Georges May

ONE WAY AND IN BOTH DIRECTIONS: CONSIDERATIONS ON IMAGINARY VOYAGES

Did the first men dream their voyages before making them?* Or did they have to first take to the sea so as to be able to later embark on the ship of their imagination and thus embroider on accounts of their journeys? Is it the prestige of the dream that spurred them on to run the risk of translating it into a real experience? Or is it the account of authentic voyages that supported that of imaginary voyages? These are questions that make one dream and that we continue to ask ourselves, even though we suspect that they are idle, since it is impossible to answer them with certitude. All that we know, or think we know, is that among the first written testimonies that have come down to us, real and imaginary voyages are mixed and confused in an alloy of a

Translated by Jeanne Ferguson

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homogeneity that resists analysis and is perhaps an image of the reception they had from their original public. Who knows if the Greeks who listened in the middle of the first millennium B.C. to the poets singing the return of Ulysses to Ithaca, could, or wanted to, untangle the part of truth from that of poetry? Who knows if the Arabs who, at the end of the following millennium heard the enchanting tale of the voyages of Sinbad, distinguished, as the Western orientalists of the 19th century must have done, the real ports of call and the shipwrecks experienced in the dreamed places and fantastic adventures?

This is to remind us that there is an organic and historical connection between the two categories of voyages that the modern mind separates with much more care than was no doubt true originally. It is also to remind us that the writings historians of literature situate after the 18th century in the categories of imaginary voyages have always flourished at the heart of civilizations known for their maritime vocation and for the daring of their travelers. Great navigators, the Greeks who conquered Troy and gave birth to the *Odyssey* and other *nostoï* that are lost today. Great navigators, the Arabs who plowed the Indian Ocean from the Gulf of Oman to the coasts of India and China and who recounted and listened to the stories of Sinbad the Sailor's voyages. Great navigators, the French who accompanied Jacques Cartier to the banks of the St. Lawrence and whose journey suggested to Rabelais the fantasized ports of the *Quart Livre*. Great navigators, the English who traded by sea with Africa, America and Asia and invented Robinson Crusoe and Lemuel Gulliver. Great navigators, the Americans who walked on the moon and gave interstellar adventure films the vogue they still enjoy. It is thus clear that there are no imaginary voyages, although we can neither affirm that the inverse is true and that maritime civilizations had always been the source of imaginary voyages nor that real voyages had always preceded the others in time. In one case as in the other, a literary history of imaginary voyages is inconceivable without a parallel history of the great voyages of discovery.

Who says historiography also says periodization. In the immense panorama that goes from the *Odyssey* to the *Planet of the Apes* and *Star Wars* we are at first tempted to distinguish the oldest and most poetic works, those in which the charm of adven-

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ture is such that today it gives the impression of being self-sufficient. Perhaps a false impression and arising from our inability to put ourselves into the skin of a sailor or caravan leader listening to an Arab storyteller of the Middle Ages, as much as the suggestive power of the images born from these marvelous tales seem to be the fantastic and poetic doubles of authentic voyages. In any case, it is an impression different from that we received when faced with texts in which, beginning with the Renaissance, fantasy, far from being an end in itself, coexists with an idea of after-thought. Whether we think of the great utopias of the Renaissance, the *Utopia* of Thomas More which in 1518 gave its name to the genre it illustrated; of Tommaso Campanella's *City of the Sun* (1620); or of Francis Bacon's *Atlantis* (1627); or that we think of the famous satirical allegories that followed, such as the two last books of *Pantagruel* (1548-1564), the *Autre monde* of Cyrano de Bergerac (1657-1662) or *Gulliver's Travels* by Swift (1726); all these texts have at least three important things in common that distinguish them from those that had long gone before them. The first is that the fantasy is no longer gratuitous but didactic. The second is that this didactic intention is not openly revealed but is discerned behind a veil that is transparent enough that the reader can see through it without straining his eyes too much. Finally, the third is that, if the author is careful to facilitate this double reading it is because his intention would be betrayed if we read his book as when we were children, in the editions described as "for young people", *Gulliver's Travels,* for example, or in the way we assume somewhat gratuitously that the Greeks listened to the account of Ulysses's voyages.

