"LA PRINCESSE DE BABYLONE":

THE WORK OF A PHILOSOPHE

"LA PRINCESSE DE BABYLONE":

THE WORK OF A PHILOSOPHE

By

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A critical analysis of La Princesse de Babylone, linking the thought and style with the ideas and literature of the Philosophes and of Voltaire in particular.

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"Empêchez que des continuateurs téméraires ne gâtent par leurs fables les vérités que j'ai enseignées aux mortels dans ce fidèle récit."

(Voltaire, La Princesse de Babylone)

INTRODUCTION

In March, 1768, Voltaire published La Princesse de Babylone. Like his other contes it is a short work and can be superficially taken as a light and entertaining story, the purpose of which is to amuse rather than teach. To do so, however, is to misunderstand Voltaire's purpose, and to ignore much of his style and subject matter.

Critics' reactions to the work have been slight or even non-existent. Lanson (1), Tallentyre (2) and Cresson (3) make no mention at all and of the other important writers none considers it of sufficient importance to pass more than a brief, and often inaccurate, generalisation. Brailsford (4) suggests that it could be "a parable designed to inculcate vegetarianism" (5) while Aldington (6) has little to say except that it "forms another excuse for a vertiginously swift ramble through divers states of the world."(7)

The fact that so little is said by any of the major critics suggests that La Princesse de Babylone is distinctly inferior to Voltaire's other tales, or that it is of such insignificance as to not

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(1) G. Lanson, Voltaire, Paris: Hachette, 1906.

(2) S. G. Tallentyre, The Life of Voltaire, New York: Putnam, 1905.

(3) A. Cresson, Voltaire. Sa Vie, son oeuvre, Paris: Presses universitaires, 1958.

(4) H. N. Brailsford, Voltaire, London: Oxford University Press, 1935.

(5) Ibid., p. 134.

(6) R. Aldington, Voltaire, London: Routledge, 1925.

(7) Ibid., p. 226.

merit serious mention. It will be shown that, although clearly not equal to the masterpieces Candide or Zadig, La Princesse de Babylone has many qualities of its own, and that, as an expression of Voltaire's philosophical outlook, it is much more representative of the later period of his life than is, for instance, L'Ingénu which appeared a few months earlier in 1767.

This study will consist essentially of four sections: the conte, an attempt to define Voltaire's purpose in using this particular literary genre; the form, which will be devoted to an examination of various sources and influences, showing how each is suited to the philosophical purpose; the style, which will study Voltaire's technique of reflecting the subject matter in the written form; the philosophy, which will summarize the ideas and problems included by Voltaire in La Princesse de Babylone, linking them with some of his other works, showing what development, if any, there is throughout the contes.

It is worth remarking that, although not sufficiently treated by any of the Voltaire critics, La Princesse de Babylone has been used in at least two works as an illustration of the author's technique: in Pomeau's Voltaire par lui-même(1) where a number of extracts are given, together with one shorter passage from the Histoire des voyages de Scarmentado, as the only examples of Voltaire's art as a conteur, to the exclusion of Micromégas, Zadig or Candide; or again in Naves and Lagarde's L'Oeuvre de Voltaire(2), which is a small group of selections,

(1) R. Pomeau, Voltaire par lui-même, Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1955, p. 113.

(2) R. Naves & A. Lagarde, L'Oeuvre de Voltaire, Paris: Hachette, 1946, p. 120.

La Princesse de Babylone is listed with the three other tales just mentioned, as an illustration of Voltaire, le romancier. This, although not offered as proof of outstanding quality, suggests that there is more to the work than is immediately apparent, and that it merits at least a little more attention than has so far been given it.

I

THE CONTE

In a letter to Marmontel, written in 1764,[1] Voltaire offers the following advice:

> "Vous devriez bien nous faire des contes philosophiques, où vous rendriez ridicules, certains sots et certaines sottises, certaines méchancetés et certains méchants; le tout avec discrétion, en prenant bien votre temps, et en rognant les griffes de la bête quand vous la trouvez un peu endormie."

All these things Voltaire had already done in his own writings, and Candide or Micromégas are first-class examples of what he had in mind. Certainly when he wrote La Princesse de Babylone he was fully aware of the value of the conte for a philosophical writer.

Lawrence Bongie[2] discusses some of the reasons put forward to explain why Voltaire should have turned to writing contes suddenly with great vigour in 1747. By that time Voltaire was a man of fifty-three, and Bongie concludes that this was a period of crisis in his life, and that it developed from his inability to reconcile evil and the existence of God: the evil, which he experienced and noted in the world around him, and the existence of God, which was a theoretical and social necessity. Certainly the fantasy of this new form, adopted by Voltaire, permitted him to express, in an acceptable way, a contradiction which was not well suited to the traditional literary genres: the theatre or the full-length

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[1] 28th. January, 1764. Quoted in W. R. Price, The Symbolism of Voltaire's novels, New York: Columbia, 1911, p. 10.

[2] L. L. Bongie, "Crisis and Birth of the Voltairian conte", Modern Language Quarterly (March, 1962), pp. 53-64.

novel. This, however, is not a sufficient explanation for Voltaire's continued successful use of the conte throughout the latter part of his life. It may help to explain why the best contes were written at a particular period, but as is shown by the letter quoted above, Voltaire had a much more conscious purpose in mind.

The princess, Amaside, in Le Taureau blanc[1] gives a description of what should be expected in this art form:

> "Je voudrais surtout que, sous le voile de la fable, il [le conte] laissât entrevoir aux yeux exercés quelque verité fine qui échappe au vulgaire."

This "verité fine" is basic to the whole of Voltaire's work and to the eighteenth century generally. The didactic element of the "philosophic" writings is inseparable from the attempts made in the field of pure literature. This is not to say that such authors were unaware of art forms generally, and indeed the reverse is rather the case. Many of the traditional styles were imitated by writers who were hypersensitive to the shape and form of the original. Voltaire's own efforts in the theatre illustrate only too well how this hyperconsciousness can lead to poor and unconvincing literature.

In the case of the conte, however, the situation is rather different, principally because it was not until the eighteenth century that it was developed to its fullest and most powerful use. Dorothy

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[1] Mol. 21, 506 [Voltaire, Oeuvres complètes, ed. Louis Moland, Paris, Garnier, 1877-85].
References to Voltaire's works will, with the exception of La Princesse de Babylone, be found in the Moland edition. References to La Princesse de Babylone will be found in Voltaire, Romans et contes, ed. H. Bénac, Paris: Garnier, 1960.

