DIDEROT'S DETERMINED FATALIST

Diderot's Determined Fatalist

A CRITICAL APPRECIATION OF *JACQUES LE FATALISTE*

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TO TWO SPECIAL CONTEMPORARY FATALISTS

MY FATHER AND A MODERN JACK

PREFACE

IN 1796, twelve years after the death of the author, and in Year Five of the newly enlightened era of the French Revolution, there appeared in Paris, among other posthumous works of Diderot, a strange novel entitled *Jacques le fataliste et son maître.* The critical reception was, at best, lukewarm, and the consensus of opinion was to the effect that nothing had been added to the reputation of Diderot—that, indeed, it were better had the novel remained shut away in the various drawers where it had reposed since its composition some twenty-three years before. From 1796 until 1948, the novel has had very little to do with the general fame of its author. For today, as during the preceding years, the name of Diderot suggests to the generally cultured reader first, the *Encyclopédie,* and thereafter the writer of the *Salons,* of the *Paradoxe sur le comédien,* of the *Neveu de Rameau,* as well as of several philosophic tracts which sound dangerously materialistic if not frankly communistic. Yet *Jacques le fataliste* has been continuously reprinted, and liberated France has brought out two new editions of the novel in inexpensive form as if to show that it has definitely become part of a classical tradition. In these same last years, however, literary columnists can still pass quickly over the novel as the least significant of all Diderot's fictions and sum up the contents for modern readers merely by paraphrasing the title.

All of this would seem no more than a normal, indifferent evaluation of a second-rate work, were it not for the enthusiastic reception the novel has received in its time from such important figures as Schiller, Goethe, and Stendhal. If for no other reason, the work seemed to merit a closer study in an effort to determine how constantly trustworthy were the judgments of the accepted connoisseurs, given the fact that they coincide somewhat less than perfectly with average French criticism.

There was another consideration. How well could an English-reading public know a work which had been translated only once? And would its acceptance of the work parallel the French acceptance were *Jacques* to be made available in a modern translation? For such was the fact—*Jacques* had been translated only once, and that in 1798, in a private translation for a particularly interested English lord. The present work grew out of a desire to perform that service of translation, a service made the more interesting by the challenge involved in attempting to carry over the disordered charm of Diderot's prose into another language. That work has not been forgotten, for the translation is completed and will be published in the near future. But what seemed the primary work became the secondary in importance when it grew evident that no objective attempt had been made at comprehending the novel either in the light of Diderot's other works, or in reference to its larger place in the history of French thought and literature. The present study pretends only to suggest for *Jacques le fataliste* the appreciation and evaluation which it would seem to merit after a close and, it is hoped, unbiased consideration of the text itself. The main conclusions of the research and reflection on the subject can be easily summed up. The novel is important historically as a literary experiment, and as an indication and a foreshadowing of what might be called modern literary technique. But, secondly (for things of historical import are ofttimes actually very dull), it remains a diverting and thought-provoking experience, a book worth reading. And diversion and interest still seem to be the surface requirements of the readable novel.

As to the plot, the reader who does not know *Jacques* need be told very little. Jacques and his Master travel aimlessly about eighteenth-century France, and to relieve their sheer boredom, Jacques, the Master and several other characters who happen into the novel tell stories; chief among them is the recital of Jacques' love life which acts as the backbone of the whole work. As to the less obvious implications of such aimless wandering, it is hoped that the succeeding chapters, if

they have not explained with complete satisfaction to all, have at least suggested and awakened a renewed interest in an important document of the French literary heritage.

These remarks could not be complete without a word of appreciation and gratitude to Ernestine Smith, for special reasons; to Otis Fellows and W. M. Frohock, for valuable advice on the manuscript; to James Gutmann, Irwin Edman and Justin O'Brien, for their valuable friendship from Columbia College days to the present; to Norman L. Torrey without whose "determined" patience and understanding *Jacques* might have remained as quietly unappreciated as if still in Diderot's desk drawer.

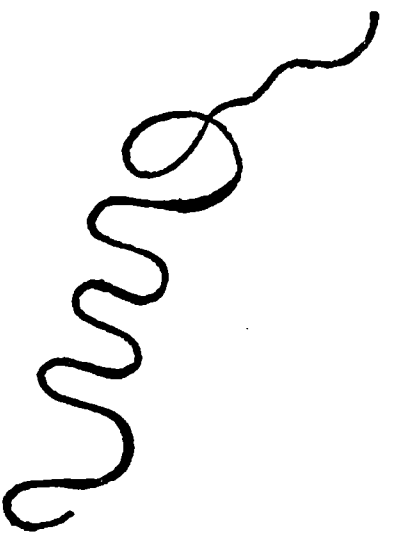
J. Robert Loy

Columbia University
January, 1950

CONTENTS

It is not the duty of the literary critic
to prove, but to suggest and interpret.

