

VOLTAIRE'S BRUTUS

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Aan mijn Ouders in Nederland

INTRODUCTION

Traditional criticism has devoted surprisingly little attention to Brutus. Is a play which may look back upon a total of one hundred and ten performances to be considered only a moderate success? Are the critics somewhat misguided by the fate of Brutus, a fate which put the play chronologically after the brilliant success of Oedipe and before the success of Zaire?

Was the limited success of Brutus due to its stoic subject? Did the fierce republicanism fail to appeal to the liberal audience of the 1730's? Did the public of the 1730's condemn Brutus to become an eternal second after Oedipe and for what reasons? Finally, did Voltaire's conception of drama change during his discussions with English writers and critics? The present study is an attempt to answer these questions. It cannot be claimed that this attempt has been entirely successful. Considerations of time and space preclude an exhaustive study of the multifarious aspect of the tragedy.

Reference to the play proper is made as follows:

Brutus. Reference to Brutus as a character are without underlining, e.g. Brutus. Proper names have been retained as in the original edition, e.g. Arons. The text used is that of the Moland edition of Voltaire's Oeuvres complètes. Capital Roman numerals are used to refer to the acts - lower case Roman numerals for indicating the scenes, e.g. (V,i). Within a

sentence the reference is given as follows: Act V, scene i. Reference to a specific passage is made by indicating the Moland volume and the page, e.g. (M.II, p. 372). References to Besterman's edition of Voltaire's Correspondence is: Best. 51, the numeral being the number of the letter in this collection. Quotations from eighteenth century sources are given literally; a similar procedure is followed in quoting from Voltaire's Notebooks. References and footnotes are made in accordance with the outline proposed by Professor R.M. Wiles.¹

¹Wiles, Roy McKeen Scholarly Reporting in the Humanities. Fourth edition. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1968).

CHAPTER I - BEFORE BRUTUS

François Marie Arouet was born on November 21, 1694, in the country house of his parents in Châtenay, near Paris. His father, Antoine Arouet, was a well-to-do lawyer. A man of common-sense, he was also practical, hospitable and had no particular faith in anything but hard work and monetary prudence. At the age of thirty-four he was sufficiently well off enough to marry a Mademoiselle d'Aumard, whose birth and a certain refinement - the latter not at all shared by her husband - formed the chief part of the dowry. The Arouets had two other children - Armand of twenty and Catherine of nineteen - when young François entered college at the age of ten.

Life at the Collège Louis-le-Grand was a completely new experience to François. The early years at home had been very quiet and the only noteworthy connection had been with the Abbé de Châteuneuf, who considered François as his godson. François' fellow-students came from slighter higher social backgrounds. Friendships were established with Fyot de la Marche, who was to become President of the Parliament of Dijon and more closely with the brothers d'Argenson. One of the brothers was to become Minister of Foreign Affairs and Arouet was to appreciate his support many a time in years to come. The Collège was run by the Jesuit Fathers, who had established

a broad curriculum, which emphasized a general education, rather than specialisation in certain areas. All students took classics, history, geography and religion.

Another exercise in which the students had to participate was composition in verse. The emphasis was on Latin, but François Arouet surprised his teachers and tried to render his ideas and feelings in French. There is the poem about the well-known tabatière incident, when young Arouet's tobacco pouch was confiscated by his teacher, Father Porée:

Adieu, ma pauvre tabatière,
 Adieu, je ne te verrai plus;
 Ni soins, ni larmes, ni prières
 Ne te rendront à moi; mes efforts sont perdus.
 Adieu, ma pauvre tabatière;
 Adieu, doux fruit de mes écus!¹

These lines are interesting because they contain the detached wit which was to play such a great role in Arouet's later works. Yet young Arouet was to find more satisfaction and recognition in writing poems which had a message to convey.

François Arouet realised that one way of achieving celebrity was by writing epistles. The epistle possessed charm and was an effective way of acquiring favours from the king. Short, often witty, the epistle provokes a smile of indulgence from the person to whom it was addressed.

¹ Desnoiresterres, G. Voltaire et la société au XVIII^e siècle, pp. 29-30.

Opportunity came when an invalid asked for an epistle. Père Porée referred the invalid to Arouet who grasped the opportunity with both hands. This epistle by young Arouet has been preserved:

Digne fils du plus grand des rois,
 Son amour et notre espérance;
 Vous qui, sans régner sur la France,
 Réglez sur le coeur des François,
 Souffrez-vous que ma vieille veine,
 Par un effort ambitieux,
 Ose vous donner une étrenne,
 Vous qui n'en recevez que de la main des dieux?
 (M.I, p. 72)

This poem and the circumstances which induced Arouet to write it are at the basis of themes to be found later in Brutus. Already at this early age, Arouet shows a philosophical bent when he feels the irresistible urge to help those who are in distress. Here we have the first expression of that penchant within Voltaire, which would later develop into his fight against misery. There is the outspokenness of a young philosophe, addressing himself to the Regent, a person socially much above Arouet's position at the time.

Four teachers were responsible for young Arouet's education at the Collège. Although the curriculum was of a general nature, this fact did not prevent each teacher from cherishing his own particular subject. The influence upon Arouet of the teachers' special interests, which often took the form of enthusiasm, is best captured in the following reflection of S.G. Tallentyre:

Young Abbé d'Olivet inspired him with his own love of Cicero. Châteauneuf had taught his godson to worship Corneille; and young Arouet championed him valiantly against Father Tournemine's dear hero, Racine.²

Poetry was not the only genre which was stressed at the Collège. The emphasis on Cicero underlines the importance attached to the latter's rhetorical qualities which are to be found later in Brutus; the study of Racine and Corneille gave birth to Arouet's veneration of these authors which Voltaire would keep the whole of his life.

Arouet possibly acquired his taste for the theatre at the Collège. Plays were performed on feast days by the students. Father Porée had written a play called Brutus, which may have had its influence upon Arouet's choice of Brutus as a subject of his own drama. Barras notes: "Porée thought so highly of the stage that he placed it even above philosophy and history."³ Arouet may well have learned from Father Porée that one of the possibilities of the theatre would be the question of morality:

Porée had written plays for his school because, like the majority of Jesuits at this time, he believed that the theatre was a very efficacious institution for the teaching of morality.⁴

It is also from the time at Louis-le-Grand that dates Arouet's first tragedy Amulius et Numitor (M.XXXII, p. 380)

²Tallentyre, S.G., The Life of Voltaire, p. 5.

³Barras, M., French Theatre on the Parisian Stage 1700-1715, p. 209.

⁴op. cit., p. 203.

which draws upon Roman history: "L'auteur en avait tiré le sujet des anciennes annales romains." (M.XXXII, p. 380) Only fragments remain, as Arouet - by then Voltaire - threw it in the fire.⁵ Some lines are philosophical in nature and express the poet's preoccupation with freedom: "je sers les rois, mon fils, et non pas les tyrans". (M.XXXII, p. 380) Such lines indicate that Brutus would not be the first play in which Arouet displayed his political views.

When Arouet left Louis-le-Grand in 1710, a diplomatic career was waiting for him. His father had been able to secure a first assignment for his son in The Hague. Young Arouet could call himself lucky to be assigned to The Hague. The Hague, then very much the centre of the Western world after Paris, was a choice diplomatic centre, thanks to Dutch world trade. Yet difficulties were soon to present themselves to young Arouet.

The diplomatic position brought Arouet into contact with Mlle. Olympe Dunoyer, daughter of an ambassador in the Hague. An instantaneous love affair seemed to have arisen, although young Arouet could not hope to have the heart of the rather worldly Olympe for himself alone. In addition, Mme. Dunoyer felt that young Arouet did not come up to her expectations. Olympe herself seemed to sway between

⁵ Desnoiresterres, G., Voltaire et la société au XVIII^e siècle, p. 29.

Jean Cavalier⁶ and Arouet. Yet certain escapades were arranged between the two till the mother felt obliged to ask Marquis de Châteauneuf to have young Arouet sent back to Paris.

Back in Paris, Arouet concentrated again on writing poetry and tragedy. The urge to write poetry and tragedy is later explained when he writes to his friend d'Argenson:

"Comme j'avais peu de bien quand j'entrai dans le monde, j'eus l'insolence de penser que j'aurais une charge comme une autre, s'il avait fallu l'acquérir par le travail et par la bonne volonté; je me jetai du côté des beaux arts, qui portent toujours avec eux un certain air d'avilissement. . ."⁷

The acquaintance with the Dutch economic and political freedom may have confirmed Arouet's philosophical ideas. This conception and his dedication to literature are hardly reconcilable with the profession of a lawyer. In spite of the best intentions of his father, who now wanted him to become a lawyer, François could not stand the atmosphere in Maître Alain's office where he was articled. The time spent in this office proved useful only in establishing a relationship with Thierot, which was to last a life-time.

It was also in the years 1715-1716 that critical epigrams, which attacked the existing political system, were circulating in Paris. Suspicion fell upon the young Arouet

⁶ This is Jean Cavalier, hero of the Cévennes.

⁷ Best. 1936.

and his father thought it a wise move to ask for the removal of his son from Paris. On May 4, 1716, the father's wish was fulfilled and a lettre de cachet was issued by the Regent.

(Best. 28) Although young Arouet is unlikely to have written these pamphlets,⁸ his father seemed to have believed him capable and willing to have done so. The following is the epigram which most displeased the Regent:

Tristes et lugubres objets,
 J'ai vu la Bastille et Vincennes,
 Le Châtelet, et mille prisons pleines
 De braves citoyens, de fidèles sujets:
 J'ai vu la liberté ravie,
 De la droite raison la règle poursuivie:
 J'ai vu le peuple gémissant
 Sous un rigoureux esclavage;
 J'ai vu le soldat rugissant
 Crever de faim, de soif, de dépit et de rage;
 J'ai vu les sages contredits,
 Leurs remontrances inutiles;
 (M.I, p. 294)

Suspicion as to the author of these verses fell upon Arouet, and not even his wit could save him from the Bastille. Before the Regent issued the letter of imprisonment, the following conversation is reported to have taken place between the Regent and Arouet:

"Le Regent, recontrant le poète dans le Palais Royal:

"Mons. Arouet, je gage vous faire une chose que vous n'avez jamais vue.

"Et quoi donc, Monseigneur?"

⁸ Holand notes: L'auteur de ces vers est Antoine-Louis Lebrun, né à Paris le 7 septembre, 1680, mort le 28 mars 1743.

"La Bastille.

"Ah, Monsieur. Je la tiens pour vue."⁹

Epigrams and epistles to the Regent were only part of Arouet's written output at that time. The poet, who had already been described as "cet enfant. . .devoré de la soif de la célébrité", was searching for recognition and fame. Moland notes: "L'instinct le porta d'abord au genre tragique". (M.XXXII, p. 380)

Tragedy retained its prestige in the years 1700-1715, and new dramatists had their plays performed. Their chief sources were ancient historians and they avoided Greek mythology as a subject. Love is an essential theme in all of them¹⁰ and they were mostly influenced by the later works of Corneille and Quinault. Lion notes:

Avec Corneille; le Corneille bien entendu des oeuvres secondaires, un certain goût pour la complexité de l'action et le romanesque, des héros fanfarons, l'enflure et la déclamation du style s'imposaient en quelque sorte; avec Quinault c'était la préciosité et la galanterie, compagnes inséparables, l'imbroglio de l'action, une vide et creuse sonorité de style recouverte d'un pâle vernis.¹¹

Aghion notes that a tendency for gallantry had already set in with the generation which preceded the authors of 1700-1710:

⁹Lion, H. Les tragédiés et les théories dramatiques de Voltaire, p. 7.

¹⁰Lancaster, H. French Tragedy in the Time of Louis XV and Voltaire, p. 27.

¹¹Lion, H. Les tragédiés et les théories dramatiques de Voltaire, p. IX.

Avec La Chapelle, l'abbé Abeille, Belin, Mlle. Bernard, la tragédie devient compliquée, galantie, insipide et flasque.¹²

The imitation of Corneille and the desire for the marvellous on the part of the authors would lead to the belief that the audience gave their patronage to these plays. But this is not so: none of the plays were performed more than eight times. Indeed, if the number of performances can be considered as a valid criterion of judgement, one notes that the old masters, Corneille and Racine, were still very popular. Aghion notes: "Vingt ou vingt-cinq représentations pour un ouvrage nouveau était considéré comme un fort beau succès."¹³ Le Cid's popularity was confirmed, as the play was performed one hundred and eleven times between 1701 and 1715,¹⁴ Phèdre was, in this period, performed ninety-two times; Crebillons' Rhadamiste, considered the outstanding play of the new trend, was performed only thirty-four times.

Royalty was favourably disposed towards tragedy, which may have induced Arouet to write in this genre. In 1712 the following decree was issued:

Sa Majesté étant informée que les Comédiens jouent le moins possibles de tragédies, ce qui est contraire à l'usage et au plaisir du

¹² Aghion, Le Théâtre à Paris au XVIII^e siècle, p. 22.

¹³ Ibid., p. 23.

¹⁴ Lancaster, H. Sunset, p. 28.

public, ordre leur est donné de jouer alternativement une pièce sérieuse et une pièce comique, à peine de 300 liv. d'amende payable par la Troupe en général, à moins que. . . Nous n'en ordonnions autrement.¹⁵

To Voltaire recognition came with the performance of Oedipe. Performed for the first time on November 18, 1718, it was a success. J.B. Rousseau, later not always in agreement with Voltaire,¹⁶ praised the play:

Je ne doutais nullement que l'avantage ne fût de votre côté, mais je ne m'attendais pas que vous sortissiez si glorieusement du combat contre Sophocle, et malgré la juste prévention où je suis pour l'antiquité, je suis obligé d'avouer que le Français de vingt-quatre ans a triomphé en beaucoup d'endroits du Grec de quatre-vingts.¹⁷

Public opinion praised the beauty of the verse. An anonymous writer to Europe Savante (Letter II, July 1719, p. 63) regrets the similarity between the fourth act of Sophocles and that of Oedipe. A letter attributed to P. Arthuis (Letter I, July 1719, p. 63) concentrates its criticism on the episode of Philoctète and the unhappy liaison between the last three acts.

¹⁵ Lancaster, H. op. cit., p. 27.

¹⁶ The first letter signed "Arouet de Voltaire" dates from June 12, 1718. (Best.62) From here we will refer to Voltaire rather than to François Arouet.

¹⁷ Best. 73.

Voltaire defended himself against this criticism in Letter VII, A l'occasion de plusieurs critiques qu'on a faites d'Oedipe. (M.II, p. 44) In answer to the criticism of the fourth act, Voltaire maintains that to have substituted Créon for Philoctète would have been truer to life, but at the same time would have provoked a certain coldness.

If imitation was evident, Voltaire was not aware of it for he remarked: "Il est certain que j'ai été plagiaire sans le savoir." (M.II, p. 45) Voltaire concludes his defence: "Mais je souhaite bientôt donner une tragédie qui m'en attire encore davantage." (M.II, p. 46)

This tragedy was Artémire, and Voltaire turned to Greek legend for the subject of the play. The plot was simple: The persecution of a virtuous queen by a cruel husband whom she does not love. The play was performed for the first time on February 15, 1720, and was a failure. Lancaster notes that, according to Dangeau's statement, the play was such a failure that Voltaire himself admitted the weakness of the play and so withdrew it.¹⁸

The withdrawal of the play was partly due to the resentment by Voltaire that a parody of his play was performed under the same name. Moland, without giving sources, notes:

"On attribua l'interruption finale de la tragédie à la parodie qu'en donna Dominique aux Italiens, sous le même

¹⁸ Lancaster, H. French Tragedy in the Time of Louis XIV and Voltaire, p. 58.

titre d'Artémire." (M.II, p. 122) La Harpe thought the play suffered from the obvious imitation of Mithridate in which the King also prevents the heroine from committing suicide. As in Amulius et Numitor the attacks on slavery and flattery at the court are evident:

Son favori Pallante est ici le seul roi;
C'est un second tyran qui m'impose la loi.
Que dis-je? Tous ces rois courtisans de Pallante
Flattant indignement son audace insolente,
Après de mon époux implorent son appui,
Et leurs fronts couronnés s'abaissent devant lui.
(M.II, p. 129)

Artémire also contained veiled references to censorship as, for example, when the Queen exclaims:

Depuis quand daigne-t-on confier à ma foi
Le secret de l'Etat et les lettres du roi?
(M.II, p. 129)

The plot of Artémire was partly taken up in Mariamme with certain improvements. Voltaire examines the reasons for the failure of Artémire in the preface which he subsequently wrote for his tragedy. He argues that a criminal such as Hérode, who remains consistently cruel throughout the play, could only be repulsive to the audience. In addition, the episode between Varus and Hérode seemed superfluous and stalled the action. Voltaire comments himself:

Qu'arrive-t-il de tout cet arrangement?
Mariamme intraitable n'interessa point;
Hérode n'étant que criminel, révolta et son
entrien avec Varus le rendit méprisable.
(M.II, p. 162)

Voltaire made some changes after the initial

performance on March 6, 1724; he prevented Hérode and Varos from meeting on the stage and had the death-scene narrated. In order to avoid confusion with Nadal's recent play of the same name, he changed the name into Hérode et Marianne.