McGhee quotes[1] a remark made by Voltaire to the painter Huber about the use of the conte, showing particularly how conscious Voltaire was of its value, and how aware he was of its literary potentiality:

> "'Voilà un canevas charmant, mais permettez-moi de vous enseigner comment il faut le mettre en oeuvre.' Alors il reprenait l'histoire et nous montrait, par sa manière de la refondre, comment on doit, dans le commencement, détailler beaucoup et même longuement tout ce qui peut servir à l'intelligence exacte du conte; comment il faut faire connaître les acteurs principaux en peignant leurs figures, leurs gestes et leurs caractères; comment on doit exciter, suspendre et même tromper la curiosité; que les episodes doivent être courts, clairs et placés à propos pour couper la narration d'une grande attente; comment il faut presser la marche à mesure qu'on tire vers la fin, et comment la catastrophe doit être énoncée aussi laconiquement que possible. C'est ainsi qu'il donnait, par des exemples délicieuses à entendre, les veritables règles dogmatiques de l'art de raconter."

From this it can be easily understood what care Voltaire took in writing his contes, both from the literary and the "philosophical" point of view. By "philosophical", throughout this study, should be understood that which appertains to the so-called Philosophes of the eighteenth century: those men who earned this title because of their quest for truth and wisdom through rational enquiry, rather than because of any link they may have had with philosophy in the classical sense.

When the motives behind the work of these Philosophes are understood, it becomes apparent how well the conte is suited to their purpose. From the time of Fontenelle and Bayle, works of popularisation had increased in all fields, but particularly in that of science. During the eighteenth century this movement turned to questions of morality.

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[1] D. M. McGhee, Voltairian narrative devices, Menasha: George Banta, 1933, p. 30. The passage is recorded by the Baron de Gleichen in his Mémoires.

Social and political questions were given more than just a public airing, as the intellectual writers of the age turned their efforts to an education of greater numbers, in an attempt to order the destiny of a nation, an effort which was only too successful.

Voltaire appears at the heart of this didactic movement in literature and, almost without exception, all his work was born of a desire to say something of general social or moral value. This "littérature engagée" is an inherent part of the eighteenth century and it would be wrong to ignore the philosophical elements of a work such as La Princesse de Babylone. The theory has been put forward, notably by Pietro Toldo[1], that the essential side of Voltaire's contes is one of amusement. Describing what he calls "des contes purement pour rire" he says:

> "Bien que les contes ne visent qu'à amuser, vous y remarquez, de temps à autre, des pointes d'ironie, des attaques aux puissances, mais ce ne sont là que des traits accessoires."

A similar attitude is found in Gide[2], who takes the point even further and criticises Voltaire for his seriousness:

> "Il écrit Candide pour s'amuser, et en s'amusant, il amuse. Mais l'on sent aussi qu'il veut prouver, et l'on ne sait plus bien quoi, ni non plus à qui il en a...S'il revenait aujourd'hui parmi nous, combien ne se dépiterait-il pas d'avoir si peu triomphé de bien des choses qu'il attaquait donc mal ou qu'il avait tort d'attaquer; et d'avoir fait le jeu de bien des sots."

Apart from the fact that these last remarks are more a justification of Voltaire's activities than a condemnation, it seems to be a mistake

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[1]Pietro Toldo, "Voltaire conteur et romancier", Zeitschrift für französische Sprache und Litteratur, Vol. 40 (1912-13), 131-185.

[2]André Gide, Journal (1889-1939), Paris: Pléiade, 1948, p. 1197.

to consider the philosophical aspect of the contes as mere accessories to an amusing story. It is true that Voltaire's ability in this particular sphere remains unquestioned, but it is equally true that the serious remarks in the contes are concerned with very specific questions and are the raison d'être of the text itself.

Voltaire's preoccupation with the serious aspects of his writings is made quite clear in a passage found in Le Philosophe ignorant[1]:

> "Ce qui ne peut être d'un usage universel, ce qui n'est pas à la portée du commun des hommes, ce qui n'est pas entendu par ceux qui ont le plus exercé leur faculté de penser, n'est pas nécessaire au genre humain."

The very immediate and practical nature of Voltaire's philosophy will be seen in the section of this study dealing specifically with the content of La Princesse de Babylone, but one should beware of making too sharp a division between the literary and the philosophical in a single text.

At first glance, La Princesse de Babylone can be divided into two distinct and apparently unconnected parts: the first, which tells of the competition for the hand of Formosante, the subsequent triumph of Amazan, his return to the "pays des Gangarides" and the beginning of the princess' journey to find her departed hero; the second, which tells of their travels through the world in pursuit of one-another, reaching a climax of disillusion, which gives way to victory as the couple return home to wed and rule in happiness.

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[1]Quoted in: V. W. Topazio, "Voltaire, Philosopher of Human Progress", P.M.L.A., Vol. 74 (1959), 356-364.

In spite of this break the narrative continues and at no point does one totally lose sight of the participants. It will be seen, when the style of the *conte* is discussed, that the unity is greater than it first seems, and that it is wrong to count this as a technical fault, as does George Saintsbury[1] in his mention of the story. Dorothy McGhee[2] and others have implied that the story is an excuse for philosophical discussion, yet this view is as wrong as that which dismisses *La Princesse de Babylone* as something merely "plus féerique"[3] than the other *contes*.

Certainly the fairy-tale element is very strong in *La Princesse de Babylone*, perhaps more so than in any of the other *contes*, yet even this has a particular purpose to serve. It has already been suggested[4] that the fantasy of the *conte* enabled Voltaire to reconcile an otherwise unreconcilable contradiction. There is, however, a more obvious and perhaps more important use for the same fantasy, which, it should be noted, has played a part in all of Voltaire's previous *contes*. In *Micromégas* the rôle of the unlikely or the impossible is essential to the whole story; in *Candide*, particularly, the fantastic, although not immediately apparent, is equally essential, for by its use the reader can stand away from the narrative, viewing it objectively, not entering into the disasters and misadventures which befall the hero, and thus is

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[1] G. Saintsbury, *A History of the French Novel*, London: Macmillan, 1917, p. 385.

[2] *Ibid.*, p. 12.

[3] R. Naves, *Voltaire. L'Homme et l'oeuvre*, Paris: Boivin, 1942, p. 76.

[4] *Supra*, p. 4.

able to approach the philosophical side of the story in a sane and fully conscious manner.

In this way Voltaire is able to underline the points he is trying to make, without going so far as to write them in black and white. This is an ingenious and almost subliminal way of catching the reader unawares and of forcing him to take notice of what is being advocated. It is true that in his later life Voltaire became more practical and immediate in his propagandist writings than earlier and, from what has been said, it comes as no surprise to find the fantastic and fairy-tale elements increasing in proportion to the immediacy of what is being said. La Princesse de Babylone, Le Taureau blanc and Les Lettres d'Amabed all demonstrate how eager Voltaire was to indulge in the fanciful, and they belong to the period of his life when l'infâme was uppermost in his mind, and when the immediate social evils were more important than the misconceptions of Leibnitzian philosophy or other more general questions.