Setting aside the possibility of this so-called naive reading, the success of the rhetorical procedures used in these great books rests, in fact, on the voluntary collaboration of the reader who, seduced by the skill of the author, by disorientation, by the irridescence of the colors, the strangeness of the creatures and the charm of the adventures spontaneously becomes the accomplice of the author and mentally translates into clarity what is presented to him in an open and voluntarily transparent code, sufficiently esoteric, however, to justify the satisfaction with which the reader congratulates himself on his ability to decipher. Whether it is a question of the *Quart Livre*, of Dyrcona's trial before the tribunal

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of the birds, of the social and political order observed by Gulliver in the country of the Houyhnmhnms and the Yahoos, imaginary journeys of this kind always reveal a hidden meaning to the aware reader, as for example, in Aesop's fables or the parables of the Gospels. Now, it so happens that this meaning is tied to the itinerary followed by imaginary travelers which, always leading them into foreign and strange places, brings to their minds the contrasting bearers of the didactic message of the work. The itinerary followed by these voyagers thus having a meaning resulting from its direction, we have the right to say that the meaning (le *sens*), of their voyages depends on their direction (*leur sens*).

* * *

The only admissible goal of this play on words is to bring out the relatively late innovation in the art of the imaginary voyage which is our real purpose here. This deserves all our attention, because it allows us to distinguish a third period in the history that has just been summarily sketched, one that perhaps has not yet ended. In fact, as we shall see, the form taken by the works using this innovation is in better agreement, if not with our literary tastes, at least with some of the major preoccupations of our time, than those which preceded them.

This decisive innovation was not simply to reverse the direction of the voyage and in so doing radically modify its meaning, in short, recurring to the word play, to change its meaning (*sens*) into the two meanings (*sens*) of the word direction (*sens*). The *Lettres persanes* of Montesquieu are if not the oldest (1721) at least the best known of the first great books to have used this reversal of the classic voyage. Instead of taking us away from home, like Pantagruel and his shipboard companions, or like Gulliver and many other heroes of traditional imaginary voyages, Usbek and Rica, Montesquieu's tourists and letter-writers, leave their distant Ispahan for western Europe, where they stay for ten years or so and from which they write most of the letters that comprise the book.

They were not the first to do this: is one ever the first in literature? Their fictional sojourn being dated from 1710 to 1720, they had been preceded by a curious and engaging Turk, secret envoy

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of the Grand Master as an agent for gathering information at the "courts of the Christian princes." Issuing from the imagination of the Genoan Giovanni Paolo Marana, this character named Mahmut or Mehemet, perhaps better known with the pseudonym Titus of Moldavia that he adopted on his arrival in the West, was a clandestine visitor in Paris for 45 years (1637-1682). Faithful to his mission, he kept bombarding his correspondents of Constantinople with reports. Most of the letters containing these reports are limited to reeling off a sort of long chronicle of dynastic, diplomatic and military history of 17th-century Western Europe, but a sufficient number also deal with mores and institutions, so that we have a foretaste of the *Lettres persanes,* which is not at all surprising, since Montesquieu had a copy of Marana's book in his library. This work had begun to appear in 1684, in a series of volumes entitled, depending on the language of their editions, *L'Esploratore turco, L'Espion du Grand Seigneur* or *A Turkish Spy*. The history of their publication, very complicated, especially in the hands of the continuators of Marana who carried on his work until the middle of the 18th century, testifies to the lasting popularity of the book.

