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VOLTAIRE'S TRAGEDIES

by

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PREFACE

I have endeavoured to trace the chief developments in Voltaire's technique as a dramatist in the following thesis. Taking his twenty-seven tragedies, I have divided them into three groups, roughly corresponding to his changing outlook throughout the sixty years of his writing. 1. The period in which he was most under the influence of Classic tradition 1718-1730; 2. The period of experimental drama, the time of his best work 1730-1760 ; 3. The period of decadence marked by an attempt to portray classic themes while using the technique of melodrama, 1760-1778. Each period is treated separately, emphasis being placed upon his divergencies from classic standards in both subject matter and technique.

I would like to thank the University of Toronto Library for the loan of the 1784-1789 Gotha Ettinger edition of Voltaire's Oeuvres Complètes which have been an invaluable aid, also Professor E. F. Haden of McMaster University for his most helpful criticism and direction of my studies.

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VOLTAIRE'S TRAGEDIES

Although Voltaire's fame as a dramatist has dimmed in the years succeeding his death in 1778, he is undeniably the outstanding French dramatist of the 18th century and was deemed by his contemporaries to be one of the greatest of all time, above Corneille and on a par with Racine. While only Zaire of all his twenty-seven tragedies is now played on the French stage, the audiences of his day acclaimed almost every one as a masterpiece. Voltaire loved the theatre and tragedy passionately. He had his own theatres at Paris, Cirey and Ferney and often took part in his own productions.¹ Voltaire used the tragedy as a vehicle for ideas and purposes that others would deem only fitting for a newspaper article, as a means of spreading political propaganda, with a polemic intention, to display his historical studies and his new ideas on critical theory derived from foreign sources.² A view of his theories in nearly all fields of thought can be gained from a study of the ideas incorporated in his plays.

This essay, however, will deal mainly with the development in his dramatic technique and his divergencies from classic standards in that connection. As Voltaire's ideas on the drama changed considerably throughout the course of the sixty years of his writing we can divide his plays roughly into

^{See}
1. Lanson G., Esquisse d'une histoire de la tragédie française p118.

2. Ibid.

three periods:

1)the period in which he was most under the influence of classic tradition 1718-1730

2)the experimental period ,the time of his best work
1730-1760

3)the period of decadence to the time of his death.1760-1778.

The first period is best typified by Oedipe which, written in 1718,made young Arouet's reputation.The subject is well known-the son,Oedipe,who has unwittingly killed his father,Laius, and wed his mother,Jocaste.Thebes is suffering from disease and famine.The ghost of Laius has given warning that these plagues will continue until his murderer is apprehended and justice meted out.Philoc-tete,an old lover of Jocaste,is at first suspected but,in Act III Oedipe is revealed to be the murderer.The crowning revelation is made in Act V when Oedipe learns that Jocaste is his mother.He blinds himself and goes into exile while Jocaste commits suicide.

Voltaire's adherence to classic standards can be clearly seen in this tragedy.The depiction of high personages and the use of style noble ,verse and the three unities are classical and show young Arouet's enthusiasm for the great works of Racine and the classic masters.A distinction is made between the rules and the bienséances,the mere dramatic proprieties.The latter may vary but the former are fundamental since they are according to good taste.¹ Voltaire prides him-

self on his bon goût. It is supposedly modelled on that of the 17th century masters but is really far from that of Corneille and Racine. The style of Oedipe is noble but it is rather graceful and witty than displaying the simple grandeur of the classic manner.¹ Because of the necessity of conforming to the bienséances, Voltaire is careful not to have any of the characters say or do anything too shocking to the delicate feelings of his audience, in this tale of incest and murder.

Yet there are definite divergencies from the Classicism of the 17th century, even in this first of his plays. The most fundamental difference is that Voltaire does not get his tragic interest from an unfolding of the psychology of the characters but rather depicts them being buffeted by the blows of chance. Oedipe bore himself bravely in the encounter with the arrogant old stranger who wished to dispute his passage and who was killed in the ensuing fight. He did not know that Jocaste was his mother and innocently received her hand as the just reward for his services in ridding Thebes of a ravaging monster. Yet he finds he has committed two horrible crimes and, in his despair, blinds himself and goes into voluntary exile. Only by accident did Jocaste marry her son and she dies reproaching the gods for the results of their handiwork. Thus tragic interest for Voltaire arises from the events which form pathetic situations. It increases when the situa-

1. See Lanson - Voltaire ----- p. 85

tions vary.¹ He believed that psychology unfolds itself and acts too slowly-besides it is hard for the civilized mind to admit of the monstrous passions which create tragic events. His tragic philosophy is one of chance, the play of little causes, coincidences and misunderstandings.² However, Voltaire, through the interest of situations, follows an aim conforming to classic tradition. He wishes to show the soul wounded and suffering even though he does not present the spectacle of a soul preparing for action but one suffering from the event. If he multiplies the situations it is to vary the griefs and complaints of the oppressed soul.³

In the first edition of Oedipe, Voltaire made a startling innovation. He left out all love interest, on the grounds that the theme did not require it to sustain the public's interest. On the refusal of the actors to present it in that form, Voltaire was forced to supply Jocaste with a middle aged lover, Philoctete, and so introduce a note incongruous to present-day readers. Another thing, not at all in accord with classic tradition, is the thinly veiled attack on priests and religion that is evident in this play. Note Philoctete's speech in Act 3, scene 5, -

"Un pontife est souvent terrible aux souverains;
Et, dans son zèle aveugle, un peuple opiniâtre,
De ses liens sacrés imbécile idolâtre,
Soulant par piété les plus saintes des lois,
Croit honorer les dieux en trahissant ses rois;
Surtout quand l'intérêt, père de la licence,
Vient de leur zèle impie enhardir l'insolence."

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1. See Lanson - Esquisse --- de la tragédie française -- p. 119 .
2. Ibid ----- p. 119 .
3. Ibid ----- p. 120

And Jocaste's speech in Act 4, scene 1, -

"Cet organe des dieux est-il donc infaillible?
Un ministère saint les attache aux autels;
Ils approchent des dieux, mais ils sont des mortels.

Non, non: chercher ainsi l'obscur vérité,
C'est usurper les droits de la divinité.
Nos prêtres ne sont point ce qu'un vain peuple pense;
Notre crédulité fait toute leur science.

In the final act of Oedipe there are notes for stage directions and setting, another change from classic drama. We see Phorbas (se jetant aux genoux du roi), Jocaste (se frappant) and the note that (Ici on entend gronder la foudre, et l'on voit briller les éclairs). Although there is not a great deal of this in Oedipe, or in Marianne and the fragments of Artemire, we can see Voltaire's trend to melodrama which will be fully realized in his second period.

On his return from the visit to England which he made in 1727, the great period of his experiments in the drama begins. This period coincides with his most intense philosophe writings, and many of his ideas of this time are reflected in his plays. During his visit to England Voltaire had come into contact with the English stage and the plays of Shakespeare, who was to influence him greatly. Although he took various ideas, details and suggestions from Shakespeare, Voltaire never really respected him. While he has genius and bizarre and gigantic ideas, he is brutal and barbaric with no spark of le bon goût nor any idea of the rules. What Voltaire understands in Shakespeare is his poetry and lyricism, the interest in national subjects, the force of situations and of passions and the power of his dramatic movement. He sees the coldness of French tragedy through Shakespeare.

1. See Lanson - Esquisse --de la tragédie française p116

While Voltaire took many of the ideas for his innovations from the English stage and his own desire and liking for action, in some respects he was but following the trend of the times and the example of contemporary authors. Racine had introduced elements of emotion and poetry that Corneille had more and more neglected. He had re-¹discovered them in the Greeks. Towards the end of the reign of Louis XIV an awakening of sentiment, a taste for tenderness and volupté² was softening the severity of classic art. Opera was showing stage setting to the French public. The nostalgia of the emotion started by Racine took effect on his successors, Campistron and Crébillon, and resulted in a widespread use of extraordinary situations, unnatural passions, incognitos, recognitions in their tragedies and so Voltaire was but following their example to a certain extent. There is also a difference between the invention of Voltaire and that of Corneille and Racine. Voltaire took an abstract idea of a situation, combined the drama according to universal logic and added details of history, legend and local colour. The abstract drama and the form in which he places it are separately conceived and reunited³ after the inspiration. This method of composition leads to the employment of clichés, stock situations and catalogued effects and too often results in the historic colour remaining on the surface, separated from the action of

1. See Lanson, Voltaire ----- p.95

2. Ibid ----- p.95

3. See Lanson-Esquisse ---- -- tragédie française p.118

the play.¹

It is surprising how the plots of these plays of the second period fall into a few patterns. Firstly, there is the hero, moved by a strong sense of strict Roman virtue, who sacrifices filial or paternal love to duty. This is exemplified by Brutus, in the play Brutus, who condemns his son Titus to death in order that future Romans may be kept from all thought of treachery to the state, and by Brutus in La Mort de César, who carries out the plot to murder his father, Julius Caesar, rather than have him live as a menace to the liberty of Rome.