Jean Sareil sums up the necessity of including in the contes fantastic elements, which serve to underline the philosophy, when he says: "Le conte philosophique exige une histoire invraisemblable, aux péripéties exagérées, afin de donner par contraste plus de poids à la thèse philosophique."[1] It could be argued that the light-hearted side of the contes tends to distract, and that as polemic works they fail to instil a proper attitude in the reader, yet this is probably more true of the twentieth century reader than the eighteenth century one.

Perhaps one should not look so far for reasons to explain the

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[1] J. Sareil, "La Répétition dans les contes de Voltaire", French Review, Vol. 35 (1961), 137-146.

increase in the use of the fantastic, particularly as found in La Princesse de Babylone. After all, as William Bottiglia points out[1], a royal decree in 1757 had restored the death penalty for writers and publishers convicted of attacking religion. Although possibly not a very subtle disguise, the fairy-tale method of criticising, not only religion but political and other institutions, is something of a guarantee for the writer. More will be said in the second chapter of this study, when the influence of the oriental tale and the voyage narrative are discussed, of the way in which the writer was able to hide more securely behind the artificial barrier of fantasy, from which he could hurl his darts in comparative safety.

From these remarks it is seen why the conte form was of considerable importance to Voltaire as a writer and a philosopher, but there is another, more personal reason, which may add to an understanding of the success of this particular genre and its appeal to Voltaire. This is an idea put forward by Jacques van den Heuvel in an article called; "Le Conte voltairien ou la confidence déguisée."[2] In this the author suggests that in the contes we can obtain a picture of Voltaire himself, who, whether aware of it or not, was using his personal experience in a very immediate and exact way. He agrees that Voltaire recognized the value of the conte as a weapon of propaganda, but claims that it is a necessary reflection of his personality. Heuvel follows this idea through the contes linking each period of Voltaire's life with what he

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[1] W. Bottiglia, "Candide's Garden", P.M.L.A., Vol. 66 (1951), 718-733.

[2] J. van den Heuvel, "Le Conte voltairien ou la confidence déguisée.", La Table ronde, Vol. 122 (1958), 116-121.

wrote down. There is no doubt at all that Voltaire drew very much on his own experience for many of the episodes in each of the contes, and it is worth noting that of all the many genres which Voltaire tried during his literary career, the conte is the one which offers the writer the widest scope for an expression of his personality, whether consciously intended or not. Again this aspect of the work will be treated under the heading The Philosophy, when it will be seen how La Princesse de Babylone is largely taken from Voltaire's immediate experience and thought.

That the work, as far as Voltaire was concerned, had to be written, becomes clear when it is realized just how inflammatory was the material contained in La Princesse de Babylone. It is beyond the scope of this study to examine the differences between the early editions which appeared in 1768, but the differences which occur between the original March edition, published in Geneva, and that published in July in Paris by the Mercure de France, are considerable and worth noting.

Madeleine Fields has gone into this question of the first edition to appear in France[1], showing how in spite of the promise contained in the introduction, the work, in its revised form, falls far short of the controversial Swiss edition. In the introduction, quoted in the article mentioned, there is this passage:

> "Ce conte très moderne est réduit. On a fait une miniature d'un grand tableau; en conservant néanmoins toutes les touches précieuses du maître et en employant, autant qu'il est possible, les traits d'imagination, les saillies d'esprit, les pensées philosophiques, et l'art par lequel il sait à la fois amuser, instruire et intéresser."

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[1] M. Fields, "La première édition française de la Princesse de Babylone", Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century, Vol. 18, (1961), 179-182.

As a definition of the original this is very good, but unfortunately it could hardly serve to qualify the original, were it not for the all-important and scarcely noticeable words "autant qu'il est possible." The new version was greatly shortened and practically devoid of any philosophical content, leaving "une simple histoire galante."[1]

It is not surprising therefore that this particular edition escaped the royal censure, and it is something of a testimony to the significance of Voltaire's work that so much was, of necessity, cut out of a conte which was published without condemnation on French soil. Madeleine Fields, by way of conclusion, notes the rather special nature of the occasion:

> "Cette première édition en France de la Princesse de Babylone demeure ainsi l'unique et l'inexplicable exemple d'un conte de Voltaire publié, partiellement il est vrai, dans des pages officielles, sans l'intervention ni sanction du gouvernement."

It might be asked how far these negative aspects were necessary to Voltaire, for from the briefest of acquaintances with any of his writings, one is quickly aware of this seemingly hyper-critical side of his work. Yet there are two points which should be borne in mind: the first is that the abuses and wrongs, then as now, were much more apparent than the positive attributes of society and as such were of more value as a source of inspiration to the writer; the second is that the eighteenth century in particular formed something of a reaction against, or even a negation of, the seventeenth century. Literary, political and social criticism were very frequently made with reference, favourable or otherwise to the previous century, and as the eighteenth

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[1] Ibid., p. 181.

century progressed these criticisms became necessarily more and more forceful. As 1789 drew nearer there was little room left for positive building and, as the criticisms which had begun as remarks half concealed in one form or another became more and more open, a headlong rush was begun which ended in the Revolution. Thus the destructive prose of which La Princesse de Babylone was a part, seems to have been necessary to the eighteenth century literary life. The Philosophes, with their concern for man's destiny and the future of humanity, tended to lose sight of pure art in their works, and it is all the more remarkable that Voltaire, while so active in all fields of criticism, could maintain such a high standard of literature. Works of art such as La Princesse de Babylone can only be judged after a closer examination of the style and technique adopted for them.

At all events, it would seem that by 1768 Voltaire fully appreciated the propagandist, philosophical value of the conte, and that when he wrote La Princesse de Babylone he did so in a conscious attempt to teach and influence rather than amuse. By a stroke of irony the appreciation of the work by a twentieth century critic will, quite rightly, be based almost totally on the literary qualities, whereas Voltaire's intention would seem primarily to lie in the other direction.

It should be remembered that the conte was still a recent development and that Voltaire did not think the genre appreciated enough to discuss his work in his correspondence. Few of his contes are mentioned before they actually appear, and even then, as in the case of L'Ingénu, Voltaire showed himself unwilling to admit authorship until some time later. This is again partially a means of self-protection in a world of strict censorship, but it also derives from the lack of

importance attached to this particular form.

Voltaire hints at the serious nature of La Princesse de Babylone in the title of another Geneva edition which also appeared in 1768 and which consisted of 156 pages. The revised title read: "Voyages et Aventures d'une princesse babylonienne, pour servir de suite à ceux de Scarmentado, par un vieux philosophe qui ne radote pas toujours." The suggestion is that the book has a serious intent and that, in spite of the fact that Voltaire had reached the age of seventy-four, he was still as capable of brandishing his literary weapons of propaganda as he was twelve years before when he wrote the Histoire des voyages de Scarmentado.

In conclusion, it can be said that Voltaire approached the composition of La Princesse de Babylone with the confidence he had gained from earlier and highly successful attempts at writing contes. It had nevertheless developed into something new, with the fairy-tale element playing a more important rôle as far as the style was concerned, and a more necessary rôle as far as the danger from serious censorship was concerned. Voltaire, whether or not he had begun writing contes for amusement (his own or other people's), had by this time become fully aware of his purpose, and used La Princesse de Babylone for renewing his attacks on traditional and long-suffered wrongs, as well as for redoubling his criticisms of more recent and thus more acute abuses.

II

THE FORM

Having seen some of the reasons why Voltaire was attracted to the *conte* and why he found it especially fitted for his purposes, the question of sources and influences must be discussed. As is generally the case it is impossible to affirm dogmatically that Voltaire read a particular book or even knew about it. The best indication, to date, of Voltaire's reading matter is found in Voltaire's catalogue of his library at Ferney, edited by Havens and Torrey,[1] and in the list of books which they have drawn up, as based on the catalogue. There is frequently, however, no direct knowledge of when Voltaire acquired a given book, nor whether he read it, nor whether it influenced his way of thinking at all. What can be said, with reasonable certainty, is that a particular *genre* or style was in vogue and that consequently Voltaire must have had some awareness of its existence.

Before talking about the style of *La Princesse de Babylone*, some of the apparent influences will be discussed under four headings: the philosophical tale, which will trace something of the history of the didactic short story; the traveller's tale, which, whether imaginary or factual, created a definite *genre* of its own; the oriental tale, which developed particularly in the eighteenth century; and the love story, which had already established a traditional form.

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[1] G. R. Havens & N. L. Torrey, "Voltaire's catalogue of his library at Ferney", *Studies on Voltaire*, Vol. 9 (1959). All references in this study to Voltaire's library have been taken from this work.

The value of each as an expression of a philosophical viewpoint will be shown.

1

The Philosophical Tale

The didactic in literature was never much of a novelty and, whether the purpose was social satire or an expression of philosophical truth, the tradition can be seen to go a long way back. In French literature the short-story form of satire appeared first in the early fabliaux and in the episodes of the Roman de Renart. Against the background of an animal society, or a chosen social situation, the writers attacked many of the same abuses as did all social and moral satirists, of whom Voltaire was a direct descendant.

Among the fore-runners of Voltaire should be mentioned particularly Rabelais who, in episodic form, built a full pattern of satire linked with amusement. There was also Montaigne whose aim: "instruire et plaire" is noticeably close to the description of Voltaire's purpose as described by the editors of the first Mercure edition, already quoted[1]: "à la fois amuser, instruire et intéresser." What Rabelais termed the "substantifique moelle"[2] of his work, is precisely what Voltaire called the "verité fine"[3] of the conte.

Other than these there exists the tradition of the grouped narrative tales with a socio-satirical purpose, found in Italy as Boccacio's Decameron, in England as Chaucer's Canterbury Tales and

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[1] Supra, p. 12.

[2] Prologue to Gargantua.

[3] Supra, p. 5.

in France itself as Marguerite de Navarre's Heptaméron. All these created a pattern which reappears in Voltaire and which McGhee describes [1] as a general formula consisting of three points: a definite, serious purpose, a studied internal structure, and a pervading ironical tone. These could equally well apply to the Essais of Montaigne, and the gauloiserie in Rabelais shows its satirical grin just as strongly in Voltaire.

Without discussing other traditions of didactic literary genres, many of which Voltaire adopted, it is not difficult to see that, while making use of the conte form which was in vogue at that particular time, he also belongs to a long line of writers who found the short narrative, including episodic and essay styles, especially suited to the expression of an intellectual outlook.

2

The Traveller's Tale

A vogue which had developed more recently, yet which dates back to the time of the Renaissance writers, and indeed to classical literature, was that of the traveller's tale. A distinction should be made between those narratives which are genuine accounts of voyages and travel, and those which are, for the largest part, imaginary. In point of fact the two sorts mingle and interact with the result that in a work such as La Princesse de Babylone they combine to produce an imaginary voyage in a real setting, used essentially for a basis of criticism. For the moment, however, the distinction must be maintained and the history of both types traced.

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[1] Ibid., p. 35.

The authentic voyage descriptions developed naturally enough from the voyages of discovery which began particularly in the fifteenth century and were part of the Renaissance. Perhaps this itself only prolonged a tradition already created by the Chansons de Geste and the early accounts of the crusades.

Martino, whose work is invaluable for a knowledge of the interest in the Orient in French literature of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, discusses[1] the rôle of travel and its importance in France. He shows that the French were not skilled travellers until around 1670, and that it was not until the early eighteenth century that travel accounts became very frequent. From 1746 until 1789 there was published the Histoire générale des voyages at the rate of one volume every two years. During the eighty years from 1660 to 1740 there were more than one hundred relations de voyages in France alone, covering particularly the eastern countries: Turkey, Persia, India, China and Siam.

With an increase in education and in the linguistic ability of the travellers, the facts about the countries they visited became more widely known than ever before. The travellers themselves became more sophisticated and, instead of giving accounts full of vague and sometimes incorrect information, the intention of which was chiefly to amuse, their purpose became one of instruction. In Voltaire's library can be found the following items:

2795 Tavernier, J. B., Six voyages en Turquie, en Perse et aux Indes. Paris 1679. 3 vols.

602 Chardin, Jean, Voyages en Perse et autres lieux de l'orient. Amsterdam 1711. 3 vols.

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[1] P. Martino, L'Orient dans la littérature francaise au dix-septième et au dix-huitième siècle, Paris: Hachette, 1906, p. 48.

267 Bernier, Francis, Voyage, contenant la description des états du grand-mogol. Amsterdam, 1725. 2 vols.

These and others, while being important sources for Voltaire's factual information about the Orient which he was able to incorporate in the Essai sur les moeurs, were also first class examples of the voyage narrative technique, and as such helped to provide the pattern of La Princesse de Babylone.

The voyage imaginaire has probably older literary antecedents than the authentic traveller's tale. Philip Gove[1] traces the development back to Homer through Dante, Rabelais, Cervantes and Defoe, calling Lucian's True History the earliest philosophic voyage. All these works were possessed by Voltaire and were probably read by him.

The link between the voyage imaginaire and the utopian novel is very close, and they are almost synonymous. At least in those imaginary tales where there is no description of an ideal paradise, the reflections and experiences are the direct opposite and are thus, in a negative way, equally a postulation of the perfection which is sought after.

E. Pons in his article on Le 'voyage' genre littéraire au 18e siècle[2] cites Thomas More's Utopia (1518), Rabelais' Quart Livre (1552), Thomas Artus' Hermaphrodite (1605), Campanella's Civitas Sadis (1620) and Bacon's Nova Atlantis (1620) as examples of the utopian works which emerged from the Renaissance and which influenced the literature

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[1] P. B. Gove, The Imaginary Voyage in Prose Fiction, New York: Columbia, 1941.

[2] E. Pons, "Le 'Voyage' genre littéraire au dix-huitième siècle.", Bulletin de la Faculté des Lettres de Strasbourg, Vol. 3 (1926), 97-101.

of the succeeding centuries. These pictures of the Renaissance "heavenly city"[1] created an image which continued through until the late nineteenth century, when the optimistic belief in progress began to wane.

From the idea of a utopia, capable of being reached, there grew in the seventeenth century a group of works, the subjects of which were imaginary journeys to imaginary places. Pons gives five of these: Cyrano de Bergerac's Voyage comique 1648-57), Denis Vairasse's Histoire des Sevarambes (1675), Gabriel Foigny's Aventures de Jacques Sadeur (1710), Godwin's Voyage de Domingo Gonzalès dans le monde de la lune, and Tyssot de Patot's Voyages de Jacques Massé (1710). Add to these Robinson Crusoe which appeared in 1719, as well as the flood of imitations which followed it, and one has some idea of the wealth of literature in this field.

An even closer influence on Voltaire must have been Swift's Gulliver's Travels, published in 1726, and translated as the Voyages de Gulliver by l'abbé Desfontaines in 1727. This influence is more apparent in a work such as Micromégas, but the knowledge of Swift's story that he obtained in England, and from his own readings in a copy of Swift received in 1738, must have consolidated once and for all the relationship which already existed in his mind between travel and philosophy.

Gove quotes a passage from Garnier's Voyages imaginaires, songes, visions, et romans cabalistiques which is, as the title suggests, a

[1] C. Becker, The Heavenly City of the Eighteenth Century Philosophers. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1932. Becker was referring to the eighteenth century but the origin seems to be more in the Renaissance.

collection of imaginary travel tales. It appeared in 1787 and in the Avertissement de l'editeur there is a summary of what was expected by the reader from such works:

> "Tels seront les principaux événemens que nous ferons parcourir à nos lecteurs dans cette première partie des voyages imaginaires...critique, morale, philosophie, peintures intéressantes: nous comptons parler alternativement à l'esprit, pour l'amuser & l'instuire; & au coeur pour le toucher."

Once more there appears the "amuser et instruire" of Montaigne, reminding one that the tradition is not very recent. There is also an indication of the source of the fantastic and fairy-tale elements of Voltaire's writings, which will be discussed further when the significance of the pays des Gangarides is studied. It is worth noting, however, at this point that only seven years before the appearance of La Princesse de Babylone Voltaire had obtained a copy of Villeneuve's Le Voyageur philosophe dans un païs inconnu aux habitans de la terre (Catalogue no. 2945). Of course all the countries but one, travelled through by Amazan and Formosante, are real enough, but the idea of the travelling philosopher may well have been renewed in Voltaire's mind at that time.

In the Avertissement to the Moland text of the contes[1] there is a passage by Auger which sums up the use which Voltaire made of the voyager's tale technique:

> "Pour faire entrer dans un même cadre les moeurs contrastées de plusieurs peuples divers, genre de peinture où il excellait, Voltaire fait voyager au loin, les héros de tous ses romans. Les objets vus

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[1]Mol. 21, p. iii.

> par un étranger, tels qu'ils sont dans la realité et non tels que l'accoutumance les fait paraître aux yeux des habitants du pays, sont représentés naturellement sous leur aspect le plus philosophique et le plus piquant: c'est l'artifice des Lettres persanes; c'est aussi celui de Candide, de Scarmentado, de la Princesse de Babylone, de l'Ingénu, etc."[1]

The element of travel as a basis for philosophical criticism, whether by example or admonition, is a very obvious one, and is one which appealed to Voltaire at a very early point in his literary career. The Lettres philosophiques form, in a broad sense, a travel document and are very much an application of the principles already laid out by the professional travellers of the beginning of the century.

In the contes the same travel style is all-pervading showing to what extent the myth of travel belongs to the eighteenth century. In the Voyages du baron Gangan (1939), a text which has never been discovered, but which is thought to be something of a rough draft of Micromégas, Voltaire first used the voyage technique for a work of fiction.

As early as 1734 the same idea of the extra-terrestrial traveller who visits the Earth and offers his criticisms, sometimes direct and sometimes indirect, is found in the Traité de Métaphysique. Here Voltaire is writing in totally serious vein, yet this is the way he sets about obtaining a satisfactory view of mankind:

> "Je suppose, par exemple, que, né avec la faculté de penser et de sentir que j'ai présentement, et n'ayant point la forme humaine, je descends du globe de Mars ou de Jupiter. Je peux porter, une vue rapide sur tous les siècles, tous les pays, et par conséquent

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[1] Auger, Mélanges philosophiques et littéraires, Vol. 1, p. 421.

sur toutes les sottises de ce petit globe."[1]

It is no surprise to find the two travellers in Micromégas (1752) arriving in much the same way:

> "En sortant de Jupiter, ils traversèrent un espace d'environ cent millions de lieues, et ils côtoyèrent la planète de Mars, qui comme on sait, est cinq fois plus petite que notre petit globe."[2]

Nearer 1768 Voltaire still has the same plan in mind, although on this occasion the traveller leaves the earth to visit heaven, and to criticize dogmatic standpoints:

> "Le 18 février de l'an 1763 de l'ère vulgaire, le soleil entrant dans le signe des poissons, je fus transporté au ciel, comme le savent tous mes amis... j'avoue avec ingénuité que mon voyage se fit je ne sais comment."[3]

Scattered throughout these writings there is also Zadig (1747) who is obliged to travel for political reasons, Babouc (1748) who is sent on a journey by the angel Ituriel, Scarmentado (1756) who travels for his own improvement throughout the world, Candide (1759) whose journeys take him through many European countries and even to America, and l'Ingénu (1767), who has come from America to Europe. The appeal of this particular formula must evidently have been very strong, for a single author to have used it so many times in so many works.

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[1]Voltaire, Traité de Métaphysique, (ed. H. T. Patterson), p. 2.

[2]Voltaire, Romans et contes, (ed. H. Bénac), p. 102.

[3]Voltaire, Dictionnaire philosophique, (ed. J. Benda), Paris: Garnier, 1961, p. 172 (art. "Dogmes").

Before leaving the voyager's tales, there is another literary tradition which is closely connected, and which was equally at work at this time. This is the tradition of the picaresque hero, which arrived in France from Spain at the beginning of the eighteenth century. Le Sage in particular was responsible for this movement in France, although the fashion of Spanish culture had already been strong during the reign of Louis XIV. The displaced persons and unemployed soldiers created by the decline of the New World Spanish empire, gave rise, in part, to the myth of the picaro or rogue who, being unattached, could move with ease from one social setting to another. For an author to use this means of directing his critical and satirical gaze over a wide field was a relatively simple matter, and this is precisely what occurred with Gil Blas and Le Diable boiteux. The individual roaming almost aimlessly through the world is far enough removed from the reader's sympathy, to underline the situations described.

Both these works were recent literary antecedents of Candide and once again it is worth noting how Voltaire chose to use a style which was already established, and to adapt it to his purpose. In all three stories the depth of character is slight, and there is continually an impression that the author is using his hero as an excuse for something more important than characterization. Candide after all is a social outcast, being chased from the "château de monsieur le baron de Thunder-ten-tronckh", and in the same way Amazan chooses to wander the world alone, in an attempt to prove his love, a cause trite enough to demonstrate where Voltaire's aims really lay.

Whatever the reason for travel, whether imaginary or real, satirical or didactic, it is very much a reflection of a spirit of cosmopolitanism in the eighteenth century as a whole. Whereas the English had been great travellers in the seventeenth century, it was not until the decline of the age of Louis XIV that Frenchmen began to look outwards and move around very much. Pierre Bayle, who was obliged to spend much of his life exiled from France, applied his critical attitude to the position in which he found himself, and created a cosmopolitanism which was very modern in concept. It was very largely this cosmopolitanism which opened the way for the Philosophes with their ability to look inwards at themselves as men, and at the institutions of which they were part, and permitted them to write from an external position.

3

The Oriental Tale

To confirm themselves in this pseudo-external situation the eighteenth century critical writers turned to the oriental tale, either as a means of bringing in an unbiased but perspicacious visitor or of offering a distant yet possibly obtainable ideal. This tradition, like that of the traveller's tale, developed in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century, and Martino points out[1] that by 1760 the Orient had become firmly established as an intellectual field and could be used successfully for philosophy.

The interest in the Orient grew largely because of the crusades and appeared in the fabliaux and some of the epics. Except

[1] Ibid., p. 141.

for isolated works such as the writings of Marco Polo it was, according to Martino, only in the fifteenth century that interest really developed. This interest lay dormant, with no significant mentions of the Orient, until the mid-seventeenth century when links with the eastern countries became established. These links were derived from a number of sources: colonial development, oriental travellers' reports and the expansion of Jesuit missions. The foundation of the great Compagnies: that of China in 1660, that of the West Indies in 1665 and that of the Levant in 1670, resulted in a rapid increase in the number of authentic documents on these new areas of interest.

Even more direct were the reports sent back by the missionaries in the form of Lettres édifiantes et curieuses. These were issued regularly during the period 1707 to 1776 and were for Voltaire a source of a large part of his knowledge of the East, and particularly of China. By a rather ironical twist, Voltaire was to use this same information to satirize the very religious institutions in France which had sent the missionaries in the first instance. In general the attitude of the Jesuits was a favourable one, especially in those regions where conversions were successfully taking place.

Both these sources, together with the writings of those sophisticated travellers already mentioned, Tavernier, Chardin and Bernier,[1] and others, created an atmosphere in France which was very receptive to things oriental. Consequently, with the arrival in France of eastern ambassadors and envoys during the last part of

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[1] Supra, p. 19.

the seventeenth century, the general interest grew to the extent that the public was ready for a whole new field of literature.

Martino lists[1] three writers who within a period of ten years produced extended works on China and Japan:

Engelbert Kaempfer, Histoire naturelle, civile et ecclésiastique de l'empire du Japon (1729)

le P. du Halde, Description géographique, historique, chronologique, politique et physique de l'Empire de la Chine (1735)

le P. Charlevoix, Histoire et description générale du Japon (1736)

All but the last Voltaire had among the books in his library and of le P. Charlevoix he possessed three works including the Histoire du Paraguay (1756). These represent the movement of orientalism which runs through the eighteenth century, and which was present in all the major writers to some degree.

Opposed to the above very accurate, scientific works which supplied the factual information required by the writers of the period, there also came to France much genuine oriental literature. This was translated by men such as Galland (Mille et une nuits), Pétis de la Croix (Les Mille et un jours) and Anquetil Duperron (Zend-Avesta), who had been sent by Colbert to learn the oriental languages, with the purpose of making them secrétaires-interprètes du roi. Their work, particularly that of Galland, was invaluable to writers, setting them a pattern for the oriental and suggesting a thousand and one ideas for subject.[2]

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[1] Ibid., p. 138.

[2] Voltaire's copy of Les Mille et un jours is dated 1766, and it is not unlikely that this rekindled his already strong interest in the Orient.

This does not mean that there had been no earlier work done in this field. Barthélemy d'Herbelot had already been working on his Bibliothèque orientale which appeared in 1697 and which was a work which Voltaire knew, and which he had borrowed from the marquis d'Argenson in 1742. This work has as its sub-title Dictionnaire universel contenant tout ce qui fait connaître les peuples de l'Orient and it is certain that it provided Voltaire with much of his basic knowledge about the customs of the eastern peoples.

Martino claims[1] that this knowledge of Voltaire's was outstanding, even for the eighteenth century, and that a study such as the Essai sur les moeurs has more references to the Orient than any other work which appeared during the same century. It was largely thanks to Voltaire that China, which was relatively unknown at the beginning of the century, became by 1768 "mieux connue...que plusieurs provinces d'Europe."[2]

In literature the influence of the Orient reflected the general interest, with a few references appearing in the seventeenth century but the majority developing after the beginning of the eighteenth century. In tragedy the beginnings of the oriental were seen in the theatre of Jean Mairet and Tristan l'Hermite although, as Martino points out, this was more an "Orient de convention" than any genuine picture. Racine followed with Bajazet, but until Voltaire no very extensive use was made. Even with Voltaire the subject was not

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[1] Ibid., p. 22.

[2] Voltaire, Relation du bannissement des Jésuites de la Chine, (ed. R. Naves in Voltaire, Dialogues et anecdotes philosophiques, Paris; Garnier, 1939, p. 217.)

particularly fruitful and plays such as Mahomet or Zaïre are not outstanding, even if the reception given them by Voltaire's contemporaries shows how far the Orient had forced itself into the public mind.

The same is true, but to a lesser extent, of the comedies produced during this time, the tradition opening with Molière's Bourgeois gentilhomme, but producing few major successes. As a representation of the oriental, the opera achieved much more, and works such as those by Mozart, Die Zauberflöte or Die Entführung aus dem Serail recaptured in full splendor all the colour and the exotic of the East.

