essential themes and techniques which are to characterize his future novels. From the point of view of an "observer" Marivaux, in Les Lettres sur les habitants de Paris, deciphered appearances of the Parisian populace in order to penetrate to reality, to see behind the masks of a

\(^{39}\)Marivaux, Pensees sur différents sujets, p. 59.
variety of "types" of Parisians who, despite class differences, all seemed to resemble one another as universal "types." Les Lettres contenant une aventure are "letters" of a different nature. They are supposedly "real" letters rather than purely "literary" letters as were Les Lettres sur les habitants de Paris. They are supposed letters written by one young man, who had overheard an extraordinary conversation between two ladies, one naive and innocent, the other experienced in the ways of the world, to a friend. The "adventure" contained within these letters is that of the elder and more experienced woman who, in a conversation, explains in detail how a woman can use her charms to survive and manipulate the presumably dominant males. Within the progression of this short epistolary story the theme of "coquetterie" is fully developed. In this sense, the "coquette" of Les Lettres is most definitely a precursor of both the "dame âgée" in Le Spectateur and Marianne in La Vie de Marianne. The story is told in the first-person, a type of narrative that Marivaux is to become increasingly more interested in, for it allows him to make a more subtle psychological analysis of his characters as they reconstruct their past. In this way Marivaux assigns a double role to his most famous prose characters; they are both narrator and principal personage of the story of their life told in retrospect. In Les Lettres Marivaux does not preoccupy himself with a formal ending. It is precisely the "formlessness" of this work that makes it possible for him to elaborate his experimentation with conversational style and to further develop themes in an original and typically Marivaudian manner.

A close study of the three works that precede Le Spectateur français, Lettres sur les habitants de Paris, Pensees sur différents sujets and Les Lettres contenant une aventure, would disclose vital information to help
better understand the future world of Marivaux's comedies and novels. These initial "journalistic" endeavors point directly to the even more serious undertakings of Le Spectateur français, L'Indigent philosophe and Le Cabinet du philosophe which will appear as journals with their own autonomy and their own inherent evolution.

To the Marivaux scholar, Marivaux's journalistic works provide invaluable insight to his life and to his overall work. As Deloffre and Gilot point out, we do not have the right to consider him as an anonymous creator of "un univers théâtral." Marivaux should not be remembered only as a playwright. Aside from his thirty-six comedies, he has also left us journals, novels and essays containing his most intimate thoughts regarding the act of literary creation. They should not be ignored. To quote Deloffre and Gilot on this score:

Mais qui n'apprécierait la chance unique que l'on a ici d'entrer en contact avec son expérience, de l'observer lui-même au mouvement où il regarde les gens de son temps, la rue, la vie, lorsqu'il passe de l'observation à la réflexion, et de la réflexion au jugement? de prendre connaissance de ses points de vue, de découvrir ce qui le frappe ou qui l'intéresse, de se trouver en un mot aux sources mêmes de son inspiration? De même Valéry, après avoir donné Charmes, nous a laissé ses Cahiers.

In following his efforts to attain a practical understanding of life, we can witness the progressive augmentation and refinement of his thoughts and we can discover the feelings of a sensitive man with the imagination of a poet.

In the next chapter we will concentrate more specifically on Le Spectateur français; we shall see how Marivaux conceived the idea of writing

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40 Deloffre and Gilot, "Notice" to Les Lettres sur les habitants de Paris, p. iii.

41 Ibid. pp. iii-iv.
his own "journal" and why this particular genre presented itself as an opportunity to continue and give new direction to his literary quest. We shall discuss some of the major characteristics of the "journal" and the feuille. From there we will be able to isolate specific themes fully developed in Le Spectateur.
CHAPTER III

LE SPECTATEUR FRANÇAIS: PURPOSE AND THEMES

Origin and Purpose of Le Spectateur français

Marivaux borrowed the idea of Le Spectateur from his English predecessors, Addison and Steele who had begun publishing their Spectator in 1711. Appearing daily "at the hour of tea" from the first of March 1711 to the sixth of December 1712, the English Spectator aroused and maintained the immediate interest of a large reading public. Its popularity soon spread to other countries, Holland and France in particular, where intellectuals promptly began making translations in an effort to further promote the uniqueness of the English undertaking and to encourage successive works of similar nature. Thus, word of the English journal reached Marivaux. He saw, in the form itself, an excellent means of renewing moral thought in France which, in his eyes, was still suffering from the formalities of seventeenth century classicism. Whatever Marivaux's intentions may have been concerning the scope of his Spectateur, he certainly did not commence his project under the pretention that he should attain the same degree of popularity as his predecessors; he did not envision his work as being competitive or monumental. Frederic Deloffre and Michel Gilot, in their "Notice" to Le Spectateur, rightfully point out the unlikeliness of any intention, on the part of Marivaux, to "mener à bien une entreprise journalistique."¹

¹Deloffre and Gilot, "Notice" to Le Spectateur français, p 109.
The irregular publication of Marivaux's *feuilles* supports this view for, in fact, the English *Spectator*’s success had been largely due to the unbroken regularity of its publication, an accomplishment made possible by the energetic and collaborated efforts of a well organized *équipe*. Unlike Marivaux, Addison and Steele were not alone in their enterprise, a fact that indicates a serious concern for the prosperity of their *Spectator*.

It would be quite unjust to conclude that Marivaux was motivated by similar ambitions or that he foresaw an equally bright future for his *Spectateur*. Since Marivaux was not preoccupied with respecting a rigorous schedule of publication, the success of his journal was in jeopardy from the beginning. With this in mind, we must be hesitant in overemphasizing Marivaux's indebtedness to his English counterparts even though, in the opening lines of the twelfth *feuille*, Marivaux openly declares his obligations to his fellow Spectators, praising them: "mon confrère vaut mieux que moi, puis-qu'il pense mieux et qu'il est venu le premier." 2 Marivaux's attitude toward his forerunners is one of appreciation and admiration. Essentially then, if we are to speak of the dominant influence Addison and Steele had on Marivaux, we must isolate specific similarities which actually exist between the two Spectators so that we will be able to distinguish those characteristics and qualities of the *Spectator* that Marivaux appreciated and admired most. Primarily it was the form and the general idea of the *Spectator* that most readily appealed to Marivaux's temperament and his literary goals. Secondly, as Deloffre and Gilot put it:

> ...il apprécie certainement la liberté d'esprit des auteurs à l'égard des préjugés, leur indépendance de jugement même à l'égard des Anciens, qu'ils admirent, leur intérêt pour tous les problèmes, généraux et par-

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Even more so than Addison and Steele, Marivaux obviously felt that the "quest" was more important than the "taking." This can be said not only of Le Spectateur, but also of his other journals and many of his articles. For example, in Les Lettres sur les habitants de Paris Marivaux substantiates this hypothesis by explaining: "...ici tout mon devoir est d'eser, et point de réussir." Such a statement certainly applies to Le Spectateur, an enterprise through which Marivaux "dares" to give way to his most natural inclinations as a writer without giving second thought to the possibility of failure. What counted for Marivaux was the opportunity to experiment with a fundamentally unrestricted form, to expose and define his literary theories and eventually to discover himself in the process. For this reason alone Le Spectateur français ultimately "dépasse le contexte dans lequel il s'insère." That is to say, Le Spectateur does not close the circle upon itself; instead, it blossoms into a work or art or, more specifically, into the expression of a structuring consciousness. In fact, it is on this level that Le Spectateur inadvertently surpasses the English Spectator. This being the case, Marivaux readily adapts this new genre to the original inclinations of his own style and ultimately improves upon the original model. One opinion of a contemporary of Marivaux's suggests that: "Le français pense plus profondément, et plus délicatement que l'Anglais; l'auteur ne veut point être

3 Deloffre and Gilot, "Notice" to Le Spectateur français, p. 109.
4 Marivaux, Les Lettres sur les habitants de Paris, p. 32.
5 Deloffre and Gilot, "Introduction" to Journaux et Œuvres diverses, p. v.
connu, mais à la beauté de son style, tout le monde croit y connaître M. de Marivaux.\textsuperscript{6} Although Marivaux's debt to Addison and Steele is a great one, his \textit{Spectateur français} is a work that can stand on its own merit. Its unique characteristics have been recognized by more modern critics. Deloffre and Gilot have this to say concerning the uniqueness of \textit{Le Spectateur français} in relation to the English \textit{Spectator}:\textsuperscript{7}

D'une manière générale, là où le Spectateur anglais est minutieux et méthodique, son émule français est vigoureux et vivant; aux dissertations du premier, le second substitue les évocations brèves; aux ressources de la rhétorique, il préfère une poésie faite de délicatesse et de charme, et au pittoresque la suggestion. En un mot il imprime sa marque à tout ce qu'il touche.\textsuperscript{8}

Since Marivaux rarely upheld his promises concerning the publication of his \textit{feuilles}, it should not be out of context to briefly consider certain circumstances which either intentionally or unintentionally may have been responsible for Marivaux's reluctance or inability to pursue his project on a more stringent basis. For example, the six months of silence between the first and second \textit{feuilles} could very well have been due to his having resumed his law studies. Between the years 1722 and 1724, other prolonged delays of \textit{Le Spectateur} may have been the result of Marivaux's increasing involvement with the "Théâtre Italien" which, banished under the reign of Louis XIV, "fut rappelé pendant la Régence par le duc d'Orléans."\textsuperscript{8} During these years Marivaux seriously collaborated with the "Théâtre Italien" and produced such plays as: \textit{La Surprise de l'Amour}, \textit{La Double Inconstance}, \textit{Le Prince Travesti} and \textit{La Fausse Suivante}. Marivaux's unique style brilliantly lent itself to the interpretations of the improvising Italian actors who certainly were instrumental in making these plays

\textsuperscript{6}Adrien Martel, quoted by Gilot in \textit{Les Journaux de Marivaux}, p. 355.  
\textsuperscript{7}Deloffre and Gilot, "Notice" to \textit{Le Spectateur français}, p. 109.  
\textsuperscript{8}Sainte-Beuve, \textit{Causeries du Lundi}, p. 370.
successful. As a final and equally likely possibility, Deloffre and Gilot maintain that the spasmodic progression of Le Spectateur might also have been the result of a desired stylistic approach: "c'est une façon pour l'auteur d'exercer sa souplesse en tromant l'attente des lecteurs, de se dérober sans cesse en se montrant, c'est-à-dire de se masquer derrière son propre visage, ou plus profondément encore de se chercher à travers la diversité de ses apparences." If we are to adopt this point of view, a most credible one indeed, we are assuming that "l'entreprise journalistique," for Marivaux, served as a pretext, not necessarily to establish himself as a successful journalist, but to find himself through the unfolding of a series of esthetic themes. Apropos Lucette Desvignes writes: "Au fur et à mesure que les réactions de l'explorateur en littérature s'organisent, se complètent, se précisent, la personnalité de l'auteur se révèle et s'affirme... Sa simple existence devient principe." Before examining the esthetic themes expressed in Le Spectateur we must first consider the importance of the journalistic form and how Marivaux naturally conforms to that form.

In Le Spectateur français Marivaux is experimenting with a new form. The "journal" offers itself as a perfect means of experimentation; it is a genre with virtually no restrictions. For Marivaux it is a new point of departure, an opportunity to define his esthetic principles, develop innumerable themes and create a more direct relationship with his readers. By being able to adopt a more personal tone, Marivaux can freely confront his characters and they, in turn, can confront him. Now he can reveal his pre-

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9 Deloffre and Gilot, "Notice" to Le Spectateur français, p. 110.

sence, and shed his author's guise. He can be a man who simply writes for other men. Using the "journal" as a pivot from which he can move freely in all directions, he can vary his subjects as quickly as he is able to focus on different objects; his mind receives and develops whatever impressions chance may bring. In short, he creates spontaneously.

With such a loose and open form, Marivaux is able to fully develop "l'esthétique du hasard," a narrative style that will provide him with the "singularité" he desires. His ideas are most authentic and most valid, he believes, when they result from a natural impulse rather than from a methodic forethought. By means of an "imperfect" form he finds it possible to perfect and justify a style that is peculiar to his own temperament.

Marivaux's journal is basically a periodical, not a diary or "un journal intime" written without the intention of being published. Essentially it is a literary form intended to convey moral messages. This singular aspect of the journal certainly attracted Marivaux for it offered him an opportunity to return to "la réflexion morale" and to expand his personal moral philosophy.

Let us examine now how Marivaux organizes Le Spectateur and how he experiments with the new form. In the twenty-five feuilles that comprise Le Spectateur Marivaux includes anecdotes, letters, short stories, a journal he comes upon by chance, moralistic essays, literary criticism, mémoires and even longer stories disclosing the life of an individual. He tells us of particular experiences and records observations that he had made while walking in the streets and alleys of Paris. To "record," in this sense, does not imply the exercise of categorizing and filing away of observations and thoughts so that they may be available for future reference. Marivaux
explains his procedure in the following manner: "il me vient des idées dans l'esprit; elles me font plaisir; je prends une plume et les couche sur le papier pour les considérer plus à mon aise et voir un peu comment elles feront. Après cela, quand je les trouve passables, je les donne aux autres, qui s'en amusent eux-mêmes, ou qui les critiquent..."\(^{11}\) He listens to conversations or initiates them with some passer-by, a customer in a book store or a poor shoemaker. Marivaux adeptly links this wide variety of situations, encounters and thoughts together by utilizing the many advantages of la feuille. Unlike a "chapter," a feuille can be detached from the whole without interrupting the development of a plot or a theme. The dependence of one feuille on another is minimal except perhaps in the last part of Le Spectateur where Marivaux becomes less a Spectator than an actual prose writer. Essentially, the feuille is as unrestricted as the "journal" itself, and each one relates a particular moral message in a straightforward and practical manner. By means of the feuille Marivaux intends to "instruire agréablement" rather than to compose a huge and impressive volume "de la morale déterminée, toute crue...sans art...et conservée dans son caractère."\(^{12}\) He thus proposes to deviate from tradition by confronting his public directly and by making his observations accessible to them in just a few pages. He intends to appeal to everyone and at a price at which "tout le monde peut s'instruire."\(^{13}\) By resorting to this genre, Marivaux stresses that he is not writing only for an elite few. He therefore realizes that certain "beaux esprits" will be suspicious of his feuilles and will judge them by the "mediocrity" of their form rather

\(^{11}\)Marivaux, Le Spectateur français, vingt-troisième feuille, p. 245.

\(^{12}\)Ibid., sixième feuille, p. 139.

\(^{13}\)Ibid.
than by the content. In the sixth feuille he explains what he means through a narrative example. Having browsed around for some time in a book store, "un homme d'esprit grave" asks the book store owner whether he might have anything new of particular interest. The dialogue between the two continues:

J'ai Le Spectateur, lui répondit le libraire. Là-dessus, mon homme mit la main sur un gros livre, dont la reliure était neuve, et lui dit: Est-ce cela? Non monsieur, reprit le libraire, Le Spectateur ne paraît que par feuille, et le voilà. Ffi! repartit l'autre, que voulez-vous qu'on fasse de ces feuilles-là? Cela ne peut être rempli que de fadaises, et vous êtes bien de loisir, d'imprimer de pareilles choses. L'avez-vous lu, ce Spectateur? lui dit le libraire. Moi! le lire, répondit-il; non, je ne lis que du bon, du raisonnable, de l'instructif, et ce qu'il me faut n'est pas dans vos feuilles. ¹⁴

In effect, Marivaux is responding here to the biased reproaches of his critics. By presenting them as actual characters who, like everyone else, play a distinct role in society, the response itself takes on a more striking and legitimate quality. Seen in context, the "homme d'esprit" appears realistically and not simply as an ambiguous figment of the writer's imagination. The reader, as well as the "homme d'esprit" himself (if ever he should dare lower himself to read "des feuilles"), can actually witness a mirrored image of himself as he socially interacts. Thus the journal enables Marivaux to expose human prejudices and to simultaneously support his observations with concrete and realistic examples. Furthermore, it enables him to incorporate his ideas into real situations with which any reader can readily identify. Hence Marivaux's focus, not exclusively on his enemies, but also on the common man to whom he gives a place of legitimacy in literature. "Le libraire" is only one of many examples.

