

National Identity and Politicisation in Fiction up to the Revolution: The Example of the Moral Tale

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This article will examine the ways in which national identity was constructed in the French moral tales of the second half of the eighteenth century by writers who reacted to the literary, philosophical and political circumstances in which they were writing. In particular, the key themes of patriotism and Frenchness will be taken as benchmarks to measure developments in the construction of identity. These will reveal how the fiction of the period became increasingly politicised and how it ultimately reflects changing attitudes which can be seen as paving the way for the French Revolution. While initially the moral tale focused on the ridiculous ways of its predominantly noble pool of characters, England's successes in the Seven Years' War led French authors to query their country's moral standing and to use England as a model for morality. The greater diversity of social classes offered by English literature encouraged in turn a broadening of the social base of characters in French fiction. Gradually, as the character base broadened and authors explored the implications of this for society's morals, a concept of Frenchness and French virtue developed. In its emphasis on charity, nobility of sentiment over birth, and freedom from oppression, this concept took its lead from England, but there came a point when authors felt they no longer needed to look beyond French shores for their models; they were confident enough to use French models instead.

The moral tale was one of the most predominant forms of fiction in the years leading up to the Revolution, combining morality and mores in a short, accessible form. In terms of size of readership, the tales were more popular than many of the texts that we now see as the important works of the

Enlightenment.¹ Although written predominantly by Parisian authors, which gave a certain bias to them, they did reflect the culture and concerns of their day. They were written specifically for an immediate and, by eighteenth-century standards, broad public. It is generally recognised that such minor texts give a clearer idea of what was read and thought at the time and thus give us a more complete understanding of the complex political, philosophical and literary ideas propagated in the years leading up to the French Revolution.²

The reading public of the second half of the eighteenth century was an expanding one. Possession of books among the bourgeoisie increased noticeably in the second quarter of the century and these gains were reinforced by wider public access to texts through reading rooms and libraries. Literacy did improve among the lowest classes as well but evidence is scarce as to how much they would actually have read.³ In fact, it is extremely difficult to know what was read at the time and by how many, but what is clear is that increasingly as the century progressed, 'literature spilled over social distinctions, mobilising public opinion among all the literate classes'.⁴ It was able to do this in part because the social backgrounds of the writers were changing. A new group of writers became prominent in the second half of the century, people who no longer saw writing as a status but as a liberal profession and there were a number of authors such as Rétif de la Bretonne (1734–1806) who came from the lower classes. This new breed of professional writer, with Rétif and Louis-Sébastien Mercier (1740–1814) in the lead, represented a shift in the reading and publishing habits of the century as reading became a more individualised, private affair and correspondingly, writers began to push for their authorial rights and the need for individual copyright.⁵ The second half of the eighteenth century was, therefore, one of change: in the readership, in the authors, in the type of books being written and read.

Ever since Daniel Mornet produced his work on the intellectual origins of the French Revolution, scholars have attempted to identify aspects of literary texts that reveal evidence of pre-Revolutionary tendencies. The most significant of these is Roger Chartier's reasonably recent work re-examining Mornet's thesis, where he suggests that rather than trying to identify the origins of the Revolution specifically, we should instead be looking to 'recognise changes in belief and sensibility that would render such a rapid and profound destruction of the old political and social order decipherable and acceptable'.⁶ To do this, he argues, it is necessary to consider 'not only clear and well-elaborated thoughts but also unmediated and embodied representations; not only voluntary and reasoned engagements but also automatic and obligatory loyalties' (p. 6). One way of doing this is to consider the works of secondary writers who responded much more directly to the needs of their age and followed trends rather than setting them. As Mornet pointed out, 'le rôle historique des écrivains ne se mesure pas nécessairement à leur talent et aux jugements de la postérité',⁷ and it is profitable to explore such second-rate authors, overlooked by Chartier, who concentrates on

philosophical tracts, and by Edmond Dziembowski who, in his study on national identity, looks primarily at political texts and some works of theatre.⁸ By moving away from non-fictional texts such as political or philosophical writings, we can more easily avoid the judgement that it was the ideas in the texts that changed people's attitudes and instead look at how fast-gaining ideas changed texts. If a viewpoint is revealed consistently in the moral tale, or indeed the popular novel or any other form of lesser fiction, it is because the authors were reacting to ideas commonly expounded not because they were trying to change people's political opinions. There is ample evidence to show that such secondary authors preferred to advocate a *juste milieu* rather than extremes.⁹