—F. C. GREEN



1

"JACQUES LE FATALISTE" AND THE CRITICS

> Il me semble que quand on est de chair, il ne faut pas croire que les autres sont de marbre.
>
> —Diderot

> Diderot ist Diderot, ein einzig Individuum; wer an ihm oder seinen Sachen mäkelt, ist ein Philister, und deren sind Legionen.
>
> —Goethe

> "Et votre *Jacques* n'est qu'une insipide rapsodie de faits, les uns réels, les autres imaginés, écrits sans grâce et distribués sans ordre."
>
> . . . les entretiens de Jacques le Fataliste et de son maître, ouvrage le plus important qui ait paru depuis le *Pantagruel* de maître François Rabelais, et la vie et les aventures du *Compère Mathieu*. . . .
>
> —Diderot

LITERARY critics are not infallible. The pronouncement is neither surprising nor debatable. Yet to follow the literary fortunes of any important work, and to see the original formula of criticism perpetuated, is to feel in operation amongst the members of the literary *confrérie* a respect for past dicta which approaches dogmatism. What is disconcerting in such blind faith in a former judgment is the fact that the first judgment very often shows a complete misunderstanding of the work.

On this score, it must be admitted that ***Jacques le fataliste*** has been sinned against much less than many other works in the history of literature. *Jacques'* story has been pretty generally one of indifference, rather than of complete condemnation. But one has only to glance through the standard handbooks and histories of any litera-

ture to notice the repetition of trite judgments. Such uncomplicated generalities are necessary and actually useful in literary manuals as a point of departure for the student. But frequently it appears a useful service to devote a more thorough study to such an indifferently accepted work, in an attempt to revaluate its merit by more recent standards.

The following collection of criticism of *Jacques le fataliste,* since three years prior to its first publication in 1796, aims at a representative history of the vicissitudes of the novel. The literary fortunes of Diderot in general have already been traced in a valuable study by Mary Lane Charles.[1] The history of the criticism of the single work, *Jacques le fataliste,* corresponds more or less to the periods outlined in that work.

The critics at the close of his own century seem to have least understood Diderot. This is natural when one considers the unsettled atmosphere in which the book first appeared in 1796, and is, at once, a tribute and a proof that the *tête universelle* wrote for posterity. The most surprising lack of comprehension and sympathy is found in the man who was to Diderot friend, disciple, and literary heir, Naigeon.[2] This very serious gentleman has little patience with *Jacques,* and finds that Diderot is trying to copy both Rabelais and Voltaire (in his *Candide*) without having the requisite grace and comic spirit to handle the assignment.

> Out of it all, only the episode of Mme de La Pommeraye should have been kept, for it, alone, would have made a charming tale of the greatest interest and with a very moral end. Which is not to say that in this same novel, whose hero is Jacques, we don't find here and there very subtle reflections—very often such as one might expect from a solid, broad, and daring mind which knows how to generalize its ideas. But these philosophic ideas, put in the mouth of a servant (such as has never existed), motivated moreover not too naturally, and not at all connected to any serious objective . . . whose parts mutually support one the other and form a whole. ONE system . . . have had very little success.[3]

The reviewers of the day, on the whole, agree with Naigeon and find the novel scarcely worthy of the serious thinker. Given the confusion and hesitation which characterizes the work, this is not surprising in a postrevolutionary society where confusion may very well be fact, but hardly the welcome document in print. Andrieux, writing in the *Décade philosophique* of October 31, 1796, refuses to be taken in by the name of the author and, finding merit in the sensitivities of *La Religieuse* and in the humor of Sterne, sees little or nothing of value in *Jacques;* the question of fatalism is not even really dealt with, he complains, then continues:

> You know Rabelais? You know Sterne? If you don't, I advise you to read them, especially the latter; but, if you want a very weak imitation of *Tristram Shandy,* you have only to read *Jacques le fataliste.* . . . From his model, Diderot has copied only the disorder and lack of transition.[4]

He is particularly shocked by the gay episodes, a part of the novel which will arouse rebellion in other sensitive natures to follow: "Do you like scandalous tales, even filthy ones about monks, whores and renegades? Read *Jacques le fataliste.* . . . It's enough to turn the stomach of the least delicate reader." A writer in the *Gazette nationale ou Moniteur universel* of November 16, 1796, is happily of a less sensitive nature. His appreciation of the Rabelaisian element sets a precedent not too often followed by later critics: "All these situations are developed with a good-natured spirit, and a light touch which could displease only a few peevish minds who replace purity of morals by the hypocrisy of decency." [5] And as to the Sterne influence, he thinks that "Diderot had that work in mind," but that *Jacques* is "an original modeled after an original."