Through experimentation with the unrestricted nature of the feuille Marivaux is able to further develop a new concept of the narrative, one

which demands the reader's direct participation. Each feuille is like a circle without an end, a conclusion is never prepared. Marivaux generally ends his feuilles on an open note: "Juges! que les devoirs de votre état sont nobles! Mais je finis; nous les examinerons ailleurs..." Mais je pense que je ferai bien de quitter la plume; je sens que je m'appesantis.... Mais il me semble qu'il y a longtemps que j'écris; et si je ne finissais, la matière me mènerait trop loin... Adieu, mon ami, le papier me manque. Vale." In the same way that the feuilles do not come to a formal conclusion, Le Spectateur as a whole is also left "inachevé." Is it so surprising that his two greatest prose works, La Vie de Marianne and Le Paysan parvenu, should have no ending? This aspect of Marivaux's use of the narrative will be considered in more detail in the following chapter. At the moment, we are concerned with the form of the journal in general and of the feuille in particular and how this form encourages the narrative style peculiar to Marivaux. In any case, it is here, in particular, that Marivaux's work resounds with a striking tone of modernity. Like the nouveau roman of the 1950's and 1960's, Marivaux's journals and novels are demanding the reader's participation; the reader must finally become aware of the role that he has inevitably played all along. Since a work of art, by itself, is essentially inert, it depends on "une conscience réceptrice en qui se réaliser." Without a reader or "une conscience réceptrice,"

15Ibid., p. 132.
16Ibid., cinquième feuille, p. 137.
17Ibid., septième feuille, p. 149.
18Ibid., vingtième feuille, p. 231.
19Starobinski, La relation critique, p. 16.
the work is merely suspended in its materiality and exists only as ink on paper. It requires "une conscience" to accomplish itself. In *Le Spectateur*, Marivaux prepares his readers for the role they will eventually have to play in *La Vie de Marianne* and *Le Paysan parvenu*. The reader is certainly one of the main personages in any narrative, and particularly in *Le Spectateur*.

In summation, the openness of each successive feuille contributes to the overall movement of *Le Spectateur* which, in its progression, can be compared to a chain reaction of thoughts constantly being triggered by a continual flow of impressions reflected in a mirror-like thought process. Since *Le Spectateur* is not a work in static form, all of Marivaux's observations and thoughts can be condensed into anecdotes or fragments of stories without turning *Le Spectateur* into a collection of dissertations or a gallery of portraits. Just as Jean Starobinski says of Rousseau, so we can reiterate concerning Marivaux: "il n'a pas consenti à séparer sa pensée et son individualité, ses théories et son destin personnel. Il faut le prendre tel qu'il se donne, dans cette fusion et cette confusion de l'existence et de l'idée."  

In *Le Spectateur* there is an inherent convergence of life and literature, of the real and the imaginary. Life is a dynamic force that cannot be organized by one man alone - the author. Therefore, if literature is to be the expression of an existence in its process of becoming it must reject the confining nature of a static form. The creative consciousness of an artist is in a state of perpetual change, evolution, metamorphosis. His work is the representation of the evolution of the creative consciousness.

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Marivaux organizes his life and work as he lives his life and work, as he experiments, explores and acquires experience. In short, Marivaux is dealing with a project that is yet to be, a project that never encloses itself upon itself, a project that remains perpetually to be fulfilled.

Seeds of a New Esthetics for the Novel: Elements of the Creative Consciousness

In this study of Le Spectateur français the first feuille must be considered very carefully, for it is within these first few pages that Marivaux prepares us for a new esthetics for the novel. He begins by describing the duties and obligations of a writer and clarifies the procedure of his quest for personal enlightenment. Included in this first feuille is a story, an anecdote, disclosing the genesis of Marivaux's vocation as "Spectateur" and writer.

As a young man of seventeen, Marivaux was very much attracted to a young lady whose apparent "sagesse" made him "sensible à sa beauté." Being young and naive, he believed that the young lady was indifferent to her "charmes." "Il me semblait toujours," writes Marivaux, "qu'elle n'y entendait point finesse, et qu'elle ne songeait à rien moins qu'à être ce qu'elle était."21 One day, after a walk in the country, the two young people part company and go their own separate ways. On his way the young Marivaux realizes that he lost a glove making it necessary for him to turn around and retrace his steps. From a distance he sees "sa belle" who, much to his surprise, is busy looking at herself in her mirror and practicing her smiles and gests, the very same ones he witnessed during their "entre-

21Marivaux, Le Spectateur français, première feuille, p. 118.
tien." From that moment on Marivaux sees the young lady in her true light, unmasked. What he had taken for innocent beauty was nothing other than a "bag of tricks." His love for her vanishes immediately for, as he says: "je l'avais crue naturelle et ne l'avais aimée que sur ce pied-là." When she finally discovers that she is being watched she blushes. Marivaux approaches her laughing and ends the scene with the following dialogue:

Ah! Mademoiselle, je vous demande pardon d'avoir mis jusque-là sur le compte de la nature des appas dont tout l'honneur n'est dû qu'à votre industrie. Qu'est-ce que c'est? que signifie ce discours? me répondit-elle. Vous parlez-vous plus franchement? lui dis-je. Je viens de voir les machines de l'Opéra. Il me divertira toujours, mais il me touchera moins. Je sortis là-dessus, et c'est de cette aventure que naquit en moi cette misanthropie qui ne m'a point quitté, et qui m'a fait passer ma vie à examiner les hommes, et à m'amuser de mes réflexions.

This particular incident designates the awakening of Marivaudian consciousness on two different levels. One, it is the discovery of illusion. Two, it is that moment in which "Marivaux saw truth dissolved, or at least that truth to which he attached any value, veracity of feeling, human sincerity." Prior to this moment of discovery the young Marivaux lived in an idealized world, a world of "naïveté." The discovery of illusion suggests a rupture and affirms a "before" and an "after." However, in the case of Marivaux the rupture does not completely efface the "before." The "before" implies a state of innocence at which point confidence in others is based on a purely intuitive and, therefore, irrational process — that of feeling. Marivaux does not conclude that human feelings are, from

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22Ibid.

23Ibid.

this moment on, disreputable or that they should be disconsidered entirely. For Marivaux feeling will always be a noble criterion for judgement; feelings, especially in the case of women, are often more lucid than one's reasonings. Nevertheless, truth concerning human affairs can never be wholly grasped without the help of the "after" - the ability to see clearly and reflect accordingly. The "after" implies recognition of the real world by way of a rational process, a process which must be consciously developed by observing and thinking about one's observations. Essentially, the mirror episode can be viewed as the awakening of the observing consciousness, the point of departure, the point from which Le Spectateur is to unfold. It informs us of the way in which Marivaux is to view and analyze others.

The interplay of feeling and reason is a complex theme which can be found throughout the work of Marivaux. We must be careful about giving priority to one over the other. Marivaux himself notes:

> La passion est souvent meilleure ménagère de ses intérêts qu'on ne pense, et je croirais que la raison même dans de grands besoins la secourt de tout ce que ses lumières ont de plus sur; car l'homme est ainsi fait que tout ce qu'il a lui sert, et vient à lui quand il le faut.²⁵

The lucid Marivaudian character is he who is able to sense the reciprocal relationship that can exist between feeling and reason. This is possible only if the individual is able to come to terms with himself, and to remain faithful to those terms. For this reason, the "before" retains its importance. It is Marivaux's personal point of reference; it is the foundation of his principles concerning human sincerity. Marivaux would like everyone to return to that state by admitting their shortcomings and by recognizing their responsibilities to their fellow man. If human relations

²⁵Marivaux, Le Spectateur français, vingtième feuille, p. 227.
were founded on sincerity there would no longer be a need to disguise oneself; one could be what one is and say what one thinks. Marivaux himself will never stray from this principle. Rather than becoming dupe to illusion, Marivaux holds steadfast to his principles which, for him, comprise "une loi de nécessité absolue ... une loi de bon sens universelle ... une loi qui nous prescrit d'être juste et vertueux." As "Spectateur," Marivaux takes it upon himself to expose the illusions that obscure man's true condition from him and that inhibit him from recognizing his responsibilities to himself and to his fellow man. It is in this vein that Marivaux reverts to "la réflexion morale" in Le Spectateur. In proposing a practical method of education he renews the form of "l'observation morale."

Marivaux opens Le Spectateur by addressing himself directly to his readers: "Lecteur, je ne veux point vous tromper." In so doing, he immediately affirms a desire to be sincere. In order to be sincere he must, first and foremost, refuse to play a role which, in this case, is the role of author: "et je vous avertis d'avance que ce n'est point un auteur que vous allez lire ici." The refusal to be an author stems from the refusal to force and organize one's thoughts as well as from the refusal to play a role. Since Marivaux is concerned with communicating on a common level, he must not allow his ideas to diverge from the plane of practicality and "bon sens." The arbitrary choice of thoughts (a procedure peculiar to an author) perpetrates the vast possibility of deception. Therefore, the reader who is not accustomed to "les belles tournures" is unable to establish a point of reference and ultimately loses sight of the question

26 Ibid., vingt et unième feuille, p. 235.

27 Ibid., première feuille, p. 114.
at hand. This act of "composing" may be appreciated by the erudite thinker, but not by the majority of individuals who neither learn nor profit from it. Marivaux considers it necessary for a writer to express himself naturally so that all readers may easily understand him. He reproaches those writers who are interested in polishing their form and style and who, in so doing, suppress the intensity and naturalness of the idea. It is the free spirit of the human mind that is at stake here:

Ainsi, nous avons très rarement le portrait de l'esprit humain dans sa figure naturelle: on ne nous le peint que dans un état de contorsion; il ne va point son pas, pour ainsi dire; il a toujours une marche d'emprunt qui le détourne de ses voies, et qui le jette dans des routes stériles, à tout moment coupées, où il ne trouve de quoi se fournir qu'avec un travail pénible. S'il allait son droit chemin, il n'aurait d'autre soin à prendre que de développer ses pensées; au lieu qu'en se détournant, il faut qu'il les compose, les assujettisse à un certain ordre incompatible avec son feu, et qui écarte l'arrangement naturel qu'amènerait une vive attention sur elles.

Est-ce là l'esprit, après cela? Non, nous ne voyons point là ce qu'il est; mais bien ce que des égards pour des sentiments inconsiderés le font devenir. 28

An author must recognize himself as a man; he must not overlook the essential nature of his being. Thoughts and ideas must not be forced if a writer intends to communicate them on a common and natural level. They must occur to him by chance; they must be provoked by an initial feeling:

Ne serait-il pas plus curieux de nous voir penser en hommes? En un mot, l'esprit humain, quand le hasard des objets ou l'occasion l'inspire, ne produirait-il pas des idées plus sensibles et moins étranges à nous qu'il n'en produit dans cet exercice forcé qu'il se donne en composant? 29

Inspiration is the awakening of consciousness by an unexpected and sudden impression. "Il est," writes Marivaux in Les Pensées sur différents sujets, "l'effet des impressions qu'il (l'auteur) reçoit et qui le surpren-

28Ibid., septième feuille, p. 145
29Ibid., première feuille, p. 114.
Such is the definition Marivaux had given to "le sublime de sentiment," that effortless occurrence which, in turn, impels the creative consciousness into action. Prior to the moment of inspiration, the mind is a void; it is in a state of non-existence, of non-being; it is suspended in a dream. It awaits a feeling to set it into motion, to project it into time, to give it life, a life which is continually renewed.

In the first feuille of Le Spectateur the theme of "l'esthétique du hasard" is fully developed. From the beginning of Le Spectateur the reader is made aware of the concept of chance, "le hasard." In the first feuille Marivaux repeatedly uses the word "hasard." In each instance it suggests the instantaneous origin of his thoughts and ideas; each time the word is brought into context Marivaux links it with "l'esprit" or some function or product of it: "les idées, la pensée, la réflexion":

...l'esprit humain, quand le hasard des objets ou l'occasion l'inspire, ne produirait-il pas des idées plus sensibles et moins étrangères à nous... je ne sais point créer, je sais seulement surprendre en moi les pensées que le hasard me fait naître.... Tout ce que je dis là n'est aussi qu'une réflexion que le hasard m'a fournie.... Oui! je préférerais toutes les idées fortuites que le hasard nous donne à celles que la recherche la plus ingénieuse pourrait nous fournir dans le travail.... Je ne destine aucun caractère à mes idées; c'est le hasard qui leur donne le ton.

"Créer, composer, rechercher, travailler, destiner un caractère aux idées" all suggest an arbitrary decision on the part of an author to create, to put himself in a position from which he can accurately and authoritatively

30Marivaux, Pensees sur differents sujets, p. 59.

31See Georges Poulet, The Interior Distance, for full development of this theme, pp. 3-28.

32Marivaux, Le Spectateur francais, premiere feuille, pp. 114-118.

33Ibid.
preside over the formulation of thoughts and development of ideas. The mind adjusts to a "personally desired" method of approach, that is, it contorts itself in accordance with the will and desire of the author. In Marivaux's case, writing will always be manifested as a passion, a natural effort:

Quoi! donner la torture à son esprit pour en tirer des réflexions qu'on n'aurait point, si l'on ne s'avisait d'y tâcher; cela me passe, je ne sais point créer, je sais seulement surprendre en moi les pensées que le hasard me fait naître, et je serais fâché d'y mettre rien du mien.34

Marivaux refuses to create. He insists on detaching himself from an attitude of control in order to adopt the more natural attitude of a passive observer. In Jean Rousset's words: "ces 'hasards' que sont les rencontres de l'instant et de l'esprit, il ne les provoque pas, il les attend; il se tient à distance, et il regarde."35 As a passive observer, however, Marivaux is not inactive; his attention is piercing as he eagerly awaits the slightest occasion to stir his reflective conscience: "je suis né de manière que tout me devient une matière de réflexion; c'est comme une philosophie de tempérament que j'ai reçue, et que le moindre objet met en exercice."36 As Michel Gilot justly remarks: "Il est le prisme et le miroir: les airs, les gestes, les mouvements d'autrui se réfractent en lui, et il les réfléchit."37 The immediate encounter with the real world, with others, their feelings and pretentions, in short, with the drama of daily existence is the source of Marivaux's inspirations. He depends initially

34Ibid.
36Marivaux, Le Spectateur français, première feuille, p. 117.
37Gilot, Journaux de Marivaux, p. 298.
on sensations provoked by the objective world then, by "un tour d'imagination" peculiar to his temperament, he begins to analyze and penetrate the subjective world of man. In *Le Spectateur* Marivaux does not proceed from the abstract to the concrete. Instead, he strives to comprehend the concrete, the reality of life and of human existence. What better way to grasp the concrete than to participate directly as an observer and to recognize the presence of oneself in one's observations? "C'est de moi-même que je vois dans les autres."