The rise of the moral tale can be dated to the mid-1750s and its initial concern was with the search for virtue and thus happiness, usually through finding love. From the beginning though, virtue was linked to a concept of social usefulness and authors hoped to persuade their readers of the need to reform their morals to become better members of society. At this stage, there was no real reference to other countries and so no evident concept of Frenchness: the focus was on class differences within France. For instance, in 'Le Projet manqué' ['The Failed Plan'] (published anonymously under the pseudonym Montagnard des Pyrénées in the *Mercure de France*, November 1757), the heroine marries a marquis rather than remain true to her roots and marry a man of commerce. She is unhappy and regrets her move up in the world. Similarly in 'N'en croyez que vos yeux ['Only Believe What You Can See'] (*Mercure de France*, June 1758), the merchant is revealed to be much more noble in spirit and more generous than the Count.

The aim of these early moral tales was to ridicule the follies of misguided characters, but by the early 1760s there was a shift towards providing examples of virtuous characters as models to follow and cases of dastardly vicious ones to avoid. In both cases, these extremes were almost always represented by English characters. Initially, the English were warnings against vice,¹⁰ but gradually the successes of England in the Seven Years' War led French writers to see the country as a model for what Dziembowski calls a 'révolution des mœurs' [a moral revolution] (p. 195). The English became models of 'toutes les vertus sociales, la générosité, la clémence, l'humanité, etc' [all social virtues, generosity, clemency, humanity, etc.] at all levels of the social scale and this opened up whole new areas of plot for moral tale writers.¹¹ The virtue of characters from lower down the social scale was used by French writers to demonstrate further the corruption of the nobility.

Baculard d'Arnaud (1718–1805) was the author who seized most obviously the possibilities of using the English models. Baculard stands out in terms of the size of his output, his popularity amongst reviewers and readers and in terms of the excesses to which he pushed virtue oppressed for dramatic, tearful effect. He was extravagantly praised in the press of the time, and the leading modern critic of his work goes as far as to suggest that

'it was through the likes of Baculard that the majority of the public was educated to receive such ideas of the enlightenment as tolerance and freedom, the worth of the individual divorced from his social caste'.¹² It is therefore especially significant that in the early 1760s he produced a series of stories with English heroes and heroines, including *Fanni*, *Clary*, *Sidnei et Silli*,¹³ all of whom reveal a generosity of spirit and a nobility of mind that belie their lowly social status and are meant to inspire the French reader.

In the preface to the collected edition of these tales, Baculard explains why he used English characters to demonstrate the 'devoirs de l'humanité' [duties of humanity].¹⁴ He said that 'la nature en Angleterre paroît être plus énergique, plus vraie que parmi nous; la contagion de la société et du bel esprit y est moins répandue' (xxiii).¹⁵ This is backed up by the tremendously enthusiastic reviews Baculard's stories received. Of *Fanni*, who is tricked into a sham marriage by a lord but ultimately rewarded with a legal union to him, the reviewer enthused: 'c'est en un mot l'expression la plus énergique de l'étendue et de la délicatesse de la bienfaisance, et de l'excès de la reconnaissance; rien de plus moral, de plus philosophique et de plus intéressant' [in a word, it is the most energetic expression of the range and delicacy of charity and of the excesses of gratitude; there is nothing more moral, more philosophical nor more captivating] (*Mercure*, April I 1766, 77–78). The use of expressions such as 'energetic' and 'excess' by Baculard and critics alike reveals in part just why Baculard was so successful. He did have a serious point to make about following the English model but, above all, his stories were written to move the sensitive and the virtuous to tears and thus have a greater effect on them.