Among the many travelers who were not long in following in the footsteps of Mahmut, Usbek and Rica, one of the first and most famous is no doubt Micromegas, a native of the star Sirius, whose arrival in the Baltic Sea dates from July 5, 1737, allowing him to meet there a "flock of philosophers" whose voyage—this one authentic—is well known to historians. The short tale of Voltaire that bears his name appeared in 1752, but no doubt a first version existed at the end of the thirties. He had thus been preceded in England by the *Letters from a Persian in England to his Friend in Ispahan* (1735), by Lord George Lyttleton, whose title in itself reveals the model which inspired these letters. We could say as much for John Shebbeare's work, which appeared in London twenty years later, *Letters on the English Nation, by Batista Angeloni, a Jesuit who Resided Many Years in London. Translated from the Original Italian* (1755). After these imaginary Persians and Italians came the most famous of the fictional letter-writers, who visited England in the 18th century: the Chinese philosopher Lien Chi Altangi, who sent from London to Fum Hoam, first president of the ceremonial Academy of Peking, a

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long series of letters that Oliver Goldsmith began to publish in 1760 in a London journal before uniting them in a work published in London in 1762 with the title *The Citizen of the World, or Letters From a Chinese Philosopher Residing in London to His Friends in the East.* The influence of Goldsmith being added to those of Marana and Montesquieu, London later saw the appearance of two volumes written by Charles Johnstone entitled *The Pilgrim, or a Picture of Life in a Series of Letters Written Mostly From London by a Chinese Philosopher to His Friend at Quang-Tong: Containing Remarks Upon Laws, Customs and Manners of the English and other Nations* (1775). A short time before, Voltaire recounted in *L'ingénu* the adventures in Basse-Bretagne, then in Versailles, of a traveler from the land of the Hurons. This *Ingénu* having landed in the bay of St. Malo on July 15, 1689, preceded by ninety years in the fictional chronology the arrival in the port of St. Malo from the middle of the Pacific Ocean of an authentic traveler, the Polynesian Actourou, brought back by Bougainville from Tahiti. He was to become, with the name of Orou, the hero of Diderot's work composed around 1772, to which he gave the title *Supplément au Voyage de Bougainville,* and which only appeared in 1796, twelve years after the author's death. In the meantime, in Madrid in 1793 the *Cartas marruescas* had been published, a posthumous work of José Cadalso, which was first serialized like Goldsmith's novel and almost entirely composed of letters in which the young moor Gazel ben Ali, during a stay of several years in Spain (1768-1774), shared his impressions with his master and friend the old Ben Beley, who had remained in Morocco. That, without speaking of the avalanche of French works more or less adroitly plagiarizing the masterpiece of Montesquieu: letters supposedly written by the Siamese, Indians, Chinese, Turks or Iriquois. Forty years after the first edition of *Lettres persanes* Grimm could still observe in the *Correspondance Littéraire,* "After the *Lettres persanes* of the immortal Montesquieu, there is no place in Asia or America in which some individuals in France have not been made to travel in order to have them draw up a table of our manners".

If the inventions of the reversed voyage was qualified above as a decisive innovation, it is not because it launched a literary fashion. All literary fashions are not necessarily interesting

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enough, aside from the small circles making up the Republic of Letters, to deserve the attention of the readers of *Diogenes*. But it is because the effects of this invention, from the pens of the greatest authors of the 18th century, a century that exploited it, today seem as prophetic as they were then original.

* * *

The first is immediately apparent. The reverse direction of the itinerary leads to the reversal of the perspective. In the imaginary voyage of the classical type, or we could call it centrifugal—the one that goes from the known to the unknown—the subject, that is the traveler, belongs to the same culture as the reader to whom the book is addressed and who is thus invited to identify himself with him, while in the new model of imaginary voyage, centripetal—since it goes from the unknown to the known—the individual with whom the reader is tempted to identify himself is the object of the observation of the foreign tourist. This metamorphosis of subject into object logically results in an immediately felt growth of objectivity. In the model which has just been named classic or centrifugal, that of Cyrano's *L'Autre Monde* or Swift's *Gulliver's Travels,* the target at which the satirical author aims is the cultural milieu of the reader. It is a matter of opening his eyes to everything arbitrary and contestable, to show him the relative where he tends to see the absolute. In this regard the imaginary voyage acts somewhat as a real voyage, that Montesquieu particularly recommended because "a marvelous clarity for human judgment of the frequentation of the world is drawn from it".[1] In the optics of the ironic reversal resulting from the centripetal voyage, there is always a comparison of two different cultures, ours and that of the Other, but instead of being the action of someone like us, of a being that uses the same basis of comparison as we do, uses the same measurements and who, even if he is endowed with an open and generous mind, can do no more than judge the Other as a variation of the norm, as abnormal—the Lilliputians are dwarfs and the Brobdingnatians

[1] Montaigne, "De l'institution des enfants", *Essais*, I, XXVI, Paris, Gallimard, "Bibliothèque de la Pléiade", p. 168.

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giants, since the unit of measurement is one of ours, the English sailor Gulliver—the observer is from then on the Other, and he judges us according to the criteria of his own culture. That does not at all guarantee the exactness of this judgment, infallibility not having been imparted more to the others than to ourselves, but the author pays the reader the compliment of supposing him intelligent enough to know when it is proper to take the characters seriously and when it is proper not to take them seriously. This is how Micromegas—in a story clearly inspired by the success of Swift's book, since Voltaire goes so far as to mention it in the text—does not hesitate, he who is "twenty-four miles tall" to treat men like mites, indeed atoms, while his traveling companion, "Saturn's dwarf" who is only "six thousand feet tall" takes whales for men.

Let it be said in passing that what these terms of comparison have as deliberately comic in Voltaire suggests that there is a link between this reversal of perspective and the tropes of irony, which results from a reversal in a different register. In any case, we see in that the reason for which the innovation in question was called above an ironic reversal. That said, the *rapprochement* between Gulliver and Micromegas is enough to show that in both cases it is a demystification, as is proper to an essentially satirical work. This demystification can go very far, as far as sacrilege, for example, as the reactions of the Huron of Voltaire show before the sacraments of the Church, in the early chapters of *L'Ingénu,* and as the Mahmut of Marana did not hesitate to do earlier, who, like the good and faithful Moslem he was, did not fail to express, with a false and transparent naivety, his astonishment before some of the Christian beliefs and practices. However that does not make a fundamental change in the rhetorical mechanism at work. Thus from the point of view of this first effect, the ironic reversal is limited to intensifying the objectivity resulting from the contrast of cultures, a contrast that was of course already present in the classic model, without really changing its nature. In both cases, the satire or the demystification only affects our way of seeing ourselves.

It is not the same for the second effect. This is simply reciprocal to the first: if the subject of the classic voyage becomes the object of the reversed voyage, plain common sense suggests that

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the object of the classic voyage becomes the subject of the reversed voyage. Now, since this object is the outsider, the stranger, the exotic, the second effect of the reversed voyage is a change in the way we see the Other. Marana's Turk, Montesquieu's Persians and Goldsmith's Chinese are exotic for the Italians, French or English who read their letters but not for those who write them, which means that when they happen to bring up in their correspondence this or that characteristic of their civilization, it is done as though it were normal, while the Western reader who is a third party finds himself, depending on the case, shocked, attracted, in any case struck and affected differently from the way they themselves are. We must not forget that even if their letters principally consist of an evocation and critique of what they see in the West, they also contain a surprising amount of information on everything, borrowed from travel accounts, on the native countries of the letter writers, their religion, government, history and mores. In addition, the authors of *L'Espion du Grand Seigneur, Lettres persanes* and, to a lesser degree, *Citizen of the World,* had the fortunate idea of inserting into the letters written from Europe, which make up the main part of their works, a certain number of letters written by their Oriental correspondents. This fact did not escape the notice of Paul Valéry when he ended a famous essay on *Lettres persanes* pointing out the presence in this book of a surprising number of Jesuits, on the one hand, and of eunuchs on the other.

The new formula, for once to the point, was thus admirable in that it allowed its users to win on both levels, that of satire on Western mores and that of the evocation of Oriental mores. The transformation of the object into subject in fact ran the risk of causing the reader to lose, in the account of an imaginary voyage, one of its most appreciated qualities: the charm of disorientation, evasion, discovery of new horizons, astonishment, because the destination of the voyage was from then on his own country and no longer an automatically exotic elsewhere. By focusing on various procedures that do not neglect the ex-object, now become subject, the native countries of foreign travelers—we are thinking particularly of the letters written by the wives of Usbek, shut up in the harem of Ispahan and by the eunuchs who served and guarded them—the authors, Montesquieu first of all, skil-

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fully caught with one hand the exoticism they were in danger of losing from the other. This is what Marana had already done in creating a character leaving the Ottoman Empire, whose military presence in central Europe at his time sufficed to explain the curiosity the Western public could have for the Turks. And it is what Goldsmith will do in playing on the well-known theme the Chinoiseries played for the intelligentsia of his milieu and time. In thus exploiting this formula the authors also kept the advantage of preserving this other source of pleasure for the reader, this other major advantage of ironic reversals—already present although in a different form in the classic imaginary voyage—that is, the complicity cleverly established between author and reader: in the case of the voyage in reverse, the connivence of the reader who delights in the wisdom that allows him to see through the falsely naive observations of the foreign tourist. A solidarity then, between author and reader, which is made at the expense of fictional characters, oriental as well as occidental, and which allows the present but well-hidden lesson in the text to be fully revealed. The supposed curiosity of the Western public for the exotic object that is for them the Orient becomes a source not only of pleasure but also of knowledge in that it accustoms them to think of civilizations that are distant from their own not only as a source of entertainment, indeed, as a way of confirming their preconceived ideas on the obvious superiority of their own—"How can anyone be Persian?"—but like all human societies, capable of being compared to their own, without knowing in advance which will carry the day.

Another way of grasping the complexity and fertility of this mechanism is to observe that this second effect of the voyage in reverse rewards what the first had of exclusively negative. In fact, as we mentioned in bringing up the work of Rabelais, Cyrano and Swift, the decoding of their allegories mostly allowed an effect of satire to be disengaged from them. Now, if satire is a well-known arm it does not lend itself to the formulation of institutions or ideas preferable to those it attempts to discredit. In this regard, within the second period suggested above, utopian works are distinguished from allegorical works in that they propose an ideal model, even if it is obviously unattainable, while the allegories that follow them are more exclusively closed in a satiri-

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cal and thus negative vision of reality. Thanks to the innovation of the voyages in reverse, the same work could simultaneously play both roles: criticize reality and propose a more perfected model, combine the pessimism of judgment of the present with the optimism of hope for a better future. Then we can better understand that it flourished at a time that believed in progress and had introduced the search for happiness on earth into its program. We can also understand why Roger Caillois, in the preface to his edition of Montesquieu, develops what he calls, from an expression destined to draw attention to its importance, "the sociological revolution".

> "Here I call sociological revolution the thought process that consists in pretending to be a stranger in the society in which one lives, to look at it from the outside as though one saw it for the first time. Examining it as one would a society of Indians or Papuans, we must constantly avoid finding their customs and laws natural. We must consider these institutions, habits, mores, to which we are so accustomed from birth as extraordinary and difficult to understand. We respect them so much and so spontaneously that most of the time we cannot imagine that they could be otherwise. It takes a powerful imagination to attempt such a conversion and a lot of persistence to maintain it."[2]

Although at first sight Caillois seems to stress exclusively the first of the two effects we have just analyzed, we soon see that he was not blind to the second. The revolution he describes in the powerful pages of this preface is based at the same time on a critique of our society and on a tacit comparison with other human societies, those that historians have always endeavored to grasp and those with which travelers, explorers and ethnologists have tried to acquaint us. Now, the praise of the comparative method in the matter of sociology and ethnology is no longer acceptable. In a recent book, boldly entitled *Nous et les autres* and which is pertinent to our intentions here, since its subject is "French thought on human diversity", Tzvetan Todorov, referring to *Lettres persanes,* eloquently illustrated the merits of this method:

[2] Montesquieu, *Oeuvres complètes,* R. Caillois, ed., 2 vols., t. I, Paris, Gallimard, "Bibliothèque de la Pléiade", 1947, p. V.