Because Marivaux so fervently insists on "l'esthétique du hasard" does not mean that he rejects a philosophical attitude. Quite the contrary. Marivaux's attitude towards philosophy and his conception of it are entirely original: "...je deviens philosophe quand l'homme en moi a eu son compte, c'est-à-dire que je me repens lorsque j'ai eu le plaisir de faillir, et voilà ce que c'est que notre sagesse." From a moralistic point of view Marivaux's philosophy is one of admission, one in which an individual (un homme) must be in continual pursuit of his weaknesses: "...nos faiblesses, combattues sous une figure, nous échappent sous une autre. Il n'est pas question de les détruire; il s'agit de quelque chose de plus pénible et de plus glorieux, c'est de les poursuivre sans cesse." Distrustful of abstract jargon and of over intellectualizing, Marivaux sees the need to found his philosophy on more practical ground. Esthetically then, his main concern is to conserve the naturalness of his style so that his ideas can retain their immediate vitality and be mutually apprehended by his readers. This vitality depends on his ability to promptly

39 Ibid., p. 245.
40 Ibid., septième feuille, p. 143.
adapt to the vicissitudes of existence. In this sense, life and literature harmoniously converge. The purpose of literature is to express the movement of a life process. To do so the writer must abandon himself and his thoughts to the immediate impressions of the actual moment. Literary creation, like life, is never in a state of permanency.

It is precisely on this note that we are bordering the meaning of time in the Marivaudian sense. The theme is a fruitful one, for through it is reflected the convergence of being and becoming. Marivaux's authentic notion of time applies to human existence, literature and history in general. Generally, it is through Marivaudian heroes and heroines that we are referred on to the significance of time in relation to human existence.

In the following passage from Le Spectateur, an old lady, "une coquette convertie," introduces the story of her life by briefly summarizing her concept of time:

J'ai soixante et quatorze ans passés quand j'écris ceci: il y a donc bien longtemps que je vis. Bien longtemps? helas! je me trompe, à proprement parler je vis seulement dans cet instant-ci qui passe; il en revient un autre qui n'est déjà plus, où j'ai vecu, il est vrai, mais où je ne suis plus, et c'est comme si je n'avais pas été. Ainsl ne pourrais-je pas dire que ma vie ne dure pas, qu'elle commence toujours? ainsi, jeunes et vieux, nous serions tous du même âge. Un enfant naît en ce moment où j'écris, et dans mon sens, toute vieille que je suis, il est déjà aussi ancien que moi: voilà ce qui m'en semble, et sur ce pied-là, qu'est-ce que la vie? un rêve perpétuel, à l'instant près dont on jouit, et qui devient rêve à son tour.41

The Marivaudian being, as exemplified by this passage, lives in a continual present. His existence is a perpetual beginning. He exists only in the moment in which he feels but, like everything else, feelings are transitory and dissolve with the flight of time; they are lost along the way, replaced by new feelings. Life in this sense is not a duration. Instead, it

41Ibid., dix-septième feuille, pp. 207-208.
is a succession of feelings that live and die and, as Georges Poulet writes, "surge out of nothingness ... and end in a dream."42 The implication here is not that one should "profit from the moment because the moment is the place of our pleasures."43 Instead, we are dealing here with Marivaux's concept of time in relation to an individual's consciousness. Very often Marivaux's characters unexpectedly discover themselves in a state of extreme confusion due to a sudden and irrevocable situation or passion. Usually it is the act of falling in love that causes the Marivaudian being to feel his existence, to feel that he is and that he is somehow different from what he was just an instant before. Poulet very aptly describes the crystallization of such a moment in the following terms:

But before that instant in which all is thought and felt, there was nothing; or at least nothing that remains actually thought and felt. This fullness conceals a void. The Marivaudian being, without identity, without past, without habits, suddenly opens his eyes and sees all at once what he sees for the first time. It seems that this existence is given to him, not little by little as temporal existence is, but simultaneously and at a single stroke.44

In the second feuille Marivaux gives us an actual incident which demonstrates this subjective process. It is presented to us in the form of a letter supposedly written to a friend of "le Spectateur." A married young woman writes to the man (l'ami du Spectateur) with whom she had suddenly fallen in love but to whom she had not yet openly declared her love. Her situation is comparable to that of La Princesse de Clèves for if she gives in to her love she is certain to lose the "repos" that she depends

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42 Poulet, The Interior Distance, p. 16.
43 Ibid.
44 Ibid., pp. 13-14.
on. Torn and confused by her immediate feelings, she simultaneously con-
fesses and renounces her love. In spite of her confusion, she finally de-
cides that her "devoir" and "repos" are most important if she wants to re-
main virtuous in the eyes of society. The following passages reveal the
intensity of the new feelings that overtake her and which had previously
not existed:

Et d'où vient que je ne m'apercevais pas que je vous aimais moi-mêmes?
... Je n'avais rien à me reprocher; j'avais lieu d'être contente de
moi. Vous m'estimiez, je m'estimais moi-même. Je vivais en repos et
dans l'innocence. Où sont tous ces biens-là?... Que fais-je? d'où
vient vous rendre compte de ce que je sens? D'où vient que j'entre
avec tant d'abondance dans un détail si honteux? D'où vient qu'il
m'entraîne?.... Puis-je rien démêler dans mon coeur? Je veux me
chercher, et je me perds.45

The importance of time in the work of Marivaux remains fairly consist-
tent throughout. The concept of the perpetual present, the instantaneous
rebirth of consciousness, a self projected into a future "being" are cen-
tral elements of Marivaux's esthetic philosophy. On the literary level it
is partially through the Italian theater that Marivaux develops his concept
of time. In his first comedies he does not hesitate to further and more
elaborately develop his own conceptions of improvisation and spontaneity.
In effect, these comedies will be able to survive the classical restrictions
of the theater because of his ability to apply this meaning of time to the
existence and levels of consciousness of his characters. The very titles
themselves, Arlequin Poli par l'Amour, La Surprise de l'Amour, and La Dou-
ble Inconstance, derive their meaning from the instantaneous and unexpected
occurrence of LOVE, a LOVE that overwhelms Marivaux's characters with such
intensity that they become, in effect, reborn; they feel for the first
time that they are alive, they see a side of themselves they had never seen

45Marivaux, Le Spectateur français, deuxième feuille, pp. 118-123
before. From a state of nonbeing, of savageness, they arise in a surge to the realm of consciousness, of life.

In *Le Spectateur* this theme has been expanded and reaches a higher level of sophistication. Characters begin to reflect, to analyze the suddenness of their altered state of consciousness and the consequences that time has had on their lives. We shall see in the next chapter how the subtle yet distinct metamorphosis of *Le Spectateur* culminates in a positive thrust towards "l'expression romanesque," an achievement made possible through experimentation with first person narrative and subsequently with character development. In short, *Le Spectateur* prepares Marivaux for his future novels which are nothing other than the expression of an individual's lifetime as perceived by that same individual both introspectively and retrospectively.

Finally, in *Le Miroir*, which appeared in *Le Mercure* around 1750, Marivaux broadens his perspective and relates his concept of time to History in general and to the History of "l'esprit humain":

> Non, monsieur, la nature n'est pas sur son déclin, du moins ne ressemblons-nous guère à des vieillards, et la force de nos passions, de nos folies, et la médiocrité de nos connaissances, malgré les progrès qu'elles ont faits, devraient nous faire soupçonner que cette nature est encore bien jeune en nous....

> Il serait en effet impossible, monsieur, que tant de générations d'hommes eussent passé sur la terre sans y verser de nouvelles idées, et sans y en verser beaucoup plus que les révolutions, ou d'autres accidents, n'ont pu en anéantir ou en dissiper....

> Enfin, je le répète encore, l'humanité en général reçoit toujours plus d'idées qu'il ne lui en échappe, et les malheurs même lui en donnent souvent plus qu'ils ne lui en enlèvent.46

And Georges Poulet who has done the most comprehensive study of this aspect of the creative imagination writes:

> Now since chance does not cease to be chance, it does not cease to

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create; and consequently, thanks to its continuous creation, we are always "new souls" and each moment at the "first age of the world."

In the allegory of the Miroir, in which as Sainte-Beuve says, Marivaux expounded his philosophy of history, one finds the following thesis: Nature is not at all in its decline. It is still very young in us. Perhaps it is ageless. And thus it is with humanity. There are formed there, periodically, convulsions of all sorts—wars, invasions, epidemics—by means of which there appear new modes of existing. In short, for Marivaux (as for Fontenelle), if the world is always young, it is because it periodically returns to chaos. It is a world that only exists and survives by shocks....

Humanity as a whole is therefore no different than Marianne or Silvia; and Sesostris or Alexander do not play in history a role any different from that which love plays in the existences of a lover. At random, hap-hazardly, they beget the troubulous and the new. Thanks to them, man can be reborn and life begin again.

A philosophy of history which rigorously ends in the destruction of all history, since one always sets out again into the new. Neither Nature, therefore, nor humanity, nor the individual being ever grows old.47

In the concluding paragraphs of Le Miroir, Marivaux places his ultimate faith on "l'esprit humain" because of its eternal agelessness:

Non, monsieur, si j'en crois la glace; une grande quantité d'idées et une grande disette de goût dans les ouvrages d'esprit peuvent fort bien se rencontrer ensemble, et ne sont point du tout incompatibles. L'augmentation des idées est une suite infaillible de la durée du monde: la source de cette augmentation ne tarit point tant qu'il y a des hommes qui se succèdent, et des aventures qui leur arrivent.

Mais l'art d'employer les idées pour des ouvrages d'esprit peut se perdre: les lettres tombent, la critique et le goût disparaissent; les auteurs deviennent ridicules ou grossiers, pendant que le fond de l'esprit humain va toujours croissant parmi les hommes.48

It is in this light that Marivaux is able to secure a universal and timeless quality for his work, a quality which insures his originality and modernity and makes his work a valuable and interesting compendium for twentieth century readers and critics.

In the following chapter we shall see how Le Spectateur serves as a work of transition. We shall describe how Marivaux progresses from journalist to novelist through experimentation with the "journal." The role

47Poulet, The Interior Distance, p. 15.

48Marivaux, Le Miroir, p. 549.
of Marivaux's characters and use of first-person narration will be dis-
cussed in an effort to make this inherent transition more evident.
CHAPTER IV

THE TRANSITION FROM JOURNALIST TO NOVELIST

Characters in Search of an Author

The formation of Marivaux's future novels is indeed underway in Le Spectateur français. Throughout this work Marivaux expounds his literary theories, elaborates his moralistic inclinations, experiments with different types of narrative and sketches characters that will become fully developed in La Vie de Marianne and Le Paysan parvenu. The formal freedom of the "journal" enables Marivaux to explore and, in the process, discover his far-reaching abilities as a prose writer.

Throughout Le Spectateur Marivaux focuses on the private lives of individuals, of real people who are entangled in the drama of daily existence. However, his vision of them is not one-dimensional. Rather than simply perceiving them as mere objects among objects devoid of both individuality and a personal "raison d'être," Marivaux encourages and realizes the living experience of communication between reader and writer. Employing the technique of fictitious letters, Marivaux allows his readers to speak for themselves, to tell their own stories. Most often these are without beginning or end; they are mere fragments of stories which disclose intimate and often desperate secrets of people who heretofore had no place in literature. Marivaux allows them the liberty to express themselves and to reveal the confusion and distress of their existence. As a result, he gives living
examples and encourages people to expose their feelings so that they may become "philosophers" in their own right. As Gilot puts it: "On ne peut faire qu'en se faisant: voilà pour Marivaux l'enseignement et la fonction de la littérature. A l'écrivain de transformer son lecteur en "philosophe", c'est-à-dire en libre créateur de sa propre existence."¹

In most cases these individuals present themselves as readers of Le Spectateur and they openly express their confidence in the "Spectateur." For example, one young girl writes: "La lecture de quelques-unes de vos feuilles me persuade que vous avez le coeur bon, et qu'une personne aussi malheureuse que je le suis n'aura pas de peine à vous intéresser pour elle."² In another instance, the husband of "une femme extrêmement averse" sends a letter to the "Spectateur" and asks him to print it so that it may serve as an example through which his wife "ou d'autres avertes" can be confronted with the hideousness of their comportment. Here we can see how Marivaux effectively lends his moralistic inclinations to his readers so that, in revealing their particular situation or problem, others may eventually profit: "Peut-être êtes-vous embarrassé de trouver le sujet de vos feuilles, et ma situation vous fournit un que vous pouvez rendre utile et agréable."³ In another letter, a sixteen year old daughter "d'une mère exessivement dévote" asks the "Spectateur" to print her letter and to persuade her mother that she is doing more harm than good by imposing fanatic religious lessons and practices on her:

Persuadez-la, s'il vous plaît, de changer de manière à mon égard. Tenez, ce matin j'étais à ma fenêtre; un jeune homme a paru prendre plaisir à me regarder; cela n'a duré qu'une minute, et j'ai eu plus de co-

¹Gilot, Journaux de Marivaux, p. 276.
²Marivaux, Le Spectateur français, neuvième feuille, p. 155.
³Ibid., douzième feuille, p. 172.
quetterie dans cette seule minute-là qu'une fille dans le monde n'en aurait en six mois. Tâchez donc de faire voir les conséquences de cela à ma mère.⁴

In yet another letter an old man, a prototype of the Père Goriot, who had made every possible sacrifice for the well being and advancement of his son and who is presently totally neglected by that son writes to the "Spectateur" for help:

Je ne vous demande point de mettre cette lettre dans vos feuilles; je ne sais pas faire de lettres qui méritent d'être imprimées. Je vous prie seulement d'avoir la bonté, dans un de vos discours, de traiter de la situation où je suis. Si vous aîmez à secourir les gens qui sont malheureux, vous ne pouvez donner du secours à personne qui soit plus digne de compassion que moi.⁵

From these examples we can see how Marivaux's readers become actual characters in Le Spectateur. The writer's desire to communicate with his public is thus realized. As a consequence the readers themselves can be legitimately recognized as "characters in search of an author." They are characters who express a consciousness of living and who wish to expose their most intimate feelings. As fictitious as they may be, they are real and alive in the imagination of Marivaux who, in turn, represents them and their problems in a truly realistic manner. From the viewpoint of Marivaux's literary development, the composition of these fragmented stories and the gradual development of his characters makes it possible for him to further experiment with different narrative forms and techniques. Above all, it allows him to develop his characters subjectively. Given the reflective nature of the "Spectateur" himself (whose passion it is to observe and reflect) it is quite understandable why Marivaux progressively grows more and more inclined to experiment with and ultimately

⁴Ibid., p. 179.

⁵Ibid., quatorzième feuille, p. 186.
profit from the reflective qualities of first-person narration.

As Marivaux advances in his enterprise, he becomes increasingly involved with that type of prose writing that will eventually distinguish him as a capable novelist. His presence as "Spectateur" becomes less obvious in the latter part of Le Spectateur where he withdraws himself almost completely in order to allow his characters the freedom to recreate "the tissue of events" constituting their own existence.

Forging a Romanesque Mode

In the early feuilles, the reader can sense the "Spectateur's" presence. He accompanies the writer in his observations, listens as he theorizes or defines his unique style. The first feuilles appear as moments in which the writer makes an effort to come to a practical understanding of himself and of those who surround him. Feuilles three and five, in particular, deal with the "Spectateur's" direct confrontation with "la foule" where "tant de sujets se réduisent en un." The only apparent distinction between "tous ces porteurs de visages" is precisely the "visage" itself or, so to speak, the different variations of the mask. His observations amuse him immensely; he is enthusiastic in his quest for understanding. In the sixth, seventh and eighth feuilles Marivaux discusses the role of criticism, "corruption du goût," imitation and originality. Within these feuilles we find his opinions of critics who approach literature from biased perspectives, who judge a work by its form rather than by its content. He overtly reproaches critics whose first question is: Is he a Modern? Is he an Ancient? Here Le Spectateur is a medium of response

6Ibid., cinquième feuille, pp. 132-133.