The most stringent criticism of this new version of the play came from J.B. Rousseau. He held that the second version was no improvement whatsoever upon the first; he argued that the play was badly constructed, that it lacked verisimilitude and that the account of Marianne's death was too long.¹⁹ On the other hand, Mathieu Marais was so pleased with the play that he called Voltaire "le plus grand poète que nous ayons".²⁰

The early work of Voltaire, then, follows very closely the concept of tragedy common to the seventeenth century. He follows the convention of a five-act drama and puts on stage the usual confidants. Voltaire in this period is very much a disciple of Corneille whose energetic eloquence he inherits. Oedipe, Artémire and Marianne, however, had certain lines, expressing religious and social criticism, lines rarely to be found in Corneille and Racine.

The young Voltaire, then, brought certain changes into

¹⁹ Lancaster, H. op. cit., p. 65.

²⁰ Lancaster, H. op. cit., p. 65.

the strict rules of classical tragedy of the seventeenth century. His early tragedies show the tendency to follow the romanesque trend of the years 1680-1700. His emphasis shifted more and more to the spectacle with its emphasis upon misé en scene. Yet, the young Voltaire, in this period, was more poète than philosophe. In spite of the rivalry with Corneille and Racine on the purely artistic level, the constant threat of the Bastille prevented Voltaire from taking an open stand in politics. Further dramatic means and confirmation of his political ideas would be examined during his forthcoming visit to England.

PART 2

Composition

The first act of Brutus was written in England at Wandsworth. This act was composed in English, as Voltaire explained in his Discours sur la Tragédie, addressed to Lord Bolingbroke:

Vous vous souvenez que, lorsque j'étais retiré à Wandsworth, chez mon ami M. Falkener, ce digne et vertueux citoyen, je m'occupai chez lui à écrire en prose anglaise le premier acte de cette pièce, à peu près tel qu'il est aujourd'hui en vers français.

(M.II, p. 311)

Wandsworth, then a country village with its church and windmills and a pleasant river, was the residence of Falkener, a merchant

whose acquaintance Voltaire had made in Paris by chance. Wandsworth itself was only a few miles from London and Voltaire made the occasional trip to that town to visit the theatre.

Voltaire's visits to the London theatre are important in this study, as he may have learnt new dramatic skills. These visits have given rise to disputes as to which plays Voltaire actually witnessed.²¹ The plays, according to Fenger's²² appendix - which does not claim completeness - can be divided into two categories. Firstly, there was the Angustan drama. Voltaire may have witnessed the following plays between 1726 and 1728: Cato by Addison; Cribbon's adaptation of Richard III, Congreve's The Morning Bride, Lee's Mithridates, Otway's The Orphan. Fenger follows Lanson's opinion when he states that Voltaire saw the following Shakespearian plays: Hamlet, and Julius Caesar. According to Fenger, Voltaire may have seen Othello, MacBeth and King Lear. As noted by Fenger, his list consists only of conjectures; no proof has been established and the more reliable sources are Voltaire's notebooks.

Voltaire jotted down his impressions in these notebooks.

²¹Baldensperger, H. "Voltaire Anglophile avant son séjour en Angleterre", Revue de Littérature Comparée, January-May, 1929, pp. 25-61.

Adam, P.G. "How much of Shakespeare did Voltaire know?" Shakespeare Association Bulletin, No. 16, 1941, p. 126.

²²Fenger, H. Voltaire et le théâtre anglais, p. 257.

They express different basic elements of his thought and criticism between 1726 and 1728. The following remarks contain the essence of the Discours sur la Tragédie, which is the preface to Brutus:

How the French theatre bears the price.
Superior to the ancients, no visards;
and we have women.

Then there must be love. Critics are
fleas, known because they bite. Scenes
in Shakespar. No plays.

We want action.

We deal in words.²³

Voltaire's interest in themes of freedom is still evident, when he gives his version of an aspect of Swift's Tale of a Tub: "Where there is not liberty of conscience, there is seldom liberty of trade, the same tyranny encroaching upon the commerce as upon Religion."²⁴

The visits to the theatre are not the only influence upon Brutus. Voltaire did not limit his visits to Drury Lane and Lincoln's Inn Fields, but extended them to the Rainbow Coffee House, where his political ideas may have become stimulated by the discussions.

Voltaire had certain traits in common with the visitors of the Rainbow Coffee House. The visitors of this circle were

²³ Voltaire, The Complete Works, Vol. 81, p. 105.

²⁴ Voltaire, op. cit., p. 65.

voluntary expatriates. Many of them were in self-imposed exile, as was Voltaire, who preferred to go to England rather than stay within cinquante lieues from Paris, as ordered in the lettre de cachet. (Best. 272) There is little doubt that politics was one of the main topics of discussion:

Les Français réfugiés se rassemblaient alors dans le voisinage de Mary-le-Bone, à la taverne de l'Arc-en-ciel (Rainbow coffee house) où les souvenirs de la patrie, les nouvelles politiques, la chronique littéraire, les questions pendantes, de quelque nature qu'elles fussent, étaient autant d'éléments d'entretiens passionnés et bruyants.²⁵

Lanson comments about this period of Voltaire's life in more specific terms when he observes: "Des sentiments 'républicains' fermentaient en lui."²⁶

Correspondence on the composition of the further acts become sparser and sparser. Most of the letters which Voltaire wrote between the composition of the first act and the performance of the play bear upon the sale of The Henriade.

The notebooks, the most reliable source, mention the composition of Brutus once: "In two months Brutus was framed, not writ in two years."²⁷ Voltaire's note sounds like an objection - as if someone had written that the composition of the play had really taken two years. Yet we found no trace of

²⁵ Desnoirésterres, G. op. cit., p. 398.

²⁶ Lanson, G. Voltaire, p. 38.

²⁷ Voltaire, The Complete Works, Vols. 80-81, p. 105.

a critic making this objection.

Brutus was completed after Voltaire's return to France. Two and a half years passed, since Wandsworth, before Voltaire considered the tragedy worthy of performance. He invited the actors for dinner in December, 1729, and read the final version to them. (Best. 357) The invitation was not an ordinary dinner due to the particular relation between actors and author. Voltaire knew that he needed the collaboration of the actors who, particularly in this period, often took a haughty attitude. Lancaster notes: "The leading actors and actresses assumed at times a haughty attitude in regard to authors."²⁸ They had great consideration for Voltaire whose plays were usually highly profitable and who had friends among the Gentlement of the Chamber, but they showed little consideration for such authors as Le Franc de Pompignan, Clairfontaine, Bauvin and Renou. Moland quotes Desnoiresterresas saying that the play did not please the actors because of its republican subject (M.II, p. 301). Some days after the dinner, Voltaire wrote to Thierot:

"Mon cher ami, je vous dis d'abord que j'ai retiré Brutus. On m'a assuré de tant de côtés que Mr. de Crébillon avait été trouver M. de Chabot (le cavalier de Rohan) et avait fait le complot de faire tomber Brutus que je ne veux pas leur en donner le plaisir."

(Best. 359)

Voltaire's explanation is not altogether convincing. Desnoiresterres does not believe that the accusation that Crébillon's intrigue was the real reason for Voltaire to postpone the play:

Nous ne croyons guères(. . .) à l'accusation dont l'auteur de Rhadamiste est ici l'objet. Nature indolente, paresseuse, inhabile à l'intrigue, Crébillon n'était pas homme à enchrêveter, en dehors de ses tragédies, des trâmes aussi noires.

(M.II, p. 301)

New difficulties presented themselves during the rehearsals when Mlle. Lecouvreur died suddenly. Voltaire had expected her to take the rôle of Tullie, the leading feminine part, and hoped that her talent and popularity would contribute to the success of the play. He now entrusted the rôle to Mlle. Dangeville, an inexperienced actress of only fifteen years of age. She was ill at ease on the stage, obviously suffering from stage fright. Voltaire sought to comfort her:

Votre timidité même vous fait honneur.
Il faut prendre demain votre revanche.
J'ai vu tomber Mariamme, et je l'ai vue
se relever.

(Best. 373)

In his heart Voltaire was less confident about the outcome of the play, as he admits to Thieriot: "Je vous envoie la Henriade, mon cher ami, avec plus de confiance que je ne vais donner Brutus. Je suis bien malade, je crois que c'est de peur." (Best. 371)

Voltaire's fears proved unfounded, as the play, in its first run, turned out to be a success. In its first run, from December 11, 1730 to January 17, 1731, Brutus had fifteen performances.

CHAPTER II - - THE PLOT AND ITS STRUCTURE

PART I

Summary of the Plot

The theme of a father condemning a son to death was not an invention of Voltaire; it was well established before Voltaire based his play upon it. The legend of Lucius Junius Brutus had been narrated by Livy. Many changes had occurred by the time the original theme was moulded into dramatic form. Voltaire followed Mlle. Bernard and introduced the love theme. For dramatic purposes, he altered Livy's chronology in such a way that Tarquin, supported by the kings of Porsenna, is already at war with Rome.

The action takes place in the city of Rome; the play opens with a meeting of the senate with Brutus expressing his satisfaction that finally the kings of Porsenna have begun to recognize that the Romans will no longer tolerate being oppressed. Brutus then announces the arrival of Arons, ambassador of the kings of Porsenna and enemies of Rome and leaves to the senate the decision of allowing Arons a hearing. Valérius, the other consul, stresses the unreliability of ambassadors and kings and suggests that Arons be sent back without a hearing. Yet Brutus sees the visit as a homage paid to free citizens. The senate then takes the vote and Arons is

allowed one day to collect the gold due to Tarquin, as this was left behind when Tarquin had to flee Rome.

Arons then comes on to the stage and takes his place on the throne, which had been prepared for him in advance. Arons flatters Brutus for the greatness of the Senate and reminds Brutus of the prosperous times Rome had known under the Kings. Brutus interrupts Arons' speech and retorts that in Rome there is place for one law only, reconfirming his allegiance to Rome and its citizens; Brutus defends Rome's refusal to submit to tyranny and each declares war on the other. Arons pledges his allegiance to the Kings and then withdraws to consult with Albin and Messala.

Arons informs Messala, a Roman, that his friends will rebel if a leader can be found who is important enough to make Tarquin remember them. Titus, who is in charge of the main gate to Rome, is the obvious choice. He attained distinction by winning trophies when he defeated the enemy. Arons tells Messala that Titus' bitterness with regard to the senate can be exploited: Titus feels that the senate did not recognize his services by electing him a consul. In addition, Arons feels that Messala, as Titus' personal friend, can exploit Titus' love for Tullie, Tarquin's daughter. Tullie had been given hospitality by Brutus when her father was expelled from Rome.

Act II starts with a scene between Messala and Titus.

Messala, now the collaborator of Arons, tells Titus that Titus' passions of ambition, love, deserve more than the ungrateful attitude of the senate. Messala tempts Titus by telling him that he may lose Tullie if he does not take part in the conspiracy to overthrow the regime of Brutus and the consuls. Yet Titus chooses to put his duty above his love for Tullie. Even when Arons tries to win him over he does not yield. The efforts to convince Titus end when Brutus appeals to Messala to look after his son should danger arise. Brutus stresses above all that Titus should adhere to the laws. Scene v is a soliloquy in which Messala condemns Brutus' rigorous conception of virtue.

Act III starts with Arons expressing his satisfaction that he has received a letter from Tarquin, who promises Tullie to Titus if he agrees to take part in the conspiracy. Albin, the aide of Arons, informs him that a final attack on the Quirinal gate has been arranged. Messala informs Arons that his mission with Titus failed. He succeeded, however, in winning the confidence of Tibérinus, Titus' brother. Arons then announces the content of the letter to Tullie, who accepts the proposal. In scene v Tullie tries to win Titus over, but he refuses and suggests that Tullie accept the republic and his father. Brutus, in a farewell scene, reminds Tullie to obey the laws and says that, if he gave her

hospitality, this was done out of respect for her father. Titus breaks down when Tullie is ordered to leave and he asks to talk to Arons. He consults Messala, who informs him that he is on the side of Arons and also that Tibérinus, Titus' brother, joined the conspiracy. The final scene of Act III is a monologue spoken by Titus, who implores the gods to help him before he succumbs and becomes a collaborator.

Act IV begins with a scene between Titus, Arons and Messala. Titus now says to Arons that he has decided to collaborate. He accuses Arons of exploiting him at a weaker moment in life. Titus explains to Messala that, if he has agreed to conspire, it is because he owes allegiance to Tarquin above all. Tullie maintains that it is Brutus who is the only obstacle to their being united. Titus, still struggling between love and duty, implores Tullie to loathe him. This Tullie refuses. Messala informs Titus that all precautions for the conquest of the Quirinal gate have been taken, and that it is for Titus to give a clear answer. Titus, on the point of replying, is confronted with Brutus. Brutus informs Messala and Titus that Rome is in danger and that he expects Titus to save the city. Titus asks his father to lay the fate of the city in other hands. Brutus refuses, and reminds Titus that his duty is to Rome and its citizens. When Titus has left the stage, Valérius reveals the fact that there is a conspiracy. He names Messala and points out his

potential influence upon Titus. The act ends with a slave requesting an urgent interview.

In the first scene of Act V, Brutus announces to the senate that he had Messala arrested. He declares that no pity should be shown to traitors. Brutus insists that Arons and Tullie stay to witness the execution of Messala and Tibérinus. Then Valérius brings in the list of the conspirators. Brutus reads the name of Tibérinus, who had been killed when he resisted arrest. Brutus is urged to read on until he reaches the name of Titus. On seeing his son's name he faints, and, having recovered, asks Valérius to request the senate to have the father punished instead of the son. Valérius, after consulting the senate, informs Brutus that it is the wish of the senate that Brutus decide himself about the fate of Titus. Valérius tells Brutus that Tullie died and accused Titus in her last moments. Brutus asks to be confronted with Titus and draws from him the admission that in a moment of weakness he had agreed to conspire. Titus implores Brutus not to hate him and requests that he be put to death. Brutus embraces him for the last time and sends him out to be executed. Brutus' consolation lies in the fact that Rome is free.

PART 2

Internal Structure

A feeling widely shared by dramatists and public alike between 1700 and 1730 was that classical tragedy dealt too much with conversation rather than with action. Various and many interpretations of the term action and of its use to infuse new life into the concept of classical tragedy have been given. Many experiments were made. The most evident interpretation of action was the introduction of melodramatic elements. Dramatists such as Crébillon used this technique and often confounded terror with horror; the cri du sang played a great part, and recognition scenes were quite common. Voltaire, in his preface to Brutus, takes a moderate stand. He felt that the unities, as established by the dramatists of the seventeenth century, should be respected. At the same time, he was intrigued by certain aspects of Shakespeare, whose plays he saw in London. As Brutus is the first play he wrote after returning from England, one would expect it to show a balance of the two concepts of tragedy.

The charm of the characters¹ in Brutus is enhanced by their social background. Following the convention of his

¹The psychological aspects of the characters will be dealt with in a later chapter.

time, Voltaire took an episode in Roman history as his subject; he incorporated the dramatic obstacle in one role and in one person: Brutus. Although Brutus is a father, he is also a consul and in this duality lies the obstacle. The possibilities for conflict thanks to family ties could well present an interesting aspect of Roman society. In contrast to Racine, who preferred to depict Greek court, Voltaire complied with the taste of his time and chose Roman history.

Voltaire showed care by limiting the number of persons in his tragedies. Brutus has nine personages and this number is not excessive. Racine, whose tragedies are devoted above all to the analysis of persons, has never more than a total of eight persons.² Difficulties could arise with physical representation on the stage, if this number was exceeded. In addition, the suite of both Brutus and Arons might create an impression of spectacle, a feeling condemned by Voltaire in his Discours sur la tragédie which serves as the preface to Brutus.

The confidants make up half of the total number of persons in Brutus and this is a very large proportion. They can be divided in three categories: the passive, the active confidants and the collaborators. Algine, the confidante of

² Phèdre has a total of eight persons.

Tullie, is the most passive of all. Voltaire preferred her to take the role of a listener and she rarely acts in a way that causes development in the play. Albin and Proculus would fall in the category of active confidants as they act sometimes as a catalyst to the action. Messala falls in the third category. From a confidant he changes to friend and collaborator. His importance as an active confidant is stressed when, at various places, he controls and gives direction to the action. As such, he would hardly be called a confidant, but becomes a character in the play. Voltaire considered him of such importance that he introduced him in the first act.

Schérer gives the following definition of an exposition: "Partie de la pièce de théâtre qui fait connaître tous les faits nécessaires à l'intelligence de la situation initiale."³ Normally, the revelation of the facts mentioned in this part of the play takes place in the first act. Granted that Brutus is a play which Marmontel would label "une pièce à double intrigue"⁴, it may be said that the initial situation in the play with regard to the minor plot can be understood without the introduction of Titus and Tullie. Brutus is the story of

³ Schérer, J. La dramaturgie classique en France, p. 437.

⁴ Schérer, J. op. cit., p. 55.

a military leader who is gradually confronted by facts which induce him to resort to the final decision of condemning his son to death.

In addition, there is in Brutus a minor plot which is devoted particularly to Titus. But granted the double nature of the plot, it may be said that the background to the story of Brutus is given in the first act, in the dialogues between Brutus and Arons, and between Arons and Messala. Given the long discourse of Brutus at the beginning of Act I, it can be said that the tone is less intensified than that in Racine's plays. The long exposition creates an impression that the spectator will witness a tragedy which will evolve in breadth rather than in depth.

The minor plot is mentioned for the first time in Act I, scene iv, when Messala remarks: "Il brûle pour Tullie." The scene between Arons and Albin seems somewhat superfluous. Here, Voltaire makes the mistake of allowing characters tell each other what both knew already for the information of the audience.

It may be said that at the end of Act I, scene iv, the exposition is complete. Enough facts are known for the initial situation to be understood. Arons' discussion with Messala with regard to the lovers must be considered as part of the action, as it serves as an introduction to Act II. Were it not for the introduction of the details necessary for the

comprehension of the minor plot and for the scene between Arons and Albin, the exposition could have been even shorter.

The action of the main plot consists in the accumulation of facts and the reactions of the characters to these facts. Conflict arises for the first time in Act I, when Brutus and Arons differ in opinion. After Brutus and Arons have pledged the oath on the same altar (I, ii), Arons consults Albin and Messala and discusses the possibilities of winning over Titus. The major plot is then kept in the background until Act III, scene vi. It is recalled briefly by Arons (II, ii) and by Brutus (II, iv). The minor plot constitutes the subject matter of scenes iv and v of Act III and of scene iii of Act IV. The existence of two plots, one centering around Brutus, the other around Titus, culminates in Act V. It merits examination, and the relationship between the two plots will show new light upon the dénouement.

The main plot starts in Act I when Brutus announces the political situation of Rome. This theme is picked up again in Act II, scene iv, when Brutus implores Messala to look after Titus. He reiterates his position as a Roman consul in Act IV, scene vi. Act V deals mostly with the main plot. The minor plot comes into the open in Act III, scene iii and scene v. It reaches a climax in Act IV, scene iii.

The edition of 1731 attributed a greater rôle to the minor plot. According to the preface, Voltaire maintained

that if love is present in a play, it should be the main issue. Thus, in the original edition, Act II consists largely of scenes between Tullie-Algine and Tullie-Titus. Yet Voltaire realized that in these circumstances the main plot would be pushed in the background for the sake of the love theme. He finally opted for the reintroduction of Brutus in Act II, thus giving less stress to the love theme.

The emphasis on the main plot becomes clearer when we realize that there are only two feminine roles in the play. In addition, these persons are rarely on the stage. The emphasis then is on the conspiracy and it is hardly surprising to see Messala and Arons almost consistently on the stage. Out of a total of thirty-four scenes, Messala appears in ten scenes, and Arons in nineteen. Given that Tullie has a rôle in four scenes only, it may be said that the minor plot is pushed more and more into the background. Tullie, then, from the psychological point of view, becomes a tool of one of the characters of the main plot - Arons.

Tragedy demands that all episodes lead up to the dénouement. Schéerer defines the dénouement in the following terms: "Partie de la pièce de théâtre qui comprend l'élimination du dernier obstacle ou de la dernière péripétie et les événements qui peuvent en résulter."⁵ Voltaire was careful to have an obstacle that is dual in nature. The obstacle in the

⁵Schéerer, J. op. cit., p. 437.

main plot is largely external - the laws of Rome - whereas the obstacle in the minor plot consists of the internal struggle of Titus. Four threads or elements of interest should normally coincide in the dénouement and it may be worthwhile to examine these elements.

Brutus' original position was explained in the exposition (I, i and ii). He reveres the law above all, as is evident in Act II, scene iv, Act II, scene vi, Act IV, scene vi and throughout the whole of Act V. This attitude is carefully observed by Voltaire and is incorporated in Act V, when Brutus makes his final decision to have Titus executed.

The second element is in the character of Arons. He was in strong disagreement with Brutus in the first act. Arons, in Act III, scenes i and vi, is mainly concerned with the conspiracy. Act V shows that Arons' plans with regard to the conspiracy collapsed and Brutus has him witness the executions only. As such, this second thread is followed up by Voltaire and it culminates in the dénouement. The third thread, Messala, is disposed of. The audience learns later that he has killed himself.

Tullie's last moments are also mentioned. Voltaire preferred not to reintroduce her in the fifth act. This is not an inferior dramatic technique, as she is only a tool of Arons. The final thread is also followed through till the

dénouement: Titus appears on the stage and Brutus decides on his fate. With this final judgement of Brutus, it may be said that the dénouement is complete.

Another aspect of a dénouement is its rapidity; conventional tragedy called for this rapid conclusion. The dénouement starts with the arrival of the slave. Brutus knows at that moment that Rome is in danger, although he is unaware of the fact that the traitors are among the consuls and his family. The action is then arrested by a discussion between Brutus and Arons and it is only then that the final dénouement takes place. Brutus learns first of the death of Tibérinus, then of the betrayal of Titus. The discussion with Arons, and later with Titus, for whom Brutus had to wait, prevents a rapid conclusion.

The existence of two plots, then, impedes upon the unity of action, but not necessarily upon the unity of interest. Voltaire is most successful in Act I and Act V, where the unity of action is maintained. The constant coming and going in Act II, Act III and Act IV causes a divided interest and puts the emphasis upon the visible rather than in the psychological aspect of the play. Relatively numerous scenes between master and confidants give an impression of spectacle; they stress what the audience already knows and they hold up the action.

PART 3

External Structure

Voltaire paid more attention to the setting of Brutus than he had to any of his previous plays. The stage represents a part of the consular house on the Tarpeian rock:

"Le temple se voit dans le fond. Les sénateurs sont assemblés entre le temple et la maison, devant l'autel de Mars . . . Les sénateurs sont rangés en demi-cercle. Des licteurs avec leurs faisceaux sont debout derrière les sénateurs."

(M.II, p. 327)

Change of place takes place in Act I, scene iii. The action is supposed to have been transferred from the rock to the apartment of Brutus. According to stage directions, the interior of an apartment was to be shown as well as the place where the senate assembled. Another change was to have Arons - preceded by lictors - pass before the consuls and senators to a seat prepared for him in advance. Voltaire stated also in the preface that the senators wore red robes.⁶ Those who favoured the simplicity of classical tragedy deplored these innovations. As late as 1758 La Grange-Chancel expressed this view:

⁶ Voltaire possibly found this precedent for unusual costuming and stage decoration in a lost tragedy, Ferrier's Montézume; see Lancaster, H. French Tragedy in the Time of Louis XV and Voltaire, p. 127.

"Je ne puis m'empêcher aussi de combattre la fausse opinion de ceux qui voudroient corrompre la noble simplicité de la tragédie par des spectacles inutiles, ou qui du moins ne peuvent être reçus que dans les tragédies en machines."⁷

These innovations, no doubt, were daring for the time.

Lion notes: "C'était prendre déjà d'assez grandes libertés avec la règle de l'unité de lieu."⁸ Schéerer notes: "Le deuxième ennemi de l'unité de lieu est le goût du public pour les éléments spectaculaires de la représentation théâtrale."⁹

Voltaire observed the unity of time. Brutus' discussions with Arons, the conspiracy, the love affair and the resulting dénouement could have taken place within the prescribed twenty-four hours. The duration of the action would, in daily life, have lasted only little longer than the duration of the play.

Each act in a classical tragedy is supposed to be a whole in itself. Ideally, there should be a gradual building up of tension till a climax is reached upon which there should be a levelling off of tension. It can be shown that Voltaire adhered to this manner of composing.

⁷ Quoted by Lancaster, op. cit., p. 127.

⁸ Lion H. Les Tragédies et les théories dramatiques de Voltaire, p. 49.

⁹ Lancaster, H.C. French Tragedy in the Time of Louis XV and Voltaire, p. 127.

Act I starts with the relatively calm speech of Brutus. Tension is created when it appears that Valérius and Brutus have a different opinion of Roman hospitality. Dramatic conflict arises in the dispute with Arons which reaches a climax when both Brutus and Arons pledge their oath of loyalty on the same altar. Tension eases in scene iii when Arons confers with Albin. A discussion of this nature, which is more a commentary of Arons' dispute with Brutus, does not only hold up the action, but also works as a relief to the conflict. The initial curve is again intensified when Messala participates in the discussion. Intrigue in the main plot is produced by Messala's decision to participate in the conspiracy and, thus, the stage is set for Act II.

The climax in Act II is in scene ii. The act starts with a discussion between Titus and Messala, followed by the scene between Titus and Arons. The first scene, then, served as a good introduction, given that Messala was the aide of Arons. Arons informs Titus that he can win the hand of Tullie and the throne, provided that he collaborates. Relief is provided when Titus discusses his dilemma with Messala and it is then that Brutus interrupts. The sudden arrival of Brutus in Act II, scene iv, comes as a surprise because the spectator has not in any way been prepared for it. The scene does not follow logically from the interior

developments of Act II. As such, its function is almost anti-climatic and is close to a coup de théâtre.

Voltaire realised this dramatic weakness, as the edition from 1731 had only one plot. The original Act II opened with a dialogue between Tullie and Algine. This scene was an excellent introduction to the main confrontation of Tullie and Titus. The conflict between Titus and Tullie was then discussed by Titus and Messala in the scene which provided a certain easing of tension. The last scene was a monologue by Titus, who lamented his fate.

The tension of Act III is broken by the appearance of Tullie in scene iii. La Harpe observed that she appeared too late.¹⁰ Her role becomes less and less important because of the lengthy discussions between Arons, Albin and Messala. The attention, then, shifts to the minor plot, followed by a confrontation between Titus and Tullie. The major plot is taken up again by the appearance of Brutus in scene vi. Scene vi in Act III would appear to be a climax, but climax is rather achieved in scene v only in the tense dialogue between Titus and Tullie. Its exposition was in Act I when Brutus explained that Tullie was given hospitality.

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Lancaster, H.C. French Tragedy in the Time of Louis XV and Voltaire, p. 130.

The climax in Act IV is achieved by the inverse process of Act II. In Act II Titus meets first Messala, then Arons. This is an upward trend in terms of tension, given that Titus meets the most important person last. In Act IV Titus meets first Arons, then Messala, then Tullie. Given that Tullie is now a tool in the hands of Arons, it becomes clear that the climax in Act IV, scene iii, is inferior to Titus' mental struggle in Act III, scene v.

Classical tragedy required Act IV to be a commentary upon the earlier part of the drama. If the dialogue between Titus and Tullie was to lead to a climax, it never reached the degree of intensity of its parallel scene v, Act III. Relief in this act is provided by Titus' monologue in scene iv.

Act V has two climaxes - the first being in scene ii, when Brutus disposes of Arons. The climax in scene iii occurs when Brutus reads the names of Tibérinus and Titus. This is the more successful climax because of its psychological importance for Brutus. The much criticized scene vii, where Brutus summons Titus, comes close to the melodramatic. The summons of Titus arrests rapid action till Brutus' oratorical flash: "Rome est libre: il suffit. . .Rendons grâces aux dieux." (M.II, p. 381)

Exposition and climax within the acts, then, is most successful in Acts I and V. The divided interest prevents a

building up of tension in Acts II, III and IV. This weakness, from the point of view of contemporary conventions, did not prevent Voltaire from having two climaxes in Act V, which naturally were incorporated in the dénouement. Normally, as Act IV is an act where the facts are resumed before the final catastrophe sets in, one could not accept a highly developed climax in that act.

Another convention of classical tragedy was that the intervals between acts were to be reasonably explainable, thus enabling the audience to accept as probable the changes said to have taken place. Act II starts with a non from Messala. This technique may be labelled successful, as normally Titus would have had time to take a decision between the interval. He would have been able to reflect upon Arons' proposal.

Transition between Act II and Act III is less successful. Act II finished with Messala condemning Brutus' attitude. Act III starts with Arons, who has received the letter. Voltaire did not here sin against the notion of probability, but the audience might well have expected Brutus to open this act.

Act IV starts with the oui of Titus. The oui reflects the decision by Titus and fulfills as such the same function as the non of Messala in Act II. The oui at the opening of Act V sets the tone for the discussion of Rome's past which is to follow. It deals with Brutus' reflection of the tyranny

of the Tarquins. All intervals, then, between the acts may be said to be successful.

Voltaire made use also of the possibilities of the monologue. Basically, the expression of an emotion, the monologue expresses the inner conflict of the hero. The first monologue is in Act II, scene v, where Messala expresses his dissent with Brutus. This monologue has the form of a tirade. It is less the expression of an inner sentiment than the expression of a political opinion. As such it is close to an aparté.¹¹ Messala's monologue is successful in that it leads up to his decision to collaborate with Arons.

Tullie has a monologue in Act III, scene iv. She first dismisses Algive before expressing her sentiments. In contrast to Messala's monologue in Act II, which expressed contempt, Tullie's monologue expresses amazement and hope. Tullie's monologue is less intense as Voltaire did not analyse in detail her acute distress.

If Messala's and Tullie's monologues are only faint expressions of inner conflicts, then the monologue of Titus in Act IV, scene iv, is a lamentation. This monologue expresses Titus' grief at its peak, as he is now bound to

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We have an example of an aparté in Amphitryon when Sosie is alone on the stage in the final scene. He then gives his point of view in a tirade.

lose Rome or Tullie. Ideally, a monologue should reflect the inner conflict of the hero.¹² As a form of expression, Titus' monologue resembles Tullie's monologue in Act II, as both monologues are a reflection of the past and serve as liaisons between scenes. Alone on the stage, Titus, in his lamentation, is a moving spectacle for the audience and his monologue enables him to perceive what he should do. Brutus' monologue in Act V, scene iv, is less indicative of an inner conflict. Here the audience does not identify with Brutus¹³ and the emphasis of the monologue is upon the past, which Brutus deplures.

The main function of the monologues, then, in Brutus is to comment upon the situation or to express political viewpoints. Yet the monologues' lack of expression of the inner conflict does not always touch the heart of the audience. Titus' monologue, then, would be an exception.

Voltaire is sparse in his use of récits. The only récit in the play is in Act I, scene i. Here Brutus recalls the past acts of the kings to justify the present political system. Brutus will do the same in Act III, scene vi, when he addresses Tullie:

¹² The monologue of Figaro in Le Mariage de Figaro comes closest to the ideal monologue. Alone on the stage, the audience sees and feels Figaro's inner conflict. At the same time, Figaro's monologue expresses social criticism.

¹³ The psychological aspect of Brutus' inner conflict will be dealt with in a later chapter.

"Dans les premiers éclats des tempêtes publiques,
Rome n'a pu vous rendre à vos dieux domestiques;
(M.II, p. 358)

Although it may be said that these récits slow down the action, they are relevant to the issue. This is especially so in Act V, scene i, where Brutus goes to great lengths to summarise the situation.

Conventional tragedy did not allow more than eight persons on the stage at the same time. Voltaire, possibly under the influence of Shakespearian plays, wanted to change this custom. Thus Act I, scene ii, shows two major and two minor characters; in addition, both Brutus and Arons have their own suites. The presence of at least ten persons on the stage (V, v) may be pleasing to the eye, but it takes attention away from the inner conflict of Brutus, which is supposed to be the central issue. A most unusual dramatic technique is used in Act IV, scene viii, when a new character is introduced -- Proculus.

Exits and entries in classical tragedy should be justified. Voltaire's respect for this requirement is evident in scene i, Act III, when Albin is dismissed by Arons. Voltaire shows the same care in Act III, scene iv, when Algine is dismissed by Tullie when she is no longer needed in the dialogue. There is no reason why Arons should witness the dialogue between Titus and Tullie (III, v). Algine's presence may be excused as confidants were obliged to

be present at dialogues between amants. The reappearance in the same act of Albin, possibly for the use of spectacle in scene vi, enhances the visible aspect. Similarly, Voltaire did not care to have Brutus dismiss the slave after Brutus' political address to the latter (V, i).

Scenes should be closely linked together. Ideally, the transition from one scene to another should follow logically from the argument from the preceding scene. The last part of every scene is most important and the dramatist has various devices at his disposal to connect the various scenes. One of the more common devices is known as the technique of 'dismissal'.

Voltaire employed the technique of 'dismissal' in Act III, scene i. Arons had been discussing the arrival of the letter from Tarquins and its significance as a tool to win the confidence of Titus. Albin is then dismissed on the grounds that Arons is supposed to meet Tullie in secret. This technique enables Voltaire to begin scene ii. A similar technique is used in Act V, scene ii. Brutus obliges Arons to leave, just as Arons dismissed Algine in Act III. Brutus gives the order to have Arons taken away to witness the executions: "Qu'on l'emmène, licteurs". (M.II, p. 374) This 'dismissal' is a means of transition and a way is found to have scene iii started.

Another way of linking the scenes is by announcing the

arrival of a person. This technique is closely related to the technique used in Act III, scene i, where Arons announces the arrival of the princess. An instance of an announcement of arrival of another person would be in Act V, scene i: first there is the speech of Brutus, followed by the announcement of the arrest of Arons, and this information serves as a link between scenes i and ii.

A variation upon the technique of 'dismissal' and 'announcement' is the procedure of summoning. Summoning takes place at the end of a scene when the protagonist says that somebody is to be introduced. Voltaire uses this technique from time to time. An instance would be in the scene where Brutus summons Titus: "Licteurs, que devant moi l'on amène Titus." (M.II, p. 377) Sometimes this device takes the form of an order given by a person to his suite: "Que le sénat nous suive." (M.II, p. 371) Or it may take the form of an excuse that time is passing: "Seigneur, le temps me presse." (M.II, p. 358) The feeling in the audience that another scene is to follow is sometimes brought about by the adieu. Voltaire uses this means of transition in Act V, scene vii, where Titus leaves Brutus: "Adieu: je vais périr digne encore de mon père." (M.II, p. 380) A similar means of transition is used in Act IV, scene i, where Arons pretends to leave Titus. These mechanical means of transition, then, are of an external nature. They

underline the external aspect of the play, but they express rarely the inner conflict of the heroes.

Voltaire, in his desire to strike a balance between more action and more sensibility, employed the technique of surprise. Here the obvious choice was the péripétie with its dramatic elements of surprise and stimulation.

Schérer defines the péripétie in the following terms:

"Péripétie est un changement de fortune, ou le passage d'un état à un autre, contre ce qu'on avait attendu."¹⁴

The péripétie can be caused by the intervention of an external force which will have a psychological effect upon a person's feelings.

A mechanical péripétie takes place in Act II, scene iv. Its source is outside of the person as it is an interruption by Brutus, who informs Messala that a conspiracy is pending. The action is stimulated by this intervention, but it does not reveal an inner conflict of any hero in the play. A similar technique is used when persons report a new development. An instance is found in scene viii, Act IV, when mention is made of a slave who reported the conspiracy. The much criticized scene v, Act IV, shows excess of a péripétie. The sudden appearance of

¹⁴ Schérer, J. La dramaturgie classique en France, p. 85, as quoted from De Bellegarde, K. Lettres curieuses de littérature et de morale, p. 329.

Brutus is not accounted for: "Le fond du théâtre s'ouvre."
 (M.II, p. 368) Here we have a change of fortune which does not emanate from the inner conflict from external circumstances only. This technique is called a coup de théâtre. Ideally, the péripétie should reflect the progress of the physical action and of the psychological transformation of the hero at the same time. This technique takes place in Act III, scene vi, and it may be worthwhile to follow its progress.

The scene starts with Brutus ordering Tullie to leave. This initial statement convinces Titus that he is going to lose Tullie. The passion for Tullie which gradually had been built up in Titus causes him to be deeply shocked on learning this information. Quickly recovering himself, Titus changes opinion and asks to talk to Arons: "Pourrai-je vous parler?" (M.II, p. 358)

A combination of the physical and the psychological surprise takes place also in the dénouement when Brutus is presented with the list of conspirators. The péripétie is most successful when it coincides with the climax. This happens in Act II, where Arons expected Titus to accept his proposals, until Titus recognizes the trap: "Sa fille! dieux! Tullie! O vœux infortunés!" (M.II, p. 344)
 Voltaire's use of the péripétie, then, is most successful where the external circumstances cause a psychological

change in the hero and where there is a maximum of simplicity in its psychological effect upon the hero.

In general, then, Voltaire's technique is good. He breaks certain conventions and traditions of the seventeenth century, but he does so to please the public. This move emphasizes more and more his desire to make tragedy, not only a conflict, but also a pleasurable spectacle. The stress upon the visible, however, pushes the psychological aspects of the persons more and more into the background.

CHAPTER III - CHARACTERIZATION

Voltaire chose to bring characters on the stage whose characteristics are revealed as the action proceeds. Broadly speaking, there are likeable and disagreeable characters in Brutus, and the audience sympathises with the main characters for some personal motive. Dramatic conflict arises when Voltaire shows that these characters have their unsympathetic side, which is repulsive to the audience. Thus, Voltaire's basic dramatic idea of Brutus is very much the same as that of his predecessors Sophocles, Corneille and Racine.

Brutus first appears in scene i and immediately gains the sympathy of the audience by his sincere desire to save Rome and its people:

Destructeurs des tyrans, vous qui n'avez pour rois
Que les dieux de Numa, vos vertus et nos lois,
Enfin notre ennemi commence à nous connaître.
(M.II, p. 327)

As soon as Valérius Publicola tells him that Arons should not be given a hearing, Brutus objects. He suggests that for the people and its reputation it would be better to show Arons the freedom of the people of Rome:

Je vois cette ambassade, au nom des souverains,
Comme un premier hommage aux citoyens romains.
(M.II, p. 328)

Scene ii shows a Brutus who again speaks up for the people. When Arons tries to slander the people of Rome,

Brutus defends them:

Arrêtez; sachez qu'il faut qu'on nomme
Avec plus de respect les citoyens de Rome.
Le gloire du sénat est de représenter
Ce peuple vertueux que l'on ose insulter.
(M.II, p. 329)

Brutus, in these first scenes, shows which course the action is going to take. Well-spoken, there is no contempt in the way in which he addresses Arons. There is dignity and a certain melancholy in his voice when he makes an effort to address Arons by his name:

Nous avons fait, Arons, en lui rendant hommage,
Serment d'obéissance et non point d'esclavage;
(M.II, p. 330)

This is the language of a man who regrets former friendship, but who realizes that no way back is possible. Brutus uses the same form of address when he says: "Arons, il n'est plus temps: chaque Etat a ses lois." (M.II, p. 331)

Brutus respects the laws of hospitality and claims to know what suffering can mean to a princess:

Malgré la juste horreur que j'ai pour sa famille,
Le sénat à mes soins a confié sa fille;
(. . .)
Mais je sais ce qu'on doit de bontés et d'honneur
A son sexe, à son âge, et surtout au malheur.
(M.II, p. 333)

Brutus' nobility of mind induces him to extend this hospitality to Arons: "Ma maison cependant est votre sûreté; jouissez-y des droits de l'hospitalité." (M.II, p. 333)

Brutus shows his contempt of luxury which can only lead to corruption: "Prenez cet or, Arons, il est vil à nos yeux."

(M.II, p. 333) By the end of Act I Brutus has been shown to be a man of integrity who will not let his personal feelings over-rule the interest of Rome and its people.

Brutus next appears in Act II, scene iv, and here he is shown as a consul trying to warn Messala for the conspiracy. Brutus is genuine in his concern for Titus. Voltaire ensures that Brutus retains the favourable impression upon the audience when Brutus points out to Messala that Titus may be seduced by Arons' proposals: "Il (Arons) leur parle, et je crains les discours séduisants/D'un ministre vieilli dans l'art des courtisans." (M.II, p. 346)

Up till Act III, scene vi, Brutus shows no flaws in his character. So far Brutus resembles the Brutus of Mlle. Bernard. The harsher side of Livy's Brutus is softened by the introduction of human elements such as hospitality and a genuine care for his son Titus.

Act IV, scene vi, shows Brutus' surprise when his son Titus hesitates to accept the command to the defense of the city. Brutus' genuine care for the safety of Rome enhances his sympathy with the audience. Brutus, as a Roman consul and as a father, is disappointed in his son and his dilemma becomes greater as he had promised earlier that no pardon should be shown to traitors:

Si dans le sein de Rome il se trouvait un traître,
Qui regrettât les rois et qui voulût un maître,
Que le perfide meure au milieu des tourments!

(M.II, p. 332)

Brutus, in his nobility of mind, refuses to believe that his son could betray Rome. His integrity is shown by his uncompromising attitude. This concept of virtue makes no allowance for doubt when a just cause is at stake:

Mais je te verrai vaincre, ou mourrai, comme toi,
Vengeur du nom romain, libre encore, et sans roi.¹
(M.II, p. 370)

According to Brutus, a Roman should serve Rome without question:

"Donne ton sang à Rome, et n'en exige rien ". (M.II, p. 369)

The rigid concept of virtue on the part of Brutus is at the root of the conflict with his son Titus. Yet Brutus does not allow his family ties to intervene with what he considers his duty and family affection is pushed more and more into the background as Act IV, scene vii, shows. A closer connection between Brutus and Titus is prevented by the announcement of the conspiracy by Valérius. This external event takes up Brutus' time and prevents him from discussing Titus' conflict with the latter.

Brutus, throughout Act V, becomes the perfect executioner of the law, as he had promised to be in Act I, scene ii. If he had still shown genuine care for his son in Act II, scene iv, the laws in Act V prevent him from

¹ Lancaster, in French Dramatic Literature in the Seventeenth Century, p. 356, notes that Mlle. Bernard's Brutus shows the same hardness of character. When reproached for this characteristic by the press, Mlle. Bernard replied that Brutus may be harsh in public, but not necessarily so in private life.

Brutus then, is a consul whose inner life stays concealed for the audience. He is the perfect Roman consul in that he executes the laws as they have been written down, and he appears to be genuine in this duty. Part of the reason that the liberal audience of the 1730's did not like the figure of Brutus lies in the fact that Brutus is a flat character. Voltaire did not depict Brutus as a psychologically rich character and a liberal audience would not sustain for a long time an interest in Brutus as he is portrayed.

Titus' character is more complex. Titus admits from the outset that he finds it difficult to control his nature:

Ah! j'aime avec transport, je hais avec furie:
Je suis extrême en tout, je l'avoue, et mon coeur
Voudrait en tout se vaincre, et connaît son erreur.
(M.II, p. 339)

Titus first appears in Act II, scene i, and he admits to his friend Messala that he is unable to control his instinctive passion for Tullie. Voltaire ensured Titus' sympathy with the audience by the introduction of this trait in Titus. Titus feels, as a virtuous Roman, that he should be ashamed of his loss of control, as he admits to Messala:

Je rougis de moi-même et d'un feu téméraire,
Inutile, imprudent, à mon devoir contraire.
(M.II, p. 340)

The sympathy of Titus is enhanced by his struggle to have his duty prevail over his passions:

Non, ami, mon devoir est le maître.
Non, crois-moi, l'homme est libre au moment qu'il veut
l'être.

(M.II, p. 341)

Titus' downfall may be said to start at Act II, scene ii. Weaker than Brutus, who interrupted Arons in Act I, scene i, Titus is seduced by the explanations of Arons. Yet he is not so far influenced by Arons as not to distinguish the latter's intentions:

Je n'examine point si votre politique,
Pense armer mes chagrins contre ma république,
Et porter mon dépit, avec un art si doux,
Aux indiscretions qui suivent le courroux.
(M.II, p. 342)

Up until Act IV, the audience witnesses Titus' struggle and it is interesting to trace its progression. When Titus is introduced, he is still a young Roman; full of integrity.

He says to Arons:

Grâce au ciel, je n'ai point cette indigne faiblesse;
Je veux de la grandeur, et la veut sans bassesse;
(M.II, p. 344)

Even when Messala, as his friend, tries to seduce Titus, Titus does not yield:

Messala: Allez servir ces rois.
Titus: Oui, je les veux servir;
Oui, tel est mon devoir, et je le veux remplir.
Messala: Vous gémissiez pourtant!
Titus: Ma victoire est cruelle.
Messala: Vous l'achetez trop cher.
Titus: Elle en sera plus belle.
Ne m'abandonne point dans l'état où je suis.
(M.II, p. 345)

Titus' nobility of character is underlined by Messala when he has to admit that his mission failed partly:

Et cependant Titus, sans haine et sans courroux,
Trop au-dessus de lui pour en être jaloux,
Lui tend encor la main de son char de victoire,
Et semble en l'embrassant l'accabler de sa gloire.
(M.II, p. 351)

The conflict experienced by Titus is brought out by his hesitation between two distinct courses of action. At one moment he declares his readiness to submit to Rome:

J'aime encor mieux, seigneur, ce sénat rigoureux,
Tout injuste pour moi, tout jaloux qu'il peut être,
Que l'éclat d'une cour et le sceptre d'un maître.
(M.II, p. 343)

These words are hardly spoken when he seems to come to a decision to renounce Rome and its senate. His inner struggle is underlined when he says:

Dis-leur que l'intérêt de l'Etat, de Brutus. . .
Hélas! que je m'emporte en desseins superflus!
(M.II, p. 365)

At other times Titus tries in vain to have Tullie hate him, so that he may be, in peace, a faithful servant to Rome:

Haïssez-moi, fuyez, quittez un malheureux
Qui meurt d'amour pour vous, et déteste ses feux;
(M.II, p. 367)

Finally, Titus succumbs and his decision to collaborate is shown in scene iv, Act IV. Once fallen in the trap, Titus tries to put his conscience at ease. He tells himself that, if he joined the conspiracy, it was because of his loyalty to the ex-king. Titus' sympathy is enhanced by his attempt to regain his Roman dignity. Once he recognizes his mistake, he implores his father to punish him in a harsh way, and, if necessary, is prepared to be an example for Rome:

Prononcez mon arrêt. Rome, qui vous contemple,
 A besoin de ma perte et veut un grand exemple;
 Par mon juste supplice il faut épouvanter
 Les Romains, s'il en est qui puissent m'imiter.
 (M.II, p. 379)

Voltaire, then, is more successful in his portrayal of Titus than of Brutus. Voltaire gives the audience the opportunity to witness the inner struggle of Titus, whereas Brutus, as a character, remains almost a stranger.

Tullie, initially, wins the sympathy of the audience by her genuine care for her father. When Arons announces the arrival of a letter, she exclaims spontaneously: "Dieux! protégez mon père, et changez son destin!" (M.II, p. 352) Voltaire stresses her innocence as a vulnerable princess, and in this way gives her the sympathy of the audience:

Epargnez les chagrins d'une triste princesse;
 Ne tendez point de piège à ma faible jeunesse.
 (M.II, p. 353)

Tullie shows a charming aspect as a woman when she becomes suddenly excited at the prospect of winning both the heart of Titus and the throne of her father. When Arons informs her of this possibility, she exclaims:

Ciel! que je dois d'encens à ta bonté propice!
 Mes pleurs t'ont désarmé, tout change, et ta justice,
 Aux feux dont j'ai rougi rendant leur pureté,
 En les récompensant, les met en liberté.
 (M.II, p. 354)

Tullie's love becomes more lucid when, in spite of her passion, she sees the danger of Arons' sudden change. She observes:

Va, dis-je. . .Cependant ce changement extrême. . .

Ce billet!. . .De quels soins mon cœeur est combattu!
(M.II, p. 354)

On the other hand, the audience's sympathy with her dilemma in Act III, scene v, is enhanced. In spite of more urgent problems, she shows a charming, child-like, feminine side.

She asks Titus:

Le destin me permet. . .Titus. . .il faut me dire
Si j'avais sur votre âme un véritable empire.
(M.II, p. 355)

Tullie is outspoken in her love for Titus. She does not hide that she loves him and feels that her destiny is linked to

Titus: "Le mien dépend de vous." (M.II, p. 355)

Up until Act IV, scene iii, Tullie's character shows no flaws. Yet there is little reason, other than the influence of Arons, why she should slander the people. She does this as early as scene v, Act III, when she meets Titus for the first time:

Oeuvre les yeux, Titus, et met dans la balance
Les refus du sénat, et la toute-puissance.
Choisis de recevoir ou de donner la loi,
D'un vil peuple ou d'un trône, et de Rome ou de moi.
(M.II, p. 356)

In the same scene, she urges Titus to make a choice:

Ose donc me servir; tu m'aimes, venge-moi.
(M.II, p. 357)

Tullie's character comes to the fore in scene iii of Act IV. There is little reason why she should call Titus barbare. (M.II, p. 365) By the end of the same scene, she has pushed Titus so far as to allow him no compromise:

" . . . Résous d'être mon meurtrier ou d'être mon époux."

(M.II, p. 367) She shows presence of mind and superiority over Titus when she implores him not to follow her:

Titus, arrête;
En me suivant plus loin tu hasardes ta tête;
On peut te soupçonner; demeure: adieu;
(M.II, p. 367)

Tullie meets Arons once, in Act III, scene iii. She accepts the cause of her father, and most of her political efforts consist of trying to win Titus over to the side of the Tarquins. La Harpe is right when he maintains that Tullie is merely a tool in the hands of Arons.²

Tullie, for her part, sees Brutus as an obstacle who tortures her:

L'ingrat me touche encore, et Brutus à mes yeux
Paraît un dieu terrible armé contre nous deux.
J'aime, je crains, je pleure, et tout mon coeur s'égaré.
Allons.

(M.II, p. 365)

She meets him once only, in Act V, scene i, and the relationship between them is of a superficial nature. Brutus, at no point in the play, shows her any particular affection appropriate for a potential daughter-in-law. If he gave her hospitality it was only because of the laws. When Tullie's time has come to leave, Brutus almost mechanically orders her to go. In Brutus' mind Tullie forms one with Arons: they

² Lancaster, H.C. French Tragedy in the Time of Louis XV and Voltaire, p. 130.

are, for Brutus, the conspirators that Rome has to dispose of:

Déjà des murs de Rome Arons était parti:
Assez loin vers le camp nos gardes l'ont suivi;
On arrête à l'instant Arons avec Tullie.
(M.II, p. 373)

It may be said that the audience gets to know the inner life of Tullie better than that of Brutus. Yet Voltaire put the emphasis on the conspiracy after Act IV and Tullie's conflict is pushed more and more into the background after this act. Ultimately, this technique would lead to the criticism that Voltaire should produce a tender tragedy from which criticism Zaire (1732) would be the result.

The principal person outside the family circle is Arons. Voltaire borrowed him from Mlle. Bernard and introduced him as an unsympathetic character in order to have a counterpart to Brutus. Valérius, in the very first scene, expresses this view: "Ce nom d'ambassadeur a paru vous frapper." (M.II, p. 328) Once tagged as a potential conspirator, Arons assumes this rôle. Arons, then, employs all possible devices to pursue his goals and it may be instructive to study his tactics as a diplomat.

Arons shows that he understands the sensitivity of the Romans with regard to their concept of honour. He knows that in this idea of the Romans lies their weakness. He,

thus, contrasts Titus' greatness³ as a conqueror with what is from the outset a lost cause:

Vous voyez quel orage éclate autour de vous;
C'est en vain que Titus en détourna les coups:
Je vois avec regret sa valeur et son zèle
N'assurer aux Romains qu'une chute plus belle.
(M.II, p. 330)

Arons does not feel it beneath his dignity to use the famous history of Rome for his personal advantage:

Moins piqué d'un discours si hautain
Que touché des malheurs où cet Etat s'expose,
Comme un de ses enfants j'embrasse ici sa cause.
(M.II, p. 330)

At other times Arons plays upon the Senate's earlier feelings of fidelity to the former kings of Rome. He tries to hurt the pride of the Senate when he hints at a breach of loyalty:

J'ai vu chacun de vous, brûlant d'un autre zèle,
A Tarquin votre roi jurer d'être fidèle.
(M.II, p. 330)

Brutus is the only senator who speaks up against Arons. He interrupts Arons when the latter slanders the people:

Arrêtez; sachez qu'il faut qu'on nomme
Avec plus de respect les citoyens de Rome.
(M.II, p. 329)

Brutus, as an elder statesman, knows the dangers when a cunning diplomat, such as Arons, is in the city. Brutus warns Messala:

Il leur parle, et je crains les discours séduisants
D'un ministre vieilli dans l'art des courtisans.
(M.II, p. 346)

Arons shows in his dealings with Titus that he has a

³The political connotations emanating from this contrast will be dealt with in a later chapter.

better understanding of the mechanism of love. Earlier he instructed the collaborator Messala about the potential weakness of a person in love. Better than all others, Arons the diplomat foresaw the contribution to the conspiracy when he would discover that Tullie was in love with Titus. He remarked: "Un regard de Tullie, un seul mot de sa bouche. . . ." (M.II, p. 352) Arons would then exploit this relation and he knows that he is a master in this technique. Arons is without illusions about human weaknesses. He observes: "N'espérons des humains rien que par leur faiblesse." (M.II, p. 352) He is without pity for Titus and becomes cruel:

J'espère que bientôt ces voûtes embrasées,
Ce Capitole en cendre, et ces tours écrasées,
Du sénat et du peuple éclairant les tombeaux,
A cet hymen vont servir de flambeaux.

(M.II, p. 344)

Arons is a pragmatic man. He does not let himself be swept away by emotions. This trait in Arons' character comes out particularly in his dealings with Messala. After the lengthy speech of Messala, his only reply is: "Pourra-t-il nous livrer la porte Quirinale?" (M.II, p. 351) Arons' control over himself is evident in his readiness to bait people. Thus when Titus is momentarily dependent upon Arons, as he is going to lose Tullie, Arons feigns to have no time to discuss matters with Titus;

Titus: Pourrai-je vous parler?

Arons: Seigneur, le temps me presse.

(M.II, p. 358)

Arons, as a courtier, shows that he possesses the art of dissembling. He feigns innocence and tries to reproach Brutus that he violated the sacred law of hospitality:

Vos licteurs insolents viennent de m'arrêter:
Est-ce mon maître ou moi que l'on veut insulter?
Et chez les nations ce rang inviolable. . .

(M.II, p. 373)

Arons, then, controls to a high degree the actions of Tullie. He is the perfect example of the cunning diplomat and stimulates the collaborator Messala when the latter feels discouraged.

Messala first appears in Act I, scene iv, and shows contempt for the senate:

Ils osent s'en vanter; mais leur feinte justice,
Leur âpre austérité que rien ne peut gagner,
N'est dans ces coeurs hautains que la soif de régner.

(M.II, p. 335)

Messala's support for the kings soon proves to be a veneer. Voltaire preferred to introduce Messala as a calculating youngster. Messala loses the sympathy of the audience when he underlines this element in his character:

Je connais trop les grands: dans le malheur amis,
Ingrats dans la fortune, et bientôt ennemis:
Nous sommes de leur gloire un instrument servile.

(M.II, p. 336)

Messala's main objection to the senate is its pride:

Va, je verrai peut-être à mes pieds abattu
Cet orgueil insultant de ta fausse vertu.

(M.II, p. 348)

Voltaire did not elaborate upon Messala's inner conflict. Messala, after indicating his grievances in

Act I, talks either to Arons or to Titus. His rôle is soon clear to the audience by his efforts to win over Titus. There are four scenes in which he and Titus appear together - Act II, scene i, Act III, scene vii, Act IV, scene iii and Act IV, scene v.

Messala's tactics resemble closely those of Arons. As Arons, he resorts to hypocrisy and like him, is versed in the art of dissembling as when he exclaims: "A moi, seigneur?" (Act II, scene iv). Here Messala acts as if he is surprised that Brutus should ask him to look after his son Titus whereas he is already at this stage a collaborator in the conspiracy. He feigns friendship to Titus in Act II, scene i, whereas in reality he is trying to win Titus over:

"Non, c'est trop offenser ma sensible amitié;
 Qui peut de son secret me cacher la moitié,
 En dit trop et trop peu, m'offense et me soupçonne.
 (M.II, p. 339)

Messala is more lucid than Titus. He knows the weaknesses of Titus: "Un moment quelquefois renverse un grand courage." Rightfully, Messala can say that he succeeded in exploiting Titus' weaker moments: "J'ai saisi ces moments." (M.II, p. 351) He also appears more mature than Titus. His lack of inner conflict allows him to reason in a more detached way than Titus. Thus, he acts as a torturer to Titus until scene vii, Act III. In this act Messala considers it no longer necessary to hide from Titus his real sympathy with Arons and the kings of Porsenna.

Messala acts as a catalyst upon Titus' feelings. He tries to reinforce Titus' feeling that the task of the defense of Rome is too hard for him: "Qu'un autre accomplira ce que vous pouviez faire." (M.II, p. 341) At other times Messala simply reinforces Titus' doubts. When the latter hesitates to accept the command, Messala says: "J'approuve et votre amour et vos ressentiments." (M.II, p. 341)

Voltaire makes sure that the audience understands Messala's intentions. This is done by means of an aparté:

Allons, suivons ses pas; aigrissons ses ennuis;
Enfonçons dans son coeur le trait qui le déchire.
(M.II, p. 345)

From the dramatical point of view, this tirade serves as a means of transition to the next scene.

Up until Act V, scene i, Messala acts as would a Roman who is not afraid of deceit. His sympathies are with the kings, but he has his doubts as to the kings' integrity. Thus, Messala's behaviour - as narrated by Brutus - becomes somewhat improbable. Voltaire did not point out why Messala should kill himself following Messala's halfhearted support of the kings; his suicide becomes somewhat improbable and is a move towards the melodramatic. With the discussion of Messala, the inner circle of characters is closed.

Albin, the friend of Arons, is the first character outside of this inner circle. He enjoys the confidence of Arons, and appears in six scenes, but remains in the shadow

of Arons. Part of his function is to introduce the more important persons to his master. Because of this position, he often becomes a foreboding figure of evil which is to befall upon the unfortunate heroes, such as Titus. Whenever Albin opens the scene, the audience knows that a new stage has been set in Arons' intrigues. Albin has no other position in the play - he is just the announcer and informer for Arons, and it needs hardly be mentioned that his inner life is not analysed.

Albine, as Albin's confidant, possesses much the same rôle. She takes part in three scenes - Act III, scenes iii and iv; and Act IV, scene iii. She does not in any way influence the action of the tragedy and so her rôle is less important than Albin's. On one occasion she emerged from this passive rôle to encourage Tullie in her love for Titus:

Je sais que le sénat alluma son courroux,
Qu'il est ambitieux, et qu'il brûle pour vous.
(M.II, p. 354)

Voltaire did not mention whether she was present during the love scene between Titus and Tullie, although, as a confidant, she would have been allowed to have been present. In the second rendezvous between Titus and Tullie in Act IV, her rôle is limited to the introduction of Titus. (M.II, p. 365)

Voltaire followed Mlle. Bernard in his introduction of Valérius, senator and consul as Brutus. Valérius, in Act I, scene i, takes a more rigid attitude than Brutus: he

proposes to the senate not to allow Arons a hearing. Earlier than Brutus, Valérius sees through Arons:

Ce nom d'ambassadeur a paru vous frapper;
 Tarquin n'a pu vous vaincre, il cherche à nous tromper.
 (M.II, p. 328)

After the first act, Valérius plays no further part until Act IV, scene vii, where he announces the conspiracy. Valérius shows understanding of Roman virtues when he asks Brutus not to let his passions take hold of him when the betrayal of Titus is revealed: "Songez que vous êtes Brutus." (M.II, p. 374) As in the case of Albin, the audience has no opportunity to get to know the inner life of Valérius. That he is capable of deep feeling is shown when he observes: "Je tremble à vous en dire plus." (M.II, p. 375) Yet, as there was no intimate relation between him and Brutus, it may be said that Valérius' comforting words are of an oratorical nature only.

Voltaire did not indicate if he wanted the figure of Proculus, the third senator, to be surrounded by a touch of mystery. Moland does not mention whether Proculus took part in the opening scene. As a member of the senate, he may well have been present. As the action proceeds, this mystery around Proculus is heightened when he does not participate in the dialogue between Brutus and Valérius in Act I. Apart from the reasons of pleasure to the eye, Proculus' rôle here is limited to a silent one. The same

may be said of Act V, scene iii, where Proculus is on the stage without speaking.

More becomes known about Proculus in Act V, scene vi. As Valérius before him, he shows a human side when he suggests that Brutus let his sentiments as a father prevail. When a decision is to be taken about Titus' fate, he remarks: ". . .Vous êtes père enfin." (M.II, p. 378) Again, this consolation might well have been given by Valérius. Voltaire, in his desire for spectacle, would perhaps have been more successful if these rôles of Valérius and Proculus had been incorporated into one.

The desire for spectacle may have induced Voltaire to introduce yet another spectator in the final scene. Voltaire, then, in his portrayal of characters is successful. The tendency on his part toward the 'spectacle' prevents a portrayal of characters which would have allowed a detailed analysis of the heroes. Too much emphasis upon the visible aspect in Brutus is often achieved at the expense of the study of the characters.

CHAPTER IV - POLITICS

Voltaire was not the first dramatist to express political ideas in a play. R.S. Ridgway in La Propaganda philosophique dans les tragédies de Voltaire notes: "A ne considérer que le théâtre de Racine, on a cru trouver dans Bérénice l'histoire des adieux de Marie Mancini et de Louis XIV, dans Esther une allegorie de la disgrâce de Mme. de Montespan et dans Athalie des references aux troubles en Angleterre."¹ No doubt the criticism of contemporary events and, to a certain degree, of religion in both Corneille's and Racine's plays, would not have escaped Voltaire. Although it is relatively easy to draw a philosophy of politics from these plays, it must be said that in this respect their plays resemble those of their contemporaries. They contain a lesson, of raison d'état, certain maxims against war and praise of just and benevolent despotism. Both Corneille and Racine wrote political plays based upon the respect of the established power and religion; they did not question the system from within which they were writing and as such did not attack the basis of the French monarchy.

Livy's Brutus, the source of Voltaire's play, was mainly concerned with the conspiracy to have the republican

¹ Ridgway, La Propaganda philosophique dans les tragédies de Voltaire, p. 30.

government overthrown. As a narration it became more the account of the daring deeds of irresponsible youth, and such actions, in the Roman ethic, were considered as deserving condemnation. The political implications of Mile. Bernard's Brutus follow the pattern of Corneille and Racine. Her criticism is not philosophical in nature, but limits itself to certain vices at the court, as she stays well within the limits of absolute monarchy as it existed in France.

The first attempt which may be labelled philosophical came from Voltaire's contemporary, Prosper Crébillon. At an early age Crébillon had already developed daring concepts of an ideal government. He conceived the idea of a tragedy called Cromwell, in which he was to express the republican feelings of the English during the Civil War. R.S. Ridgway, in quoting L. Fontaine's Le théâtre et la philosophie au dix-huitième siècle, p. 19, observes:

"Un peu plus de fermeté ou de désobéissance, et peut-être cette pièce, antérieure à Oedipe, plus hardie même que Brutus, aurait inauguré avec éclat le rôle nouveau de la tragédie philosophique."

Crébillon was not to become the leader of the philosophical movement. In subsequent years he moved further and further away from a philosophical position. The nature of his tragedies made them unsuitable for expressing propaganda: the complexity of the action, the elements of the romanesque, and the expression of terror put the emphasis of his plays upon the dramatic aspect. These dramatic devices indicate

that Crébillon's work in this period deserves the epithet poétique rather than philosophique.

Crébillon's experience shows that not every dramatist was daring and dedicated enough to become a poète philosophe. Most critics are unanimous in their conviction that Voltaire falls into this category after his return from England. This action is generally expressed with reference to the Lettres Philosophiques. Both Lettres Philosophiques and Brutus show certain aspects of Voltaire's political opinions between 1726 and 1734, and of his attempts to express them despite censorship. Part of the reason for the late publication of the Lettres philosophiques was due to its obvious political message.

More important, if Brutus had not encountered difficulties with the Keeper of the Seals, its political implications might probably have been so profound and so subtle as to escape the attention of the censors. Brutus called upon greater craftsmanship on the part of Voltaire because he had now to combine artistic and philosophical intentions. It is worthwhile tracing Voltaire's dilemma as it illuminates both his political opinions and his environment at this time of his life.

The first factor which helps explain the political subtlety of Brutus goes back to Voltaire's private life. Having been twice imprisoned in the Bastille by 1726, Voltaire had to express his ideas with extreme care. The ever-present

danger of having Brutus censored, or of losing his personal liberty, was a basic concern. Voltaire's suspicions of the threat of the censor proved to be justified. Public indignation was aroused after the publication of the Lettres philosophiques in 1734. Professor Conlon notes:

In 1734 the hue and cry that followed the publication of the Lettres philosophiques left Voltaire with the dangerous reputation of impiety.¹

Voltaire no doubt resented censorship which had become more severe since 1705 and which would culminate in the Code de la Librairie (1744).² As late as 1733 Voltaire observed:

Il est triste de souffrir mais il est plus dur encore de ne pouvoir penser avec une honnête liberté et que le plus beau privilège de l'humanité nous soit ravi: fari quae sentiat.
(Best. 634)

The third reason for the subtle treatment of Brutus is of an internal nature. To what extent did Voltaire want to stay a pure artist and to what extent could he decide to have Brutus be an expression of his political convictions? Subtlety leads often to misinterpretation on the part of critics and audience, as may become clear upon examination of the explanations by various critics.

Trusten Wheeler Russell in Voltaire, Dryden and Heroic

¹ P.M. Conlon, Voltaire's Literary Career from 1728 to 1750, p. 109.

² For further reading see: Bachman, Censorship in France from 1715 to 1750, Voltaire's Opposition, (New York: 1934).

I.O. Wade, The Clandestine Organisation and Diffusion of Philosophical Ideas in France from 1700-1750, 1938.

Tragedy, (p. 86) feels that, with Voltaire, political ideas are primary to the artistic:

Whether he was treating the legends of Greek mythology, the stoical themes of Roman history, or the chivalric adventures of the heroic romances, the didactic purpose of his plays is always evident.

Lancaster, less emphatic and perhaps more accurate, takes a more moderate stand. In the review of Russell's thesis, he notes:

"...il est en réalité très difficile de discerner aucun but moral dans bien des tragédies de Voltaire, et que ses prétensions moralisatrices ne sont vraisemblablement qu'une tactique pour rassurer les autorités."³

Lastly, the critic of Brutus may well ask himself if Voltaire had a political message to convey why should he do this by means of an historical tragedy. At no point in Brutus does it become evident that Voltaire wanted the play to be a lesson of une philosophie de l'histoire. J. Brumfitt, in his Voltaire - Historian, feels that Voltaire in general terms uses history as a source of examples, never as an authority.⁴

If a political intention is present in the play, this intention may well have its source in Voltaire's political

³ Lancaster, Henry Carrington Review, Modern Language Notes, November, 1947, LXII, pp. 492-5.

⁴

Brumfitt, J. Voltaire - Historian, pp. 66-69.

experience in England. Lion observes:

Tout imbu pour un instant par son séjour en Angleterre et le contact d'une société libre, il a choisi tout de suite avec Brutus et La Mort de César les deux sujets les plus propres peut-être à exprimer cet enthousiasme patriotique, cet amour de la liberté, cette haine de la tyrannie, qu'il avait puisés chez les Anglais et qui avaient fait sur lui une vive impression.⁵

Lion's opinion of the impact of English liberty upon Voltaire seem to be confirmed by Voltaire's own low opinion of French royalty and court of the time. Voltaire wrote to his friend Thierot:

I am weary of Courts. All this is King, or belongs to a King, frights my republican philosophy. I won't drink the least draught of slavery in the land of liberty.

(Best. 294)

The real centre of interest resides in the struggle between the republican liberty of Brutus and the royalist sympathies of Arons. A first reading would indicate that Voltaire's sympathies are on the side of Brutus, who seems to be the ideal ruler. Brutus shows complete loyalty to Rome throughout the play; Voltaire wanted him initially to be the expression of rigorous republican sentiment:

Destructeurs des tyrans, vous qui n'avez pour rois
Que les dieux de Numa, vos vertus et nos lois,
Enfin notre ennemi commence à nous connaître.

(M.II, p. 327)

⁵ Lion H. Les tragédies et les théories dramatiques de Voltaire, p. 52.

This loyalty is maintained to the very end of the play when Brutus exclaims: "Rome est libre: il suffit. . .rendons grâces aux dieux." (M.II, p. 381)

Brutus is the personage through whom Voltaire launches his attacks upon the absolute monarch. Tarquin has become a tyrant having violated the law and imposed himself as absolute master. Voltaire has Brutus say:

Si dans le sein de Rome il se trouvait un traître,
Qui regrettât les rois et qui voulût un maître,
Que le perfide meure au milieu des tourments!
Que sa cendre coupable, abandonnée aux vents,
Ne laisse ici qu'un nom plus odieux encore
Que le nom des tyrans que Rome entière abhorre!⁶
(M.II, p. 332)

Brutus asks the Senate to vote whether Arons will be allowed a hearing. Voltaire, thus, hinted at a sharing of power between the senate and the consul. Brutus, in his capacity as consul, does not want to go against the wishes of the senate. He observes:

Aux sénateurs de Rome il demande audience:
Il attend dans ce temple, et c'est à vous de voir
S'il le faut refuser, s'il le faut recevoir.
(M.II, p. 327)

⁶ Moland notes: En 1791, le lendemain de la fuite du roi, c'est-à-dire le 22 Juin, le Club des Cordeliers afficha dans Paris la déclaration suivante:

Songez qu'au Champ de Mars, à cet autel auguste,
Louis nous a juré d'être fidèle et juste;
De son peuple et de lui tel était le lien,
Il nous rend nos serments lorsqu'il trahit le sien.
Si parmi les Français il se trouvait un traître
Qui regrettât ses rois et qui voulût un maître,
Que le perfide meure au milieu des tourments;
Que sa cendre coupable, abandonnée aux vents,
Ne laisse ici qu'un nom plus odieux encore
Que le nom des tyrans que l'homme libre abhorre!
(M.II, p. 332)

The moral conduct of the court is criticized.

Voltaire has Brutus say to Arons:

Quittez l'art avec nous; quittez la flatterie;
Ce poison qu'on prépare à la cour d'Etrurie
N'est point encor connu dans le sénat romain.
(M.II, p. 329)

Voltaire criticized the neglect of kings in administrative matters through the figure of Brutus. Voltaire argued by implication, as this reproach is incorporated in Brutus' appraisal of Tarquin. Brutus feels that, in fleeing Rome, Tarquin abandoned and betrayed his daughter, Tullie. Brutus makes this clear to Tullie when he explains her position as a temporary guest in Rome:

Tarquin même en ce temps, prompt à vous oublier,
Et du soin de nous perdre occupé tout entier,
Dans nos calamités confondant sa famille,
N'a pas même aux Romains redemandé sa fille.
(M.II, p. 358)

Although difficult to prove, it may well be that Voltaire was here attacking the King and his officers who often set aside specific undertakings such as the payment of annuities. In Voltaire's case, the payment of his annuities was resumed after his return from England. Yet this fact did not prevent Voltaire from criticizing the foundation of royalty.

Voltaire had attacked the foundation of royalty in Oedipe, but never so outspokenly as when he has Brutus say: "Qui naquit dans le pourpre en est rarement digne." (M.II, p. 347) Here Voltaire indicated a basic weakness of the absolute monarchy. Voltaire touched upon the delicate question

of royal succession. Voltaire, not an opponent of monarchy as a form of government, feels that a prince's attainment of virtue may be impeded if the prince knows from childhood that he will automatically inherit the throne. Voltaire feels that the prince should realize that he is chosen for this position and that he should take this choice into account when faced with political decisions. Brutus expresses this view when he explains to Messala why he did not support his son's desire to become a consul too fast:

Croyez-moi, le succès de son ambition
 Serait le premier pas vers la corruption.
 Le prix de la vertu serait héréditaire:
 Bientôt l'indigne fils du plus vertueux père,
 Trop assuré d'un rang d'autant moins mérité,
 L'attendrait dans le luxe et dans l'oisiveté:
 Le dernier des Tarquins en est la preuve indigne.
 (M.II, p. 347)

Voltaire stressed the relative value of titles. Here Voltaire criticized the nobility who often misused their titles in order to impress and exploit the people. This was at the same time a criticism of the nobility as a class which in no way served the economic and social interests of the country. Brutus-republican reproaches this specious concept of Arons who here stands for the nobles:

L'ambassadeur d'un roi m'est toujours redoutable;
 Ce n'est qu'un ennemi sous un titre honorable;
 Qui vient, rempli d'orgueil ou de dextérité,
 Insulter ou trahir avec impunité.
 (M.II, p. 328)

In order for a rank to be deserved, the person holding it should show a proper sense of responsibility. As the nobility

were often appointed ambassadors, Brutus' reproach to Arons will not have escaped their attention. Brutus observes after the detection of Arons' betrayal:

Plus ton rang est sacré, plus il te rend coupable;
Cesse ici d'attester des titres superflus.

(M.II, p. 373)

The exaggeration of useless adoration of hollow titles is reminiscent in the contemporary concept of warriors.

Voltaire had attacked certain misconceptions of warriors in l'Histoire de Charles XII, roi de Suède. The moral lesson of Charles' exploits is reminiscent of Brutus' advice to Titus: "Sois toujours un héros, soit plus, sois citoyen." (M.II, p. 369) The lesson as to Charles' conquests is best captured in G.R. Havens' words:

At the same time there is a philosophical conclusion to be drawn from his work. It is that Charles XII, with all his great and dazzling qualities, which often elicit Voltaire's admiration, has by his wars brought about only one result: namely, the ruin of his country and people.⁷

Some allusions in Brutus are particularly directed at the French system. Voltaire does not hesitate to protest against a criminal procedure which fails to safeguard the individual: "Arrêter un Romain sur de simples soupçons,/"

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Havens, G.R. Selections from Voltaire, p. 34.

C'est agir en tyrans, nous qui les punissons " (M.II, p. 361)⁸. Voltaire raises the question of which body should have punitive power in Act I when Arons asks Brutus: "Est-ce à vous de prétendre aux droit de le punir." (M.II, p. 330) By extension, it may be deduced that Voltaire was attacking the right of nobles to administer justice in their domains, a right which stems from feudal times. Ultimately, Voltaire's protest against this practice was to help lead to the formulation of the more human Code pénal (1810) of Napoleon and his collaborators.

Brutus' fierce patriotism does not seem to fulfill a philosophical purpose. Brutus puts his country first, as did Voltaire, who had never intended to stay in England. Although cosmopolitan in outlook - thanks to extended stays in Holland and England, and to the opportunity to compare various forms of government at first hand - Voltaire's sincere desire was always to return to France and to improve the social condition of his country men at the time.

It is not known whether Voltaire was making a contemporary reference to abuse or incompetence by ministers when he

⁸ Moland notes: M. Villemain, dans sons Cours de Littérature, raconte que, sous la Terreur, on remplaçait ces deux vers par ceux-ci:

Arrêter un Romain sur un simple soupçon,
Ne peut être permis qu'en révolution.

(Tableau de la littérature au XVIIIe siècle, tome 1, p. 192).
(M.II, p. 371)

has Brutus say: "A ce perfide Arons il vendait sa patrie." (M.II, p. 372) Brutus' reproach to the king, Tarquin, may well apply to Colbert de Torcy. Colbert de Torcy, the counterpart of Bolingbroke at the negotiations culminating in the Treaty of Utrecht, was so unsuccessful that France lost part of Canada and key-cities such as Dunkirk. Although incompetent, Colbert de Torcy could not be accused of corruption and it is doubtful that Voltaire was referring to this incidental case. It may be presumed that Voltaire was advancing a more general truth about the various abuses of ministers.

It would be a mistake to presume that Voltaire was only attacking abuses of the established regime in Brutus. If this were so Voltaire would have gone down in history as basically a person of negative outlook. What has not been observed with Brutus is that the critic is not dealing with a simple hymn in honour of some vague republican liberty and of its republican government. The sympathies of the spectator are not always with Brutus. The point of view of those who support royalty is presented with as much reason and force by Messala, Tullie and Arons.

That Voltaire felt that the ideal government is difficult to attain is evident from the fact that he inserted a philosophical dialogue in the first act. The following passage shows the technique and the daring of the philosophical dialogues as it raises the fundamentals of political

responsibility:

Arons

Quels dieux ont donc changé les droits des souverains?
 Quel pouvoir a rompu des noeuds jadis si saints?
 Qui du front de Tarquin ravit le diadème?
 Qui peut de vos serments vous dégager?

Brutus

Lui-même.

.....
 Songez qu'en ce lieu même, à cet autel auguste,
 Devant ces mêmes dieux, il jura d'être juste.
 De son peuple et de lui tel était le lien:
 Il nous rend nos serments lorsqu'il trahit le sien;
 Et dès qu'aux lois de Rome il ose être infidèle,
 Rome n'est plus sujette, et lui seul est rebelle.

(M.II, p. 330)

These are no mere boutades against tyrants fitted in to perfect the plot. Voltaire was here raising the question of the right of the people to revolt against their ruler. Sixty years later, this question would become one of the dilemma's of the Revolution. Arons conveys the royalist's point of view when he first raises the moral issue: "Un fils ne s'arme point contre un coupable père." (M.II, p. 331) Therefore, a sudden revolution is disapproved of: "Trahir toutes les lois en voulant les venger, Et renverser l'Etat au lieu de le changer." (M.II, p. 331)

A subtle aspect of the right to rebel and the consequences of rebellion is brought out by Messala. Voltaire stresses that the results of rebellion cannot be foreseen, that they may indeed be totally different from what was expected at the outset:

Que dis-je? ce consul, ce héros que l'on nomme
 Le père, le soutien, le fondateur de Rome,
 Qui s'enivre à vos yeux de l'encens des humains,
 Sur les débris d'un trône écrasé par vos mains,
 S'il eût mal soutenu cette grande querelle,
 S'il n'eût vaincu par vous, il n'était qu'un rebelle.
 (M.II, pp. 359-360)

Voltaire is stressing here the relative value of rebellion. Caution should be taken by the citizen lest he should rebel without due consideration and thus causing unnecessary bloodshed. The relativeness of such an act is underlined by the fact that a revolt may turn out to be an act of justifiable pride to shake off the yoke of a despot in a monarchy, whereas the same act would be considered an unjustified revolt in a republic. In this way, Voltaire shows his search for a form of government in which power is shared by the ruler and a legally constituted body.

The quest for a republic as the ideal form of government is weakened by the potential menace of the common people. Voltaire, who felt that the common people, as a mass, were ignorant and had to be governed from above, gives expression to his opinion through Arons. Sometimes the common people in its ignorance just asks for an iron rule: "Des citoyens romains ont demandé des fers!" (M.II, p. 370) Giving in to the common people would mean chaos and surrender "to un peuple indocile et barbare". Arons says as much:

Loin des cris de ce peuple indocile et barbare,
 Que la fureur conduit, réunit et sépare,
 Aveugle dans sa haine, aveugle en son amour,
 Qui menace et qui craint, règne et sert en un jour.
 (M.II, p. 329)

Voltaire did not want the audience to believe that by the mere act of deposing a king all would end well in the best of possible worlds and that despotism would be suppressed. In practice, such a rebellion would only mean a change of ruler. Instead of having one tyrant, the city would be at the mercy of one hundred power-hungry senators whose austerity was only an excuse to rule the country. Messala, often acting as the voice of Voltaire between Brutus and Arons, observes:

Ils osent s'en vanter; mais leur feinte justice,
 Leur âpre austérité que rien ne peut gagner,
 N'est dans ces coeurs hautains que la soif de régner,
 Leur orgueil foule aux pieds l'orgueil du diadème;
 Ils ont brisé le joug pour l'imposer eux-même.
 (M.II, p. 335)

Messala expresses the same idea in a dialogue with Arons:

Rome a changé de fers; et, sous le joug des grands,
 Pour un roi qu'elle avait, a trouvé cent tyrans.⁹
 (M.II, p. 335)

This desire for power on the part of the senators, and which criticism Voltaire wanted to apply by allusion to the nobility of the time, is at the root of the main complaint of Titus.

Titus exclaims:

L'ambition, l'amour, le dépit, tout m'accable;
 De ce conseil de rois l'orgueil insupportable
 Méprise ma jeunesse et me refuse un rang
 Brigué par ma valeur, et payé par mon sang.
 (M.II, p. 340)

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The same idea is expressed by Voltaire in his Lettres philosophiques, p. 39: "Chaque peuple avait cent tyrans au lieu d'un maître."

This unjustified pride and haughtiness was always particularly irksome to Voltaire. This was the same pride which incited le Chevalier de Rohan to ask for Voltaire's banishment, thus interrupting the latter's dramatic career. This pride would contribute to Titus' downfall and could lead only to hypocrisy and false shame, thus opening the way for corruption. Titus observes: "Mais qu'il est accablant de parler de sa honte!" (M.II, p. 340) Voltaire's limited enthusiasm for any particular form of ruler comes out when Messala says:

Je connais trop les grands: dans le malheur amis,
Ingrats dans la fortune, et bientôt ennemis:
Nous sommes de leur gloire un instrument servile,
Rejeté par dedain dès qu'il est inutile,
Et brisé sans pitié s'il devient dangereux.

(M.II, p. 336)

Arons suggests a political form of government, which may well be Voltaire's own. In the dialogue with Brutus, he suggests that a republican liberty may well be under the umbrella of an absolute monarch:

Vous pouvez raffermir, par un accord heureux,
Des peuples et des rois les légitimes noeuds,
Et faire encor fleurir la liberté publique
Sous l'ombrage sacré du pouvoir monarchique.

(M.II, p. 331)

Arons feels that the subject is mistaken in thinking that real liberty does not exist in a monarchy:

Souvent la liberté, dont on se vante ailleurs,
Etale auprès d'un roi ses dons les plus flatteurs.