By using the English model of virtue and charity, authors were making more and more explicit comparisons with their own countrymen, usually to the detriment of the latter, but few moral tale writers of the 1760s were prepared to offer any solutions. If anything, the comparison with England allowed authors to hide behind a universal concept of humanity, rather than explore what was specific to the French. Louis-Sébastien Mercier, who followed the trend for moral tales by producing a volume of *Contes moraux par M. Mercier* in 1769, asks in the preface 'quand un homme n'appartiendroit pas aux mœurs de sa nation, dès qu'il appartient à la vertu, qu'a-t-on à lui demander de plus? Le reste est frivole'.¹⁶ In this respect, moral tale writers are clearly lagging behind thinkers such as Basset de la Marelle who published a treatise on the differences between French and English patriotism in 1766 and who suggests that the French are characterised by their love of the monarchy while an Englishman is much more attached to 'sa liberté, ses droits, ses privilèges' [his freedom, his rights, his privileges] than to royalty.¹⁷ Gradually, however, moral tale writers became less preoccupied with England and much more with what constituted the French character. In view of developments at the end of the 1780s, it does not seem unreasonable to suggest that the English models of virtue found so often in the prose fiction

of the time encouraged the French, along with political and philosophical treatises, to move away from a patriotism based on the monarchy to one which places more emphasis on freedom.

Daniel Mornet identified the 1770s as marking the beginning of a patriotic sentiment in France as the ideas of the *philosophes* became more widespread (Mornet, p. 263). This is also mirrored in political developments in the late 1760s and 1770s as the elderly Louis XV looked to leave his heir a secure reign. The crown 'once more set itself on a more "robust course"', suppressing the *parlements* in the 1770s.¹⁸ This was not well received by public opinion, which, by the 1770s, 'had become a powerful political force',¹⁹ and what Le Roy Ladurie calls a 'patriotic coalition' of opponents to the government grew in strength, seeking 'to juxtapose, or replace concepts of monarchical sovereignty or divine right with notions of national sovereignty, and further, drawing on Rousseau, notions of the general, or common, or national, will' (Le Roy Ladurie, 465).

There is evidence in the moral tale to suggest this shift in conscience towards seeing the King as separate from the nation, towards being French. In 1767, a reviewer of Baculard d'Arnaud's *Nancy* commented 'c'est ainsi qu'un homme de lettres peut devenir utile à ses concitoyens, et bien mériter de sa patrie et de l'univers entier',²⁰ revealing a continued belief in humanity, but ranking this below services to one's country. Baculard followed this tale with an historical one, *Batilde*, where an English princess and a French prince both reveal noble, generous qualities, and then a medieval story focusing specifically on French knights. A reviewer of this latter tale, *Sargines*, claimed that it would captivate 'tous les lecteurs françois, la jeune noblesse sur-tout par l'éloge qui s'y trouve d'une ancienne institution qu'elle doit regretter, par la peinture de cette aimable courtoisie qui en est le fruit'.²¹ Baculard, sensing the change in public attitudes towards a concept of Frenchness, looked to foster this shift in opinion with a new series of historical tales, the *Nouvelles historiques*, where he offered heroes and heroines from France's glorious past to rekindle pride in being French, such as the *Sire de Créqui* (1776), a crusader in the reign of Louis VII, who escapes from imprisonment by the Turks to return to France, and *Le Duc de Bretagne* (1777).²² The review of *Sargines* in the *Année littéraire* hints at why Baculard had recourse to the medieval period: he is able to portray chivalry, honour, righteous kings, sure that his love stories will rekindle such noble sentiments once more, since 'il suffit de parler d'honneur à des François pour réveiller dans leurs cœurs des sentimens qui n'y sont jamais entièrement éteints'.²³ Thus Baculard fits closely with those of the patriotic coalition who did not want a revolution but a reform of absolutist abuse.

This is reflected in Baculard's treatment of more overtly political issues. His handling of the theme of illegitimacy for instance won him the epithet of patriotic writer from the reviewer in the *Mercure* (11 December 1779, 72) for wanting to reform contemporary morals. He attacked what he saw as the

inhumane prejudice of placing birth above merit by focusing on the anguish of the eponymous Valmiers, who cannot marry the woman he loves because he is an orphan and does not know who his parents are. By this late phase of the 1770s, it was quite normal for reviewers of moral tales to discuss characters' duties as citizens as an extension of the earlier emphasis on humanity in general (*Mercure*, October II, 1777, 111). Thus those who are benevolent are now seen as good citizens and not just enlightened individuals. In 'L'Héroïsme de l'amitié' ['The Heroism of Friendship'] for instance, the hero visits hospitals giving out money, frees those imprisoned for debt, and gives dowries to those who would otherwise be unable to marry. The author, Rousselot de Surgy, an administrator with considerable knowledge of political economics, comments: 'c'est ainsi que la bienfaisance éclairée d'un particulier obscur créoit des bras à sa patrie, et disputoit à la Providence le plaisir de faire du bien à l'humanité.'²⁴

Baculard was not alone in developing a sense of identity through the past. Louis d'Ussieux (1747–1805), an agronomist and later a member of the revolutionary parliament, was another author of moral tales who used the idea of historical plots to produce firstly a *Décameron françois* and then *Nouvelles françoises* from which he believed 'il résultera un nouvel intérêt, un intérêt national' [the outcome will be a new interest, a national interest].²⁵ D'Ussieux's tales focused specifically on the themes of treason, political oppression, tyranny and the abuse of power. 'Clémence d'Entragues', one of the *Décameron françois*, shows how virtuous behaviour can provide strength to combat abuse of power; 'Louis de Bourbon', the first *nouvelle françoise*, outlines the susceptibility of kings to evil men as their confidants. However, the use of female characters as the focus for most of the tales shows that d'Ussieux was copying Baculard's pattern of heightened *sensibilité* to make his plots dramatic and exciting and historical facts were never allowed to get in the way of a good tale.

The use of historical settings and characters from a specifically French past by a number of authors led naturally to a shift in emphasis towards the political, as the tales concern tyrants, corrupt ministers, traitors, national saviours, accounts of how the Parisians can sway opinions and change political events, even a château stormed by the mob in a tale from the 1780s.²⁶ Paternalistic, generous rulers who reform abuse and tolerate failings are revered,²⁷ but those who are cruel, tyrannical, and unjust, invariably receive their comeuppance and thus it is clear where the authors stand on the matter of government: in favour of a fair system and against the abuse of power and authority.

In the progression that is becoming clear in the moral tale from the English as models, to the French as citizens, to a politicisation of plots, censorship plays its part. D'Ussieux for instance, having written some strong tales about historical political situations in France for his *Nouvelles françoises* soon reverts to writing conventional moral tales, such as 'Sainte-Agnès et Corneville, ou les oignons de tulipes' ['Sainte-Agnès and Corneville, or The

Tulip Bulbs'] with little overt political comment. The suggestion from Constant d'Orville (1730–1800?) that reform of the individual can lead to the reform of the state ('la bonne éducation forme des hommes vertueux, des citoyens, l'honneur de leur patrie; la mauvaise élève des êtres frivoles et inutiles, quelquefois des monstres qui en font le déshonneur et la ruine, surtout si la fortune les a placés dans un rang éminent') is hidden behind a Russian setting so that no-one could take offence at the implied criticism of French society.²⁸

The difficulties writers faced in producing political plots involving French characters led to a significant proportion of writers approaching the problem from the reverse angle. Rather than focusing on those in power, they turned their attention to the lower social orders, offering virtuous examples in contrast to the corrupt lifestyle of the nobility, or else showing how these citizens suffered from the existing political regime. Authors turned away from town life and characters from 'ces états, dont l'élévation n'enfante que des incidens de chevalerie' ['those ranks whose elevation only brings forth tales about knights'],²⁹ concentrating instead on peasants who led virtuous lives. Not all depiction of life in the country is idealised, however. Just as Chartier has shown that in 1789 one of the most common complaints was dissatisfaction with the way in which seigneurial powers were abused, so the moral tale also deals with this aspect of life in the country. In Louis Charpentier's 'L'Enlèvement trompeur' ['The Misleading Abduction'] for instance, an unpopular steward, Regnard, tries to regain his fortune and his popularity by offering his son in marriage to the daughter of Alain, a well-respected and virtuous man in the village.³⁰ When the prospective couple meet, the son treats Nicette contemptuously because she is of lower birth and she declines his offer of marriage as a result. Regnard's *amour-propre* is wounded by this and he spreads a rumour that Nicette is pregnant by him to gain his revenge. He is then mortified to discover that the villagers take her word over his and the story ends when the villagers succeed in having father and son removed from office for abusing their position of power. Here Charpentier was attacking those who misuse their authority but without directly criticising the political system that gave them power in the first place. This is quite in keeping with the moral tale tradition as there was a tendency to avoid extremes where ever possible, but this makes it all the more interesting when such stories are written.

There was one author who was not afraid to go to extremes, and not afraid to voice his views on the political state of society: Rétif de la Bretonne, known as 'one of the precursors of Utopian socialism'.³¹ He produced several mammoth collections of short stories, including *Les Contemporaines* [*Contemporary Women*] and *Les Françaises* [*French Women*], and, during the Revolution, *L'Année des dames nationales* [*The Year of National Ladies*]. He aimed his stories specifically at 'la Clâsse la plus nombreuse des Citoyens' [the most numerous class of citizens],³² the 'clâsse commune' [common class

of people] (XVIII, 292). His was a very clear attempt to provide a concept of French virtue around characters who had until then featured only sporadically in the moral tale. He wanted to show that shopkeepers, artisans and peasants were not 'vils' [base], but rather 'considérables, estimables, importants, utiles, nécessaires, indispensables' [worthy of consideration, estimable, important, useful, necessary, indispensable] (XIX, 'Postface', unpaginated). He believed that the American Revolution had shown that 'toutes les classes de la société sont également à considérer' [all social classes are to be equally taken into consideration] (V, 'Au sujet des critiques', 17). He made a point of portraying *French* characters for the good of his readers, rejecting implicitly previous use of the English as moral models. In Rétif's eyes, it was the lowest classes that should be held up as an example to others. The wife of a labourer, contrasted directly with a duchess, is said to be 'un tableau vrai de la femme française' [a true picture of French women] (XXXI, 'La Duchesse', 79), and a woman 'qui remplit tous ses devoirs à l'égard de la patrie, de son mari, de ses enfans, de ses domestiques, en un mot envers tout ce-qui-a-quelque-rapport-à elle'.³³ The order of her duties here is an interesting reflection on the changing priorities of moral tale writers over the second half of the eighteenth century.

Rétif even went as far as to suggest the need for reform, something most other moral tale writers shied away from. He believed the rural nobility was 'insolente, agreste, tirannique, injuste, digne en-un-mot d'être efficacement réprimée!'³⁴ This belief led him to say:

il est besoin d'une reforme dans les mœurs de notre noblesse campagnarde. [...] Les Grands: ce sont des Etres qu'aucune morale ne peut toucher, qu'aucune loi ne peut contraindre; les richesses leur donnent trop de passions et trop de moyens de les satisfaire, pour qu'ils aient des mœurs: quant aux lois, ils les éludent, ou les font taire.³⁵

He is the only writer of moral tales to my knowledge to call actively, militantly for reform, even revolution. In hindsight, his warning in 'Les Associés', a story about a proto-communist community of skilled workers, seems prophetic:

elle viendra peut être (et je la desire malgré les maux dont elle serait accompagnée je la desire pour vous punir) elle viendra peut-être cette révolution terrible, où l'homme utile sentira son importance, et abusera de la connaissance qu'il en aura (et cette manière de penser seroit plus naturelle qu'aucune de celles que la mode a mise en usage); où le Laboureur dira au Seigneur: – *Je te nourris, je suis plus que toi, Riche, Grand inutile au monde, sois-moi soumis, ou meurs de faim* (II, 'Les Associés', 391)³⁶

Such a politicisation of the moral tale was only made possible by a gradual process of self-awareness and Rétif represents, perhaps above all other writers

of moral tales, the shift of the French moral tale away from its English moral model. For the moral tale at least, Josephine Grieder's claim that by the 1780s the English had become 'moral models on whom, it is strongly suggested, the French might do well to pattern themselves' is in fact misleading.³⁷ By the 1780s, there is sufficient evidence in the moral tale to show that authors had moved beyond a need to compare their compatriots with the English. Instead they were looking to enhance the social and political side to their insistence on the power of virtue by contrasting the nobility and the lower classes. In a century where 'la vraie philosophie éclaire toutes les classes de la Société', to borrow a phrase from Rétif [true philosophy enlightens all classes of society] (*Les Contemporaines*, XXXII, 'La Dédaigneuse provinciale', 565), moral tale authors came to feel that their duty was to encourage their readers to be critical of society while at the same time persuading them to be virtuous. With the hindsight that the Revolution gave authors, this was often exaggerated into 'une intention patriotique' [a patriotic intention].³⁸ The phrase is one used by Louis-Sébastien Mercier, writing in 1792, who also claimed that 'j'ai toujours été conduit par un sentiment vif qui me disoit que l'homme étoit né pour sortir de la fange des erreurs, de la honte et de l'abjection de l'esclavage, et pour s'élever à toute la hauteur de la vertu'.³⁹ These are claims which fit in well with the revolutionary climate of 1792, but which do not hold up when the contes from 1769 to which he is referring are examined, where the characters are predominantly taken from the nobility and where virtue does not always win through.

The evident development in the moral tale of a sense of the French nation being made up of individual citizens, whose identity was not necessarily linked directly to the king, reflects a growing confidence among the writers about their power to comment on social matters that impinge on the political. Authors were convinced that they could form opinion and change morals and society by writing; there are numerous prefaces to moral tales to this effect. It would of course be wrong to suggest that the moral tale created ideas that led to the Revolution, but it does reveal a growing political awareness among writers and readers, among those who responded to leading philosophical ideas rather than creating them. Second-rate fiction can be used as a barometer of changing ideas and concepts because only once ideas are generally accepted do they find their way in the plots of these tales. It should not be forgotten that 'un petit conte est quelquefois plus instructif qu'un gros traité de morale, et est à coup sûr moins ennuyeux' [a short story is sometimes more instructive than a heavy moral treatise, and is certainly less boring].⁴⁰ They were widely available, they were read avidly and they provide us with valuable evidence that new ideas were changing mentalities. As writers and readers alike became politicised, so did the moral tale.

Notes

1 Marmontel's *Contes moraux* were re-edited more times than Rousseau's *La Nouvelle Héloïse* in the twenty years after they were both published in 1761. See V. Mylne, 'Re-éditions as a Guide to the Assessment of Public Taste in Fiction', in D. Mossop, G. Rodmell and D. Wilson (eds), *Studies in the French Eighteenth Century Presented to John Lough* (Durham, 1978), p. 131.

2 D. Mornet was one of the most prominent critics to draw attention to this with *Les Origines intellectuelles de la Révolution française (1715–87)* (Paris, 1933). R. Darnton has explored the concept in many of his works on the book trade in the eighteenth century; see for instance 'The High Enlightenment and the Low Life of Literature in Pre-Revolutionary France', in D. Johnson (ed.), *French Society and the Revolution* (Cambridge, 1976), pp. 53–87. With regard to the moral tale specifically, Michelle Buchanan has commented on this in relation to Marmontel, the self-proclaimed inventor of the moral tale, in 'Marmontel: un auteur à succès du XVIII^e siècle', *Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century*, 55 (1967), 321–31.

3 For more on the reading public of the period, see R. Chartier and D. Roche, 'Les pratiques urbaines de l'imprimerie', in H.-J. Martin and R. Chartier (eds), *Histoire de l'édition française II: Le Livre triomphant 1660–1830* (Paris, 1984), pp. 401–29.

4 R. Darnton, *The Forbidden Best-Sellers of Pre-revolutionary France* (London, 1996), p. 196. See also R. Darnton, 'Reading, Writing and Publishing in Eighteenth-century France: A Case Study in the Sociology of Literature', *Daedalus*, 100 (1971), 214–56.

5 For more, see É. Walter, 'Les auteurs et le champ littéraire', in H.-J. Martin and R. Chartier (eds), *Histoire de l'édition française II: Le Livre triomphant 1660–1830* (Paris, 1984), pp. 383–99.

6 R. Chartier, *The Cultural Origins of the French Revolution*, trans. by L. Cochrane (Durham, N.C., 1991), p. 2.

7 '[T]he historical role of authors is not necessarily measured by their talent or by the judgement of posterity.' D. Mornet, *Les Origines intellectuelles de la Révolution française (1715–87)*, 5th edn (Paris, 1954), p. 34. All translations are mine unless otherwise indicated.

8 E. Dziembowski, *Un Nouveau Patriotisme français 1750–70: La France face à la puissance anglaise à l'époque de la Guerre de Sept Ans*, *Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century*, 365 (1998).

9 See for instance chapter 5 of my doctoral thesis, 'The Moral Tale in France and Germany 1750–89' (Exeter, 1998), especially pp. 118–19.

10 See for instance the characters in 'Qu'il est dangereux de mentir' ['How Dangerous It Is To Lie'] *Mercure*, July II, 1760 and Baculard d'Arnaud's 'Fanni' (later renamed 'Nancy') *Mercure*, October II, 1760.

11 *Mercure de France*, June 1774, p. 73: review of tales translated from the English. Subsequent references will be placed in the text.

12 R. Dawson, *Baculard d'Arnaud: Life and Prose Fiction*, *Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century*, 141 & 142 (1976), vol. 2, p. 569.

13 Published together in *Les Épreuves du sentiment*, 4 vols (Neuchâtel, 1773).

14 *Œuvres*, 11 vols (Paris, 1803–An XI), vols I–VI: *Les Épreuves du sentiment*, vol. 1, footnote, p. v.

15 '[N]ature seems more energetic, truer than here; the contagion of society and wit is less widespread there.'

16 '[E]ven if a man does not follow the morals of his nation, as long as he is virtuous, what more should we ask of him? The rest is irrelevant.' L.-S. Mercier, 'Avertissement', *Contes moraux par M. Mercier* (Amsterdam, 1769), p. v. Much more

renowned for his drama and his *Tableau de Paris*, Mercier's *contes* have received little critical attention, primarily because they were almost all translations or re-writings of other people's work. See for instance E. T. Annandale, 'Johann Gottlob Benjamin Pfeil and Louis-Sébastien Mercier', *Revue de littérature comparée*, 44 (1970), 444–59.

17 Quoted in W. Krauss, "'Patriote", "patriotique", "patriotisme" à la fin de l'Ancien Régime', in W. Barber (ed.), *The Age of the Enlightenment: Studies Presented to Theodore Besterman* (Edinburgh, 1967), p. 392.

18 See E. Le Roy Ladurie, *The Ancien Régime: A History of France 1610–1774*, trans. by Mark Greengrass (Oxford, 1996), p. 439.

19 W. Doyle, *Origins of the French Revolution* (Oxford, 1980), p. 82.

20 '[I]t is thus that a Man of Letters can be useful to his fellow citizens and deserve well of his country and of the whole universe.' *Mercure*, November 1767, p. 69.

21 '[A]ll French readers, the young nobility especially, by the praise to be found therein of an old institution that the young nobility should lament and by the depiction of that polite courtesy that resulted from such an institution.' *Mercure*, August 1772, p. 92.

22 *Nouvelles Historiques*, 3 vols (Paris, 1774–83).

23 '[I]t suffices to talk of honour to Frenchmen to reawaken in their hearts feelings that were never entirely extinguished.' *Année littéraire*, vol. IV for 1773, p. 248.

24 '[T]hus did the enlightened charity of an obscure individual create hands for his country and rival Providence for the pleasure of doing good to humanity.' [J.-P. Rousselot de Surg], *Les Vicissitudes de la fortune ou cours de morale mise en action pour servir à l'histoire de l'humanité*, 2 vols (Amsterdam, 1769), vol. 1, p. 234.