7Ibid., troisième feuille, p. 124.
to Marivaux's contemporaries. The following quotes emphasize to what extent Marivaux opposes partiality and imitation, to what degree he promotes originality. In spite of his obvious attraction to the Moderns, Marivaux insists on the singularity of his principles and style:

...je parais aujourd'hui n'apostropher que les amateurs des Anciens; un de ces jours, les Modernes auront leur tour; je m'y engage, et je promets que leur article vaudra bien celui-ci; car je ne suis d'aucun parti: Anciens et Modernes, tout m'est indifférent: le temps auquel un auteur a vécu ne lui nuit ni ne lui sert auprès de moi. J'adopte seulement, le plus qu'il m'est possible, les usages et les moeurs, et le goût de son siècle, et la forme que cela fait ou faisait prendre à l'esprit; après quoi, je vais mon train.... Les Anciens avaient plus d'esprit que nous: nous avons plus d'esprit que les Anciens: voilà les vraies causes de la corruption du goût, s'il vient à se corrompre.

Est-ce le génie des auteurs grecs qu'il faut que ce jeune homme imite?....

Et bien! un jeune homme doit-il être le copiste de la façon de faire de ces auteurs? Non, cette façon a je ne sais quel caractère ingénieux et fin, dont l'imitation littéraire ne fera de lui qu'un singe, et l'obligera de courir vraiment après l'esprit, l'empêchera d'être naturel....qu'il se nourrisse seulement l'esprit de tout ce qu'il leur sent bon, et qu'il l'abandonne, après, cet esprit à son geste naturel....

...je pourrai bien, un de ces jours, argumenter dans les formes et prouver qu'écrire naturellement, qu'être naturel n'est pas écrire dans le goût de tel Ancien ni de tel Moderne, n'est pas se mouler sur personne quant à la forme de ses idées, mais au contraire, se ressembler fidèlement à soi-même, et ne point se départir ni du tour ni du caractère d'idées pour qui la nature nous a donné vocation.8

Hence, Marivaux "va son train," "il abandonne son esprit à son geste naturel."9 Along the way he amuses himself:

...il faut que le jeu me plaise, il faut que je m'amuse; je n'écris que pour cela, et non pas précisément pour faire un livre; il me vient des idées dans l'esprit; elles me font plaisir; je prends une plume et les couche sur le papier pour les considérer plus à mon aise et voir un peu comment elles feront.10

Little by little the "bonheur" and enthusiasm of the "Spectateur"

8Ibid., septième et huitième feuilles, pp. 142-154.
9Ibid., septième feuille, p. 148.
10Ibid., vingt-troisième feuille, p. 245.
are replaced by a more serious and detached attitude. The last feuilles of Le Spectateur bear little resemblance to the first ones. For example, in the opening of the twenty-fourth feuille Marivaux expresses his disgust and indifference to the art of writing and concludes that his only reason for resuming Le Spectateur is that he must have something to occupy his time:

Je reprends enfin le Spectateur interrompu depuis quelques mois, et je reprends pour le continuer avec exactitude. Je l'avais quitté par une paresse assez naturelle aux personnes d'un âge aussi avancé que je le suis; et d'ailleurs, me disais-je, quand même ce que j'écrirais serait excellent, ce qui n'est pas qu'en arriverait-il? On dirait: celui qui nous donne le Spectateur écrit bien. Et à mon âge, quand on a passé sa vie à examiner les hommes, à réfléchir sur eux et sur soi-même, et sur la valeur de nos talents, en vérité l'estime qu'on peut s'acquérir en une infinité de choses devient bien indifférente: on se dégoûte de tout, lamente et blâme, tout est regardé du même œil; on ne méprise rien si vous voulez, mais on ne se soucie de rien non plus, et l'on n'en est pas plus philosophe pour cela, car cette indifférence où vous tombez ne vient pas que vous l'avez cherchée, elle vient de la nature des choses que vous avez examinées; elles vous donnent pour elles une tiédeur que vous n'attendiez pas, vous leur sentez un vide que vous n'aviez point déssein d'y trouver, et ce vide que vous leur sentez, vous ne prenez pas même la peine de voir s'il y est réellement, et si vous avez raison de le sentir ou non, ce serait autant de fatigue inutile; vous restez comme vous êtes sans plus de curiosité, sans blâmer ceux qui ne sont vous; et voilà précisément l'état où je me trouve aujourd'hui.

Pourquoi donc est-ce que je reprends le Spectateur? Par une raison fort simple: c'est qu'il y a mille moments dans la journée où je m'ennuie de ne rien faire.... Ainsi j'en reviens toujours à dire que je ne cherche ici qu'à m'occuper moi-même.11

There is no way at this point for Marivaux to discontinue his literary task. Writing has become a way of "being" for Marivaux; "car," writes Giovanni Bonaccorso, "il a désormais le métier d'écrivain dans le sang."12

In these last feuilles the "Spectateur's" reflections give way to more

11Ibid., vingt-quatrième feuille, pp. 252-253.

serious meditations - the significance of the life of an individual. He no longer preoccupies himself with telling his readers of a moment, an event he has just lived nor is he so resolutely concerned with explaining his personal literary theories. Instead, "le va et le vient" between the imaginary and the real is resorbed into a renewed effort of "l'expression romanesque." Having acquired a practical understanding of reality and an exact sense of experience along with having defined and restructured his artistic priorities, Marivaux is ready to apply his discoveries and revelations to more involved stories. No longer "un spectateur de ces hasards," Marivaux, in the latter feuilles of Le Spectateur, "nous entraine dans son rêve profond."

In the seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth feuilles he tells the story of "une coquette convertie," the life of a woman who, in her later years, has arrived at an understanding of the meaning of her life. The story is told in the first-person and in the form of a mémoire. "La dame âgée" entitles this story of her life: "Mémoire de ce que j'ai fait et vu pendant ma vie." In this mémoire she retrospectively analyzes the evolution of her existence remembering how she reacted to her becoming conscious, at different stages, of her advancing years: "Mes années commençaient à m'inquiéter; leur course me semblait plus rapide qu'à l'ordinaire"; later she comments: "ma jeunesse continuait à se passer"; and eventually: "l'âge enfin me gagnait,...mon visage n'était plus disciplinable"; and finally: "j'étais tellement une femme faite que je la fus bientôt trop, et que, toute ressource épuisée, il fallut au bout du compte en venir à la raison et voir au vrai ce que j'étais."  

13Coulet and Gilot, Marivaux: un humanisme expérimental, p. 93.  
14Marivaux, Le Spectateur français, dix-huitième and dix-neuvième feuilles, pp. 214-220.
It is with "la coquette convertie" that Marivaux announces many themes and techniques to be found in La Vie de Marianne. Here is that point of transition between Marivaux journalist and Marivaux novelist. The mémoire format used in the story of "la coquette" supplies Marivaux with a point of departure for his future novel. With the mémoire format Marivaux is able to have his heroine evaluate the effects of time on her life. In the process he is able to make a more subtle psychological analysis of her character, and thus reconstruct an existence in its dynamic process of becoming, just as he will do in La Vie de Marianne. Both "la coquette" and Marianne tell the stories of their lives in retrospect in an effort to recover lost time, that is, the temporal distance which separates them (at the time they narrate their stories) from their youth. To do so both heroines recreate, as the authors of their own existences, the succession of events that fill the gap between their present being and their early years.

Characteristic of all of Marivaux's major narrative works is the jeu of time and individual consciousness. As the narrators recount their stories there occurs a subtle play with time and consciousness manifested in a number of unpredictable digressions appearing throughout the text. Most often the reader is uncertain as to whether the digressions pertain to the attitudes and instinctive perceptions and feelings of the narrator as a young person (at the actual moment of experiencing an event) or to the analytical reflections of the experienced and mature adult who is examining that event in retrospect. Marivaux thus combines the faculty of thought with that of feeling and pure instinct so that his characters emerge as super sensitive and extremely lucid individuals. The result of these characters' retrospective as well as introspective analyses is that they ulti-
mately envision their existences as being continually renewed with each succeeding instant and event. In essence they themselves capture the meaning of time. It is for this reason that Marivaux refuses to play the role of author. By placing this responsibility in the hands of his heroes and heroines he allows them to relive, from a perspective of greater insight, the adventures and experiences that have shaped their personal destinies. He thus makes it possible for each of them to discover what they were and are.

Perhaps the most important prose attempt in Le Spectateur is the story of "l'Inconnu," the definitive link to Marivaux's future novels. In the opening of the twenty-first feuille Marivaux informs his readers that he had recently received "un pacquet" from an anonymous person which contained "un manuscrit contenant la vie de ce même inconnu." "l'Inconnu" appears as the last character who writes to the "Spectateur." Unlike all the rest, "l'Inconnu" does not ask for help. Instead, he volunteers to contribute to the "Spectateur's" endeavors. Along with the manuscript he encloses a letter in which he reveals his intentions:

Monsieur,

Puisque vous appliquez à connaitre les hommes, n'y en eût-il qu'un seul entre cent mille qui dût profiter de vos recherches, votre étude ne dût-elle avancer que vous dans la sagesse, ne contribuât-elle qu'à perfectionner votre raison, le peu de progrès que j'ai fait moi-même dans cette étude me persuade que je dois, si je puis, aider au progrès que vous y pouvez faire. Le secours que j'ai à vous donner, c'est l'histoire de ma vie; si vous ne trouvez pas à propos de la produire telle qu'elle est, du moins y puisserez-vous des réflexions qui vous seraient peut-être échappées. Dans tout le cours de mes aventures j'ai été mon propre spectateur, comme le spectateur des autres; je me suis connu autant qu'il est possible de se connaître; ainsi, c'est du moins un homme que j'ai développé, et quand j'ai comparé cet homme aux autres, ou les autres à lui, j'ai cru voir que nous nous ressemblions presque tous; que nous avions tous à peu près le même volume de méchanceté, de faiblesse, et de ridicule; qu'à la vérité nous n'étions pas tous aussi fréquemment les uns que les autres faibles, ridicules, et méchants; mais qu'il y avait pour chacun de nous des positions où
nous serions tout ce que je dis là, si nous ne nous empêchions pas de l'être.¹⁵

In this passage we recognize the philosophy of Marivaux uttered by one of his characters. "L'Inconnu" is the image of Marivaux himself. He is a "Spectateur" who has lived and experienced the commerce of life, who has observed and become acquainted with the follies of human existence. He is a "Spectateur," "un homme" who, like Marivaux, has completed one phase of his "odyssey." Having made the essential discoveries about himself and others, he is now his own philosopher. Marivaux lends all of his resources to this one last character of Le Spectateur: "c'est du moins un homme que j'ai développé."¹⁶ As "l'Inconnu" continues his letter he gives his opinion of what it means to be "un homme":

Quoi qu'il en soit, Monsieur, disposez comme il vous plaira de ce que je vous envoie, et continuez votre travail: de tous les usages qu'on peut faire de son esprit, le plus louable, et peut-être le seul utile, c'est celui que vous faites du vôtre. Laissez à certains savants, je veux dire aux faiseurs de systèmes, à ceux que le vulgaire appelle philosophes, laissez-leur entasser méthodiquement visions sur visions en raisonnant sur la nature des deux substances, ou sur choses pareilles. A quoi servent leurs méditations là-dessus, qu'à multiplier les preuves que nous avons déjà de notre ignorance invincible: Nous ne sommes pas dans ce monde en situation de devenir savants; nous ne sommes encore que l'objet, ou plutôt le sujet, de cette science que nous voudrions avoir. Jusqu-là soyez donc téméraires notre orgueil, sa curiosité ne trouverait pas ici son compte, tout en nous est disposé pour la confondre; l'envie que nous avons de nous connaître n'est sans doute qu'un avertissement que nous nous connaîtrons un jour et que nous n'avons rien à faire ici qu'à tâcher de nous rendre avantageux ce développement futur des mystères de notre existence;...¹⁷

Marivaux has successfully realized one of his primary objectives: to develop a man sensitive to both himself and the world around him, one who is capable of deciphering for himself the common law which unites all men, a law

¹⁵Ibid., vingt et unième feuille, p. 232.

¹⁶Ibid.

¹⁷Ibid., pp. 232-233.
which must be respected if man is to live in harmony with his fellow man. Through experience "L'Inconnu" has developed the only science worthy of consideration by all men - "la science de l'homme." As a science foreign to no one, it necessarily demands everyone's cooperation. We need only to make an effort to recognize the meaning that this science has for us and how we, in turn, perpetuate it.

After a rather long discourse on the meaning of "justice" and "vertu," Marivaux intervenes and gives his reasons for cutting the letter short:

Je supprime ici de la lettre de l'inconnu plus que je n'en donne, mais ce qu'il en reste nous mènerait trop loin.
J'ai lu d'un bout à l'autre ses aventures, et je les ai trouvées si instructives, et en même temps si intéressantes que j'ai résolu de les donner, quelque longues qu'elles soient; elles empliront bien dix-huit à vingt de mes feuilles, et je les regarde comme des leçons de morale d'autant plus insinuantes qu'elles auront l'air moins dogmatique, et qu'elles glisseront le précepte à la faveur du plaisir qu'on aura, je crois, à les lire.18

Marivaux certainly envisions the possibility of writing a novel when he states that the story of "l'Inconnu" would probably take up from eighteen to twenty feuilles. As usual, Marivaux does not stick to his promise; Le Spectateur ends without explanation at a crucial moment in the story of "l'Inconnu" the beginning of his journey to Paris.

In the four feuilles which constitute the "unfinished" story Marivaux fully develops, in a touching and harmonious progression, the adolescence of "l'Inconnu." The narrator, of course, is "l'Inconnu" himself who retrospectively reconstructs the story of his life. "L'Inconnu" explains that he was born into a family of good standing. His father had ascended the social ladder and procured a position "qu'il exerca avec beaucoup d'honneur."19 Sudden misfortune strikes. The father falls ill and is forced

18Ibid., pp. 235-236.

19Ibid.
to give up his post. The family's situation becomes even more desper­ate because of a "banqueroute" which causes them to lose all but a small piece of land in the country to which they are unavoidably forced to re­treat. Having quickly decided to make the best of the little they had, they soon overcome their afflictions. They create their own little world based on love and honor. The parents take it upon themselves to educate their son and daughter in the ways of the world and its uncertainties. Marivaux describes in detail the nature of the young boy's practical educa­tion:

...nous passâmes six mois dans toute la paix et toute la gaiété que peut donner un état où l'on ne désire plus rien. Je me promenais souvent avec mon père, et de tout ce qui s'offrait à nos yeux, il en prenait occasion de m'instruire; je ne sais comment il faisait en m'instruisant, mais je regardais nos entretiens comme des heures de récréation pour moi; je craignais de les voir finir; il avait l'art de les rendre intéressants, j'aimais à sentir ce qu'il disait. Ma jeunesse et ma vivacité, qui pouvaient me dégoûter de ce qui était sérieux et raisonnable, comme pour l'ordinaire elles en dégoûtent les jeunes gens, ne contribuaient avec lui qu'à me rendre plus attentif à tous ses discours; j'en valais mieux entre ses mains d'être jeune et vif, parce que je n'en avais que plus d'ardeur pour le plaisir, et que ce plaisir, il avait su faire en sorte que je le misse à m'entre­tenir avec lui.20

The harmony and beauty of this simple yet profitable existence was destined to last but a short while. Within a few months the mother dies. The fa­ther's already weak state makes it impossible to overcome the shock of his wife's death; he dies a year later. The children are left alone and poor, no-one to turn to, nowhere to go:

Que nous étions à plaindre! Nous n'avions point de parents dans la province; des amis, nous n'en connaissions point: qui est-ce qui s'at­tache à d'honnêtes gens qui sont dans l'infortune? Il n'y a point d'objet plus disgracié parmi les hommes, plus abandonné d'eux que l'homme pauvre et vertueux tout ensemble; tous les coeurs sont glacés pour lui; il est comme un étranger dans la nature.21

20Ibid., vingt-deuxième feuille, p. 240.

21Ibid., vingt-quatrième feuille, p. 257.
At this point they decide to sell their land. With the meager sum of money they receive it is hardly possible for the both of them to go out into the world. Recognizing the fact that it would be easier for the boy to go to Paris and "faire sa fortune," they decide to part ways; the sister willingly retreats to a convent and "l'Inconnu" sets out for Paris just as Jacob and Marianne will do to find success and happiness.

So begins the adventure of "l'Inconnu." Having left his sister behind, he journeys past all of the familiar places of his childhood. Now, alone and deprived of any external support, "l'Inconnu" must find himself anew and be conscious of his solitary existence: "il n'allait plus me rester que moi pour moi-même, et qu'est-ce que c'était que moi?" Typical of Marivaux's romanesque heroes, "l'Inconnu" must ask himself this one essential question: "qu'est-ce que c'était que moi?" This question requires a lifetime to answer:

Je succombais sous toutes ces idées-là; je me croyais perdu; je craignais tout sans savoir pourquoi, sans avoir d'objet fixe; je me regardais comme un homme entouré de périls, et mon esprit était dans un étourdissement qui me faisait des monstres de tout ce que je voyais.

Whatever the case, there is no going back; the Marivaudian hero must face the world and himself alone with an uncertain future before him. Faced with such a crisis, the Marivaudian hero characteristically comes to his senses and assumes an attitude of defense based on egocentricity and egotism:

Enfin je m'éloignai tant que je les perdis de vue; il se fit alors un changement en moi; je n'avais été jusque-là que triste et attendri sur moi-même; je n'avais songé à rien qu'à nourrir ma tristesse de tout ce qui pouvait me la rendre plus sensible; mais quand je me vis hors de la portée de ces objets qui m'étaient si chers, et que l'éloignement où je me trouvais eut rompu, pour ainsi dire, le commerce que

22 Ibid., vingt-cinquième feuille, p. 261.
23 Ibid.
mes yeux et mon coeur aimaient à avoir avec eux, je fus à l'instant saisi de je ne sais quel esprit de défiance et de courage qui me rappela tout entier pour moi-même, et me rendit l'objet unique de toutes mes attentions; je regardai les périls que je croyais courir moins pour les craindre, comme j'avais fait auparavant, que pour prendre garde à moi; ma timidité me donna des forces, et je marchai armé d'une précaution soupçonneuse qui veillait à tout, et qui me tenait toujours en défense.

It is with this attitude that "l'Inconnu" detaches himself from his past and sets out, not to conquer the world, but to survive. So it will be with Marianne and Jacob as they face the pretentions and injustices of Parisian society. Having no-one but themselves to rely on, they develop a lucid consciousness of the "self" and of their natural abilities to defend that "self."

Marivaux does not conclude "l'histoire de l'Inconnu" in Le Spectateur. Nevertheless, the story ends, along with Le Spectateur, as the point of a new beginning. La Vie de Marianne and Le Paysan parvenu will eventually take up where "l'histoire de l'Inconnu" leaves off. Having launched "l'Inconnu" into the commerce of life, Marivaux will not neglect to resume the adventures and experiences that that life has to offer. Marianne and Jacob will complete "l'aventure romanesque" of which "l'histoire de l'Inconnu" is only the beginning. In La Vie de Marianne in particular, Marivaux will make an original breakthrough by giving a detailed psychological analysis of the life of one individual. Use of first-person narrative will allow him to detach himself completely and let Marianne be the author of her own existence. Thus, "l'aventure romanesque" will find its complete expression in both of Marivaux's future novels. To quote Coulet and Gilot, "l'aventure romanesque se déroule sur deux plans à la fois: le héros affronte le monde extérieur, se défend contre sa violence, d'une part; il apprend d'autre

24Ibid., p. 263.
part à se connaître lui-même, il éprouve ce dont son âme est capable."\(^{25}\)
"La rencontre du monde" will thus culminate in "une rencontre de soi."
The lives of Marivaux's heroes take the form of "un tissu d'événements" which each of them will retrospectively analyze and reconstruct. These same heroes thus become the authors of their own existences, and, in the process, "ils nous prennent dans leur jeu"\(^{26}\) just as Marivaux had done in _Le Spectateur_. Thus the novel, for Marivaux, becomes the expression of an introspective as well as retrospective examination of the "self," of the continual search of "une ligne de vie."\(^{27}\)

In terms of _Le Spectateur_, "l'histoire de l'Inconnu" marks the fulfillment of Marivaux's quest, he has developed a character who is the philosopher and creator of his own existence. _Le Spectateur_ thus reveals itself as a project of experimentation. Through his experimentation with the form of the journal, Marivaux is able to invent an entirely original form for the novel and to discover "le privilège de l'écriture romanesque." In the words of Henri Coulet this new form: "ne cesse de changer la vie en destin, et le destin à son tour en expérience, en forme constructive."\(^{28}\) Through his experimentation with first-person narratives in _Le Spectateur_ (letters, a "journal within a journal," and mémoires,) Marivaux "develops a narrative self-consciousness that allows him to be more subtle and insinuating in his analysis of character."\(^{29}\)

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\(^{26}\)Ibid., p. 93.

\(^{27}\)Ibid., p. 92.

\(^{28}\)Ibid., P. 93.

\(^{29}\)Rosbottom, _Marivaux's Novels_, p. 84.
poignantly remarks: "il n'est, selon Marivaux, qu'un objet digne du roman: écrire une vie, et une vie ne s'écrit jamais qu'à la première personne." Use of the first-person makes it possible to place more importance on the subjective reactions of characters rather than on the events that provoke those reactions, events that constitute a life and form an individual psychologically.

Marivaux, like his heroes, is propelled by the dynamic force of life; his art is in a perpetual state of transformation, continually searching, continually inventing and continually becoming. It is precisely for this reason that the works of Marivaux are inevitably without a formal ending. Marivaux's passion to live and "d'avoir du mouvement pour aller plus loin" is the ultimate expression of each and every one of his literary enterprises. Le Spectateur is certainly no exception.

The next chapter will deal specifically with Marivaux's moral convictions as expressed in Le Spectateur.

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30Coulet and Cilot, Marivaux: un humanisme expérimental, p. 91.
CHAPTER V

LE SPECTATEUR: A RELATION WITH BEING, WITH OTHERS
AND WITH THE WORLD

The Meaning of Philosophy and of Literature
as Manifested in Le Spectateur

Writing at a time in French literary history when philosophic enthusiasm was at its peak, when critical thought and a vivid passion for new ideas were penetrating every domain of literary expression, Marivaux could feel both at home and extremely alienated in this milieu. He most certainly contributed to the overall enthusiastic spirit of his age by welcoming certain new ideas and approaches, by openly experimenting with new literary forms and by communicating with a changing society. Nevertheless, Marivaux was not altogether appreciated by his contemporaries. Unable to recognize the originality and fervor of his innovations, his detractors affirmed their prejudices against him by mocking and criticizing his style and Christian inclinations. Insensitive to the subtlety of his style, they reproachingly labeled him "précieux" and "unnatural." As a moralist Marivaux was accused of being excessively dependent on the Christian ethic. In short, Marivaux was grossly underestimated by his contemporaries. Their short-sightedness was ultimately responsible for procuring an unfavorable reputation which obscured the fertility of his ideas and the modernity of his overall enterprise to successive readers for well over a century. Even then his true spirit was hardly recognized. In fact, Marivaux has only begun to be under-
stood within the last three decades. Only out of bitter resentment towards the literary "judges" of his time could Marivaux have said: "Que le talent d'auteur traîne après lui de petitesse."

Much of the negative criticism directed at Marivaux finds its origin in Marivaux's reluctance to wholeheartedly comply with the positivist way of thinking that dominated the better part of the eighteenth century. He did not believe that philosophic rationalism should invade all literary genres, as it was doing. The considerable influence that "science" exercised over literature was viewed by Marivaux as detrimental to art. It diminished the artist's possibility of manifesting his intimate relationship with his work. That is to say, "scientific thought," by its very nature, excludes the scientist from his project. This being the case, the scientific project suffers from the shortcomings of not being able to refer us to the existence of the "scientist" or of his relation to his project. The "scientist" therefore exists outside of his work, not within it. Literature would no longer be literature if it were condemned to be the product of a purely scientific approach. The work of art necessarily expresses the relation that links artistic activity with its creations. The artist thus exists in his work and does not annihilate himself in the process of literary creation. Marivaux felt that the integrity of literature should not be sacrificed or replaced by scientific "modes" that prevailed during his time. Perhaps for this reason alone Marivaux was relegated to an inferior status by his contemporaries.

Another reason why Marivaux refused to place exclusive faith in philosophic rationalism was his sceptical vision of man regarding man's ability

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1Marivaux, *Le Spectateur français*, huitième feuille, p. 150.
to resolve all problems. Marivaux felt that over-confidence in human reason had obscured man's true nature, flattered his amour-propre, and made him believe that the mind, by resorting to the experimental sciences, was capable of achieving exact and absolute understanding of all things, including man himself. Marivaux saw many unresolved issues in what "les philosophes" or "les faiseurs de systèmes" believed to be "un nouvel humanisme." He found in it a fundamental divergence from the true nature and condition of man. Although a humanist in the truest sense of the word, Marivaux did not believe man capable of understanding himself in toto. His view was that philosophy should not be limited to the scientific conviction of mind over matter. To do so meant that man could be defined in terms of rationally contrived generalities, and that, for Marivaux, would not suffice. To Marivaux the false conviction of the omnipotence of the human mind simply served as a final proof of man's invincible ignorance. It is his pride, "l'orgueil," according to Marivaux, that blinds man and prohibits him from actually being what he would like to believe he is. Seeing oneself in such a distorted light strongly confirms the invincibility of one's ignorance. Marivaux's scepticism on this subject assured him greater philosophic freedom. In fact, it is upon this sceptical attitude that he founded a humanistic philosophy peculiar to his temperament and his personal convictions. By recognizing the existence of certain incomprehensible mysteries as a fact of human life, Marivaux could assume a more modest philosophical stance; he could focus his attentions on a more practical level of understanding without pretending to be able to solve all of man's problems.

In spite of his convictions that not all things can be rationally ap-

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2Ibid., vingt et unième feuille, p. 232.
prehended, Marivaux does not imply that all the mysteries of existence should be disregarded:

...l'impossibilité de les comprendre ne les détruit point, n'en empêche pas les conséquences: de la manière dont nous les ignorons, il nous est aussi peu possible de les nier que de les comprendre; et ne pouvoir les nier, c'est en connaître ce qu'il nous faut pour en craindre le noyau, et pour prendre garde à nous. Voilà où nous en sommes; ne nous révoltions pas contre cette admirable économie de lumière et d'obscurité que la sagesse de Dieu observe en nous à cet égard-là; en un mot ne cherchons point à nous comprendre; ce n'est pas là notre tâche; interrogeons les hommes, ils nous apprendront quelle elle doit être.  

Since it is impossible for us to understand ourselves completely we must spare our energies and learn to realize our imperfections which in turn should underscore our dependence on others and render evident our obligations to our fellow men.

Marivaux's philosophy is thus primarily concerned with discerning the affinities which link all men in a common bond and not with scientifically and arbitrarily resolving the absolute nature of man. Marivaux suggests, therefore, the application of a direct and empirical procedure of contact between men, without extracting them from their social context. "Interrogeons les hommes" 4 is truly the only sincere procedure conducive to a sensible and practical understanding of man. Thus, in opposition to a purely abstract "science," Marivaux proposes a pragmatic "science" that will be relevant to all ages. In effect, Marivaux is concerned with re-habilitating the ignored science of man in a sincere attempt to bring all of humanity closer together. His goal is to remind man of himself and of

3Ibid., vingt et unième feuille, p. 233.

4Ibid.
his obligations to others. To accomplish this he confronts his readers with the banality of their true condition. Once faced with the banality of their social behavior, they may become more aware and hopefully more understanding of their actions both towards themselves and towards others. How exactly does Marivaux achieve this goal?

The answer to this question lies in what Marivaux feels to be the purpose of literature. Literature, for Marivaux, must serve a practical purpose, not to the writer alone, but to others as well, to his contemporaries in particular. Marivaux believes in the social nature of literature. He confirms our hypothesis when, in Le Cabinet du philosophe, he asks himself: ".. mais écrirait-on pour soi? J'ai de la peine à le croire. Quel est l'homme qui écrirait ses pensées, s'il ne vivait pas avec d'autres hommes"? To write then is a practical way in which one man can reach and hopefully relate to other men. In Marivaux's case such an attitude further supports the altruistic nature of his philosophy, "car," writes Gilot apropos, "être homme c'est rencontrer des hommes." In assigning himself the role of "Spectateur," Marivaux does just that. He encounters others by assuming this position which involves a direct participation in the life and culture of his times. Society is his school and life his maître. Marivaux learns through his observations and lives through his literature. Since Le Spectateur français is partially a study of man in his living context, the distance that had heretofore always existed between the writer and his subject is now completely eliminated, a factor which enables the writer to relate to his subject on a human and

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5 Marivaux, Le Cabinet du philosophe in Journaux et Oeuvres diverses, p. 351.

6 Gilot, Journaux de Marivaux, p. 417.
compassionate level. It is precisely on this note that Marivaux radically differs from other French writers and moralists of his time. Although Marivaux does not entirely oppose the classical rule which demands that literature must *instruire et plaire*, his idea of *instruire et plaire* is basically more down-to-earth; he applies this "rule" to an infinitely more practical and sincere context. This is especially evident in *Le Spectateur* when Marivaux abandons a train of thought or a promise to his readers in order to treat a more pressing subject, one that concerns an individual in need of immediate help. For example, the fourth *feuille* opens with the following explanation to the reader:

> J'ai promis, dans la dernière feuille du Spectateur, un rêve tiré d'un manuscrit espagnol; mais je ne puis m'empêcher de le différer; j'ai quelque chose de plus pressant à dire. Je cède à des réflexions moins amusantes, mais plus instructives. Je me reprocherais d'écarter la situation d'esprit où je me trouve; je me livre aux sentiments qu'elle me donne, qui me pénètrent, et dont je voudrais pouvoir pénétrer les autres. Jamais, peut-être, ne me reviendraient-ils avec ce caractère d'attendrissement qu'ils portent. Je m'imagine en devoir compte aux autres; et je vais essayer de faire passer dans leur âme toute la chaleur de l'impression qu'ils me font.  

This particular passage reveals the acute sensitivity of the writer, his compassion for others and his desire to capture and relate to his readers a feeling at its most intense moment. Rather than appealing to his readers "intellectuellement," Marivaux intends to appeal to them "sensiblement" in an effort to replace "la raison pure" with "la raison pratique," a cold rational thought with a warm emotional thought. For a thought to be properly communicated, Marivaux feels that it must be appealing, not only on an intellectual level, but also on an affective level so that it may provoke a sympathetic response and subsequently avoid the possibility of being misunderstood. Furthermore, we can see that one of the primary purposes of

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literature for Marivaux is disposed to compassion, to pity, to feeling for others: "Je m'imagine en devoir compte aux autres."\(^8\) In a later feuille Marivaux adheres to this same principle. He explains to his readers his reasons for having been inconsistent in varying the subject matter of three successive feuilles:

Quelques-uns de mes lecteurs s'ennuieront, sans doute, de voir trois feuilles de suite rouler sur le même sujet, mais les intérêts de la demoiselle en question le demandent, et tout ami que je suis moi-même de la variété, je ne la soutiendrai jamais aux dépens des services que je pourrai rendre dans mes feuilles. Il vaut mieux remettre vingt curieux que de faire attendre une personne qui a besoin de secours.\(^9\)

So, we see how Marivaux remains faithful to life and human existence, and how literature emerges as a privileged form of participation in life which can and should serve a functional purpose, that of modifying man's social behavior by making him respond emotionally and therefore sincerely to real day to day human situations. In short, man must learn to recognize and be sympathetic towards the needs and existence of others if true social harmony is to be realized.

In Le Spectateur Marivaux offers us his most intimate experiences and thoughts by adeptly vacillating between the real and the imaginary, between experienced reality and literary creation, not in an effort to recover the "essence" of being, but in an attempt to clarify and express the "existence" of human reality in its perpetual and dynamic process of becoming. The underlying negation of scientific "laws" suggests Marivaux's resolution to establish a new and authentic way of being-in-the-world which depends on the "laws" of reason, common sense and a sense of virtue and justice, "laws"

\(^8\)Ibid.

\(^9\)Ibid., onzième feuille, p. 166.
which are vital to the security of social order. Through "l'Inconnu" Marivaux defines the nature and necessity of this type of order:

...nous ne faisons pas plus tôt société que nous sommes frappés de la nécessité qu'il y a d'observer un certain ordre qui nous mette à l'abri des effets de nos mauvaises dispositions; et la raison, qui nous montre cette nécessité, est le correctif de notre iniquité même.

Cet ordre donc, une fois prouvé nécessaire pour la conservation générale, devient (à ne parler même qu'humainement) un devoir indispensable pour chacun de nous qui frémissions d'horreur à la vue de ce qu'il arriverait, si cet ordre n'y était pas.

Il faut que mon prochain soit vertueux avec moi, parce qu'il sait qu'il ferait mal s'il ne l'était pas; il faut que je le sois avec lui, parce que je sais la même chose.

Malheur à qui rompt ce contrat de justice dont votre raison et la mienne et celle de tout le monde se lient, pour ainsi dire, ensemble, ou plutôt sont déjà liées, des que nous nous voyons, en quelque endroit que nous nous voyions, et sans qu'il soit besoin de nous parler. Contrat qui m'oblige même avec l'homme qui ne l'observe pas à mon égard, parce que ce n'est pas une loi conditionnelle et particulière faite avec lui; loi qui serait inutile, impuissante, et malgré laquelle notre corruption reprendrait bientôt son empire féroce. Non, c'est une loi de nécessité absolue, passée pour jamais avec l'humanité, avec tous les hommes ensemble, et par tous les hommes en général, qui l'ont tous ratifiée, et qui la ratifieront toujours...

Que les coutumes, que les usages particuliers des hommes soient défectueux, cela se peut bien; aussi ces usages sont-ils de la pure invention des hommes, aussi ces coutumes sont-elles aussi variées qu'il y a de nations diverses. Mais cette loi qui nous préscrit d'être juste et vertueux est partout la même: les hommes ne l'ont pas inventée, ils n'ont fait que convenir qu'il fallait la suivre telle que la raison ou Dieu même la leur présentait et leur présente toujours d'une manière uniforme. Il n'a pas été nécessaire que les hommes aient dit: Voilà comment il faut être juste et vertueux; ils ont dit seulement: Soyons justes et vertueux, et en voilà assez; cela s'entend partout, cela n'a besoin d'explication dans aucun pays; en quelque endroit que j'aille, je trouve dans la conscience de tous les hommes une uniformité de science sur ce chapitre-là qui convient à tout le monde. Si j'ai des besoins ou des intérêts qui me soient personnels et particuliers, je n'ai qu'à les dire et l'on sait tout d'un coup ce qu'il me faut. 10

Before finally defining the exigencies of this "loi de nécessité absolue," "loi de bon sens universelle," Marivaux had to discover "dans la conscience de tous les hommes une uniformité de science." 11 To do so meant experiencing life and encountering others. Le Spectateur made it possible for Mari-

10 Ibid., vingt et unième feuille, pp. 234-235.

11 Ibid.
vaux to do just that thanks to the nature of the procedure he used. His observations do not reduce man's existence in the world to the state of being a mere object among objects or a thing among things, rather, man becomes a subject which is not perceived in isolation or detached from its natural and dynamic context. This man is the "subject" of Marivaudian discourse. Michel Gilot sums it up most aptly when he writes: "Que les hommes existent avant d'être des objets de savoir, des pécheurs à prêcher ou des sujets du roi de France, voilà ce qu'il ne cesse de nous rappeler, voilà d'où découle leur psychologie, sa morale, toute sa pensée." Le Spectateur does not merely consist of Marivaux's objective observations; it is also the expression of a subjective vision of man. In the letters and anecdotes which appear throughout Le Spectateur we come into direct contact with a dramatic representation of different individuals' personal and totally subjective struggles as they strive to exist in a world that continually confronts them with obstacles and hardships.

In chapter four we have seen how Marivaux allows his readers to speak for themselves. As these characters relate their personal experiences and situations to the "Spectateur" they are to ultimately serve as examples from which others may profit. These particular "characters" often explicitly express a desire to set an example for others who may be involved in a similar situation. Marivaux thus moralizes through his characters, characters who are represented realistically and who express a consciousness of living. One particular example concerns a letter to the "Spectateur" from a gentleman who proposes to furnish him with a story that may be useful and agreeable to other readers of Le Spectateur: "Peut-être êtes-vous quelquefois

12 Gilot, Journaux de Marivaux, p. 417.
embarrassé de trouver le sujet de vos feuilles, et ma situation vous en
fournit un que vous pouvez rendre utile et agréable."13 In another letter
an anonymous person informs the "Spectateur" that he has discovered a u-
unique way of getting debtors to pay their debts to others:

Zélé comme vous l'êtes pour le public, je ne doute pas que vous ne lui
fassiez un présent de ma lettre; elle sera très courte, et j'y donne
le secret de se faire payer de certains débiteurs qui sont très hon-
nêtes gens, très généreux, et les meilleurs coeurs du monde, mais qui
dans le cas dont il s'agit, ont une bizarrerie d'humeur, qui leur ôte
l'usage de leur bon caractère, c'est qu'ils ne peuvent se résoudre à
payer leurs dettes.14

"La dame âgée," about whom we have discussed in chapter four, has this to
say concerning her reason for writing the story of her life: "Je n'écris
l'histoire de ma vie que dans l'espérance qu'elle pourra servir à l'instruc-
tion des autres."15 "L'Inconnu," in his letter to the "Spectateur," encour-
grages him to continue his enterprise (Le Spectateur) whose primary objec-
tive is to "faire ressouvenir les hommes de leurs véritables devoirs,
etc."16 And Marivaux himself makes a significant comment concerning the
value of "l'Inconnu"'s story:

J'ai lu d'un bout à l'autre ses aventures, et je les ai trouvé si
instructives, et en même temps si intéressantes que j'ai résolu de les
donner quelque longues qu'elles soient... et je les regarde comme des
leçons de morale d'autant plus insinuantes qu'elles auront l'air moins
dogmatique, et qu'elles glisseront le précepte à la faveur du plaisir
qu'on aura, je crois, à les lire.17

This passage is of particular interest for its revelation of Marivaux's
view of the function of the "moralist." Marivaux distinctly breaks with the

13Marivaux, Le Spectateur français, douzième feuille, p. 172.
14Ibid., quatorzième feuille, pp. 191-192
15Ibid., dix-huitième feuille, p. 213.
16Ibid., vingt et unième feuille, p. 235.
17Ibid., p. 236.
moral traditions of the late seventeenth century France by proposing to write moral lessons which no longer adhere to "classical" rules.

In previous chapters we have remarked how important it is to Marivaux to express his thoughts in a way that safeguards the vitality and naturalness of those thoughts. However concerned Marivaux may be (and he often mentions this concern throughout Le Spectateur) about appealing to his readers, he will not, under any circumstance, arbitrarily conform his ideas and principles to the expectations of his reading public. To do so would mean resorting to a refined style, a disguise, "une coquetterie d'attentions" which would destroy the relation between writer and reader by making it pretentious. It would ultimately nullify all sincere communication. For this reason Marivaux rejects delivering to his readers "une morale déterminée, toute crue... une matière naturellement froide, sérieuse, sans art, et scrupuleusement conservée dans son caractère".

Rather than assigning a specific "caractère" to his ideas, Marivaux effectively employs the technique of "suggestion." He thus succeeds "de faire passer dans leur âme toute la chaleur de l'impression qu'ils (les sentiments provoqués d'autrui) me font." By repudiating "the laws of literature" or as Marivaux would say, "les lois stériles de l'art," he insists on his freedom as a writer and as a man. Without hiding behind the mask of the traditional professions of author, philosopher or moralist he can thereby remain first and foremost a man, and more exactly "un homme qui ne

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18 Marivaux, Le Cabinet du philosophe, p. 336

19 Marivaux, Le Spectateur français, sixième feuille, p. 139.

20 Ibid., quatrième feuille, p. 127.
veut point tromper ses lecteurs." As a result of all this, the "Spectateur" can become a mediator through which supposedly real individuals are able to voice intimate opinions and confide to him burdensome secrets and emotions. In this manner Marivaux adds a "living" dimension to his moral lessons and revitalizes the "science of man" in subjective as well as objective terms. By dispensing with the traditional designation of "la réflexion morale" Marivaux adds a new dimension to the role of moralist. Just as he allows his readers the freedom to exist, so he grants them the freedom to choose from a suggested system of values. With this in mind, we can now venture to isolate more specifically those values which Marivaux considers to be essential to the development of sound individual choice and the responsibilities to oneself and to others that each choice entails. As Marivaux sees it, social harmony depends entirely on whether these responsibilities can be recognized and respected mutually by all.

**Education, morality and freedom**

Marivaux's moral philosophy hinges largely on the writer's original perspectives on education, morality and freedom. *Le Spectateur français* is in fact "une école de la responsabilité." It is a work whose task it is "d'ouvrir les hommes sur les autres" so that even the least privileged may never be compelled, because of the unequal distribution of wealth and power, to feel the solitude and insignificance of their being. The greatest of human tragedies for Marivaux is the feeling of solitude and neglect.

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21 Ibid., première feuille, p. 114.


23 Ibid., p. 447.
"au milieu des hommes." All men must share equal rights regardless of social rank or wealth. Ideally, in any democratic society, no one should feel abandoned or unjustly neglected. It is the responsibility of Kings to recognize the needs of every individual they represent, and by the same token it is the responsibility of each individual to recognize his duties to his nation and his King. Above all, an individual must always be respected as a free individual. A sense of justice, virtue and moral consciousness is necessary in any free society. *Le Spectateur* is a response to a society that did not encourage these values. Through it we see how self interest, illusion and hypocrisy prevail in lieu of virtue and justice. In the society that Marivaux describes there is hardly a place for the virtuous and honest person, and to survive he too is forced to resort to subterfuge and role playing. "L'Inconnu," after having lost both parents and alone for the first time, points out the uncertainties that face a virtuous person who must finally confront society:

Il n'y a point d'objet plus disgracié parmi les hommes, plus abandonné d'eux que l'homme pauvre et vertueux tout ensemble; tous les coeurs sont glacés pour lui; il est comme un étranger dans la nature. Un fripon indigent est peut-être plus méprisé, mais mieux servi, moins rebuté; du moins le mépris qu'on a pour lui est-il plus sans conséquence et de meilleur composition; que dire à cela? C'est que la qualité de fripon tranche moins que la vertu avec le caractère des hommes en général; il leur ressemble par là davantage, peut-être qu'il y gagne à n'être ni estimé ni estimable, les hommes qui sont vains en traitent plus commodément avec lui; il est rampant avec eux; cela les flatte; ils ont le plaisir de primer sur lui quand ils le servent, au lieu que l'homme vertueux est honteux et respectable, et cela les dégoûte, parce qu'ils n'oseraient l'humilier en le secourant; il faudrait l'honorer malgré son indigence, et ils rougiraient de la comparaison qu'ils seraient obligés de faire avec lui.25

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24 Ibid.

Society itself becomes the greatest obstacle to virtue, for in a milieu where people are conditioned to believe lies, the honest person is looked upon with suspicion. What then does it depend upon to become successful in society—flattery?

In the thirteenth feuille Marivaux answers this question by noting that the only socially accepted values are those which are based on corruption. Only those who have learned to master the art of deception can hope to be successful in society, a fact which makes one question the integrity of all man-made institutions whether they be religious, political or educational. This is indeed a threatening reality for Marivaux, and one which leads the "humanist" in him to give way to strong misanthropic tendencies. The thirteenth feuille specifically deals with this problem and exposes the author's pessimism in this regard. Hermocrate, a philosopher of Marivaux's nature, recounts a decisive experience in his life which lead him to permanently detach himself from the corrupt commerce of men. A precursor of "l'Inconnu," Hermocrate describes himself as follows:

Mon père répara, par une éducation excellente, la médiocrité des biens qu'il avait à me laisser. J'étais dans la fleur de mon âge quand il mourut; je crus, après sa mort, ne devoir rien négliger de tout ce qui pouvait augmenter ma fortune. J'avais l'âme généreuse, et de tous les plaisirs auxquels j'étais sensible, je n'en connaissais point de plus grand, de plus cher, ni qui me fut plus nécessaire que le plaisir d'obliger les autres. Quand je pouvais rendre un service à quelqu'un, je n'avais pas besoin d'étudier mes façons pour sauver aux gens la petite confusion qu'on a souvent d'être obligé dans bien des choses. J'étais là-dessus tout sentiment; je n'avais qu'à laisser faire mon coeur; il n'y avait rien à ajouter à son industrie naturelle, non plus qu'au talent qu'il avait de cacher son industrie même. 26

Unfortunately for the young Hermocrate his virtuous desire of making his fortune by being good and helpful to others leads him to learn a perplexing

26Ibid., treizième feuille, pp. 181-182.
lesson concerning the incompatibility of friendship and success. Finally, when an "honorable" position becomes available, he innocently believes (although somewhat discomforted by the idea) that he can count on his many friends for political support against a rival described in the following terms:

...c'était un homme dangereux, malin, vindicatif, qui avait le courage de dire de bons mots contre ceux qui ne lui plaisaient pas, et qui, à l'égard des ridicules de son prochain, était d'un commerce aussi cavalier que le mien était doux et humain.

His opponent, who paradoxically enough "s'attirait des ennemis qui s'empressaient à le servir, pendant que je me faisais des amis qui refusaient de m'être utiles," wins. One of Hermocrates' so-called friends offers the following explanation for having preferred his opponent:

Voulez-vous que nous vous parlions franchement? Ma foi, rien n'est d'une moindre ressource, rien ne tarit tant au plaisir de la société qu'un homme aussi excessivement bon que vous l'êtes à tous égards; son entretien n'a rien de vif, rien qui flatte la curiosité maligne que nous avons tous mutuellement sur ce qui nous regarde. Que diantre faire avec un homme contre l'esprit de qui le vôtre n'a point à se précautionner dans la conversation? De quoi s'occuperaient-on avec lui, de qui l'on ne peut espérer aucun trait de malice, et à qui, par conséquent, on n'en peut rendre; qui ne médit de personne, et qui par là ne vous apprend rien; qui ne vous dispute jamais son suffrage, quand vous avez de l'esprit avec lui, qui n'est point jaloux de cet esprit, ce qui ôte la vanité d'en avoir; d'un homme avec qui votre amour-propre languit dans une éternelle sécurité, d'où naît l'ennui; d'un homme de qui vous ne craignez rien, ni sur vos intérêts ni sur votre réputation, de qui vous n'attendez rien à votre avantage contre celui des autres, ce qui n'établit aucun motif de liaison ni d'intrigue entre vous et lui? Eh bien! vous êtes un bon garçon, je vous aime, parce que vous serez toujours bon pour moi; mais vous me lassez, parce que vous ne serez jamais mauvais pour personne. Nous ne vous avons point rendu service dites-vous. Eh! par où nous excitez-vous à vous servir? Étes-vous capable de vous venger de nos refus là-dessus? Non, je vous l'ai dit, vous serez toujours bon, toujours généreux; ainsi, ce n'est pas la peine de se donner du mouvement pour un homme dont on ne peut rebuter la bonté ni s'attirer la rancune. Pour ceux que vous venez de nommer, je passe

27 Ibid., p. 183.

28 Ibid.
Disgusted by the iniquities of men, Hermocrate makes no further attempt to associate himself with them. He chooses to live in solitude as far away as possible from his country.