The pattern is repeated with the novel, although the use of the oriental did not receive any importance until 1705 to 1710 when the influence of the genuine oriental literature first was felt. From that time the novelty and lack of monotony ensured a success which remained in vogue throughout the century. That is not to imply that there was no reaction to what Ascoli calls "l'engouement du jour."[1] He quotes, for instance, the heading of Hamilton's Quatre facardins in which the author discusses the failure of the so popular contes orientaux, as he saw them in 1730:

> "Ensuite vinrent de Syrie
> Volumes de contes sans fin,
> Où l'on avait mis à dessein
> L'orientale allégorie,
> Les énigmes et le génie
> Du talmudiste et du rabbin,
> Et ce bon goût de leur patrie
> Qui loin de se perdre en chemin,
> Parut, sortant de chez Barbin,
> Plus Arabe qu'en Arabie!
> Mais enfin, grâce au bon sens,
> Cette inondation subite
> De califes et de sultans,

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[1]Voltaire, Zadig (ed. G. Ascoli), Paris: Hachette, 1929, p. xlvii.

Qui formait sa nombreuse suite,
Désormais en tous lieux proscrite,
N'endort que les petits enfants."[1]

It was perhaps not so much of a coincidence that one of the books which Formosante read while waiting to sail to England, and which failed to interest her, was Les Quatre Facardins.

The use of the Orient for satirical purposes is traced by Martino[2] to a Genoese historian, Giovanni Paolo Marana, who in 1684 produced L'Espion du Grand Seigneur et les relations secrètes envoyées au divan de Constantinople, découvert à Paris pendant le règne de Louis le Grand, traduit de l'arabe en italien, et de l'italien en francais par x x x. This and Dufresny's Espion dans les cours led to the Lettres persanes (1721) of Montesquieu, in which the combination of the satirical and the exotic produced a masterpiece which remained the standard example for later writers. Not a novel in any sense, the Lettres persanes established a technique of criticism which is essentially that of La Princesse de Babylone. Whereas Montesquieu was trying to lend authenticity to his travellers, Voltaire took the other direction and, profiting from a literary vogue, successfully combined the unreal elements of the exotic Orient with the direct satire of an already established form.

During the first half of the century there were vast quantities of pseudo-oriental letters sent by critical travellers, from France, or from other parts of Europe, a typical example of which was the marquis d'Argens' Lettres chinoises (1739), which was unfinished, but which Voltaire had in his library.

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[1] Hamilton, Oeuvres (1731 edition) Vol. III, p. 4.

[2] Ibid., p. 284.

From England, in 1759, came a new development. This was Johnson's Rasselas which combined the philosophical travellers and oriental tales in a single critical work. Although there is no evidence that Voltaire read Rasselas it seems highly probable, for the work appeared within a few months of Candide and the similarities between the two must have been striking enough to draw the attention of both authors.

The Orient became part of the philosophical literature of the period, not as an excuse merely to introduce a foreign critic to the native land, but also as a genuine attempt to clarify a situation, in which relativity was rapidly becoming of prime importance. Indeed the term, century of relativity might well be used to describe the eighteenth century. This was a period in which outside references and comparisons led the thinkers to postulations and criticisms, which could hardly have occurred before.

Price discussing Zadig[1] with reference to the oriental considers that it is of small significance for Voltaire, and to support his idea quotes the Epitre dédicatoire to the work, which says that it is an "ouvrage qui dit plus qu'il ne semble dire." He is of course, trying to show that the symbolism in Voltaire is of more consequence than the sources and influences, which is true, but at the same time it would be incorrect to minimize the importance of the oriental for the Philosophes. The very fact that Voltaire wrote so much about the Orient in his Essai sur les moeurs shows how much genuine significance he attached to it.

Montesquieu's Esprit des lois (1748) which shows the eighteenth century relativity at its extreme, also demonstrates how seriously the

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[1] Ibid., p. 8.

Philosophes took the discussion of other customs and ideas, whether in fact or fiction. In particular the Orient became for the Philosophes a source of discussion, not only on politics and religion, but on the very basis of metaphysics. Martino estimating the influence of the Orient on Voltaire has this to say:

> "Il apparaît évident, je crois, que la philosophie pratique de Voltaire, si elle n'est pas née de ses lectures sur l'Orient, y a du moins trouvé les occasions fréquentes de se préciser; ce n'est certes pas sans un très sérieux profit de l'esprit qu'il avait parcouru les relations des voyageurs, et feuilleté les lettres des missionnaires, tout empressés à lui vanter l'Asie."[1]

4

The Love Story

The tradition of the love story is too vast to trace in any particular direction, but a little can be said on what was expected from it in the eighteenth century, and on how Voltaire was able to use it as an expression of philosophy.

It should be mentioned here that numerous links have been traced between Ariosto's Orlando furioso and various works of Voltaire. René Legros[2] has shown in a convincing way how close the Orlando furioso is to La Princesse de Babylone. From Voltaire's correspondence it is known how much he admired Ariosto and in his library he had both the Italian and the French versions of the work. Legros shows how the two are alike not only as far as the story, the structure, the general spirit and the psychology of the characters is concerned,

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[1] Ibid., p. 337.

[2] René P. Legros, "L'Orlando furioso' et la 'Princesse de Babylone' de Voltaire", Modern language review, Vol. 22 (1927) 155-161.

but also in many of the details of names and descriptions. As Legros points out: "Tous deux s'efforcent de faire ressortir les faiblesses, l'inconséquence de la nature humaine."

This is an indication of the philosophical purpose which justifies the love intrigue in La Princesse de Babylone. Although it is in part a concession to the popular taste of the sentimental novel, there lies behind it a serious moral and philosophical purpose. This was of course nothing new, but ever since the high point of classical theatre in France, there had been a concern for the attitudes and aspirations of the characters involved. In the seventeenth century this had had more of a universal application but, with the practical and immediate nature of the eighteenth century, the intrigue could be turned to more direct uses.

Van Tieghem in his introduction to a 1930 edition[1] of Contes et romans, points out that "l'amour est le ressort qui déclenche les événements, et les événements à leur tour déclenchent les réflexions." This is very close to the technique of the classical tragedy, but here it is taken one step further: the reader is now obliged to review these ideas which are presented to him as a result of the action.

In Voltaire the pattern is already a familiar one. Zadig spends most of his time looking for Astarté; Rustan, in Le Blanc et le noir, seeks in vain for "la princesse de Cachemire"; Candide travels the world in his attempt to find Cunégonde; and even l'Ingénu presents a similar problem between the Huron and mademoiselle de St. Yves. So in

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[1]Voltaire, Contes et romans (ed. Philippe van Tieghen), Paris: Roche, 1930, p. xi.

La Princesse de Babylone it is not unexpected to find Amazan being sought by, or seeking, Formosante. The significance of this will be discussed in the section dealing with the actual philosophy, but it can be said now that this is an off-shoot of the utopian novels which have already been mentioned.[1] All these characters, as well as those in Johnson's Razzelas and Wieland's Agathon (1766), belong to a group which Hazard calls the "voyageurs mécontents"[2]. The search for happiness theme is basic to eighteenth century thought, and shows itself both in the escapism of the Robinson Crusoe legend and in the utopianism of Eldorado or Happy Valley.