25 *Le Décameron François*, 2 vols (vol. 1, 1772; vol. 2, 1774); *Nouvelles françaises*, 3 vols (Amsterdam, 1775–84), 'Avertissement', unpaginated.

26 B. Imbert, 'Les Ruses innocentes' ['Innocent Tricks'], *Lecture du matin, ou nouvelles historiettes en prose* (Paris, 1782).

27 See 'L'Oracle journalier', N. Bricaire de la Dixmerie, N. *Contes philosophiques et moraux*, 2 vols (London, 1765), vol. 2, p. 71.

28 '[A] good education forms the virtuous man, the citizen, the honour of the nation; bad education creates frivolous and useless beings, sometimes monsters who dishonour and ruin their nation, especially if Fortune has placed them in an eminent position.' 'Ema et Lémosoff', A.-G. Contant d'Orville, *Romans moraux pour servir de supplément à la 'Bibliothèque de campagne'* (Amsterdam, 1769), p. 26. A recent edition of Contant d'Orville's *Le Mariage du siècle* produced by Sylvie Dangeville (Paris, 1999) is the only modern work on the author.

29 [L. Charpentier], *Nouveaux Contes moraux ou historiettes galantes et morales* (Amsterdam, 1767), p. x.

30 Little is known about Charpentier but his work has been identified as an important precursor of realism by Angus Martin. See A. Martin, 'Argent, travail, commerce et autres thèmes bourgeois vers 1770: les romans et contes de Louis Charpentier', *Zeitschrift für französische Sprache und Literatur*, 84 (1974), 307–24.

31 E. Le Roy Ladurie, *The Mind and Method of the Historian*, trans. by Siân Reynolds and Ben Reynolds (Chicago, 1981), p. 252. Le Roy Ladurie has done much to raise Rétif's profile as a social anthropologist (see his chapter on Rétif in *The Mind and Method of the Historian*). The principal literary study is P. Testud, *Rétif de la Bretonne et la création littéraire* (Geneva, 1977).

32 N. Rétif de la Bretonne, *Les Contemporaines ou aventures des plus jolies femmes de l'âge présent recueillies par N*** ** *** et publiées par Timothée Joly de Lyon*, 42 vols (Leipsick, 1780–85; repr. Geneva, 1988), vol. 18, 'Avis', p. 291.

33 '[W]ho fulfils all her duties towards her homeland, her husband, her children, her servants, in a word, towards everything which is connected to her.' XXX, 'La Femme de Laboureur' ['The Labourer's Wife'], p. 491.

34 '[I]nsolent, rustic, tyrannical, unjust, worthy in a word of being efficiently suppressed.' XXXII, 'La Dédaigneuse provinciale' ['The Disdainful Provincial Woman'], p. 568.

35 '[I]t is time for a reform of the morals of our rural nobility. Those in high places are beings which no morals can touch, that no law can constrain; riches give them too many passions and too many means of satisfying them for them to have any morals: as far as the law is concerned, they elude it or silence it'. *Ibid.*, p. 572.

36 '[I]t will come perhaps (and I want it to come despite the ills that it will bring, I want it to come to punish you), it will come perhaps this terrible revolution, where the useful man will feel his importance and will abuse this knowledge that he has (and this way of thinking will be more natural than any that custom has created); where the labourer will say to his overlord: I feed you, I am more than you. Rich bigwig, useless in this world, submit to me or die of hunger'

37 *Anglomania in France 1740–89: Fact, Fiction and Political Discourse, Histoire des idées et critique littéraire*, 230 (Geneva, 1985), p. 83.

38 L.-S. Mercier, *Fictions morales*, 3 vols (Paris, 1792), 'Avant-Propos', p. xiv.

39 '[I] have always been led by a keen awareness which said to me that man was born to leave behind the mire of his errors, the shame and abjection of slavery, and to raise himself to the heights of virtue.' *Ibid.*, p. xiv.

40 N. Bricaire de la Dixmerie, 'La Philosophe rendue à la raison', *Mercure de France*, September 1774, p. 40.

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