As a moralist Marivaux is concerned with instructing others by providing them with sensible moral values, yet he does not pretend to be able to resolve all of the human iniquities that naturally exist in society. He simply holds firmly to his principles and consistently stresses the absolute necessity of virtue and a strong moral consciousness.

His concept of virtue is reflected in every aspect of his philosophy, not necessarily as the key to the salvation of man, of the individual, but at least as a point of reference from which he can progressively learn to distinguish between illusion and reality. This clear-sightedness will enable the individual to survive in a corrupt society.

For Marivaux then virtue is the ability to see clearly and to assume one's liberty as an individual without abusing the liberty of others. It is in this sense that Le Spectateur most prominently manifests itself as a "périodique en école de vie civile ou esquisse d'une pensée sociale."

It is a work that vividly brings into perspective:

...l'immense ronde, où personne ne peut tout à fait se dire étranger à personne,...les grands seigneurs et les "honnêtes gens" qui ont besoin d'eux, les amants heureux et les époux qui ne se regardent plus que pour se haïr, les séducteurs et les filles qu'ils ont abandonnées, les fils ingrats et leurs vieux parents, les "amis" qui tous les jours trahis-

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29 Ibid., p. 185.

30 Gilot, Les Journaux de Marivaux, p. 448.
Although human relations most often breed friction, misunderstanding and hate, it is not possible to deny the union that bonds all men together. Just as human beings are responsible for the misery of others, so they can and must be, according to Marivaux, responsible to some extent for the happiness of others. If only they thought about their obligations to them rather than of themselves exclusively. As long as self-interest and greed prevail over compassion and generosity there will continue to be a sense of distrust and unhappiness among human beings.

Marivaux's position as a moralist does not advocate complete social reform. Le Spectateur, it must be understood, is neither constructive nor destructive. Unlike other enlighteners, Marivaux avoids the false conviction of possessing the vital answers necessary to the restructuring of a perfect and ideal society. Instead, he prefers an attitude of openness; all questions are weighed carefully and considered without prejudice. Although quite critical of social banalities, Marivaux does not feel that a solution is to be found in the destruction of social values and conventions. These values and conventions must be questioned and re-examined, but not overthrown. His moral philosophy is based on compromise and therefore social reform should occur naturally and without force. Just as he does not wish to upset the natural order by which society functions, so he does not imagine the possibility of constructing an ideal or alternative type of society. It is hardly worth the effort to condemn one illusion just to accept another. In the following passage Michel Gilot makes a rather intelligent conclusion concerning Marivaux's unwillingness to overt-

31Ibid., p. 454.
ly insist on social reform even though he does sketch in Le Spectateur the image of an ideal society. Only out of contempt for and dissatisfaction with the corruptness of the society he himself lived in does he envision the nature of a more harmonious and just society. The alternatives he proposes simply support his criticisms; they do not offer magic solutions. Gilot, in this passage, stresses some of Marivaux's most original and therefore most admirable qualities as a "journalist," as the author of Le Spectateur français:

Marivaux, "expérimenteur en matière d'humanité," is attempting, in Le Spectateur, to communicate with and appeal to the individual by conserving "en toute occasion un esprit de libre examen." His ultimate goal as a moralist is to encourage individuality and happiness so that the

32 Ibid., pp. 456-457.

33 Ibid.

34 Ibid.
individual, in turn, will be able to display an interest in life despite its many complications. Being interested in life implies being free to live, to openly and spontaneously experience life. It is for this reason that, as a moralist, he rejects a dogmatic approach, one based exclusively on intellectualization or, more clearly, on the restrictive imposition of ideas alone.

Since Marivaux places a great deal of importance on individual freedom, and since the ultimate goal of his humanistic philosophy is to encourage individuality, it is not surprising that he should dedicate a substantial number of pages in *Le Spectateur* to his own original concepts of education and child rearing. Throughout *Le Spectateur* Marivaux directs his criticisms at parents who bring up their children by molding them to the biased demands of tradition and convention, at parents who sacrifice the natural spontaneity of their child so that he may be made to function mechanically in and meet the demands of society. It is not his intention to destroy the family. On the contrary, Marivaux sees the family as a sacred social institution which contributes to social order and harmony. To be successful, however, parents must, in Marivaux's view, treat their children as equals and not as inferiors upon whom they can blindly impose the illusory values and morals of the hypocritical society that still adheres to "l'ordre ancien," and authoritarian traditions. As Gilot puts it, speaking of Marivaux, "il n'est guère de points où il ne mette en cause l'ordre ancien qui servait de cadre à la vie de ses contemporains, même voilé par la "politesse," sublime en "moeurs" ou en "bienséances."  

Forthcoming generations are the focal point of Marivaux's optimism; he

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35 Ibid., p. 455.
hopes that they will come to reject hypocrisy and illusion.

Let us consider a few specific examples in Le Spectateur which touch on the negative influences of parents on their children, and what sort of solutions our author ultimately proposes.

In a letter addressed to the "Spectateur" by a sixteen year old girl we are presented with the example of a mother who has arbitrarily imposed certain values and religious beliefs on her daughter. Marivaux contends that in such a situation the child will eventually question the validity of its strict upbringing and finally rebel against it. In her letter to the "Spectateur" the young lady reveals this characteristic and expresses fear concerning her future:

Je ne vous dirai rien de mon cœur, la suite de ma lettre vous expliquera ce qu'il est. Il suffit que vous compreniez que je suis aimable; moi, je le comprends encore mieux, et voilà ma peine. Ma mère est extrêmement dévote et veut que je le sois autant qu'elle, qui a cinquante ans passés; n'a-t-elle pas tort?

Quand je vous dis cela, ne croyez pas que je blâme la dévotion; j'en ai moi-même ce qu'il m'en faut; je suis naturellement sage, mais jusqu'ici j'ai plus de vertu que de piété, cela est dans l'ordre; et de cette piété, je vous jure que j'en aurais davantage, si ma mère n'exigeait pas que j'en eusse tant. Jamais je ne me sauverais, si je devais vivre toute ma vie avec elle. 36

For any young individual such a situation is not a healthy one, for it is one which breeds disgust, hatred and fear:

Nos heures d'exercices n'arrivent point, je n'entends sonner ni vêpres ni complies, je ne vois point de livre pieux, que je ne sois saisie d'un ennui qui me fait peur....

Savez-vous bien, Monsieur, que je crains les suites de mes dégoûts là-dessus? Savez-vous bien qu'une prédication me donne la fièvre, moi qui aimerais à entendre prêcher, si je n'en avais satisfection? Ce n'est pas là tout; si vous voyiez comme ma mère m'habille, au voile près, vous me prendriez pour une religieuse; encore, au voile près, je me trompe, ma coiffe en est un, de la manière dont je la mets. À l'égard de mon corps, il me va, jusqu'au menton; il me sert de guimpe: vous jugez bien qu'une âme de seize ans n'est pas à son aise sous ce petit attirail-

36Marivaux, Le Spectateur français, douzième feuille, p. 177.
lā. Entre vous et moi, je crains furieusement d'être coquette un jour; j'ai des émotions au moindre ruban que j'aperçois; le coeur me bat des qu'un joli garçon me regarde; tout cela m'est si nouveau; je m'imagine tant de plaisir à être parée, à être aimée, à plaire, que si je n'avais le coeur bon, je haïrais ma mère de me causer, comme cela, des agitations pour des choses qui ne sont peut-être que des bagatelles, et dont je ne me soucierais pas, si je les avais.37

Unable, under such conditions, to love and respect her mother, the young girl cannot possibly be straightforward with her; she must conceal her feelings and pretend to carry out her mother's expectations:

Dans l'instant où je vous écris, ma mère est en méditation, et je suis censée y être aussi. Par précaution je tiens toujours ouvert le livre où est le point que je dois méditer, afin qu'elle me trouve sous les armes, si, suivant sa coutume, elle venait s'assurer de ma ferveur.38

Finally, and inevitably the cry of revolt against the parent whose over-excessiveness defeats its own purpose. The young and captive soul feels the passionate urge to liberate itself from the authority which denies it its life:

Six heures et demie sonnent, elle m'appelle déjà de son cabinet; je m'en vais lire, je vais prononcer des mots; je vais entrer dans ce triste cabinet que je ferai, quelque jour, abattre, s'il plaît à Dieu: car sa vue seule me donne une sécheresse (pour parler comme ma mère) qui m'empêcherait, toute ma vie, de prier Dieu, si je restais dans la maison. Ah! que je m'ennuie!39

In another instance regarding the education of children in Le Spectateur Marivaux employs a technique made successful by Montesquieu in Les Lettres Persanes. The fifteenth and sixteenth feuilles deal with the day to day observations and reflections of a non-French observer (a Spaniard) who, during his stay in France, kept a detailed diary wherein he discusses some peculiar aspects of French society. The technique is a revealing one for it allows Frenchmen to see themselves through the impartial eyes of a

37Ibid., p. 178.
38Ibid.
39Ibid., p. 179.
foreigner. Furthermore, it enables Marivaux to add a more personal flavor to "la réflexion morale." The entire journal is written in the passé compose reflecting the conversational tone. This "journal" within a "journal" evokes the thought processes in all their naturalness.

Marivaux confronts his readers with certain negative consequences which arise from parents' overt authority over their children. The authoritarian parent makes his child fear him and therefore represses the child's natural dignity. The latter becomes a slave who strives for liberty "et qui en usera comme un fou quand il l'aura." Bound by authority, the child is not allowed to authentically experience life or to grow expansively. His freedom is totally neglected him so he naturally develops into a hypocrite like his parents. Marivaux believes that obedience does not need to depend on unbending discipline. Instead, obedience must come from within, from the child's heart. Children must be convinced by their parents that they are loved by them and that they can trust them rather than fear them. Children will naturally react to love with love. They can thus be sincere, free and responsible individuals. As Marivaux sees it the sense of freedom must touch primarily the emotions. To simply think that one is free does not suffice; one must feel free if he is to authentically experience life and grow spontaneously, naturally. In short, Marivaux's philosophy of education is one which guarantees the respect of the personality of the child. Children, like adults, are individuals who seek dignity and respect, "ainsi que chaque visage a sa physionomie," writes Marivaux, "chaque esprit aussi porte une différence qui lui est propre; que la correction qu'il faut apporter à l'esprit n'est pas de l'arracher à cette

40Ibid., seizième feuille, p. 204.
difference, mais seulement de purger cette même différence du vice qui peut en gâter les graces, de lui ôter ce qu'elle peut avoir de trop cru..."\(^{41}\) Essentially, education of any sort should "corriger et non pas gâter."\(^{42}\)

In the story of "l'Inconnu" Marivaux effectively lends the most important values of his moral philosophy to he who is perhaps the most important "character" in Le Spectateur - "l'Inconnu." As Marivaux sketches this character he reflects on the advantages of being brought up in an "ideal" family. Detached from society, the parents of "l'Inconnu" raise their children with love and concentrate on nourishing in them a moral consciousness based on virtue and justice. They represent "ideal" parents who accomplish the ultimate goals of responsible educators. Gilot effectively summarizes what Marivaux believes should be the primary preoccupation of all educators:

L'éducateur ne devra pas seulement aider un jeune être à se réaliser au mieux de ce qu'il est, mais, au-delà de toute soumission à des caprices, des préjugés, des traditions ou des lois, lui ouvrir l'accès au monde des valeurs, faire naître à la vie adulte une personne consciente, un homme, responsable \(^{43}\)

Although detached from society, "l'Inconnu"'s father instructs his son in the ways of the world. Knowing the corruptness that exists in the commerce of men, he prefers not to shield his son, and makes his lessons interesting.

Of his mother, "l'Inconnu" writes:

Quelle union entre elle et mon père, que de tendresse elle avait pour ses enfants! Je ne me souviens pas de l'avoir jamais regardée comme une personne qui avait de l'autorité sur moi; je ne lui ai jamais obéi parce qu'elle était la maîtresse, et que je dépendais d'elle; c'était l'amour que j'avais pour elle qui me soumettait toujours au sien.

\(^{41}\)Ibid., huitième feuille, p. 149.

\(^{42}\)Ibid., septième feuille, p. 145.

Quand elle me disait quelque chose, je connaissais sensiblement que c'était pour mon bien; je voyais que c'était son coeur qui me parlait; elle savait pénétrer le mien de cette vérité-là, et elle s'y prenait pour cela d'une manière qui était proportionnée à mon intelligence, et que son amour pour moi lui enseignait sans doute, car je la comprenais parfaitement, tout jeune que j'étais, et je recevais la leçon avec le trait de tendresse qui me la donnait: de sorte que mon coeur était reconnaisant aussitôt qu'instruit, et que le plaisir que j'avais en lui obéissant, m'affectionnait bientôt à ses leçons mêmes.  

"L'Inconnu"'s education is complete for it transcends the intellectual plane and fulfills emotional needs: "je connaissais sensiblement..., c'était son coeur qui me parlait." The insistence on developing the affective senses most distinctly characterizes Marivaux's philosophy of education as it does his entire moral philosophy. In the following passage "l'Inconnu" points out the advantages of having refined feelings, advantages that greatly supersede exclusive intellectual refinement:

Ces sortes de choses paraîtront peut-être des délicatesses qui demandent de l'esprit; non, avec tout l'esprit possible, souvent on ne les a point; je le répète, il ne faut pour cela qu'un peu de sentiment, et qu'est-ce que ce sentiment? c'est un instinct qui nous conduit et qui nous fait agir sans réflexion, en nous présentant quelque chose qui nous touche, qui n'est pas développé dans de certaines gens, et qui l'est dans d'autres; ceux en qui cela se développe sont de bons coeurs qui disent bien ce qu'ils sentent; ceux en qui cela ne se développe pas le disent mal et n'en sont pas moins. Cependant, c'est toujours esprit de part et d'autre que cet instinct-là, seulement plus ou moins confus dans celui-ci que dans celui-là; mais c'est une sorte d'esprit dont on peut manquer, quoiqu'on en ait beaucoup d'ailleurs, et qu'on peut avoir aussi sans être spirituel en d'autres matières; et c'est là toute l'explication que j'en puis donner.

The individual who is able to react instinctively to an unforeseeable situation has a decided advantage over one who is not.

Marivaux will further develop this notion of intuition, or sentiment, in his upcoming novel La Vie de Marianne. The life of Marianne is repre-

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44Ibid., vingt-quatrième feuille, p. 255.

45Ibid.

46Ibid., p. 256.
sented as a succession of events and obstacles that she, as an individual, must face and learn to deal with. She is able not only to survive but to succeed because of her ability to make spontaneous decisions and to do instinctively what is best for her. Marianne's intuition is supported by her intellect, her ability to reason, with which she carefully weighs the advantages and disadvantages of certain situations. Marianne is the embodiment of that perfect balance between heart and mind which Le Spectateur only alluded to: "on rêve dans le Spectateur français de réconciliation et de mariage entre le coeur et l'esprit." Being a woman, Marianne relies more on her natural instincts and learns from her acute sensitivity. By her very nature the young Marianne can spontaneously sense what is right or wrong, profitable or dangerous. However, it is the aged and mature Marianne (she who narrates the story of her life) who is able to make rational and intelligent comments about her past experiences. Whence the many digressions including reasonings and thoughts of the elder Marianne who retrospectively analyses her actions and feelings as a young woman. By allowing Marianne to be the author of her own existence Marivaux is able to achieve this reconciliation and marriage between the mind and heart that Gilot refers to. Marianne is Marivaux's example of a lucid philosopher, one who has acquired knowledge through having emotionally experienced life, and who has, later on, intellectually defined the nature of her becoming by re-examining the succession of events and subsequent feelings that had influenced her destiny.