(M.II, p. 343)

Absolute monarchy as a form of government can be a yoke to the

citizens when it is exercised by a tyrant. On the other hand, it may be a benediction when a paternalistic king rules the country. Arons observes: "Affreux sous un tyran, divin sous un bon roi." (M.II, p. 360) Voltaire's ideal form of government is reminiscent of the reign of Henry IV. It was a reign of great achievement for the subjects; they felt that justice was administered in an objective way; the arts flourished which led to refinement and progress of the subjects. Messala conveys the memory of the ideal reign of Henry IV when he says to Tullie:

Daignez nous ramener ces jours où nos ancêtres
 Heureux, mais gouvernés, libres, mais sous des maîtres,
 Pesaient dans la balance, avec un même poids,
 Les intérêts du peuple et la grandeur des rois.
 (M.II, p. 360)

Another aspect, typical of the philosophy of monarchists of the time, is their recognition of the limits of human endeavour. Although firm believers in the nation of progress for the ultimate happiness of the people, these monarchists make allowances for the mistakes of man. On the other hand, the Jacobean fervour for the extreme knows no compromise and may even lead to bloodshed. Voltaire, through the figure of Arons, indicates that a more moderate objective is more liable to enhance man's chances for progress. Voltaire-philosophe, realized that progress is a painful and slow development. This humble concept contained at the same time a moral lesson in humility for the proud and self-righteous nobility of the

time. Arons observes: "Quel homme est sans erreur? et quel roi sans faiblesse?" (M.II, p. 330) The limits of human endeavour are stressed again by Arons when he takes up the defense of the expelled King. Arons condones empiricism rather than dogmatism; he feels that kings and mankind learn through their faults and consequently should not be judged too harshly:

Instruit par le malheur, ce grand maître de l'homme,
Tarquin sera plus juste et plus digne de Rome.
(M.II, p. 331)

Voltaire advanced his ideas of war in Brutus. Two camps are opposed: the royalists and the republicans. If a contemporary reference is to be found it may be that Voltaire was referring to the wars of prestige waged by Louis XIV. These wars had caused great physical suffering and had almost brought financial ruin to the country. Perhaps more important, Voltaire was making a distinction between what Pomeau in La Politique de Voltaire (p. 112) calls a preventive war and a war of attack. Voltaire's position upon this important issue becomes clearer upon examining the exploits of Titus, the celebrated soldier. Valérius, in his praise of Titus' exploits in Act I, said he had repulsed the tyrant. Voltaire here condones a war of defense and, by implication, condemns a war of attack.

Voltaire's decision to have Titus condemned to death shows his concept of the place of the individual in the

early eighteenth century. From the dramatic point of view, Titus is an extension of the Corneillean hero who should place duty above nature. Yet the political implication seems to go beyond this seventeenth-century dramatic and political concept. Voltaire felt at this stage of his life that the law was the only guarantee of a collective order. This concept might mean a solution for Titus' conflict as the latter has to admit to his regret:

Nous sommes ennemis. . . La nature, la loi
 Nous impose à tous deux un devoir si farouche.
 (M.II, p. 357)

The only possible transcendence for Titus is to resort to the law. This concept of Voltaire's is borne out by Brutus who, throughout the play, defends his motives and acts as being based upon the law.

Voltaire, then, is not putting forward a new form of government in Brutus. The contrast of monarchy with the republican form of government leads to what Sonet calls "un balance de gouvernement". Pomeau in La Politique de Voltaire (p. 104) perhaps best expresses this idea:

"Perfection d'un corps politique obtenu par l'équilibre de forces compensées." To say, as Trusten Wheeler Russell does, that "the didactic purpose of his plays is always evident" is somewhat over-simplifying. In contrasting two forms of government, Voltaire is indeed far away from that kind of play that later would be known as a pièce à thèse.

Brutus is a very objective expression of political ideas and the audience is left to choose whichever form of government it thinks proper. This very relativism does not prevent Voltaire from defending and arguing in favour of certain inalienable rights such as civil liberty and the security of the individual. If these rights are infringed upon by the king, the people are entitled to revolt. Again Voltaire stresses the unpredictable consequences of such an act: a rebellion by the king's subjects may lead to a tyranny which is even more oppressive than an absolute monarchy, while a government of lesser tyrants is the worst of all possible forms of government. This objective message, humanitarian in essence, was given by Voltaire for the consideration of his audience.

CHAPTER V -- THE DEIST CHURCH OF BRUTUS

Brutus contains many references to religion and its language indicates that Voltaire is conscious of the particular force of religious expressions. Characters express themselves often in religious terms when they refer to destiny and the gods. The expressions mostly used are ciel and dieux.

When characters use the word ciel, the reference is to a force outside of the individual. Characters refer to le ciel as to a force which controls their lives to a certain degree and from which they can claim protective power. Similarly, they often refer to les dieux in the same sense. Broadly speaking, the conspirators refer less often to le ciel than the republicans. Arons, the main conspirator, invokes the gods only once in Act I: "Quels dieux ont donc changé les droits des souverains." (M.II, p. 330)

Brutus opens the play with a reference to the gods in the plural. He mentions the gods in a sentence about the laws, thus underlining the equality of the gods and the laws of Rome:

Destructeurs des tyrans, vous qui n'avez pour rois
Que les dieux de Numa, vos vertus et nos lois,
Enfin notre ennemi commence à nous connaître.
(M.II, p. 327)

Brutus refers again to the gods in plural form when he says: "Ces dieux qu'il outragea" (M.II, p. 330) and: "leurs juges sont les dieux". (M.II, p. 331) Tullie refers also to the

gods in plural form when she expresses her amazement that Titus does not respond to her love. Here the reference to the gods becomes a pained cry of wonder and indignation: "Dieux! il m'évite encore." (M.II, p. 354) Brutus refers to God in the singular when he observes: "Qu'il révère en ces lieux le dieu qui nous rassemble." (M.II, p. 328) Again, later in the same act, Brutus refers to a single god: "Numa, qui fit nos lois, y fut soumis lui-même" (M.II, p. 331) and closes the play with his final thanks to the gods: "Rome est libre: il suffit. . .Rendons grâces aux dieux." (M.II, p. 381) Voltaire's use, then, of the singular and plural does not lend itself to a logical conclusion and no pattern can be discovered in the use of dieu or dieux.¹

Further reference to some ultimate power is expressed by the use of the words destin and sort. Guizot in Dictionnaire des synonymes defines the two in the following terms: "Le sort est aveugle et tient du hasard: le destin semble posséder quelques idées de science et de prévoyance . . .On résiste au sort, on peut échapper au sort: mais on se soumet au destin, on n'échappe pas au destin."

¹ Brutus contains twenty-one references to le dieux, and four to dieu. Reference to le ciel is made eleven times, seven times to le sort, eight times to le destin and once to les destins.

This blindness of fate is expressed by Tullie: "Mon sort est en vos mains." (M.II, p. 355) or again when she observes: "le sort, dont la rigueur à m'accabler s'attache". This reference to fate implies sometimes a complete helplessness on the part of the characters: "Sort qui nous a rejoints, et qui nous désunis " (M.II, p. 359); or again:

Il est, il est des rois, j'ose vous le dire,
Qui mettraient en vos mains le sort de leur empire.
(M.II, p. 342)

Yet there is little perceptible difference in meaning in Voltaire's use of the word sort or destin. Destin, on the one hand, leaves some scope for control by the characters. When Tullie has decided that she loves Titus and that she wants to share his responsibilities, she observes: "J'ai réglé mon destin." (M.II, p. 366) When Arons is referring to Titus' future in a dialogue with the latter in Act IV, he observes:

Hélas! que pour vous deux
J'attendais en secret un destin plus heureux!
(M.II, p. 363)

No confusion is intended in any of these cases, but it is doubtful whether Voltaire meant any distinction in the use of destin and sort.

Sometimes the impression is created that both king and subjects are to a large degree dependent of the gods rather than of fate. When Brutus, in Act I, says to Arons that the laws of the republic are sacred, Arons

retorts that the laws of kings are as sacred as those of Rome - the kings will be judged by these gods:

Les droits des souverains sont-ils moins précieux?
 Nous sommes leurs enfants; leurs juges sont les dieux.
 (M.II, p. 331)

Destiny in Brutus sometimes seems subject to le ciel. When Tullie feels that she will be sure to win the heart of Titus, she observes: "Le ciel à mes desirs eût destiné Titus." Yet, at other times, characters resort to the gods rather than to le ciel as the ultimate power. This power, then, is often seen as a help to which the characters can address themselves, especially when in distress. An instance occurs when Albin announces to Titus that Arous can see him. Titus, at this moment, knows that he is going to lose Tullie and in his distress turns to the gods. He exclaims: "O dieux de Rome! O dieux de ma patrie." (M.II, p. 361) A variation upon the dependence by the characters upon the gods rather than upon le ciel is given by Brutus in Act V. When he learns that Titus has been executed according to the laws and to his will, Brutus thanks the gods for the just course which he considers matters have taken. He observes: "Rome est libre: il suffit. . . Rendons grâces aux dieux." (M.II, p. 381) Yet no consistent distinction between Voltaire's use of these terms seem to warrant a logical conclusion; the measure of dependence of one upon the other is minimal. Broadly speaking, it may be said that some power exercises

its influence upon the characters and it may be worthwhile to examine the reactions of the characters to this power. An examination of Voltaire's changing attitude towards God and destiny throws a strong light upon the attitudes of the heroes towards destiny and religion in Brutus.

A distinction can be drawn between Voltaire's conception of God and the relation of early eighteenth century man to his gods. This distinction shows that Voltaire had a different attitude to the gods before 1726, as expressed in the Epître à Uranie, written in 1716. Voltaire, before his stay in England, sees the gods very much in two absolute ways: the God who punishes, le Dieu vengeur, and the God who remunerates, le Dieu rémunérateur. In that poem Voltaire expressed his metaphysical anguish in his appeal to the Gods for an answer to his religious dilemma:

Un Dieu que je devrais haïr,
 Un Dieu qui nous forma pour être misérables,
 Qui nous donna des cœurs coupables
 Pour avoir droit de nous punir.

(Epître à Uranie. M.II, p. (i))

Oedipe, performed in 1718, showed that Voltaire was already struggling with these two concepts. In Oedipe, Voltaire showed that he had not yet completely come to terms with himself, that he had not yet decided what value he could attribute to religion and what purpose it could have for man for his ultimate happiness. Pomeau notes:

Voltaire a écrit Oedipe pour exprimer l'horreur du Dieu terrible. Il y a fait passer un frémissement qui porte à croire que l'angoisse de son personnage ne lui est pas étrangère. . . . Voltaire connaît sans doute l'angoisse du Dieu terrible, mais, avec lui, Oedipe, il refuse cette angoisse.²

Here Voltaire's stay in England proved to have an influence upon his earlier doubts about the functional role of religion, as it did on his political views. The comparison between the various sects with their different and sometimes strange creeds and rituals did not fail to strengthen Voltaire's idea that religion was a very relative institution. Ultimately it was to lead to the view that deism is the form of religion best suited to a society in which men sought progress and happiness on earth. The usefulness of the comparison of the various sects is confirmed by Pomeau:

D'autre part. . . .Voltaire ne connaît que deux 'portraits' du Dieu chrétien, tandis qu'après le séjour en Angleterre, il tirera argument de la diversité des sectes.³

Brutus, on the other hand, does not show the cruel gods of the Épître à Uranie any more. The idea of Oedipe, where the gods are to a high degree the villains, cruel in their treatment of

² Pomeau, La Religion de Voltaire, p. 87.

³ op. cit., p. 110.

the main hero, Oedipe, is no longer entertained in Brutus. Voltaire seems to have decided exactly what his attitude to religion was before he started writing Brutus and a study of the characters will show that the notion of God in Brutus has more than one feature.

Brutus is firmly convinced that the gods are on his side. In the first act, as he sets himself up as the defender of Rome, he acknowledges the gods of Rome as his helpers and superiors. Brutus maintains this conviction till the very end of the play when it has been proven that the laws have been adhered to, and when gratitude is due to the gods for a just course of events. Brutus exclaims at the end of Act V:

"Rome est libre: il suffit. . .rendons grâces aux dieux."

(M.II, p. 381) Brutus' attitude towards religion can be seen in two ways: first, his attitude towards his family and, second, his attitude towards religion in his capacity as a Roman consul.

At no point in Brutus does Brutus want to impose religion upon his family. This does not prevent Tullie from seeing him as a Dieu terrible who ultimately could turn out to be a Dieu vengeur. When Tullie, in Act IV, feels that Brutus is the only obstacle to her marrying Titus, she observes:

"L'ingrat me touche encore, et Brutus à mes yeux
Paraît un dieu terrible armé contre nous deux."

(M.II, p. 365)

Yet it is unlikely that Voltaire was referring to the Dieu vengeur of the Old Testament. Tullie's comparison of Brutus

to a Dieu terrible seems to be more a figure of speech inherited from the Middle Ages, and no religious connotations for the eighteenth-century can be discovered.

In his personal life, Brutus acknowledges that his faculties were given him by a Superior Being. When he feels that his advanced age prevents him from taking command of the defence of Rome, he recognizes that this was the will of the gods: "Dans mon âge débile les dieux ne m'ont donné qu'un courage inutile;" (M.II, p. 369) At other times he recognizes that the gods honoured him with the gift of two sons: "De deux fils que j'aimai les dieux m'avaient fait père;" (M.II, p. 379) Brutus, then, at no point in the play shows a bitterness towards the gods. That Brutus, with soul and body, recognizes the superiority of the gods need not necessarily mean that Voltaire was attacking Locke's notion of sensationalism. The most obvious explanation for the absence of sensationalist notions in Brutus seems to be that they had not matured in Voltaire's mind enough for him to put them in dramatic form.

The respect of the gods by Brutus is also reflected in the attitude of Brutus in his rôle of consul. Brutus recognizes that the throne of state which Tullie is going to take is a gift of the gods. He observes:

Allez, et que du trône, où le ciel vous appelle,
L'inflexible équité soit la garde éternelle.

(M.II, p. 358)

Brutus sees the gods as the protectors of the people, but of the people of Rome only:

Pardonnez-nous, grands dieux, si le peuple romain
A tardé si longtemps à condamner Tarquin.

(M.II, p. 332)

Yet Brutus' language sometimes becomes oratorical rather than an expression of his inner conviction of the will of the gods. Brutus is onesided in that he thinks that the gods will condone his just cause. Brutus first takes a decision and only then consults the gods. In other words, his trust in the god's is of a limited nature. He implores the gods to protect the people from an undesirable fate: "Dieux, donnez-nous la mort plutôt que l'esclavage." (M.II, p. 371) On the other hand, the seemingly paradoxical attitude of Brutus towards the gods should not deter the critic from further examining Brutus' behaviour. This paradox has been noted by Pomeau who observes: "L'incrédulité du déiste était traversé de certains actes de foi."⁴

Another aspect of Brutus the consul is an attitude reminiscent of a Church Father. Brutus sees himself as a father and protector of the senate and of Rome. When he decides to allow Arons a hearing, he feels that he has to talk in the name of the people. He observes: "Brutus en

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Pomeau, op. cit., p. 36.

est le père et doit parler pour elle." (M.II, p. 329) It is not known whether Voltaire was referring here to the quarrels brought about by the promulgation of the Bull, Unigenitus; these quarrels, no doubt, were still fresh in the audience's mind. It is possible that in making Brutus father of the senate and of the people of Rome, Voltaire wanted to show that the clergy should not interfere with the right of the consuls. Yet, Brutus is not a tragedy in which hostility to the clergy is often explicit.

The only direct attack upon the clergy in Brutus comes from Brutus himself. Brutus feels that the loss of liberty of the kings of Porsenna and their subjects is partly due to the clergy. When Brutus cites the reasons for what he considers to be the decline of the monarchy, he observes:

Esclaves de leurs rois, et même de leurs prêtres,
 Les Toscans semblent nés pour servir sous des maîtres,
 Et, de leur chaîne antique adorateurs heureux,
 Voudraient que l'univers fût esclave comme eux.

(M.II, p. 331)

Yet it would be oversimplifying to deduce from this statement by Brutus that Brutus is an anti-clerical play. Voltaire was too versatile a man to concentrate on one subject, the clergy only. The problem in Brutus is not a struggle against the clergy, but rather the problem of transition of religion from one historical period to another. In other terms, the question of religion in Brutus for Voltaire is how to explain and use

religion for the progress of eighteenth century man. This problem is reflected in Brutus' attitude as he sometimes looks up towards the gods - the vertical spiral - but who more often takes the initiative into his own hands - the horizontal relation of man with the gods. The alternance in Brutus' attitude poses once again the question of superiority in the relation of man and God.

Although basically faithful to the gods, Brutus as a man soon takes action according to his own judgements rather than relying upon the gods. When he learns in Act V that his sons were conspirators, he expresses his grief in a monologue to the gods: "Et contre votre ouvrage armez-vous mes enfants?" (M.II, p. 376) Yet, when the gods give no answer to his grief, he proceeds to act independently of the gods. Voltaire implies here that it is man himself who makes the laws which even the gods have to follow. Although Brutus talks about the "Dieux vengeurs de nos lois" (M.II, p. 376) it is Brutus himself who applies the law. Brutus observes: "Numa, qui fit nos lois, y fût soumis lui-même." (M.II, p. 331) It is probable that Voltaire was here criticizing such kings as Louis XIV who made, for example, such pronouncements as: "L'Etat, c'est moi"; the myth that God and King were one. The audience learned through Brutus that the laws may be heavenly inspired, but more important, that man makes them and that both subject and king have to adhere to them.

Brutus, then, in his personal life as well as in office, seems to be genuine in his religious convictions. He considers religion as a moral criterion to uplift the citizens of Rome and its senate. At no point in the play does he query the existence of a Superior Being or does he express a metaphysical anguish.

Arons, Brutus' counterpart and defender of the cause of royalism, also expresses himself in religious terms. One instance is when Arons reproaches Brutus and the senate for having broken their oath of loyalty to the kings of Porsenna. Arons observes: "Qui peut de vos serments vous dégager?" (M.II, p. 330) He refers once to the gods as that power which bestows authority upon the kings. Yet it is doubtful whether Arons is genuine for he is in the process of convincing Tullie to try to win over Titus, "Ce grand appui de Rome et son dieu tutélaire." (M.II, p. 353) Arons usually refers to the gods to appease the senate, as in the dialogue with Brutus in the first act. This dialogue takes the form of a débat religieux. The reconstruction of this scene in Act I is as follows:

Brutus

Pardonnez-nous, grands dieux, si le peuple romain
A tardé si longtemps à condamner Tarquin.

.....
O Mars, dieu des héros, de Rome, et des batailles,
Qui combat avec nous, qui défend ses murailles.
Sur ton autel sacré. Mars, reçois nos serments
Pour ce sénat, pour moi, pour tes dignes enfants.
.....

Arons, avançant vers l'autel
 Et moi, sur cet autel qu'ainsi vous profanez,
 Je jure au nom du roi que vous abandonnez,
 Au nom de Porsenna, vengeur de sa querelle,
 A vous, à vos enfants, une guerre immortelle.
 (M.II, p. 332)

Voltaire, no doubt, was fully aware of the implications when he has both a royalist and a republican pledge an oath. The symbolism of this act with regard to ritual would not have escaped the attentive audience of the 1730's.

Voltaire, in the preface to Brutus, expressed the opinion that tragedy should retain an equilibrium between pompe and spectacle. This dramatic concept entails the extreme simplicity of the ritual in Act I and brings out Voltaire's desire for the demystification of religion and rites. This simple ritual, then, can be seen as one of the first expressions of Voltaire's attacks on myths in the forms of rituals. The introduction of two opposing parties in a temple could only bring about a sense of relativism with regard to religion. This relativism comes out in a study of Titus' behaviour.

Titus, as Brutus and Arons, shows reverence for the gods. When tempted to give in to the conspirators, he exclaims: "Dieu qui me secourez, je suis encor Titus."
 (M.II, p. 361) Like Brutus, Titus resorts in the final analysis to decisions made independently of the gods. Titus recognizes his free will, detached from the gods: "Non,

crois-moi, l'homme est libre au moment qu'il veut l'être."

(M.II, p. 341) Whereas Voltaire's Oedipe died at the hands of the gods, Titus' death is brought about by man-made laws. It may be conjectured that if Titus had not sinned against the law, the gods would not have been able to change the free will of Titus. Brutus' decision to have Titus condemned to death is of a moral nature. If any religious influence was inherent in Brutus' final decision this may well be a simplified version of manicheism which did not allow for mercy in justice.

Brutus' civil law, based upon a narrow distinction between good and bad is in essence religious, yet leaves no scope for a revision of Brutus' final judgement to condemn his son to death. This rigid concept seems paradoxical, having been brought in by such a liberal thinker as Voltaire. The explanation may well lie in the fact that Voltaire simply wanted to remain faithful to the story of Brutus as narrated by Livy. In addition, punishment by death was seen at the time as a powerful deterrent to crime. Titus, like Brutus, respects the gods, but takes worldly decisions when they are called for. As Brutus and Arons, Titus' dealings with the gods show that they take a second place in Brutus after the decisions of man.

Tullie, as do the other characters, reveres the gods. When she fears that Titus will make the wrong decision, she

expects some guidance and moral support from the gods. She exclaims: "Inspirez-lui, grands dieux le parti qu'il doit prendre." (M.II, p. 356) She does not become bitter when her prayers are not heeded. When she is taken into custody by the guards, she does not have to resort to suicide as she promised when she could not win the heart of Titus:

Je jure à tous les dieux qui vengent les parjures,
Que mon bras, dans mon sang effaçant mes injures,
Plus juste que le tien, mais moins irrésolu,
Ingrat, va me punir de t'avoir mal connu;
Et je vais. . .

(M.II, p. 367)

Tullie, then, sees the gods very much as a means for moral support.

Brutus, thus, shows Voltaire's quest for a useful purpose of religion. All characters recognize a certain form of a Superior Being. The contrasting attitude of two parties towards religion could not fail to bring about a sense of relativism, a relativism which would ultimately find its expression in the much quoted citation from Voltaire: "Si Dieu n'existait pas, il faudrait l'inventer."

The lack of an absolute god in Brutus need not offend the religious zealots but could well please the liberal spectators in the audience. Voltaire-philosopher was at his very best here because the débat religieux could not fail to act in an iconoclastic way. This was no god for fanatics nor for atheists; Voltaire's god is an essential one, as its concept opens a way for the future; Voltaire's conception

of religion offered early eighteenth-century man a god, essentially ethic, able to give moral support and to act as a regulating force for friend and foe alike.

CHAPTER VI - THE FATE OF BRUTUS

Voltaire's fears that Brutus would be a failure proved unfounded. The attendance on the first night was one of the highest recorded up to that time. (Best.375) The Mercure de France comments upon its presentation at the court in December, 1730:

La tragédie nouvelle de Brutus de M. de Voltaire, fut représentée à la Cour le samedi 30, de ce mois, avec un très grand succès; on le donna le lendemain sur le Théâtre François pour la neuvième fois et toujours avec beaucoup d'applaudissement.

(December, 1730, p. 380)

The paper rated it above Voltaire's previous works and praised him for the pains he took to guide the actors during the rehearsals. The Mercure de France stressed the high qualities required from the actor who wanted to play the title rôle of Brutus:

. . . que l'on regarde dans Paris comme l'Ouvrage Dramatique que M. de Voltaire ait le mieux écrit, mais qui exige une grande exécution, extrêmement difficile and nécessaire, pour avoir un long succès au théâtre.

(December, 1730, p. 382)

Voltaire had constantly worried about the title rôle. He knew that the role of Brutus had to be played with energy and he strove, but in vain, to persuade the actor Sarazzin to play with the necessary vigour. Lancaster, in French Tragedy in the Time of Louis XV and Voltaire (p. 15) notes:

"Though he (Sarazzin) subsequently acted in a number of plays by Voltaire, the dramatist reproved him for lack of force when he played the title rôle in Brutus."

Receipts from Brutus started to decline after the performances in December, 1730. They fell from 5065 livres for the initial performance on December 11, 1730 to 660 livres on January 17, 1731. By this time, the public had started to comment upon Brutus and this criticism was published in the Mercure de France. Certain critics alleged that Voltaire's Brutus bore a striking resemblance to a play of the same name by Mlle. Bernard. Some critics went so far as to accuse Voltaire of plagiarism. On the other hand, other critics felt that no imitation was involved. An anonymous comtesse took up the defense of Voltaire when she wrote to the Mercure de France. She refers at the same time to a parody which was written about Brutus:

J'avais reçu à ma Campagne une pièce Burlesque, ou espèce d'Arrêt de Momus, par lequel ce Dieu, qui n'épargne pas les Dieux mêmes, condamnoit M. de Voltaire à la restitution de sept ou huit cent Vers pillés dans l'ancien Brutus de Mlle. Bernard. J'ai été ravie pour la gloire de mon Héros versifiant de réduire ce nombre exorbitant à cinq ou six hémistiches que sa mémoire lui a dictés à l'insçu de son esprit.

(Mars, 1731, p. 121)

Further charges of imitation came from England. Brutus was translated into English by William Duncombe as early as 1732. This time the charge of imitation came from an article in the Prompter. According to Lounsbury in

Shakespeare and Voltaire (pp. 75-76) the Prompter of

February 18, 1735, commented as follows:

Everybody knew it was (and the author gave it no more than) a translation from Mr. de Voltaire, who has not only taken the hint from our own countryman Lee's Brutus, but coldly imitated his finest scenes.

Much of the confusion seems to have arisen from the fact that Voltaire was always reluctant to indicate his sources. Lion notes: "Mais avec lui (Voltaire) il faut faire attention, car nous verrons qu'il n'aime guère citer ses sources."¹ Secondly, Moland goes to great lengths to examine certain of Voltaire's borrowings and he found only a few. One such instance would be a borrowing from Father Porée: "Terminez mes forfaits, mon désespoir, ma vie." (M.II, p. 380) Yet these cases are so incidental that they do not warrant the charge of imitation. In the final analysis, Voltaire's own statement can be regarded as an accurate estimate of his indebtedness to his predecessors. Reportedly, he remarked: "S'il y a imitation, j'ai été plagiaire sans le savoir."

Brutus met with varying success in the years between 1731 and 1790.² The play was performed in the provinces,

¹Lion, H. Les tragédies et les théories dramatiques de Voltaire, p. 45.

²Lancaster, H.C. French Tragedy in the Time of Louis XV and Voltaire, pp. 625-626.

The record of performances for the three plays is as follows: Oedipe (336 from November 18, 1718 till May, 1774); Brutus (110 from December 17, 1730 till May 1774) and Zaire (479 from August 13, 1732 till May, 1774).

notably in Caen in 1731. The Mercure de France commented upon this performance:

Brutus, Tragédie de M. de Voltaire, représentée au Collège de la très-célèbre Université de Caen, pour la distribution solennelle des Prix, donnez par Noble Homme Jacques Maheult de Sainte-Croix, Proviseur du même Collège, le Jeudi 31. Juillet. . . Nous avons cependant remarqué une licence que Mrs. de Caen se sont donnée en faisant paroître au second Acte, Julie chargée de chaînes, déclarant à Algint, sa Confidante, son amour pour Titus. Ces chaînes ont apparamment paru plus touchantes, et devoir produire un plus grand effet sur le Théâtre Normand, qui s'impathise peut-etre un peu avec le Théâtre Anglois.

(August, 1731, p. 101)

These incidental performances were not to match the success of Brutus in the years 1790-1793. The patriotism of Brutus appealed to the public of the 1790's and a certain part of the audience asked for the presentation of Brutus. Moland notes: "Depuis longtemps, une partie du public. . ., sollicitait vivement la reprise de Brutus, tragédie de Voltaire, et les comédiens se rendirent enfin à ses vœux le 17 Novembre, 1790." (M.II, p. 305) Brutus now became une pièce de circonstance because of the political interpretation given to it by the audience.

There were two opposing camps in this political interpretation. The audience could easily detect striking similarities to the political situation of the time. The most common interpretation, in the light of current political events, was to equate Rome with Paris. It was easy to deduce

that the senators stood for the Constitutional Assembly, whereas the expelled kings of Porsenna were seen as the Bourbon Monarchy. While royalists applauded the conspiracy between Arons and Messala, revolutionaries tried to have the more liberal maxims repeated. Moland notes that pandemonium broke loose during the first performance of Brutus in November, 1790. This occurred at the moment when Brutus exclaimed: "Dieux! donnez-nous la mort plutôt que l'esclavage!" (M.II, p. 371) The tumult caused the authorities to take precautionary measures for the safety of the public.

By November, 1790, debate became so heated that the authorities were obliged to prohibit the carrying of any offensive weapon during the performance of Brutus. Moland notes the following public statement by the authorities:

Conformément aux ordres de la municipalité, le public est prévenu que l'on entrera sans cannes, bâtons, épées et sans aucune espèce d'armes offensives.

(M.II, p. 306)

The years 1790-1793 saw the performance of Brutus in the provinces. Its presentation was promoted by the supporters of republicanism who hoped to win votes for their cause and who saw in Brutus an appeal to the patriotism of the audience. Yet when performed in traditional royalist cities such as Lyon, Angers and Cambrai the play met with remarkable indifference.

Kennet N. McKee notes that when Brutus was due to start

in Lyon, royalists leaped on the stage and shouted: "Point de Brutus."³ The rest of the audience and the actors gave in and Richard, Coeur de Lion was performed. A similar fate befell Brutus when it was performed in the same year in Lille.

Being now connected with political circumstances, it comes as no surprise that the popularity of Brutus was to wane with the change that took place in the political system of the 1790's. The too rigorous republicanism no longer appealed to audiences after the fall of Robespierre. The play was only occasionally performed till the advent of Napoleon. Brutus was performed before Napoleon who did not like the play.⁴ Given that Napoleon was to censor the theatre shortly afterwards,⁵ his dislike for Brutus comes as no surprise; the liberal and democratic form of government proposed in Brutus did not fit into Napoleon's political system. Thus, the play was no further performed and McKee notes that to his knowledge the play was not revived after the showing to Napoleon in 1804.

³ McKee, Kennet N. "Brutus during the French Revolution", Modern Languages Notes, February, 1941, p. 105.

⁴ Ibid., p. 106.

⁵ See Hallays-Dabot, l'Histoire de la censure théâtrale en France, (Paris: 1862).

CONCLUSION

The relatively few performances of Brutus show that the play was not a success from a dramatic point of view. Voltaire realized this failure, as he called Brutus 'une pièce défectueuse'. (M. XXXIII, p. 221) He felt rightly that Brutus did not come up to the expectations, especially with regard to theatrical action and spectacle, as envisaged in the preface to Brutus.

The existence of two plots, one centering around Titus' love for Tullie, the other around the conspiracy, breaks the play in two separate entities, and causes a divided interest; all too often the spectator asks himself whether he is witnessing a love affair or a conspiracy. The charge against Voltaire of destroying the unity of action and of interest is felt all the more, as Voltaire emphasized in the preface that, if love is present in a play, it should be the main issue. Even Titus' love is not an entity within itself. It is felt that his love would have been more convincing if Voltaire had not given secondary 'vices' such as pride and ambition to this character. In addition, the existence of two plots prevents the audience from getting to know the inner life of Tullie and of Brutus. Disparity between the action of the play and the action as envisaged in the preface extends in breadth rather than in depth.

The audience looks in vain for the poignant and pathetic scenes which Voltaire may have witnessed in tragedies he saw in England. La Harpe called Act V "un chef-d'oeuvre de pathétique". Our study shows that these acts have little inner force and their success often depends upon outer trappings. Voltaire, in his desire to impress the eye as well as move the heart, falls sometimes into a trap of extremes, as for example when Brutus suddenly appears on the stage in Act IV, scene v. Such incidents are melodramatic in nature, as too are the sometimes lighthearted changes of place, reminiscent of English opera of the time. Yet these criticisms are at the same time positive as they lead to a new conception of mise en scène. The wearing of red robes by the senators, the changes of place (assumed sometimes), the 'coup de théâtre' can be seen as a timid move towards the théâtre romantique. And these innovations on the dramatic level are matched by Voltaire's unorthodox attitude towards religion.

Brutus no longer shows the Jansenistic tendencies of the Epître à Uranie. The tone of the play is fundamentally optimistic and no traces of anti-clericalism are present. Voltaire, as philosopher, finds a new purpose for religion in Brutus; he was among the first to promote religion from an ontological position to a functional one. This concept of religion was to have far-reaching consequences upon

eighteenth-century man, as reflected in Titus.

Titus' struggle between his nature and the law is a perfect instance of this religious transition from one period to another. As such it can be seen as a religious struggle which marks the painful transition from the tribe to Voltaire's secular city. Brutus moved no longer in Aquinas' world where nothing can be moulded, adorned or changed. In Brutus, the regularity of the cosmos is no longer determined for all time and consequently unchangeable. Voltaire's merit as a philosophe was that he thus prevented man from falling back into the mythical way of thinking of the Middle Ages. Voltaire's God is an ethical one and Voltaire was the first to transform religion into a social purpose.

The present analysis shows that Voltaire's attitude towards the relationship of art to polemics was still uncertain. Above all, he wished to be a dramatist, and no doubt, this inner conflict had an unfavourable effect upon his artistic achievement in Brutus. More than Oedipe, Brutus is the expression of this conflict and it can be said that, at this time of Voltaire's life, political preoccupations outweighed concern for artistic expression.

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