Garat, writing in the *Clef du cabinet des souverains* of March 29, 1797, finds the Mme de La Pommeraye episode worthy of Richardson, and would have preferred for the title, *Jacques l'amoureux.* He is, on the whole, rather kind in his criticism although the significance of the wilful disorder escapes him: "There is through-

out the work some sort of movement which, although disordered, has warmth, and which, without ever awaking any really deep interest, continually drives away care and boredom." [6]

La Harpe, that unconvincing chameleon who lived to repudiate his early communion with the *philosophes,* can be depended upon to fit *Jacques* somewhere into his concerted moral polemic:

> Diderot has declared war on moral man just as Voltaire had on religious man. I do not make the accusation lightly; the work which we will have next after this one [*Supplément au voyage de Bougainville*], will present you with the textual proof. The author talks there much more freely than elsewhere because the work was not to appear until after his death. It is the first part of his philosophic testament, and the second part is in *Jacques le fataliste,* another posthumous work. In the last of these two works, fatalism excludes all idea of crime; in the first, since everything touching natural man is good, moral man is destroyed—and purposely so, as I have said above.[7]

The surprising element of the above is the place of importance given to *Jacques.* The very literal interpretation of the book's title is made for the first time, but not the last.

The nineteenth century is, on the whole, more understanding, but it repeats most of the adverse criticism already noted. That the general pattern should show greater comprehension in proportion to the lapse of time only strengthens the basic conviction Diderot had that he was writing for posterity. But, in detail, the criticism of *Jacques* during the nineteenth century reflects the general waves of liberal and reactionary thought which Miss Charles has seen for the works of Diderot in general. Thus there is a renewal of interest in Diderot and in *Jacques* in the early part of the century, and a judgment which is on the whole favorable; there is another renewal of interest in the latter part of the century where judgment of *Jacques* is less favorable. This is probably a reflection of the unrest during the Restoration; the varied feeling, with Reaction

usually victorious, under the Second Empire. For Diderot in general, and the very equivocal nature of *Jacques* in particular, might be expected to appeal to those thinkers who are not completely satisfied with the *status quo*.

The period between 1796 and the early part of the French nineteenth century (*ca.* 1830) is best represented not by French but by German criticism. For the Germans, and more especially Goethe and Schiller,[8] had discovered *Jacques* even before the French; they discuss it, and write letters about it with unusual enthusiasm during the close of the eighteenth century and well into the nineteenth. Schiller had been so attracted by the Mme de La Pommeraye episode that as early as 1785 he had translated it for the newspaper *Thalia* under the title of *Merkwürdiges Beispiel einer weiblichen Rache*. His enthusiasm for *Jacques,* a very natural consequence of his general high regard for Diderot, is evident in the short allusions made in various letters. In 1793 he writes to Gottfried Körner: "If you can manage to read *Jacques le fataliste* which Mylius translated (for the French is still not to be had), do read it. . . . I was completely delighted with it." [9] In 1795, he writes to his close literary companion Goethe, communicating some of his feeling for the novel to that fabulous figure: "*Jacques le fataliste* has appeared in translation at Unger's in Berlin. I cannot tear myself from it." [10] From Weimar, in 1804, he writes to Fritz Jonas: "Likewise, several years ago, *Jacques le fataliste* appeared in a German translation before the French original, and curiosity for things French was thereby all the more aroused." [11] In speaking of his translation of the Mme de La Pommeraye episode, he hints at the reason for his admiration:

> Diderot's whole rhetoric will, however, scarcely give reason to the aversion which this unnatural deed must necessarily awaken. But that daring novelty of plot, the uncompromising truth of the painting, the unadorned elegance of the description have led me into temptation, this temptation which will obviously not have succeeded in catching the singularity of the original. The

whole is taken from a (so far as I know) still unknown composition of M. Diderot, titled *Jacques and His Master, or Fatalism.*[12]