"L'Inconnu" also represents an individual that displays a reconciliation between "le coeur et l'esprit." His education and upbringing as a child are responsible for his most admirable characteristics. However, Le

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47Gilot, Les Journaux de Marivaux, p. 454.
Spectateur does not pursue his story long enough for us to know how he will fare when he finally has to face the world and make it on his own. As Le Spectateur comes to an end "l'Inconnu" is on his way to completing his education as an individual. At this point he is to experience life and learn for himself how to survive. Reality is to be his next "maître."

Gilot accentuates this same point when he writes:

Mais toute éducation demeure inachevée, radicalement insuffisante et, comme par nature, mutilée: c'est le mérite, on dirait presque la grandeur de Marivaux, que de l'avoir finalement fait reconnaître à ses lecteurs. Les parents de l'Inconnu ont couvé dans la tendresse leurs deux jeunes enfants: le Spectateur les en loue, lui qui n'avait cessé de dire comme il est salutaire de regarder en face, sans garde-fou, sans commentaires, certaines réalités.... A chacun de se faire en trouvant son propre chemin.... Ces tendres parents meurent et pour leurs enfants les routes bifurquent: la jeune fille va rencontrer la corruption, "l'Inconnu" l'injustice sociale, ils affronteront seuls les hommes et l'expérience, ils auront à naître seuls à la vie. Vingt ans plus tard peut-être on saura si leur éducation était réussie.48

Nevertheless, "l'Inconnu" confronts life having a sense of virtue and justice, he has been told of the iniquities and the injustices that exist in the world, he has a point of reference and he can see clearly. His lucidity will guide him and help him overcome the evils that will naturally be imposed on him. Although it is not "l'Inconnu"'s choice to cut the primary ties that attach him to his father and mother, their deaths naturally make him do so. Out of necessity he must become totally independent and learn to face the world as an individual; he will not run away from life. For this reason we can say without reservation that Marivaux's philosophy is a realistic one and not purely idealistic: "A chacun de se faire en trouvant son propre chemin."49 "L'Inconnu"'s future is now entirely up to him;

48Ibid., p. 452.

49Ibid.
it is here that Marivaux ends his story.

Since Marivaux's moral philosophy is dependent upon the Christian ethic his opinions on religion should be briefly considered at this juncture. We have seen that his philosophy is primarily concerned with strongly encouraging responsible individuals, free individuals who respect the freedom of others and who recognize their obligations to others as well as to themselves. Marivaux, however, does not preach Christianity as such nor is he concerned about advocating institutionalized religious practices and beliefs. Marivaux's religion is a personal one; it is a relation between the individual and God, a relation which does not depend on any sort of intermediary. A sound relationship with others and with the world depends ultimately on having a sound relationship with God (the converse being equally true), a natural and superior force which compensates for man's imperfections. Man alone is not capable of knowing all things and therefore should not preoccupy himself with such illusions: "ne nous révoltons pas contre cette admirable économie de lumière et d'obscurité que la sagesse de Dieu observe en nous."^50 We see this in "l'Inconnu" when the father leaves the central character with a last bit of advice:

Mon fils, me dit-il, un moment avant que d'expire, vous avez perdu votre mère, vous allez me perdre, et je vous vois au désespoir, mais vous n'y serez pas toujours, le temps console de tout. Je vais répondre de mes actions à celui qui m'a donné la vie; vous lui répondrez un jour des vôtres, songez-y; au défaut des biens que je ne puis vous laisser, mon amour vous laisse cette pensée-là, ne la perdez point, vous y trouverez tous les conseils que je pourrais vous donner, et c'est elle qui doit désormais vous tenir lieu de père et de mère.^51

It is this faith in God which allows Marivaux to find consolation for only God is capable of making the final judgement. All of the world's iniquities,  

^50Marivaux, Le Spectateur français, vingt et unième feuille, p. 233.  

^51Ibid., vingt-quatrième feuille, p. 256.
hypocricies and injustices will sooner or later meet their doom. God will provide for those who are naturally virtuous and sincere. In the final pages of *Le Spectateur* Marivaux states the following conclusion:

...la raison même dans beaucoup d'occasions veut que ceux qui sont utiles, qui ont de certaines lumières, de certains talents, jouissent d'une fortune un peu distinguée; et quand l'homme heureux n'aurait rien qui méritât ce privilège, il est un Étre supérieur qui préside sur nous et dont la sagesse permet sans doute cette inégale distribution que l'on voit dans les choses de la vie; c'est même à cause qu'elle est inégale que les hommes ne se rebutent pas les uns des autres, qu'ils se rapprochent, se vont chercher, et s'entraident.... Cette inégale distribution de biens, dont nous parlions tout à l'heure, lie nécessairement les hommes les uns aux autres, il est vrai, mais le commerce qu'elle forme entre eux n'est-il pas trop dur pour les uns et trop doux pour les autres? et de cette différence énorme qui se trouve aujourd'hui entre le sort du riche et celui du pauvre, Dieu, qui est juste autant que sage, n'en serait-il pas comptable à sa justice, s'il n'y avait pas quelque chose qui tînt la balance égale, si le bonheur du riche ne le chargeait pas aussi de plus d'obligations?

Ainsi vous, dont ce riche ne soulage pas la misère, prenez patience c'est là votre unique tâche à cet égard-là; vivez comme vous faites à la sueur de votre corps; continuez, c'est Dieu qui vous éprouve; mais vous, homme riche, vous payerez cette fatigue et ces langueurs ou vous l'abandonnez; il y résiste; vous payerez la peine qu'il lui en coûte; c'est à vos dépens qu'il la perd; vous répondez de ses murmures, et de l'iniquité où il se livre, et en périsant il vous condamne.52

Overall, the primary objective of *Le Spectateur français* is to expose the illusions by which most people live and to penetrate their sources so as to provide a renewed basis from which more practical and realistic moral values can be developed. No doubt, Marivaux's task is an ambitious one, one which demands perseverance and a rigorous faith in his principles and personal convictions. All of Marivaux's works display a striking degree of consistency in regard to "la réflexion morale" and to literature. "La réflexion morale" and literature, for Marivaux, is a way of being, a way of feeling life and of evaluating his relationship with himself, with others and with the world. Gilot has already noted this awareness in Marivaux on

52 Ibid., vingt-cinquième feuille, p. 266.
the moral plane, when he writes that:

...à partir de 1723 Marivaux ne se fait guère d'illusions sur l'efficacité de l'action morale: elle s'exercera ou non sur tel ou tel de ses contemporains ou de leurs lointains successeurs, hasardeuse, imprévisible, comme souffle l'esprit; mais pour l'écrivain qui s'y adonne elle constitue une étrange raison de vivre: la psychologie paraît une bien pauvre science, à côté de cette passion; ou plutôt, il est une dialectique ou une interaction continue de la psychologie et de la morale comme connaissance et comme action. Découvrir le monde comme il va, éprouver dans ce qu'il a de bouleversant le contact des autres, c'est d'abord une conquête morale, mais le moraliste se plaît à tous les jeux où peut s'exercer sa familiarité avec les êtres humains.

The literary quest is necessarily a personal one, and the only absolute value for a writer is the degree of individual growth, fulfillment and success in literary achievements. Since we are dealing with a particular man's choice of a "way of being," it is imperative that we stress what is important to the writer himself. In Marivaux's case it is *Le Spectateur français* which contains the most comprehensive statement about the significance of the creative act to man.

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As a result of this study we can conclude that *Le Spectateur français* marks an important stage in Marivaux's evolution as a writer. The *Spectateur* is certainly the author's most important work in terms of its comprehensive view of Marivaux the man and Marivaux the writer. It reveals a man who has reacted to the complexities of his times, an individual who has strived to relate what his human condition meant to him, and shows how as a writer he has defined and defended his position through the discovery and formulation of esthetic principles and moral convictions. To view *Le Spectateur* in this light, that is, as a work of discovery, invention and subsequently transition, we can intelligibly conclude that it does indeed manifest itself as "the project of an existence." The work is the representation of a dynamic state of mind, constantly changing and enriching itself through an ever renewed contact with daily reality and experience. *Le Spectateur* is a "project" which lucidly traces the movement of a structuring consciousness from its moment of genesis to that of its application in a literary context. This new form of artistic awareness ultimately results in a new beginning for "l'expression romanesque." In this perspective *Le Spectateur* marks not only a crucial stage in the overall accroissement of Marivaux's creative genius, but is a forerunner of some very innovative breakthroughs for the modern novel as a whole.
We have pointed out that Marivaux's articles (those which appeared in *Le Mercure*) clearly indicate a turning point in terms of Marivaux's literary endeavors. We have given the name of "oeuvres de jeunesse" to those which preceded his *Les Lettres sur les habitants de Paris*, that first experiment with treating immediate realities of his time. Along with this new approach to literary expression came a complete revaluation of the writer's purpose, a questioning of traditional modes of thought and narrative expression. In this respect Marivaux had apparently committed himself to the ideals of the Moderns and to their struggle to give new direction to age-old concepts of the writer's obligations to his public and to the slavish classical rules of style, form and subject matter. But this commitment is only secondary. By token of his open mindedness, independence and individuality he is a unique figure desirous of portraying a unique and realistic vision of the world. The dissimilarities between Marivaux and other eighteenth century "enlighteners" accentuate his unsurpassable understanding of human existence and his compassion for his fellow man. No other writer or philosopher of this period has succeeded with as much finesse to combine the study of the human mind and the human heart and recognize the high degree of affinity between them.

As a "Spectateur" the young and eager writer had greater freedom to experiment and give free rein to his natural inclinations. Unconcerned about a formal method of approach, Marivaux abandoned himself entirely to improvisation and to spontaneous creation. He thus liberated himself from the traditional obligations characteristic of the "author's" role. Contrary to other "authors," the "Spectateur" eliminates any unauthentic thought from his text, that is, any thought or idea which does not genuinely occur in his mind or which is not genuinely felt in his heart at the
time at which he is writing. Truth, veracity of feeling and absolute sincerity are the principal elements governing the unity of *Le Spectateur*. Although reflecting opposition to formal and rigorous order, the Mari­vaudian text is not chaotic, it is not without structure. Like "l'édifice de l'architecte-né,"¹ Marivaux's work evolves in perfect proportions; all of its elements harmoniously correspond and relate to one another without the artist's having to carefully calculate in advance the relation that these elements will have. It is the informal order of *Le Spectateur* that most aptly characterizes Marivaux's original approach for it reflects an approach characterized by the capturing of thoughts at the moment of their greatest intensity. So, as we read *Le Spectateur* we are indeed following the development of a structuring consciousness wherein each thought announces the next. This implicit movement governing the progression of Marivaux's work indicates that his literary quest, his "project," remains perpetually to be fulfilled. Since Marivaux is not a writer motivated by success but rather by ideals of perfection, his literary quest manifests itself as a constant search for more effective ways of communicating and for whatever perpetually remains to be discovered and rediscovered. This is indeed how Marivaux invents and remakes his existence.

To a greater extent than his other two journals *Le Spectateur* represents a basis of study through which the writer not only finds himself, but others as well. In *Le Spectateur* Marivaux reacts to all that surrounds him and affects him. He absorbs and reflects on "la nature" as he witnesses and experiences it. Since Marivaux's philosophy is primarily concerned with expressing a knowledge or "science" of man, Marivaux maintains that it

¹Marivaux, *Les Lettres sur les habitants de Paris*, p. 34.
is essential that one remain faithful to the peculiarities which constitute the drama of daily existence whether it be the subjective drama of one particular individual or of the objective drama of human interactions on a broad scale. The point is that a comprehensive and faithful representation of man lies in the writer's ability to base his investigations on the living context within which man functions. An exclusively objective approach smothers the dynamics of life. The latter approach is antihuman by nature for in it man is viewed as an inanimate being. He is immobilized for the sake of intellectualization. Out of opposition to this one-dimensional vision of the world and representation of man, Marivaux vigorously insists that a complete knowledge of man must necessarily consist of a psychological and emotional understanding of the individual. The objective, therefore, is to discern the primary relations of man to reality which include observing him as he interacts with others and then deciphering the internal logic that actually governs every act. To accomplish this Marivaux carefully observes. His immediate observations are then followed by a series of thoughts which go beyond the purely objective or purely rational in an attempt to isolate the unconscious reasonings which are responsible for the actions of a specific individual or type of individual. It is not at all that Marivaux puts thoughts into his subjects' minds, rather, he intuitively reorganizes the mental confusion that the individual himself is insensitive to. It is on this level that Marivaux metaphysically experiences life of which his literature is often the representation. Included in Marivaux's apprehension of the world and of others are the affective relations which are at the source of all human actions. Once he has grasped the subtleties of this internal logic, Marivaux the writer tries to represent man subjectively so that the internal drama of
existence can reveal itself in a natural manner. To do so Marivaux turns to the very effective technique of first-person narration - he thus allows his characters and readers to speak for themselves so that they may unknowingly demonstrate their emotional and intellectual confusion. From this point on Marivaux will become increasingly more involved with "l'expression romanesque" since the novel is the genre par excellence to which this sort of detailed analysis can be applied and further experimented with. As Marivaux progresses in Le Spectateur he discards his haphazard reflections for more serious meditations indicative of even deeper experimenting with the novel. In the latter feuilles of Le Spectateur Marivaux becomes more concerned with the act of writing for its own sake. As a consequence, Le Spectateur becomes towards the end a kind of new testing ground, "un roman expérimental," in which Marivaux once again reorients and gives himself new direction.

Over the years much of literary criticism has certainly done injustice to Marivaux and his work. The immediate friction that his work encountered succeeded in making Marivaux a rather obscure literary figure for many generations to come. The few serious attempts that had been made to resurrect him and give him credit for his accomplishments inadvertently fell by the wayside. The principal reason for the lack of success was that traditional modes of criticism (modes against which Marivaux himself had vigorously struggled) had always tended to overlook factors and elements upon which the coherence of a work of art depends. Critics either approached a writer biographically, sociologically, historically or psychologically and disregarded the importance of the work itself as being the total expression of the writer's total vision of the world, a vision which necessarily includes the writer's biographical, historical, sociological and psychological frame
of reference. By failing to recognize that it is the work itself which most faithfully represents the writer's being, the critics, until just recently, had never been able to penetrate the substance of Marivaux's thoughts nor were they able to recognize his relation to his work. Thanks to the New Critics in France and their many followers, Marivaux has reappeared and has been regarded as a man with extremely Modern insights into the realities of his times and into literature.

I should hope that this study serves as a faithful interpretation of Le Spectateur français and of Marivaux's creative genius. I also hope that this study succeeds in generating an interest in Marivaux's works so that they may be seen as a crucial and original representation of eighteenth century French thought. Marivaux's journals are indeed the key to a complete understanding of Marivaux's novels and plays. Further investigation into L'Indigent philosophe and Le Cabinet du philosophe as well as into Le Spectateur itself could most certainly prove to be fruitful and intriguing. There remains much to be discovered about Marivaux. A detailed study of his "oeuvres de jeunesse" could conceivably disclose vital information concerning Marivaux's personal myths and struggles as a young writer and they perhaps warrant more recognition than as simple works of apprenticeship. Much remains to be done on Marivaux's evolution as a novelist. Questions such as what his objectives were, how he succeeded in giving these objectives substance remain to be answered. What was finally Marivaux's relation to his readers, that apparent continual dialogue between reader and writer and how does the reader or even the main character become the "author" of his own existence? These are all subjects that deserve discussion and research.
As for Le Spectateur itself, one could relate the esthetic and moralistic themes developed in it to Marivaux's comedies or novels. Since Marivaux has only recently been studied seriously, he remains a great challenge. Marivaux has consistently proven his appeal to twentieth century readers and scholars. He is still very much alive today!
BIBLIOGRAPHY