Secondly, there is the hero or heroine who brings about his or her own death because of a misunderstanding: Zulime with its heroine who kills herself because of her love for the already married Ramire, Tancredi, whose hero voluntarily seeks death because he thinks that Aménide has been unfaithful to him, and even Zaire with the Sultan Orosmane who kills himself after stabbing Zaire because of a misunderstanding.

In the third group we have the play ending with the magnanimous gesture of the wronged or offended party. In this group we can include Alzire with Don Gusman forgiving his murderer, Zamore, in the final scene, and L'Orphelin de la Chine in which Gengis Khan pardons Idamé and Zamti for their attempted opposition and resolves to be a magnanimous and truly great emperor in future. (Les Quèbres, Les Scythes and Le Triumvirat, tragedies of the third period, will also fall in this category.)

1. Lanson, Esquisse --- ---tragedie française -p.119

The fourth group has as its central theme the unknown child who is recognized with fatal or near fatal consequences. Cedipe, of the first period, already comes into this class. With it we can put Sémiramis and Eryphile in which the son kills the mother by mistake in the gloomy tomb of the murdered father; Oreste, with the hero who returns to his homeland in disguise and kills his mother, Clytemestre, in attempting to kill the tyrant, Égisthe, : Mahomet with Séide and Palmire who, unknown to themselves, are brother and sister and the children of Zopire, whom Séide murders in his religious frenzy : Zaïre, with Nérestan and Zaïre turning out to be the children of Lusignan, the old hero of the Crusades, who demands that Zaïre promise to embrace the Christian religion and so places her in the difficult situation which leads to a misunderstanding with Crosmene and her death ; Méropé is the example of the nearly fatal recognition when Méropé almost kills her own son by mistake.

Of course all these plays have their various differences in detail and characters but they fit these categories rather well. Mahomet is an exception in that the villain is triumphant although the final impression is that the prophet's triumph turns to dust and ashes on the death of Palmire. A certain amount of overlapping is evident, too, as witness Zaïre, which falls in two categories.^{1.}

Since the same plot patterns are used so frequently

1. If the reader is unfamiliar with the plots and characters of any of these plays he will find them summarized in the Appendix.

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the same results often follow the same situations. The most common result of the child's ignorance of its parents is, of course, the recognition scene when all is made clear. This situation is found in all Voltaire's plays throughout the three periods of his writing, from Oedipe, through the tragedies of group four in the second period, on into various plays of the third period (Les Guèbres, Les Lois de Minos, and Climpie.)

Misunderstandings are probably the next most frequently used device. Crosmans does not know that Nérestan is Zaïre's brother and so thinks that the note sent by Nérestan is an appointment for a lovers' tryst and, in his jealous rage, kills Zaïre. Tancredi believes that Aménaïde has been unfaithful to him and seeks death in battle. Arzace kills his mother, Sémiramis, thinking to kill Assur and Oreste, thinking to stab Égisthe, kills his mother, Clytemnestre. Disguises and incognitos, as in Tancredi and Oreste are other of Voltaire's methods of complicating the plot.

The essential aim is to keep the characters in ignorance of the things one would most expect them to know throughout at least the first three acts of the play. The children of unknown parentage, disguises and the tragic misapprehensions are means to this end.

"Les héros de Voltaire sont des hommes chargés par lui de ne se point connaître, contre toute apparence, et de retarder de toutes leurs forces pendant quatre ou cinq actes le moment de la reconnaissance. Ils y mettent un zèle admirable." 1.

Alzire is a classic example of this, for no character seems

to know things that are apparently common knowledge. Alzire believes that Zamore is dead and so allows herself to be married to Don Gusman. Zamore does not know that Don Gusman is the son of Don Alvire, does not know the whereabouts of Alzire or that she is going to marry Gusman. Alvire is ignorant of the cruelties of his son and is quite astonished to learn why Zamore hates Gusman so much. All this lack of knowledge is quite improbable but at least it makes for four recognitions, divers coups de théâtre and surprises. Yet these scenes really hold up the action of the play." Ce sont amusettes mélodramatiques, étrangères et extérieures au vrai drame... Dans Alzire, si tout le monde se connaissait dès le début, le drame aurait pu valoir beaucoup mieux. Du moins l'auteur aurait eu le temps d'essayer de l'écrire. Il n'aurait pas écourté misérablement une scène hardie et qui pouvait être fort belle: celle où Alzire demande à Gusman, son mari, la grâce de Zamore, son amant."¹.

The frequency with which Voltaire has to resort to these stock situations in order to obtain his dramatic interest is evidence of a serious lack in his powers as a dramatist, that "de faire quelque chose de rien" as expressed by Racine. The qualities of great general truth are lacking. One cause of this may be attributed to the speed with which he wrote his numerous tragedies. Although he rewrote them many times to obtain different effects the main portions of the great majority of his tragedies were written in from four days to a month. Ideas need a long time to really mature². This air of

1. Lemaitre, J., -- Impressions de théâtre ----- p. 14

See
2. Brunetière, Les Époques du théâtre française ---- p. 259

of easy improvisation and facility which his contemporaries¹ applauded is now regarded as his chief fault.

Another cause of his failure to show true dramatic talent is his principle of using very involved situations to obtain his dramatic effects. As a result of this method there is a serious lack of motivation in his characters which become mere puppets, subjected to a series of happenings they are powerless to avoid. The invraisemblance of these particularized situations and coincidences, combined with the lack of motivation and psychology in his characters, removes all qualities of general truth from his drama. So his theatre is too romanesque, too far from nature and truth. Voltaire's wide knowledge of foreign drama enabled him to use situations from these sources and present them as daring innovations to his contemporaries. By having a ready-made store of plots he was able to write his plays at great speed without having to resort to the long and painful cogitation necessary in a really lasting work of art. In a way he is not to be blamed for this. He wanted applause primarily and, getting it, did not feel the need of producing any different and more enduring type of work. At least he provided more for the eye, more movement and spectacle than any one before him.²

Yet, because of his use of complicated plots and spec-

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1. Brunetière, Les Époques du théâtre française---p.260

2. Ibid.-----p.261

tacle, he definitely changed his plays from tragedies to melodramas.

"Mais, enfin, on peut dire, d'une façon très générale, que l'intérêt de la tragédie est surtout dans le développement des caractères et des passions (les personnages se trouvant d'ailleurs engagés dans des situations propres à exciter en eux des sentiments violents), et que l'intérêt du mélodrame est surtout dans des combinaisons extraordinaires d'événements fortuits. Non que ces combinaisons soient toujours absentes de la tragédie: rappelez-vous certaines pièces de Corneille. Mais là même, ce n'est guère que la situation initiale qui est extraordinaire. Cette situation une fois donnée, les conséquences se déroulent et le hasard n'intervient plus que discrètement. Au contraire, dans le mélodrame, un hasard astucieux gouverne les événements d'un bout à l'autre. Les sentiments des personnages y sont simples et faciles à prévoir; leur peinture n'est point l'essentiel. Ce que le mélodrame éveille surtout chez le spectateur, c'est une curiosité un peu grossière." 1.

Voltaire's dramas conform closely to the definition of melodrama. The great place given to the affections naturelles is more a matter of melodrama than tragedy. All the effect of the reconnaisances is based on these affections.

"Un père et une fille, une mère et un fils, qui ne se sont jamais vus, se rencontrent et découvrent tout à coup ce qu'ils sont l'un à l'autre: étonnement, stupeur et en avant "la voix du sang". Voltaire a beaucoup fait parler cette voix-là. C'est lui, j'imagine, qui a inventé "la croix de ma mère". La plupart de ses premiers actes sont remplis de reconnaissances, et les méprises tragiques abondent dans les derniers. Or, méprises et reconnaissances, d'est presque tout le mélodrame." 2.

Voltaire's leaning to melodrama had been evident already in Cedipe but not until the second period does he really let himself go in this type of drama. Although Voltaire never admitted that his plays were anything so vulgar (except perhaps in the preface to Les Scythes when he calls this play

1. Lemaitre, J., Impressions de théâtre----- -- --p.12

2. Ibid-----p.13

a drama) his tragedies are nothing else than pure melodrama. As such, they are considerably cramped by his self-imposed restriction of conforming to the Classic rules of verse, style noble and the three unities. By the necessity of rhyming succeeding lines he must express in a whole line what could be done more effectively in one word. Because of his use of style noble he was prohibited from using the pithy and more succinct expressions of common speech which are used with such wonderful effect in Shakespeare. His taste for involved situations is obviously cramped by the unities of action, time and place, for it is highly invraisemblable that so many events could happen on the one day and in the same place as are presented in Tancredi or L'Orphelin de la Chine for example. Voltaire did not understand that the manner in which he conceived of the drama demanded a larger and more supple form which would allow him to move about freely in time and space. He thought he was remaining entirely classical by observing the mere externals of Classicism.

"Prenez ce qui est comme l'enveloppe de la poétique du 17e siècle: trois unités, distinction rigoureuse des genres, noblesse de ton, merveilleux, éloquence continue, toutes choses qui sont des effets de la conception artistique du grand siècle, et non cette conception même; et cette sorte d'enveloppe et d'écorce, désormais sans substance et sans sève, prenez-la pour l'art lui-même; ayez cette illusion; vous aurez celle de Voltaire, et l'explication, du même coup, de ce qu'il y a, manifestement, d'artificiel, de sec, d'inconsistant et de creux dans l'art de Voltaire et de son groupe." 1.

It will be noticed that the desire for the observance of

the external rules and forms of Classicism becomes even stronger in the third period when the old man rails bitterly against Shakespeare for his non-conformity to the rules while perpetrating as many melodramatic coups de théâtre as can be found in any of Shakespeare's. This taste for melodramatic situations and effects, while restraining them under the narrower and less essential rules of Classicism, is characteristic of Voltaire throughout all three periods of his writing.

Voltaire sought to obtain a more poetic effect through the use of historical colouring and spectacle. He was very proud of the variety of his subjects, modern and exotic subjects in particular.¹ Knights of the Middle Ages, American Indians, Arabs and Chinese were now introduced to the stage of the Comédie Française. Zaïre in 1732, was his first tragedy to depict eastern customs and setting. Yet because of his avoidance of anything shocking, the audience applauded it wildly and, with some justice. Although he wrote the play in twenty two days, we see from his letter to Formont that it was conceived some time before being written. Voltaire apparently carried the idea of Zaïre in his head for quite a while and allowed it to mature instead of putting it into the form of a play immediately as was his

1. See Lanson, G., Esquisse ----- de la tragédie française p.119

usual custom.¹ There is more universality in Zaire than in any other of his plays .The question involved really boils down to one of mixed marriages and this has been a matter of general interest for all times.How much are a father's or brother's rights over a girl of Zaire's age?Zaire must choose between the claims of patriotic religion as personified by Lusignan and her love for the Mohammedan,Crosmane.Our interest lies less in the mistakes and recognitions² than in the humanity of the emotions and characters. For once the author has really steeped himself in his story and characters.The latter are living and sympathetic figures,the former,romantic intrigue though it be, still stirs and seizes with permanent appeal.³ For these reasons Zaire has stayed in the repertoire of the Comédie Française.

Zulime is another play in an exotic setting,namely the north shore of Africa,with Moroccans and Spaniards as its characters.Alzire depicts Peruvian Indians as well as the Spaniards of the century preceding Voltaire's own,this being the closest approach to modern times yet shown on the French stage.The scene of Mahomet,too, is set in the exotic atmosphere of Mecca.Sémiramis is largely Eryphile placed in Babylon instead of Argos and gaining in interest for the parterre thereby because of the added spectacle of

1. See Brunetière, Les Époques du théâtre française-p.264

2. Ibid.-----p. 264

3. Nitze and Dargan, Hist. of French Lit.-----p.418

the exotic setting. The list of foreign climes is completed by L'Orphelin de la Chine which is set in Peking and presents Tartars and cultured Chinese.

Under modern and national subjects as compared with themes and characters from ancient Greco-Roman times, we can include Zaïre and its presentation of Lusignan, one of the French heroes of the Crusades, Adelaïde du Guésclin, Alzire, Le Duc de Foix, Mahomet and finally Tancrede with its portrayal of French chivalry in Sicily. Zaïre could be called a summary of all his innovations, for its setting is exotic, it takes place in more nearly modern times, contains something of national interest to the French people and most of the stage properties so plentiful in these plays of the experimental period although all these things are in a much less exaggerated form.

The elaborate settings, directions to the actors, costumes and the various mechanical devices and stage properties Voltaire used are realistic elements in his drama. In its present usage Realism may be defined as the attempt to give a truth of detail, even where such details are trivial or sordid. That Voltaire has attempted to give some truth of detail cannot be denied. The tournament armour of chivalry, the lists and pavilions in Tancrede, the Chinese costumes of L'Orphelin de la Chine and his general insistence on details of acting and stage setting in the dramas of the last two periods are all realistic tendencies. Although his attempt at local colour was not a great success it was nevertheless a great advance over the techni-

que of his predecessors and contemporaries. He is not greatly to be blamed for his failure to present true local colour ,for Faguet says, -

"La vraie couleur locale n'est pas chose de théâtre; mais dépayser un peu le spectateur ,sans prétendre à plus, je l'ai dit ,cela n'est point mauvais. Cela le réveille; le dispose bien, fait qu'il ouvre les yeux, condition nécessaire pour bien écouter, localise son attention; rien de plus; mais c'est la fixer." 1.

"De vraie couleur locale il n'en a point mis; le minimum, je dirai presque la petite illusion nécessaire, ou agreable ,de couleur locale, il l'a donnée." 2.

At any rate Voltaire points the way to the local colour of Romanticism.

However much Voltaire railed against Shakespeare in his later years, he was undeniably indebted to him for many of his ideas as to stage setting and the use of material means to obtain effects. The ghosts in Semiramis and Erynhile are undoubtedly taken from Hamlet. Orosmane in Zaire, has been called a pale Othello. Antony's funeral oration over the dead body of Caesar in La Mort de César is strongly reminiscent of "I come to bury Caesar not to praise him". Whether to be attributed to Shakespeare's influence or not ,it is interesting to note the frequent use of various mechanical means and stage properties.

Instead of merely relating the death of the characters as was done in classic drama, Voltaire increases the sensationalism of his plays by displaying corpses and

1. Faguet, E., XVIIIe Siècle-----p.270
2. Ibid-----p.271

and people killing themselves and dying right on the stage. From the very beginning Voltaire used this means of arousing emotion, for Jocaste commits suicide in Oedipe. The plays of the second period are one long list of murders and deaths-Orosmane stabs Zaïre and kills himself; Zulime kills herself at the sight of the two happy lovers; Mahomet is particularly rich in killings with Zopire emerging, dying, from behind the altar, covered with blood, Séide dying from the effects of a slow poison and Palmire committing suicide; Sémiramis and Éryphile die in the arms of the sons who have killed them; Don Gusman meets death bravely, forgiving Alzire and Zamore with his last breath; Tancrede is carried in dying to the arms of Aménaïde who collapses over his dead body; the bodies of Caesar in La Mort de César and of Polyphonte in Mérope are brought in covered with a bloody robe.

Prisoners are frequently brought onto the stage. Starting with Phorbas in Oedipe there is a long array including Brutus' son, Titus, Hermogide in Éryphile, Assur in Semiramis, Zamore in Alzire, Ramire and Atide in Zulime, Electre and Égisthe in chains in Oreste and Mérope respectively, and Aménaïde, surrounded by guards in Tancrede. The sight of these prisoners, either in clanking chains or surrounded by grim faced guards is a powerful factor in creating an air of realism and adds pathos to the play.

Coming to the more inanimate type of stage properties we have, firstly, the all too frequent display and use

of weapons. In Oedipe Jocaste kills herself, probably with a sword. The plays of the second period contain a whole armoury of swords, daggers, lances, scimitars and spears. The bloody swords and daggers with which Alc-méon, Arzace and Séide kill their respective parents are freely displayed. Zulime kills herself with a dagger after Atide is prevented from using one on herself by Ramire. In La Mort de César we see Cassius (un poignard à la main) winning over the people after the murder of Caesar. Mérope is about to stab her son but is stopped in time by old Narbas. Later in the same play Égisthe enters, bearing the gory axe with which he has just killed the tyrant, Polyphonte. L'Orphelin de la Chine shows Idame drawing a dagger with which Zamti is to kill her and himself. In Tancrede there is a plethora of weapons, the knights all bear swords and Tancrede's two esquires carry his lance, sword and armour behind him as he enters the lists.

Another common sight in Voltairian tragedy is the altar. These are seen in Brutus, Eryphile, Mérope, Mahomet, La Mort de César, Sémiramis, and Oreste. Various characters kneel and pray there in full view of the audience and this adds realism and a further element of sensationalism to the play. Notes and letters play an important part in the development of the intrigue. The letter to Zaïre from her brother, Nérestan, was particularly fatal, for it brought all Crossane's

suspicions to a head and precipitated the disaster. In Brutus, Tullie is given a letter from her father, Tarquin, which tells her that she can marry Titus if so minded. She shows this to Titus and it acts as but one more temptation to him. Tancredi contains two letters. The first written by Aménaïde to Tancredi is not addressed and is the cause of her being accused as a traitor and Tancredi's lack of belief in her faithfulness. In the same play Aménaïde receives a note written in his blood, telling her that he has voluntarily sought death because of her unfaithfulness. The letter from the dead Ninus to Arzace, denouncing Sémiramis and Assur as his murderers, is but another of these fatal billets so common in Voltaire's tragedies. "La Croix de ma mère" is important in Zaire, for, by it, Lusignan identifies her as his daughter. The urn containing the ashes of Egisthe's son and the sword left to Creste by Agamemnon are but others of the physical details of his realism.

In reading these plays of Voltaire, one is struck by the frequency with which stage settings and directions to the actors are given. An examination of some of these settings will show Voltaire's increasing attention to detail in his attempt to obtain effects of historic and local colouring. Such a thing was unheard of in Classic drama, of course, since there the chief appeal was to intellectual emotions and no attempt was made to move by mere spectacle. Voltaire, however, paid great attention to his stage set-

tings and after the presentation of Méropé, in 1743, the audience was removed from the stage and the full expanse given to the actors to display their costumes and scenery. Voltaire took great pains with the acting of the various parts and realized that the art of the actor is just as difficult as that of the dramatist. In Classic drama the actors had merely stood still and declaimed their speeches. Now the audience saw something new, as witness Tancredi, in which the actress, Mlle. Clairon, as Aménaïde, crosses the stage, half fainting on the executioners who surround her, her arms falling as if dead, and all at once comes to her senses with a cry on perceiving Tancredi.¹ Not only were the actors trained carefully in their parts but they were fittingly costumed as well. In L'Orphelin de la Chine Zamti and Idamé were dressed as cultured Chinese of the period and Gengis Khan as a Tartar Emperor. In Zaire there were turbans, plumes, falbalas and dolimans.² In Tancredi appears on the stage the spirit of the troubadours which preceded the romantic Middle Ages. On the stage, only recently rid of spectators, pranced the knights of the Middle Ages, armed with the tournament weapons of the 14th century. The stage is decorated with shields, sashes and coats of arms. Pavillions are erected on it and the lists are established for the combat in which the gloomy Tancredi saves the weeping Aménaïde.³

1. See Lanson, Voltaire----- p. 99

2. See Brunetiere, Époques du théâtre française p. 255

3. Lanson, Voltaire----- p. 100

Let us just note some of these directions as to stage setting. From Oedipe with its simple statement "La scène est à Thèbes" let us turn to Brutus, written some fourteen years later on his return from England and his first acquaintance with the English stage. At the beginning of this play we read "Le théâtre représente une partie de la maison des consuls sur le mont Tarpeien; le temple du Capitole se voit dans le fond. Les sénateurs sont assemblés entre le temple et la maison, devant l'autel de Mars. Brutus et Valérius Publicola, consuls, président à cette assemblée; les sénateurs sont rangés en demi-cercle. Des licteurs avec leurs faisceaux sont debout derrière les sénateurs." This is indeed a far cry from 17th century drama. Following this play Voltaire contents himself with rather brief statements for some time; e.g. "La scène est au sérail de Jérusalem", "La scène est à la Mecque", "La scène est à Messène dans le palais de Merope". In his later plays of this period he begins to give more and more extensive details. Sémiramis, for example, has "La scène est à Babylone. Le théâtre représente un vaste péristyle au fond duquel est le palais de Sémiramis. Les jardins en terrasse sont élevés au-dessus du palais. Le temple des mages est à droite, et un mausolée à gauche, orné d'obelisques." At the beginning of Oreste we read "Le théâtre représente le rivage de la mer: un bois, un temple, un palais et un tombeau, d'un côté; et de l'autre, Argos dans le lointain." Tancredi gives a good deal of detail, "La scène est à Sy-

racuse dans le palais d'Argire et dans une salle du conseil, ensuite dans une place publique sur laquelle cette salle est construite. L'époque de l'action est de l'année 1005. Les Sarrasins d'Afrique avaient conquis toute la Sicile au IXe siècle; Syracuse avait secoué leur joug. Des gentilshommes normands commencèrent à s'établir vers Salerne, dans la Pouille. Les empereurs grecs possédaient Messine; les Arabes tenaient Palerme et Agrigente."

Not only was it an innovation to have these details as to scene included at the beginning of his tragedies but, by having directions to the actors liberally interspersed throughout his plays he made an even more unusual departure from the common classic procedure. These directions, if not in the best classic tradition, are at least an aid to the reader in following the plot and are indispensable in the melodramatic type of drama he was creating. It would be uninteresting and unprofitable to note all the stage directions given throughout his tragedies but a few of the more common ones might be examined.

A stage direction frequently met with is that with which Act III of Brutus commences when Arons enters, (une lettre à la main). In Act 5 Brutus finds that Titus is one of the traitors and (Il se laisse tomber entre les bras de Proculus). When Titus asks his father's forgiveness (Il se jette aux genoux). This last action is most common. The last act of Alzire, for example, is

full of characters (se jetant aux genoux) or (se jetant à ses pieds). Another frequently used insertion is (il se tue) or (elle se tue) varying with the sex of the characters as in Zaïre and Zulime. Throughout nearly all his plays Voltaire gets his characters off the stage by putting in such phrases as (Elle sort), (on l'emmène). It is certainly an aid to the reader, for it at least gives the reason for the absence of a certain character in the succeeding scene.

Voltaire increases his stage directions in the moments of crisis and this arises of necessity, for his type of melodrama gets its effects from the actions of the characters and not from the relation of these actions. Mahomet is an example of this. The first three acts are rather bare of stage directions as they are only a preparation for the action but in Act 4, when Séide kills Zopire, Voltaire indulges in an orgy of bracketted interpolations. (Le fond du théâtre s'ouvre. On voit un autel) Zopire (près de l'autel) is praying. Séide (un poignard à la main, sort et va derrière l'autel où est Zopire). (Il revient d'un air égaré) (Il s'assied et en pleurant)regrets his crime. (Zopire paraît, appuyé sur l'autel , après s'être relevé derrière cet autel ou il a reçu le coup) (avancant et soutenu par Palmire) (Il s'assied). Séide (se jetant à genoux) asks forgiveness and threatens to kill himself but Palmire (à genoux, arrêtant le bras de Séide) stops him. Zopire forgives them (en les embrassant). In Act 5 , Séide (un poignard à la main, mais

déjà affaibli par le poison)confronts Mahomet .(Il avance,il chancelle,il tombe entre les bras de siens). He calls on the people to avenge him and denounces Mahomet as an impostor,but Mahomet (en l'interrompant,et s'adressant au peuple)wins them over.(Le peuple se retire).Palmire(revenant à elle)denounces Mahomet and then(elle se jette sur le poignard de son frère ,et s'en frappe.)

La Mort de César is also rather restrained in the giving of stage directions until the final scene when (Le fond du théâtre s'en ouvre;des licteurs apportent le corps de César couvert d'une robe sanglante;Antoine descend de la tribune,et se jette auprès du corps). We may close this examination of the various types of stage directions with Tancrede which is particularly well supplied.An understanding of the action of the final scene can be gleaned merely by reading the bracketed directions. The whole cast is assembled with Tancrede (dans le fond porté par des soldats)(pendant que Loredan parle on approche lentement Tancrede vers Aménside presque évanouie entre les bras de ses femmes;elle se débarrasse precipitamment des femmes qui la soutiennent,et,se retournant avec horreur vers Loredan,dit:) "Barbares,laissez là vos remords odieux."(Puis,courant à Tancrede ,et se jetant à ses pieds)(Il la regarde-se soulevant un peu-Argire,se jetant aussi à genoux de l'autre côté et embrassant Tancrede,puis se relevant-Tancrede en

reprenant un peu de force et élevant la voix-Aménaïde, se jetant sur le corps de Tancrede-Elle se relève en fureur-elle tombe dans les bras de Fanie-Finally (Elle tombe à côté de lui). From the above examples an idea of the Voltairian type of climax can be obtained, highly melodramatic and obtaining more of its interest from spectacle and action than from the depiction of character unfolding and the pure intellectual attraction of its classic verse.

Psychology is only incidental to Voltaire. What there is of it is superficial and weak in execution. He seems afraid to attribute too much to the passions. Orosmane in Zaire is an Othello much weakened by the influence of Racine's Bajazet.¹ In spite of his emphasis on fate through chance he did contribute something to dramatic psychology. He brought a new feminine type to the French stage, one derived from Shakespeare, -the woman, sweet, weak and seductive, made all for love, incapable of heroic effort as exemplified by Zaire, Idamé, Aménaïde and Alzire.² Classic tragedy gets its pathetic effects from combats of the soul against passions of the flesh. Hermione, Roxane, Agrippine, Phèdre and Athalie are not absolutely bad nor good. Voltaire's heroines, on the other hand, starting with Zaire have done nothing or said nothing to merit their sad fate.³

"Jetées par la fortune, ou par le caprice du poète, au milieu des circonstances les plus tragiques, elles en

1. See Lanson, Esquisse -----de la tragédie ---p. 119

2. Ibid -----p. 119

3. See Brunetière, Époques du théâtre français-p. 277

"sont les victimes innocentes. Vous voyez la conséquence: leur aventure nous apparaît aussitôt comme plus lamentable encore que tragique à vrai dire, et l'injustice de leur sort excite en nous des mouvements d'une pitié passionnée. L'émotion d'art diminue, mais l'émotion humaine augmente. Le drame se rapproche de nous; la condition souveraine des personnes n'y sert plus que comme d'un décor; nous croyons tous être exposés au sort d'Orosmane ou de Zaïre." 1 .

In Mahomet Voltaire also made an attempt at religious psychology. We see the cheat and racketeer, Mahomet, posing as a divinely inspired prophet and religious leader; Palmire, the blindly devoted worshipper and the fanatic Séide, in horror of the crime and yet committing it. In addition, he made an effort to make sketches of ethnic psychology, to portray the various aspects of men in different epochs.² This can be seen in his attempt to contrast the moeurs of the Tartar leader, Gengis Khan, with those of the cultured Chinese gentleman, Zamti, in L'Orphelin de la Chine, those of the Spaniards with the outlook of the Peruvian Indians in Alzire. In the third period he made a further endeavour to contrast the strict mode of living and the stern morals of the Scythians with those of the luxury-loving Persians in Les Scythes and to contrast the customs and religious beliefs of the Romans with those of the Parsis in Les Guèbres. Unfortunately his attempts were largely spoiled because he felt it necessary to conform to the demands of le bon goût at any cost. As a result, his characters, while giving vent to different opinions on various matters, still

1. Brunetière, Les Époques du théâtre français-----p. 277

2. See Lanson, Esquisse --- de la tragédie française--p. 119

express themselves as would any educated Frenchman of the 18th century and so sound very unreal.

Philosophy has been substituted for this rather pronounced lack of psychology in many of Voltaire's plays.^{1.} He had two methods of incorporating it into his tragedies-- firstly, by spreading maxims and couplets throughout the play to serve as philosophical propaganda and as arguments against the adversaries of philosophy as in Zaire, Alzire, Mérope and others.^{1.} From Addison's Cato, Southern's Oronoka and Rowe's Tamerlan, Voltaire learned another method, the philosophical idea organizes the drama and is expressed in action (Brutus, Mahomet, Olimpie etc.). The second method is decidedly superior. It raises subjects above mere anecdote and makes a symbol of the particular event.^{2.} But Voltaire is too polemic, often sacrifices truth and life to the theme, sometimes changes the thesis for theatrical effects and displays too much wit and ideas and not enough depth of emotion and poetry.^{3.} Still it was a striking innovation in French drama and Brutus and Mahomet certainly owe a good deal of their theatrical effect to the philosophical idea involved.

There was a great deal of discussion over these plays of the experimental period. Beforehand, there were confidences to friends and to the papers, afterwards,

1. See Lanson, Esquisse-- de la tragédie française - P. 122

2. Ibid----- P. 123

3. Ibid----- P. 123

prefaces, discourses and letters. His contemporaries were grateful that he did not push his "excesses" beyond the bounds of good taste. The envelope of the style noble and Racinian verses to which the public was accustomed softened with harmonious and fluid elegance the most violent situations. Not only did Voltaire please his audience by his retention of the external forms of classic art, but also by the philosophe spirit of optimism evident in his plays, which was well adapted to the spirit of the times.

"L'esprit qui règne dans ces ouvrages d'imitation, et qui en a fait en partie le mérite aux yeux des contemporains et qui pour nous, est au moins important à considérer en ce qu'il marque fortement la distance entre le 18e siècle et le 17e, c'est un esprit de compassion, de ménagement pour les nerfs et la "sensibilité" des spectateurs. C'est un esprit, et je ne dis que la même chose en d'autres termes, d'optimisme relatif, qui porte Voltaire à ne pas présenter les héros tragiques ni comme trop épouvantables, ni comme trop malheureux. Il adoucit très "philosophiquement", et comme il convient un siècle de "lumière", l'âpre et rude tragédie antique. 1.
 ...Voltaire n'a rien de féroce. Il n'est pas "Crébillon le barbare". Il veut que les grands crimes soient commis puisqu'il en faut dans les tragédies; mais il aime qu'ils soient commis par mégarde... Sémiramis sera tuée par son fils, mais par méprise, et à cause de l'obscurité qui règne dans ce maudit caveau. C'est Assur qu'Arzace croyait tuer. Il pourra se consoler. - Clytemnestre sera tuée par Oreste, mais dans la confusion d'une mêlée; c'est Egisthe qu'Oreste cherchait de son poignard. Il pourra s'excuser auprès des Furies. Notez qu'il n'a tué Egisthe lui-même que parce qu'Egisthe voulait le faire mourir. Il était dans son droit; il faut qu'il soit dans son droit. Voilà la tragédie philosophique." 2

The final period of his writings is from 1760 to his death in 1778. Le Vieillard de Ferney was now established as a literary oracle. He kept up a tremendous correspondence

1. Faguet, 18e Siècle-----p. 266
 2. Ibid -----p. 267

and his dictates as to literary excellence were regarded as law. Second only to his violence against religion was his violence now against Shakespeare. A strong reaction back to classic standards set in and the sauvage ivre was regarded with positive loathing.

"Pourquoi cette crûsade furieuse, tout à la fin de sa carrière contre l'auteur d'Othello? C'est qu'on est l'auteur de Zaire sans doute; c'est aussi que le goût intime reprend le dessus; et que le goût intime consiste dans les qualites de forme infiniment préférées au fond. Le goût de Voltaire c'est le goût de Boileau devenu beaucoup plus superbe, et beaucoup plus étroit et beaucoup plus timide."^{1.}

The second edition of P. Bramoy's Théâtre des Grecs furnished Voltaire with a basis for attributing his innovations in stage setting and technique to the Greeks rather than Shakespeare and he fully availed himself of this opportunity.^{2.} In this period of his waning powers, he chose classic subjects for the majority of his tragedies but the habits of the past 30 years were not entirely eradicated as is proven by his writing of Les Scythes with its eastern setting, Les Guèbres and Dom Pèdre which is Spanish in atmosphere.

Olimpie, the first play of this period, written in 1763, while classical in subject, still contains most of the characteristics of his daring plays. The plot contains the

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1. Faguet, XVIIIe siècle..... P. 252
 2. See Lanson, Voltaire..... P. 114

usual child not knowing its parent, disguises and suicides. Cassandre, king of Macedonia, has brought up Olimpie, the daughter of Alexander and Statira, in ignorance of her birth, and is about to marry her, both because he loves her, and because of the solid position it will give him as Alexander's successor. Antigone, his former ally becomes suspicious of this marriage with a person of low birth, and is jealous because he, too, loves Olimpie. After Alexander's death, Statira had been stabbed and left for dead by Cassandre who did it to protect his father who was being threatened by her. She has recovered from her wound and is living in seclusion as a priestess in the very temple in which Olimpie is to be married. The inevitable recognition scene follows and Statira forbids her daughter to marry the enemy of her family. Antigone proffers his aid and Statira promises him Olimpie's hand. The latter still loves Cassandre and so is in the horrible position common to Voltaire's heroines. There is a danger of civil war-- Cassandre vows to marry her at any price, Statira kills herself, thinking her enemy is triumphant. Olimpie now calls a council over the funeral pyre of her mother, and after admitting her love for Cassandre, stabs herself and throws herself on the funeral pyre. Cassandre thereupon commits suicide as well. The directions to describe these actions and the stage settings are given with the usual frequency.

Le Triumvirat of 1765, is, obviously, classic in subject yet once again the melodramatic characteristics are in evidence. At the beginning of Act 1, we read that the theatre represents the island on which the Triumvirs made the proscriptions and the division of the world. - The stage is darkened, there is

thunder and lightning. The scene reveals rocks, precipices, and some tents in the distance. The plot deals mainly with the development in character of Octavius and his final overcoming of his jealous love for Julie, the daughter of Lucius Caesar, who loves the young Pompey, and his forgiveness of the latter. With this act of generosity and his pardon of the rest of the proscribed persons in the final act, we are left with the impression that his final position as Emperor is now assured, since he has conquered himself. This play contains a great deal less directions to the actors than his preceding tragedies. Voltaire made a more attentive study of historical sources and a more serious effort at exact representation in Le Triumvirat and in Rome Sauvée, than in any other of his tragedies. He made copious notes in order to present a true historical picture as a reaction against the romanesque tragedies and the false colour of Crebillon.^{1.} He has seized, in the text, the physiognomy of an epoch, the picturesque detail of the life and manners of Roman society and its illustrious men, but, unfortunately, little of his original ideas on the subject passed into his actual plays since the conventions of the style noble have discoloured all.^{2.}

Voltaire next wrote two curious plays as an amusement for his friends, : Les Scythes, and Les Guèbres. In the Preface to L'Édition de Paris, we read that Les Scythes is:-

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1. See Lanson- Esquisse de la tragédie française...P. 121
 2. Ibid.....P. 122
 3. Gotha Ettenger Edition--Voltaire O.C.

"Le tableau contrasté des anciens Scythes et des anciens Persans. C'est une entreprise un peu téméraire d'introduire des pasteurs, des laboureurs avec des princes et de mêler les moeurs champêtres avec celles de cours-- C'est en quelque sorte l'état de nature mis en opposition avec l'état de l'homme artificiel, tel qu'il est dans les grandes villes". 1.

This sums it up pretty well-- a kind of bourgeois pastoral.

The theatre represents a grove and arbour with a bench of turf. One sees in the distance, fields and cottages. At the cèlebration for the approaching marriage, girls, crowned with flowers, and unarmed Scythian warriors, form a semi-circle around the altar. However, the old taste for a melodramatic situation once again crops up, after this peaceful introduction. Obéide, the daughter of a former Persian general is going to marry a Scythian to please her father. Her old lover turns up and kills the bridegroom in a duel. For that he is condemned to die by the hand of Obéide, since she was the wife of the slain man. An altar is brought in, covered with crepe and surrounded by laurels. A Scythian puts a sword on the altar. Athamare, the lover (and incidentally, the King of Persia) is brought in, in chains. Obéide, who really loves him, obtains a promise from the Scythians to let the rest of the Persian prisoners free if the execution is carried out. This is given, and she kills herself and falls half across the altar, after telling of her love for Athamare, and demanding that he be allowed to go free, since she is paying for his deed with her death. He tries to kill himself, but is prevented by a Scythian. Her death serves

as a lesson to the Scythians to mix pity with the severity of their justice, from now on. *Obéide* is the usual Voltarian heroine, torn between her love and her duty to her father, in the style of *Zaire*, *Aménaïde* and *Zulime*... The setting is exotic, the finale, quite melodramatic, following the now established Voltarian technique.

Similarly, in *Les Guèbres*, we have the same exotic setting, and the usual devices of misunderstandings, lost children and recognitions. This play, however, was written for the special purpose of attacking religion and presenting a plea for religious tolerance. Indeed, its alternative title is *La Tolérance*. It could obviously be applied to the Christian religion and the bitter persecution of supposed heretics in Voltaire's own day. Indeed, it was intended to be so read, and the eastern setting is but a thin disguise. Written with this intention, Voltaire simply uses his old technique of the involved plot and the usual mechanical aids such as chains, Iradan with an arm in a sling, and the all important letter to bolster up his idea and make a play of it.

Sophonisbe, written in 1769, has a semi-classic subject, in that it deals with the time of the Romans, although the scene is laid in Numidia. *Sophonisbe* is the niece of Hannibal. Her husband is killed in battle by *Massinisse*, the ally of the Romans, and her former lover. He promises to protect her if she will marry him and she does so. The Romans demand her as a hostage to be taken to Rome and grace *Scipio's* triumphal procession. *Massinisse* is surrounded and threatened with punishment if he fails to give her up. Rather than do this, he kills *Sophonisbe*, and poisons himself, thus foiling the

intentions of Scipio. The final scene is highly melodramatic, rivalling any of Voltaire's other tragedies. Massinisse enters, troubled and tottering. Scipio goes to shake hands with him, but he recoils. The door is opened and Sophonisbe is shown stretched out on a bench, a dagger buried in her breast. She tells Massinisse to hold her in his arms as she dies. The play presents the Romans, with their ruthlessness and guile, in a very bad light.

Les Lois de Minos, which was never presented on the stage, is a violent attack on religion. The plot is quite similar to that of Les Guèbres. Teucer, King of Crete, is trying to save Astérie, a young Cydonian captive, from being executed by the priests, led by Phares. He does not approve of the cruel laws that condemn those of a different religion to death, but, even though a king, the force of custom is so strong, that it would be highly dangerous to disobey them. He is having her taken away to safety when her lover, Datame, who has come to treat for her ransom as an ambassador, sees her surrounded by guards and attacks them. Teucer is incensed at this, and is resolved to have nothing further to do with the girl. However, an old Cydonian, Azémon, gives him proof that she is really his own daughter, and offers as proof a letter contained in a casket. Teucer then goes into the temple, upsets the altar and orders Datame to be released. Phares rouses his henchmen and those who feel that the old laws should be respected. Civil war begins, but Teucer is victorious. Phares is killed by Datame, who receives the hand of Astérie. Teucer vows to rule alone, and not be ordered about by a parcel

of priests any longer. The temple is set on fire, and he becomes an absolute ruler. This is, obviously, Voltaire's opinion as to the proper way for a ruler to govern, and the fitting reward for priests who meddle in secular matters. The italics as to setting and action are very plentiful in this play. We read:-

"Le théâtre représente les portiques d'un temple, des tours sur les côtés, des cyprès sur le devant". - On emène Asterie couronnée de fleurs et enchaînée--On voit dans l'enfoncement Asterie entourée de la garde que le roi Teucer lui avait donnée- Le vieillard Azémon accompagné d'un esclave qui lui donne la main...- Deux Cydoniens apportent une cassette couverte de lames d'or...- and finally (On voit le temple en feu et une partie qui tombe dans le fond du théâtre).

Dom Pèdre is his last divergence from classic subjects.

The setting is in Spain, where Transtamare, the bastard brother of Dom Pèdre, the king of Castille, is plotting to overthrow him, and claim the throne. He is supported by Duguesclin, the general of the armies of the King of France, who wishes to weaken Spain by stirring up a civil war. Leonore de la Cirda, a princess of the blood, has been betrothed to Transtamare, but is now about to be married to Dom Pèdre, whom she really loves. Transtamare vows vengeance, he is captured, but Dom Pèdre lets him go free. A battle is fought in which Dom Pèdre is captured. Duguesclin treats him with all courtesy, but the treacherous Transtamare assassinates him. He comes to claim Leonore, but the latter commits suicide. Duguesclin sternly reproaches Transtamare for his unknighly conduct, and prophesies a wretched future for him. While this play has all the ingredients of his other dramas of chivalry, it is not so filled with directions to the actors. In Act 4, Scene 2, an attempt is made to portray a meeting according to

the rules of chivalry:-

"Dom Pèdre se place sur le trône. Mendose à côté de lui avec quelque grands d'Espagne. Guésclin, après avoir salué le roi qui se lève, s'assied vis-a-vis de lui. Les gardes sont derrière le trône du roi et des officiers français derrière la chaise du Guesclin."

When Dom Pèdre determinés to fight he asks, according to the chivalric usage of the times:

"En quel jour, en quel lieu voulez-vous la bataille!"

He then gives Duguesclin his sword, who feels very honoured at receiving it. There are the usual bracketted remarks in the finale on Leonore's death :

("Elle tombe dans un fauteuil)(se soulevant sur le siège où elle est penchée)(elle se tue) (elle fait effort pour prononcer ces deux vers-ci)"

Les Pélopidés, Irène and Agathocle, are all classic subjects, treated in Voltaire's own manner. The first of these deals with the vengeance of Atrée on his brother, Thieste, who has seduced and kidnapped his wife, Érope. The mother, Hippodamie, tries to reconcile them but when Atrée learns that Érope went willingly with Thieste, and has had a child by him, his fury knows no bounds and he has both them and the child killed. The Voltarian accompaniments are much milder than usual, for the murders are accomplished off-stage, and one only hears the dying voices of Érope and Thieste. At the close, (on entend le tonnerre et les ténèbres couvrent la terre) Atrée (appuyée contre une colonne pendant que le tonnerre gronde) feels that he is going mad.

Irène presents the usual heroine, torn between love and duty. Irène is the wife of the emperor of Constantinople, but really loves the prince Alexis, to whom she had been betrothed at one time. The latter kills the emperor to protect his own life, and

reigns in his stead. He now wants to marry Irène, but her father forbids it, supported by the High Priest. More opposition comes from the strong convention that the widow of an emperor must never remarry. In his wrath, Alexis banishes her father and the High Priest, but rouses Irène's anger. He promises to bring back her father, but, in his absence, Irène, worn out by a terrible internal struggle, feels that she will not be able to resist his entreaties, and kills herself as the only way to avoid sinning. Alexis tries to kill himself, but he is prevented by his lieutenant, while the father repents his zeal at upholding the conventions.-- The play is quite free of directions and setting until Act 5, and Irène's death (Un des soldats qui l'accompagne lui approche un fauteuil) She speaks (d'une voix égale, entrecoupée, mais ferme autant que douloureuse)(Elle march égarée et hors d'elle-même) (elle tire un poignard et se frappe) (Elle tombe dans un fauteuil) and at the end, we see Alexis and the father in the usual melodramatic posture (à genoux d'un côté) and (à genoux de l'autre côté).

Agathocle was presented in 1779, the year after Voltaire's death. Once again, while choosing a classic subject, the old man was unable to get away from the habits of a lifetime in technique and plot construction. Agathocle, the old tyrant of Syracuse, has two sons:- the low and vicious Polycrate, who is his favourite, and will inherit his position, and Argide, who is good and virtuous, but is disliked by his father. Polycrate has wicked designs on a slave girl, Ydace. Argide protects the girl--the brothers fall out, and, when Ydace is about to be taken to a place of safety, Polycrate tries to prevent it, and is killed in fair fight by Argide. Agthocle is in a terrible

rage, and vows to execute his son, the slave girl, and her father, but finally has a change of heart, and makes Argide ruler in his stead. Argide immediately makes the people free and all are supposed to live happily ever after. There is really no tragedy. The whole effect of the play arises from the sudden volteface of Agathocle: and this same situation has been used at least twice before by Voltaire (Gengis Khan in L'Orphelin de la Chine and Octavius in Le Triumvirat).

These plays of the last period are, then, but a continuation of the usual Voltarian style and technique, though somewhat toned down and lacking the vigour of his tragedies of the years from Brutus to Tancredè. There is the same introduction of the philosophical interest to enlarge the signification of the subject, the same invention of stirring situations, which make us tremble or weep for a character to whom we feel sympathetic, the same choice of modern and exotic subjects, and finally, the usual device of animating the tragedy through a multiplicity of events, by a presentation of the action and not a mere telling of it, and by the scenic methods of pantomime, figuration and decoration, which aid in a realization of this action. To the end of his life, he observes the rules, the three unities, is careful to clothe all the discours in style noble and includes only what is fitting and non-offensive to the delicate niceties of le bon goût and the bienséances. Because of his adherence to the latter, he continues to make unsuccessful attempts to portray local colour and the moeurs of distant races and climes in Les Guèbres and Les Scythes and gives another rather unconvincing picture of chivalry in Dom Pèdre. He has the same use of material means as aids to the develop-

ment of the action (letters, funeral pyres, altars, weapons, etc.). Although not so much in evidence, directions to the actors and stage settings are still given with a good deal of frequency. In fact, the only innovation introduced by Voltaire, not used in these later tragedies, is that of having no love interest in non-suitable subjects as in Oreste and Méropé.

Thus Voltaire composed his tragedies along the same lines throughout his dramatic career.

He wished to conserve Classic tragedy while introducing into these elements of the drame, but only succeeded in spoiling it thereby. His public became used to his great melodramatic scenes: Méropé raising the axe on her own son; Séide poignarding Zopire near the altar where he is praying, and the old man dragging himself, bleeding, onto the stage; Ninias coming out of the tomb of Ninus, with his arms covered with ^{the} blood of his mother. As the taste for these scenes of pure pathétique increased, it was bound to diminish the old liking for the purely artistic and intellectual appeal of Classic tragedy.

His intentions and chief innovations have been well summed up in the following passage:-

"Voltaire reproche à notre tragédie de n'être qu'une suite de conversations; il veut, en conséquence, plus de rapidité et de complexité dans l'action, plus de surprises et de coups de théâtre, moins de tirades et de monologues. Il lui reproche aussi de mêler à tout une fade galanterie; il veut que l'amour, dans la tragédie soit tout ou rien, et il estime que les affections naturelles ou les passions politiques peuvent être aussi intéressantes que l'amour. Il introduit l'histoire de France sur la scène tragique; il prend ses sujets partout, même chez les Persans, les Américains et les Chinois.

Il lui faut une scène plus vaste, l'éclat des costumes, la pompe des décorations. Mais il n'a pas le moindre doute sur les unités de temps et de lieu et il donne dans une "noblesse" de plus en plus étroite et fausse." 1.

All critics agree on the poorness of Voltaire's style:-

"Ces pièces sont écrites dans une langue qui n'est ni mauvaise ni bonne, qui est indifférente. C'est une langue de convention. Elle n'est pas plus de Voltaire que de Du Belloy; elle est de ceux qui font des tragédies en 1750--Il est étonnant, même, à quel point elle ne rappelle aucunement la langue de Voltaire. Elle n'est pas vive, elle n'est pas alerte, et elle n'est pas serrée, elle n'est pas variée de ton. Elle est extrêmement uniforme. Une noblesse banale continue, et une élégance facile, implacable, voilà ce qu'elle nous présente. L'ennui qu'inspirent les tragédies de Voltaire vient surtout de là. On souhaite passionnément, en les lisant, de rencontrer une de ces négligences involontaires de Corneille, ou un de ces prosaïsmes voulus de Racine, que Voltaire lui reproche. On souhaite un écart au moins, ou une faute de goût. On ne trouve pour se divertir un peu, que quelques rimes faibles, nombre de chevilles, et quelquefois la fausse noblesse ordinaire tournant décidément à l'emphase, ce qui amuse un instant." 2.

But there are some things to be admired :-

"Disons aussi qu'on peut rencontrer deux ou trois tirades véritablement éloquentes. Celle de Lusignan dans Zaïre est célèbre. Elle est justement célèbre. Voltaire est incapable de poésie; il n'est pas incapable d'éloquence (3)... Voltaire est capable de s'empêcher d'une idée générale jusqu'à l'exprimer avec vigueur, avec ardeur, ce qui donne le mouvement à son style, et avec éclat. Les tragédies de Voltaire sont des mélodrames entrecoupés de "Discours sur l'homme"; on en peut détacher d'assez belles dissertations, comme celle d'Alzire sur la tolérance. C'est butin tout prêt pour les "morceaux choisis"; et c'est bien le péché de Voltaire, d'avoir, dans ses œuvres d'art, travaillé pour les morceaux choisis, et peut-être avec intention." 4.

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1. Lemaitre--Impressions de Théâtre.....P. 9
 2. Faguet --18e Siècle, Études Littéraires.....P. 269
 3. Ibid.....P. 269
 4. Ibid.....P. 270

Still, Voltaire had the honour of introducing the features of local colour to the French stage, in the form of the dress, customs and elaborate stage settings of the East. There was something new in his treatment of Christianity. He gives an idea of its emotional and aesthetic power in a picturesque manner.¹ He invented national tragedies, obtaining the idea in his writing of Zaïre and carrying it out two years later in Adelaide Duguésclin. While his historic colour may appear pale, and too much covered over with a veneer of the 18th century civilization, it was really a great step beyond the falsified presentations of Campistron and Crébillon. Voltaire had a wide and fairly precise historic knowledge. He visualized the great moments of world's history, the shock of civilization-(Alzire, L'Orphelin de la Chine)- the singular aspect of revolutions and great men (Mahomet). He transported his contemporaries to other climes, while keeping within the bounds of good taste.²

Voltaire's dramatic deficiencies are due, partly, to the spirit of the age as well as to his own temperament and way of writing. Busied with his tremendous historical writings, his innumerable letters and pamphlets, engaged in heated philosophe and religious controversies, it is little wonder that he lacked the power of self-detachment. He had no time to sit back and contemplate humanity from an attitude of Olympian calm, in order to arrive at the great general truths of existence. To acquire

1. See Brunetière --Les Époques du théâtre français....P. 275

2. See Lanson-Esquisse de la tragédie française.....P. 121

the position of the leading dramatist of his century with the brief amount of time he expended in composing his tragedies, was a marvellous achievement. If his plays appear timid, artificial, incoherent, false and weak to us today, we must stop and realize that they still represent a great advance over those of the other dramatists of the Neo-Classic period, and definitely point the way to the best plays of Hugo and the Romanticists.

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APPENDIX

GROUP 1

BRUTUS, 1730 - Brutus is consul of Rome at the time of the expulsion of Tarquin. His son, Titus, has won two great victories over the forces of Tarquin's ally, Porsenna, without, however, being accorded any special honours for his deeds. Titus is torn between his loyalty to Rome and his love for Tarquin's daughter, Tullie. He is urged to betray Rome by the ambassador, Arons, by his friend, Messala, and by Tullie, herself. He finally gives a half-hearted assent, but the plot is discovered, and Brutus condemns his own son to death as an example to future Romans.

LA MORT DE CESAR, 1743, deals with the assassination of Caesar by the Senators led by Brutus and Cassius. After the plot had been agreed on, Brutus finds that he is the son of Caesar by a secret marriage with the sister of Cato. Brutus admires and feels he could love Caesar, but when the latter remains adamant in his determination to become emperor, Brutus goes through with the pre-arranged plan and kills his own father, rather than have him live as a menace to Roman liberty.

GROUP 2

ZAÏRE, 1732- Zaire is a slave girl of unknown parentage, who has been brought up in the serail of Jerusalem. She is loved by the Sultan Orosmane and their marriage is about to be celebrated. Nérestan, another slave, who has been liberated and allowed to go to France to raise money for the ransom of several of the French captives, returns. At Zaire's request, the Sultan allows Lusignan, the French hero of the Crusades, to be set free with the others. Lusignan recognizes the cross that Zaire is wearing as one belonging to his dead wife, and thus Zaire and Nérestan are revealed to be his children. He makes Zaire, who has been brought up in the Mohammedan religion, swear to become a Christian. Nérestan is horrified at her marrying Orosmane, and tries to dissuade her. Orosmane, who does not know that they are brother and sister, intercepts a letter from Nérestan, asking for a final interview and becomes frantic with jealousy. He accuses her of infidelity, which she indignantly denies. He resolves to kill her if she keeps the appointment with Nérestan. She does so, and Orosmane stabs her. Nérestan then reveals that they were brother and sister and Orosmane kills himself in his remorse.

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TANCRÈDE, 1760-- Aménaïde, the daughter of Arguire, the former leader of the Norman barons in Sicily, is being made to marry Orbassan, the new leader. Her true love, however, is Tancrède, who has been away fighting for the Byzantine Emperor. Because of this he has been declared an outlaw, and his lands confiscated and given to Orbassan. The Moorish leader, Solamir, had also been a suitor of Aménaïde, when she was living at the court of Constantinople, but her mother had betrothed her to Tancrède. She writes a note to Tancrède, asking for help, but does not address it. The message is intercepted by the Normans who think that she has been writing to Solamir, who is leading the attack of the Moors on Sicily. Under the strict laws, she is condemned to death unless someone will vindicate her honour in the lists. Orbassan offers to fight for her, if she will be his loving wife, but she refuses, as she can never love him. Tancrède arrives on the scene in disguise and hears the news. Because of the strong evidence, he believes that she has been unfaithful to him, and the Normans, but resolves to fight for her and go away unknown. He kills Orbassan in a joust, but is cold to Aménaïde, when she wishes to thank him. She is now angry that he does not believe in her, and feels that he has not acted as a perfect knight. Tancrède, in his despair at her apparent unfaithfulness, goes out to fight the Moors, and after incredible feats of valour, is wounded and brought dying to her feet. He learns his error and asks forgiveness as he dies. Aménaïde collapses over his dead body.

ZULIME, 1734 - Zulime, the daughter of the Sheriffe of Tremizene, Benassar, is in the fortress of Arsème, on the shore of the Mediterranean, whither she has come with the Spanish slaves of her father, Ramire, Atide, and Idamore. She is in love with Ramire who had saved her father's kingdom from the Turks but who was now to be handed over to them under the peace terms. Atide is really secretly married to Ramire, but in order to effect their escape, she has talked Zulime into really loving him. The latter is ashamed of using Zulime in this way, but it is only through her aid that they can escape. Zulime wishes to be married before they sail for Spain, and is angry when Ramire seems to wish to postpone the marriage. In an interview with Benassar, Ramire promises to leave Zulime behind, if he and Atide are allowed to go free. In the meantime, Atide has mollified Zulime, and they have embarked. Benassar thinks he has been betrayed and captures Ramire in the ensuing battle. Zulime, however, wins Benassar's pardon and he gives his consent to her marriage with Ramire. The latter is now forced to admit that he is already married to Atide. Zulime is incensed and demands the punishment of the slaves, but Atide defends her actions and offers to give up Ramire by killing herself. Benassar and Zulime forgive the couple, but Zulime can't stand the sight of their happiness and kills herself, feeling that she has failed in her duty by loving Ramire.

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GROUP 111

ALZIRE, 1736 - The Inca prince, Montèze, is wedding his daughter, Alzire, to Don Gusman, the Spanish Governor, so that a firm peace will be established between the two nations. Alzire marries the governor, while regretting her lost love, the prince Zamore, who has not been heard of for three years, and is believed dead. Meanwhile, Zamore, who has been made captive and tortured by Don Gusman, escapes, and finds out that his betrothed is now wedded to his arch enemy, Don Alvire, the father of Don Gusman and the former governor of Peru, is a kindly old man, and a firm friend to Zamore, who had saved his life. Zamore is surprised at finding his enemy the son of his friend, but his hate for Don Gusman, and his anger at losing Alzire, lead him to attack and mortally wound the Governor. Alzire is arrested as an accomplice, but on his death bed, Don Gusman has a change of heart, and forgives Zamore. At this display of Christian spirit, Zamore is converted to the Christian faith.

L'ORPHELIN DE LA CHINE, 1755- The scene is laid in Peking. Gengis Khan has attacked and overthrown the Chinese Emperor and killed all his family, but one son, who has been placed in the care of Zamti, an educated mandarin, and his wife, Idamé. He demands that the son be handed over to him for execution, but Zamti is so loyal to his emperor's house that he decided to let the Tartars have his own son, and hide the prince. Idame cannot quell her parental scruples sufficiently to see her own son killed, and asks Gengis Khan to spare the child. Before he won fame, Gengis had been in love with her, but she had chosen Zamti. He still loves her, but she remains loyal to her husband. As her child is about to be executed, she divulges the truth. Zamti is arrested and tortured to try and make him reveal the hiding place of the prince. Idamé, in the meantime, has taken the child and shown him to the remnants of the Imperial army to try and arouse their courage, but Gengis Khan proves too strong, and captures them all. The couple expect instant death, but Gengis is so taken with their bravery, and loyalty, that he forgives them and resolves to be a great ruler and abstain from petty revenge henceforth.

GROUP 1V

Mahomet, 1741-- Séide and Palmire, unbeknown to themselves, are really brother and sister, and the children of Zopire, the Shériffe of Mecca. They had been captured in infancy by Mahomet, brought up in his religion and are fanatically devoted to him. Palmire has been captured and is held as a hostage in Mecca. Zopire meets her there and feels strongly attracted to her. Since he is the arch enemy of Mahomet, and the mainstay of the opposition, Mahomet decides that he must be eliminated. Séide is suggested to him as the most

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fanatical of all his followers. Since Mahomet is in love with Palmire, he resents her love for Séide, and so as a fine revenge, orders Séide to kill Zopire as the enemy of the true religion. After many qualms of conscience, Séide does so. He and Palmire then find out that Zopire was their father, and are naturally horrified. They accuse Mahomet, before the people, but Séide has been given a slow poison beforehand, and dies in the act of accusing Mahomet. This frightens the people, who believe that Mahomet must really be the prophet of God. Palmire sees through the trick, however, and kills herself, rather than live with Mahomet. The latter thus loses the girl he really loves, and feels condemned to a long life of loneliness.

ORESTE, 1750 - Oreste, the son of Agamemnon and Clytemnestra, accompanied by his faithful friend, Pylades, returns to Argos. Electra, his sister, has been made a slave because of her violent objections to Egisthe, the tyrant who had murdered her father, and wed her mother. Iphise, his other sister, is leading a peaceful existence as a priestess at her father's tomb. Oreste and Pylades claim to be the murderers of Oreste, and show Agemnon's sword and an urn, supposedly containing Oreste's ashes, as proof. Egisthe, who does not know Oreste by sight, welcomes them for having removed the last menace to his safety. Electra is about to kill Oreste for this supposed murder of her brother, when he tells her the truth about his deception. Egisthe's suspicions are aroused when he sees her changed demeanour, and he finds that the urn contains the ashes of his own son. Oreste and Pylades are arrested and about to be executed, when the people rise up and free them. In stabbing Egisthe, Oreste unintentionally kills his mother. He feel madness approaching as a punishment for this, but knows that some god was guiding his hand, and feels that the punishment may be alleviated for this reason.

MEROPE, 1735- Merope, widow of Cresphonte, king of Messène, is expecting the return of her son Egisthes, who has been brought up in a distant land by old Narbas, for safety, after her husband and other sons were slain. Polyphonte has made himself tyrant in the meantime, and demands her hand in marriage, to further solidify his position. She, however, feels that she must keep the legal rights for her son, on his return. Egisthes, in ignorance of his high birth, has been arrested for killing two men who set upon him. Polyphonte tells Merope that one of the attackers was her son, Egisthes, as the prisoner was carrying his armour. Egisthe maintains it is his own armour, but since he persists in saying that his parents were obscure peasants, Merope believes he has killed her son, and demands vengeance. She is about to kill him, with her own hand, when old Narbas appears and tells her that the supposed murderer is her son. Merope does not acknowledge him, publicly, for fear of Polyphonte, but the latter becomes suspicious, and is about to have the

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prisoner executed, when Mérope tells him it is her own son. He promises to spare him if she will marry him, and she is forced to consent. Egisthe rages at his powerlessness to avenge his father, murdered by Polyphonte, and to save his mother. In the temple, where the marriage is to be celebrated, however, Egisthe gets supernatural powers from the gods, rouses the people, kills Polyphonte, and is made King.

ERYPHILE, 1732 - Alcmeon, the son of Eryphile, queen of Argos, and the dead king, Amphiarus, is ignorant of his high birth. He has risen from the ranks and defeated the enemies of the queen, in battle. Now that peace is restored, Hermogide, a prince of the blood, demands Eryphile's hand in marriage. He was the murderer of Amphiarus, and expected to wed Eryphile and become king, as the result of his crime, but was forced to respect an oracle which forbade Eryphile to marry for fifteen years. Eryphile had had a youthful infatuation for Hermogide, but was horrified at his crime. She is haunted by visions of her dead husband. To escape from marrying Hermogide, she offers her hand to Alcmeon. The latter accepts, gladly, but just as the marriage is about to be solemnized, the ghost of Amphiarus comes out of the tomb and tells Alcmeon to avenge him on his mother. At first, Alcmeon thinks that he is not to marry Eryphile because his own mother was a slave, but the High Priest reveals that he is really the son of Amphiarus. Eryphile tells him to kill her, and fulfill the commands of the spectre, but Alcmeon embraces her. He is determined to get revenge of Hermogide, however, and thinking to kill him, he kills Eryphile by mistake, when the gods dazzle his senses. He attempts to kill himself, but is prevented from so doing by his followers. Eryphile forgives him and dies in his arms.

SEMIRAMIS, 1748:- Sémiramis, queen of Babylon, and widow of the dead king, Ninus, appears troubled and distraught. She is not ruling with the same strength and foresight as formerly. Assur, one of the princes of the first rank, feels that now is the time for him to force Sémiramis to marry him and make him king. He and Sémiramis had killed the king when he threatened to banish her from Babylon. Sémiramis had a horror of Assur, who instigated the crime. To avoid a marriage with him, she asks Arzace, a soldier risen from the ranks, to marry her. The latter is already in love with the princess, Azéma, and is rather taken aback at the proposal. The queen is quite enthused at the idea, and asks the gods to bless the approaching nuptials. The ghost of Ninus comes out of the tomb, and gives a warning to Arzace. The latter now finds out, from proofs left in the hands of the high priest, that he is the son of Ninus, and his rightful name

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is Ninias. He forgives Sémiramis for her share in the death of Ninus. He enters the tomb of his father, intending to kill Assur, who is supposed to have gone in there, and kills Sémiramis, by mistake. She forgives him and dies in his arms.