It is unfortunate that the reactions of Schiller are not more detailed; in effect, they tell us little more than his personal attraction to the book. In the matter of Diderot's writing, Goethe is on the whole much more critical and, unlike Schiller, accepts the Frenchman's works not *en masse,* but with some reservations. Nevertheless, what he has to say of *Jacques* is again much in the vein of Schiller's unbridled delight, and however unusual his figures of speech, he gives little actual textual appreciation. In a letter of 1780 to Merck, he holds forth in the following terms:

> There is a manuscript of Diderot, *Jacques le fataliste,* being circulated about, which is quite remarkable. A large, very rich dinner, with much intellect, prepared and served up for the mouth of a unique Idol. I took over the seat of this Bel and during six uninterrupted hours, devoured all the courses and between-the-courses in the order and following the intentions of this artificial cook and table-setter. Afterwards the book was read by others, and they have all shared it like priests; here and there they have tasted and sampled, and each has carried away with him his favorite dish. They have compared him with others, judged certain passages, etc. . . .[13]

The same strange figure of speech is to be found in his Diary for a few days before:

> From six o'clock until past noon I have read *Jacques le fataliste* without interruption. I read it with the delight of the Bel of Babel enjoying an immense feast, and thank God, I was able to devour such a portion with the greatest appetite, all at once, as if I were drinking a glass of water, and yet with an indescribable voluptuousness.[14]

A later letter speaks of the appearance of the novel, serially in the *Correspondance littéraire:*

> These newspapers are to contain not only news, but are apportioning out the most magnificent works of Diderot—*La Religieuse, Jacques le fataliste,* etc., little by little, in such small portions that curiosity, interest, and the eager exertion demanded by each new delivery, must remain lively.[15]

In the notes to his translation of Diderot's *Neveu,* he mentions *Jacques* incidentally and has more definite things to say both of Diderot and of *Jacques,* showing a writer's keen appreciation of a colleague:

> The important work [*Neveu de Rameau*] which we deliver over to the German public under this title is certainly to be reckoned among the most outstanding works of Diderot. His nation as well as his friends have reproached him as being able to write excellent parts of things, but no excellent whole work. Such formulas of judgment are not denied and are being propagated; and the merit of an excellent man, without further inquiry, remains belittled. The same ones who judge thus have certainly not read *Jacques le fataliste* which . . . shows quite well with what happy skill he has been able to mould the heterogeneous elements of Reality into an ideal whole. You can think of him as a writer what you will, even so, both friends and enemies will have to agree that nobody, in viva-voce conversation, has excelled him in vivacity, vigor, spirit, diversity, and charm.[16]

The first half of the nineteenth century in France is favorable to *Jacques,* the novel being so well known that it was treated in the theater in 1832 and again in 1847. A dissenting voice, however, is noted in the *Moniteur* in 1826 with the result that *Jacques,* along with some other works, is banned and confiscated for moral reasons; nor is this a unique attack, for much later, in 1872, a similar judgment will be levied against it in Russia.[17] When an 1831 theatrical venture, a vaudeville entitled *Heur et malheur,* was originally named *Le Fataliste,* it gave false hopes to one critic that the play would be based on Diderot's hero:

> The theater has been crying for Diderot's hero for a long time. . . . If the authors of the new play didn't have this bright idea, it will probably not escape the inspiration of others. Jacques the Fatalist is like Sancho Panza, Gil Blas, or Doctor Pangloss—one of those type characters, sprung to life from the brain of a man of genius—who are better known than many historical characters, for the mental existence that talent has given them, leaves more of a trace in the minds of men than many real lives. We might even say that Diderot's fatalist deserved more than a little act of vaudeville; he deserved, like Figaro, the honor of a trilogy. We need only a Beaumarchais, nothing more.[18]

The 1832 dramatized version of Dumersan was chiefly concerned with Jacques and Denise, and the 1847 vaudeville is as far from Diderot's novel as its title *Jacques le fataliste* could allow, yet Diderot is obviously the point of departure for both title and characterization of the plays.[19]

More valuable is the testimony of a fellow novelist during the same general period. Diderot is nowhere better understood than in several allusions of another great French writer whose work was to await appreciation equally long. This was Stendhal. In his *Journal*[20] as well as in several other non-fiction volumes quoted below *Jacques le fataliste* is held in esteem:

> Today we read only a small number of his [Diderot's] works, exception being made for *Jacques le fataliste,* a pleasant novel even if it contains four or five pages which offend conventions.[21]
>
> I thought of Diderot, son, as we know, of a Langres cutler. I thought of *Jacques le fataliste,* the only one of his works that I esteem—but, which I esteem more than *Le Voyage d'Anacharsis, Le Traité des études,* and a hundred other tomes esteemed by the pedants.[22]
>
> Doubtless this author [Diderot] is bombastic, but, in 1850 how superior will he seem to the majority of present bombastics? His bombast comes not from a paucity of idea and a need to hide his

deficiency. On the contrary, he is embarrassed with the wealth his heart has to offer him. Six pages need to be ripped out of *Jacques le fataliste,* but, this expurgation made, what work of our time is comparable to it? . . . In 1837 Diderot is adored in Madrid and Petersburg; they hold him in execration as an old roué in Edinbourgh, and twenty years from now, they will give him his just due in the rue Taranne.[23]

In an essay on Diderot from across the channel, at about the same period, comes a judgment of similar vein from Thomas Carlyle, couched in the overdone style of the Englishman:

Among these multitudinous, most miscellaneous Writings of his, in great part a farrago of Philosophism no longer saleable, and now looking melancholy enough,—are two that we can almost call poems; that have something perennially poetic in them: *Jacques le Fataliste;* in a still higher degree, the *Neveu de Rameau.* The occasional blueness of both; even that darkest indigo in some parts of the former, shall not altogether afright us. As it were, a loose straggling sunbeam flies here over Man's Existence in France, now nigh a century behind us: 'from the height of luxurious elegance to the depths of shamelessness' all is here. Slack, careless seems the combination of the picture; wriggling, disjointed, like a bundle of flails; yet strangely united in the painter's inward unconscious feeling. Wearisomely crackling wit gets silent; a grim, taciturn, dare-devil, almost Hogarthian humor rises in the back-ground. Like this there is nothing that we know of in the whole range of French literature: La Fontaine is shallow in comparison; the La Bruyère wit species not to be named. It resembles *Don Quixote* rather; of somewhat similar stature; yet of complexion altogether different; through the one looks a sunny Elysium, through the other a sulphurous Erebus: both hold the Infinite. This *Jacques,* was perhaps not so hastily put together; yet there, too, haste is manifest: the Author finishes it off, not by working out the figures and movements, but by dash-

ing his brush against the canvas; a manoeuvre which in this case has not succeeded.[24]

From England also comes the assurance that two correspondents, whose names are destined to remain long upon many lips, have read and talked about *Jacques*. In a letter of August 20, 1852, from Marx to Engels,[25] both *Jacques* and the *Neveu* are spoken of as well worth rereading. In a subsequent letter Marx speaks more at length of the *Neveu* which he characterizes as a "unique masterpiece." Unfortunately, there is no record of a longer statement on *Jacques*. But in the article on the *Neveu* [26] he quotes at length from "old Hegel" who must have read the *Neveu* with rare understanding and delight. It is clear that Hegel had also read and remembered *Jacques le fataliste,* for in a short newspaper article which concludes with a discussion of master-servant relationship, his admiration is reserved for the French manner of looking at things, exemplified immediately for him by Diderot's lackey and master. In Diderot's strange pair, he half-jokingly sees a new possibility of class society which might succeed, just as in the whole of the article he has playfully and humorously seen a central problem of his philosophy in terms of eighteenth-century art.[27]

The scene has shifted again to Germany. That interest in Diderot had not been lost is borne out by the publication in 1866 of Rosenkranz' complete study of the man and his works. The preceding year, Hettner, in his *Geschichte der französischen Literatur im 18 Jahrhundert,* had taken up most of the earlier criticism:

> Well known and yet far behind the other two [novels] is the last, *Jacques le fataliste.* As to the form he has leaned heavily on *Tristram Shandy;* as to the contents, on *Candide.* It was probably the charming depiction of the insignificant and the everyday that attracted Diderot to Sterne. Diderot does not know how to instil into his hero that all-sweeping amiability which charms us in Sterne's droll creations. Moreover, we find not a single basic thought or idea. The contrast between the belief in human free-

> dom represented by the Master, and the faith in a relentless Predestination represented by Jacques, is not sufficiently carried through. . . . The obscenity shocks us for it lacks a high healthy humor. . . . It can be only the pleasure of the many light, airy details that prompts Goethe to speak in highest praise of the novel in a letter to Merck.[28]

His explanation of Diderot's attraction to Sterne and Goethe's attraction to *Jacques* in terms of insignificant, everyday detail, suggests a more significant explanation of which Hettner had not seen the full import, as later critics will show. Suchier in his own history of French literature, repeats the usual things about Sterne, the fatalism theme as linked to *Candide,* and the Mme de La Pommeraye episode.[29] Rosenkranz, in a whole chapter devoted to the work, has made a great effort toward understanding its disjointed form and attention to petty detail:

> In the representation, it is the art of Individualization which stands out most, which distinguished Diderot, and in which he appears often as the forerunner of Balzac.
>
> It is customary to say that Diderot wanted to copy Sterne in this novel as he had copied Crébillon-fils in the *Bijoux,* and Richardson in *La Religieuse.* One can without hesitation admit the scandal superficially; the whole painting of French life alone, as Diderot here painted it, demands a full, independent outlook which, with its realism, bespeaks a tendency completely healthy in itself. And this realism is no raw experimentation, since, as I have already said above, most of the stories here recounted rest upon actual facts, but Diderot has very well penetrated a whole field which remained an idea before his time, and has pointed out its fatalistic implications.[30]

Renewed interest in Diderot in France toward the close of the nineteenth century was awakened in part by the thought-provoking political changes of 1870 and was given further incentive through the project undertaken by Assézat and completed by Tourneux

for Garnier from 1875 to 1877—the complete works of Diderot in twenty volumes.

In 1871, the gentleman bibliophile and gourmet, Charles Monselet, in a catalogue written for a collection of "rare and curious" books, sees in Diderot only the influence of Sterne; he is stupefied to find "whole pages copied from Sterne."[31] Taken seriously or with a larger than usual grain of salt, the testimony of the eccentric Barbey d'Aurevilly reflects the same outraged feeling:

> In *Jacques le fataliste,* under the guise of that unbearably philosophic lackey, it is Diderot himself who preaches against the concept of man's free will. Do lackeys, then, worry about free will? . . . Diderot, who all his life rehashed Bacon's experimentalism, is no more a creator in the medium of the novel than he is in the realm of philosophy. His *Jacques le fataliste* is, apart from its doctrine, Sterne's *Tristram Shandy,* minus the admirable genius of Sterne, minus the gracefulness of his narration, minus Corporal Trim, minus Uncle Toby. Imitation, that despoiler, is so obvious here, that Naigeon (who loves Diderot as a dog loves its master), Naigeon, the Laridon of that Caesar, does not dare deny it. . . . That heavy imbecile, Diderot—how he has mangled (stealing it at that!) this wonderful touch of England. . . . He put his hand to everything just like Voltaire, but he had no more the light touch of Voltaire than he had the subtle and languid touch of Sterne. . . . That bourgeois Diderot made everything bourgeois. He embourgeoised Rabelais, Sterne, and Voltaire by imitating them.[32]

After such devastation, there is more than a little relief in the Preface, written by Asseline, to an 1885 edition of the novel. Perhaps not until recent years has a critic tried so sincerely to see into the reason for the seemingly inconsequential theme of fatalism:

> . . . That an organized story, like *La Religieuse,* should lie precisely on the subject of the role of fatalism in human affairs, on the subject of universal determinism with neither gap nor end,

hurling defiance at the final causes of common spirituality and at the providence of religious metaphysics—and there you have the problem which confronts critics of *Jacques* and which stands out far above all literary chicanery.

It is the fatality of phenomena which allows observation to formulate as law the constancy of series, and which allows induction to foresee and sometimes predict with certainty the future. Without that fatality, there is no more science. The unbreakable chain of antecedents and results is prolonged from the first combination of two chemical elements right up to the formation and movements of heavenly bodies, from the aqueous state of the infant earth right up to the greatest acts of reflection on the part of the human organism. However, in proportion to the complication of fatality's conditions, general laws decompose into a mass of special laws—special to the species, the class, the group, the individual, each of which carries in itself, so to speak, its own fatality, at once dependent on and distinct from surrounding fatalities. There is not one oak which is identical to another oak, not a single louse exactly like his neighbor. These differences, determined by a chain of numberless causes, will thence diverge into effects of such variety as to be often incalculable.

What, then, is so astonishing if . . . in this period of crisis in which Diderot lived, precarious existence seemed to spring much more from chance than from that unchanging fatality which traces the great lines of universal destiny? What so amazing if, in human language, conceived as a distinct entity, chance is to determinism, as passing fancy is to a consistent will? [33]

The remaining critics of the century are, in general, blinded to any possible appreciation of *Jacques* by their insistence upon the by now familiar criticism concerning Sterne and the obscenity of many passages. In 1876, the Protestant pastor Vinet says in his history of French literature: