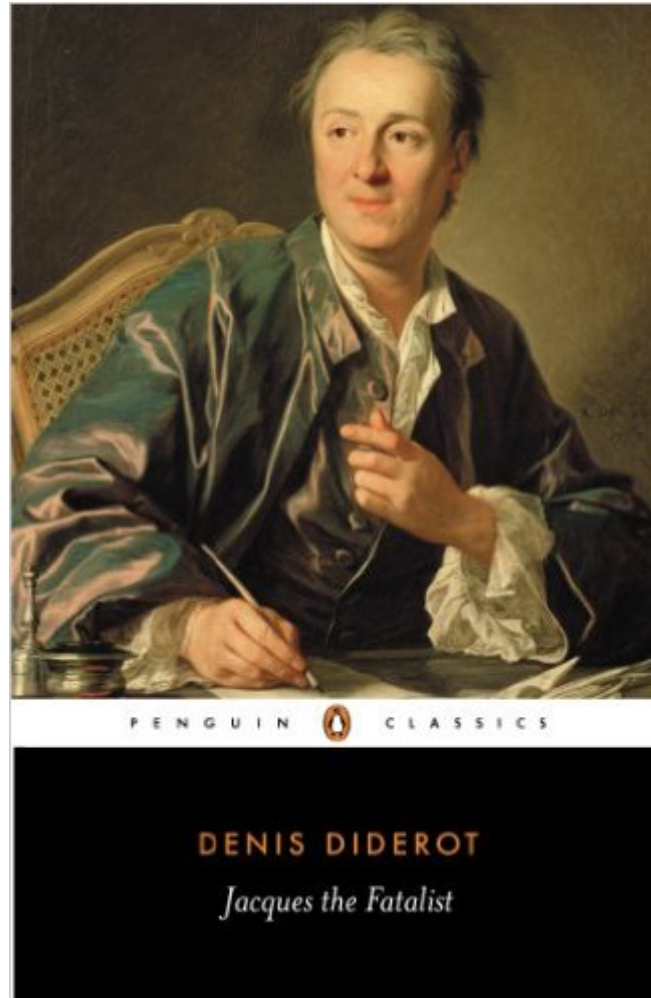


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Jacques The Fatalist And His Master (Penguin Classics)



Synopsis

Denis Diderot (1713-1784) was among the greatest writers of the Enlightenment, and in *Jacques the Fatalist* he brilliantly challenged the artificialities of conventional French fiction of his age. Riding through France with his master, the servant Jacques appears to act as though he is truly free in a world of dizzying variety and unpredictability. Characters emerge and disappear as the pair travel across the country, and tales begin and are submerged by greater stories, to reveal a panoramic view of eighteenth-century society. But while Jacques seems to choose his own path, he remains convinced of one philosophical belief: that every decision he makes, however whimsical, is wholly predetermined. Playful, picaresque and comic, Diderot's novel is a compelling exploration of Enlightenment philosophy. Brilliantly original in style, it is one of the greatest precursors to post-modern literature.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Two centuries or so before "modern" writers began writing experimental novels, Denis Diderot, the force behind the Encyclopaedia effort, wrote this strange and indeed very "modern" novel in which the author leads a conversation with the reader, asking him where he (or she, of course) would want to go and what to do with the characters and the story. Here we see the author in the very process of creation, exposing his doubts, exploring his options, and playing with the story. There is really no plot as such. Jacques, a man who seems to believe everything that happens is already written "up

on high", but who nonetheless keeps making decisions for himself, is riding through France with his unnamed master, a man who is skeptic of Jacques's determinism but who remains rather passive throughout the book. Fate and the creator-author will put repeatedly to test Jacques's theory, through a series of more or less fortunate accidents and situations, as well as by way of numerous asides in the form of subplots or stories. The novel is totally disjointed and these asides and subplots blurb all over the place, always interrupted themselves by other happenings. The most interesting of them is the story of Madame de Pommeroy and her bitter but ultimately ineffectual revenge on her ex-lover. Diderot confesses to having taken much from Sterne's "Tristram Shandy" and Cervantes's "Don Quixote". This last novel's influence seems obvious at two levels: Cervantes also talks to the reader, especially in Part Two, and also reflects abundantly on the creative process.

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