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> "Montesquieu seems to have transposed onto relations between societies what La Rochefoucauld had established for relationships between individuals within a society: we are blind as concerns ourselves, we can only know others. On the social level, self-interest is relayed by *prejudices,* defined by Montesquieu in the preface to *L'Esprit des lois* as 'that which causes us to be ignorant of ourselves'. A collective unconsciousness and no longer individual, but still not universal, prejudice is the unconscious part of the ideology of a society. The mechanism of knowledge cannot perfectly grasp the subject, because it is also a part of it; the ideal separation between knowing and living is only possible in exceptional circumstances, since to know is also to live. The objective knowledge of things 'as they really are ' is perhaps available to the ideal and disinterested foreigner; in self-knowledge, as individual or as social group, the instruments of knowledge are contiguous to the object to be known, and perfect lucidity is impossible: the eye cannot see itself, said La Rochefoucauld".[3]

One of the great merits of this reference to the book of *Maximes* is to stress the continuity of thought that leads from the psychology of the centuries called classic to the ethnology of today. Now, it is another aspect of this same continuity that leads from the classic imaginary voyage to the voyage in reverse. What changes when we go from the one to the other is the nature of the way the Westerner looks at the Easterner or, in more general terms, our way of seeing the Other. A quite simple change when it is only a matter of expressing it or even understanding it, but whose course is strewn with so many obstacles that are so difficult to overcome—we remember in particular the anathema cast on the infidel by the holders of a revealed religion—that it is not surprising that it came so late nor that its completion is still hazardous, when we witness in more than one sector of our own society the efforts that are still needed to reach a successful conclusion. Its final logical destination, the only one to fill the necessary condition for the good functioning of the comparative method mentioned above, will not be achieved until we unreservedly accord to the Other the same importance, the same value and the same dignity as we do to ourselves and when the Other pays us back in our own coin.

[3] Tzvetan Todorov, *Nous et les autres. La réflexion française sur la diversité humaine,* Paris, Éditions du Seuil, 1989, p. 391.

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In the excerpt given above, Roger Caillois judiciously stressed a condition that is indispensable to the success of this change. "It takes a powerful imagination," he affirmed. So it is not by chance that the works reviewed here are works of the imagination, fiction rather than moral or philosophical treatises. It is even less by chance that, at the time these works appeared, the novel enjoyed much less esteem within the Republic of Letters, and what it achieved during the 19th century, and what was accorded at that time to traditional genres. The writers who used it thus obeyed either an instinct or a calculation but certainly not a fashion. Instinct, if their intention was to take advantage of the form made popular by *L'Espion* of Marana by giving it a content to the taste of the day; calculation, if it was better to hide the subversity of their thought by inserting it into a form generally considered frivolous. "That is not worthy of a serious man", we read in the preface to *Lettres persanes,* a remark maliciously lent by the author to the reader who would have uncovered his anonymity. In both cases, the development and success of the literary work called here imaginary voyage in reverse can be understood as resulting from the grafting of a thought present since Montaigne's essay "Des cannibales" ("Each man calls barbarism what is not of his usage") on a new literary form and suitable to better assure the flight and complicity of the imagination.

* * *

There came a moment when this literary form was no longer so new. No more than other human activities, arts or sciences, literature did not escape the law by which any innovation quickly loses its initial impact and must sooner or later be taken over by another innovation. In Grimm's remark quoted above, we feel the scorn of the critic for the writers of his time who, like uninspired cooks, limit themselves to following a recipe. At the time he was writing, 1761, the procedure of letters sent from the Orient by a foreign tourist, successor of Titus of Moldavia, Usbek and many others of their imitators, was no longer anything but a simple mode. The books that continued to perpetuate it were no more than a form emptied of its tonic and audacious substance which several decades earlier had enriched first-rank authors. In order

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to maintain its dynamism and fertility, the thought that had been so happily expressed had to find another means of expression. It could only succeed in this by using the pen of a writer endowed with a sufficiently independent and inventive mind to adventure far from the beaten path and innovate in his turn, as Diderot did in composing his *Supplément au Voyage de Bougainville.*

The work bearing this title, written around 1772-1773, printed only in 1796, twelve years after its author's death, is not, properly speaking, either a novel or an imaginary voyage, centrifugal or centripetal. Resolutely *sui generis*—which is not rare with Diderot—it nonetheless enters quite naturally into the texture of our subject and testifies to the fact that the two effects judged above as characteristic of the voyage in reverse are not always its exclusive property. Combining in this work the procedure of reversal—if not in the direction of the voyage, at least in the orientation of the thought—with the literary tradition of travel accounts and that of the classic imaginary voyage, published by Bougainville in 1771 with the title *Voyage autour du monde,* Diderot adds a *Supplément,* entirely imaginary, in the form of several dialogues of which those confronting Tahitians with French are supposed to take place in Tahiti, while the ones between French interlocutors take place in Paris.

In fact, rather than taking his Tahitian to France, like Montesquieu's Persians, Goldsmith's Chinese or Voltaire's Huron, or even like Actourou, the authentic Tahitian who had been the rage in Louis XV's Paris and Versailles, Diderot preferred to manage the conversations so that the reader was invited to see things, not like Bougainville or his chaplain, but like the islanders with whom they had conversations, the Old Man or Orou. Therefore, on the subject of mores and morals touching sexuality, the words of Orou—somewhat like those of Socrates, often more disposed to put his interlocutor face to face with his own contradictions than to offer to solve them himself—are used less to defend the civilization of his people than to criticize that of the chaplain with whom he is speaking, to show the contradictions, the absurdities, the sad consequences:

> "OROU: Answer me sincerely, in spite of the express orders of your three lawmakers, a young man, in your country, never sleeps with a

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young woman without their permission?
CHAPLAIN: I would be lying if I assured you of this.
OROU: The woman, who has sworn to belong only to her husband, never gives herself to another?
CHAPLAIN: Nothing is more common.
OROU: Your lawmakers severely punish or do not punish: if they punish they are wild beasts who go against nature; if they do not punish they are imbeciles who have exposed their authority to scorn through a useless defense."[4]

As this short sample shows, here we have to do with the point of view corresponding to the first effect of the imaginary voyage in reverse: the transformation of the subject into object leads to satire and criticism of the civilization of the reader. Now, the consequence of this criticism, which is intended to obtain the conviction of the reader, is to show Tahitian man and his culture in a new light, as Bougainville presented them in his *Voyage*. Not just a "good savage" this one, after he is no longer seen through the eyes of a European, but "a valid interlocutor" in the full meaning of the expression. Tahitian society is no longer just a simple object of curiosity and amusement, indeed, an object of scandal, after it is grasped in this point of view, but a human collectivity provided with all the attributes belonging to a complete civilization, including the right to view other societies with a critical eye—in this case, the France of Louis XV—and that of conducting its affairs conforming to the idea it has of its own interests, as is shown by the follow-up of the dialogue given above.

Even if Diderot's *Supplément au Voyage de Bougainville* is not, on the level of literary procedures, a voyage in reverse comparable to the various works mentioned in the preceding pages, it may be considered on the level of thought as the crowning achievement of the genre. The false naivety of the questions Orou asks of the chaplain ends in an efficacious demystification of French values and mores, even more than in *L'Ingénu,* while the life style of the Tahitians is presented and explained by the Tahitians themselves, with no more claim on their part to infallibility than on the part of Micromegas. This makes it easier for the reader to make an objective comparison of the cultures and thus gain a

[4] Denis Diderot, *Oeuvres philosophiques,* P. Vernière, ed., Paris, Garnier, 1956, p. 482.

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less superficial understanding and a more just grasp of the one as of the other.

That is not all: this work that faithfully represents the enlightened thought of the end of the 18th century also points the way to the future. Certainly not through its claim in favor of sexual liberty—that is only a small part of things—but for the way in which it places this on the comparison of two societies and their cultures. In fact, if, during the interval of more than two centuries that separate us from Diderot, humanity has taken a few steps toward a better understanding of itself and therefore also toward a better understanding between men, it is partly because it has begun to suspect, as Tzvetan Todorov reminds us in the work quoted above, that self-knowledge comes through the knowledge of others, on the level of collectivities as on that of individuals. It seems the comparative method alone, since it allows the separation of what is relative, accidental or superficial in a given culture, from what it shares with other cultures, is able to lead to a more just appreciation of the diversity as well as the universality of the human species.

The masterpieces of our recent literature, profoundly different and yet both heirs, each in its own way, of the literary tradition of the voyage in reverse of the 18th century, testify to the actuality that all these questions have retained for us: *Tristes tropiques* by Claude Lévi-Strauss (1955) and *Vendredi ou les Limbes du Pacifique* by Michel Tournier (1967). The first opens in a revealing manner with a part entitled "The end of the voyages", which begins with the words "I hate voyages and explorers". In the seventh part of his book, the author presents us with the unforgettable Nambikwara of central Brazil—descendants perhaps of the three Indians Montaigne saw in Rouen more than four centuries ago and who play a well-known role in the essay "Des cannibales"—in a perspective analogous to the one used by Diderot to present the Tahitians to the public two centuries ago. Although described by an outsider ethnologist, the Nambikwara of Lévi-Strauss seem to live in symbiosis with him to the point that the women did not hesitate to wipe their noses on his shirt.[5]

[5] Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Tristes tropiques,* "Terre humaine," Paris, Plon, 1955, p. 303.

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As for Michel Tournier's novel, its title is well chosen for drawing immediate attention to the reshuffling he arranges between the two characters of the novel of Daniel Defoe. This inversion of the roles of Robinson and Friday cannot help but evoke the memory of the voyage in reverse that was one of the claims to glory of the literature of the *Enlightenment*.

This rapprochement between works separated by two centuries is all the more meaningful and justified since *Tristes tropiques* is the work of a great "explorer" and *Vendredi* that of a great novelist, modern avatars, in their way, of Bougainville and Diderot. And the bond that unites their two masterpieces is all the less due to chance since the second proceded from the first, just as the *Supplément* proceeds from the *Voyage*. In fact, Tournier, who followed Lévi-Strauss's courses in the Musée de l'Homme before taking up a literary career, more than once rendered homage to his master and pointed out the role that he played in the genesis of *Vendredi,* in which, he states, he wanted to put the essential of what he had "learned at the Musée de l'Homme, especially under the guidance of Claude Lévi-Strausse".[6] In this genesis the importance of Defoe's *Adventures of Robinson Crusoe* is not diminished: the contribution of modern ethnology simply serves as a counterweight to that of the adventure novels of the past. In fact, it is inscribed in the tradition of the classic imaginary voyage, in which the hero is the image of his reader and had for the Other—Friday in this case—only the attitude of the missionary impatient to convert him to the only true religion, his own, or in any case a condescension based on an obvious feeling of the superiority of his own culture: "[...] what was Friday for Samuel Defoe? Nothing, an animal, a being who hopes to receive his humanity from Robinson, the Western man, the only possessor of all knowledge, all wisdom".[7]

The reversal of roles, realized in Michel Tournier's novel, is therefore well in line with Diderot's book reversing the point of view in which Bougainville observed in his own the inhabitants of the New Cythera. "Re-reading his novel," wrote Tournier, referring to Defoe, "I could not [...] forget my years of study

[6] Michel Tournier, *Le vent Paraclet,* Paris, Gallimard, "Folio", p. 194.
[7] *Ibid.,* p. 227.

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at the Musée de l'Homme, where I had learned that there are no 'savages', only men coming from a civilization different from ours and which it was greatly in our interest to study''.[8]

What is the best way to end than on this thought? It suggests as the best of the reversed imaginary voyages of the 18th century had already done, that the means of communication between men, whether it is a matter of individuals or collectivities, are made for exchanges and not just for exploration, exploitation, propagation of the faith or tourism. A two-way street therefore, not just one-way. It also reminds us that differently from the classic imaginary voyages, such as the *Adventures of Robinson Crusoe,* most often bearers of a simple and clear emblematic or allegoric meaning, reversed voyages that have been the subject of the preceding pages invite a less assured reading, more ambiguous but more enriching in the phenomena of culture. A two-way street here again and not one-way.

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[8] *Ibid.*

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