McGhee tends to minimize the significance of this theme which almost always in Voltaire ends in reconciliation, saying that it is "simply a concession to the amorous intrigue in the traditional form which it has assumed throughout the tale."[3] It seems, however, more true to say that this reconciliation provides the ideal "happy ending" which is postulated in the eighteenth century attitude to life.

Dunlop in his History of Prose Fiction[4] suggests that Voltaire's source may have been a work called Le Parisien et la princesse de Babylone, which is found inserted in the Nouvelle Fabrique des excellens traicts de vérités by Philippe Alcripe, probably Philippe le Picard, a monk of the mid-sixteenth century. In this the princess is saved from

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[1] Supra, p. 20.

[2] P. Hazard, La Pensée européenne au dix-huitième siècle. Paris: Boivin, 1946, p. 16.

[3] Ibid., p. 98.

[4] J. C. Dunlop, History of Prose Fiction, London: Bell, 1888, p. 481.

an unwelcome suitor by a French jeweller, who sends her a letter by a swallow; this bird then becomes the friend and confidant of the lovers. During the story the princess elopes after feigning sickness, and there are thus a number of points of comparison between the two stories, but with no evidence to support the fact that Voltaire was even aware that the text existed, little more can be said.

However much one may seek to show certain influences at work in Voltaire, it remains a fact that as his life progressed he became more and more his own source of material. That is to say that, while one is justified in looking for these influences, it is generally true that for a work such as La Princesse de Babylone appearing late in Voltaire's life, the basic foundations had long been laid. It has already been suggested how the intrigue had already appeared in Candide, how the oriental had been found in Zadig, how the voyage form is a repetition of that in Micromégas, and as Van Tieghem says: "toutes les idées des contes sont déjà dans le Voltaire historien et philosophe."[1]

In addition to these better known sources within Voltaire's work, there are two contes en vers which date from 1764 and show something of the direction in which Voltaire's mind was moving. The first is Thélème et Macare which tells of Thélème who loves Macare too much, forcing him away. The result is a pursuit through the world ending once again in happiness and reconciliation. The following passage is significant for its similarity to the idea behind La Princesse de Babylone:

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[1] Ibid., p. xvi.

"Sa maîtresse inconsidérée
Par trop de soin le tourmentait:
Elle voulait être adorée,
En reproches elle éclatait:
Macare en riant la quitta,
Et la laissa désespérée,
Elle courut étourdiment
Chercher de contrée en contrée
Son infidèle et cher amant,
N'en pouvant vivre séparée."[1]

The other is a shorter piece entitled Azolan which opens:

"A son aise dans son village
Vivait un jeune musulman,
Bien fait de corps, beau de visage,
Et son nom était Azolan."[2]

Not only the name of the hero, but also his out standing character and beauty, are close to that of Amazan, whom Voltaire created less than four years later.

The influence of d'Alembert on Voltaire is to some extent visible in the correspondence,[3] and on a number of occasions Voltaire makes use of a particular turn of phrase, already found in one of d'Alembert's letters to him. The description of the critics of Bélisaire as "la canaille sorbonique" was used first by d'Alembert in a letter dated the 11th March 1767 (Best. 13134), and was later used by Voltaire in a number of letters such as the one to Chaussepierre of the 24th April, 1767 (Best. 13242). This suggests that Voltaire respected d'Alembert's opinions, and when he received a letter from him on the 22nd February, 1764 (Best. 10833), praising Thélème et

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[1]Mol. 10, p. 41.

[2]Mol. 10, p. 45.

[3]Voltaire's Correspondence, (ed. T. Besterman), Geneva, 1953ff. (All references to the correspondence will be given according to the Besterman number, as above.)

Macare, or Macare et Thélème as the original title was, it must have been some encouragement to him to take up the conte form which he had neglected since Candide in 1759. The letter from d'Alembert reads:

> "J'ai lu et je sais par coeur Macare et Thélème; cela est charmant, plein de philosophie, de justesse, et conté à ravir. On vous dira comme M. Thibaudois: 'Conte-moi un peu, conte;' et 'Je veux que tu me contes,' etc. C'est bien dommage que vous vous soyez avisé si tard de ce genre, dans lequel vous réussissez à ravir, comme dans tant d'autres."

The astonishing thing is that, in spite of the fact that so much of Voltaire at this time can be found in his earlier work, he has successfully created something different. The conte, like the phoenix, has been renewed in Voltaire's hands, and from the apparent ashes of the old style, there has emerged something fresh and attractive.

III

THE STYLE[1]

After a discussion of the shape of the work, Voltaire's use of language will be looked at with a view to showing how it reflects or underlines the philosophy involved.

As would be expected in a _conte_ belonging to the tradition of the voyager's tale, the plan adopted is a linear one, which starts at a given point, in this case Babylon, and moves, by various stages, towards a conclusion, again in this case Babylon. This type of plan has a number of advantages for the philosophical writer: first it offers an excuse for a review of any number of countries and civilizations which the author wishes to include. Because it is an imaginary voyage, any problems of time and space are easily overcome. As in _Candide_, the travellers in _La Princesse de Babylone_ move quickly from one place to another, either by boat in a usual manner, or by unicorn and griffins which, if not regular, adds to the exotic delight of the fairy-tale, and Voltaire is careful to point out that the unicorns "devaient faire cent lieues par jour." (p. 351)

In the early part of the work the time element is very carefully worked out: the king of Scythia feels himself obliged to

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[1] In treating the style of _La Princesse de Babylone_, I am indebted to the works of Dorothy McGhee (_supra_, p. 6) and R. A. Sayce, _Style in French Prose_, Oxford: Clarendon, 1953; the first for the general outlines of Voltaire's technique, and the second for the method of analysis adopted for the close study of French prose. Much of what follows will have been inspired by one or both of these, although it will not always be possible to give particular references.

postpone his elopement with Aldée saying: "Je vous enlèverai après-demain de grand matin, car il faut dîner demain avec le roi de Babylone." (p. 356) After Formosante leaves Babylon on her pilgrimage to Bassora it is stated that nothing happens until "la troisième couchée" (p. 363) when she meets the king of Egypt. With even more exactitude, Voltaire points out that Formosante arrives too late in the pays des Gangarides and that Amazan had left "il y avait trois heures" (p. 368) This is more important than it might seem, for here begins a series of fluctuations in fortune which are an essential part of the narrative. Gradually, however, the time indications become more vague: the unicorns "en moins de huit jours, amenèrent Formosante... à Cambalu, capitale de la Chine." (p. 372)

There is even a point at which Voltaire seems to have slipped up in his calculations, for although Formosante learns from the Emperor of China that Amazan had left the same morning, and, although she follows him immediately with unicorns presumably capable of equal speed, she learns from her cousin Aldée in Scythia, that "il a passé quatre jours entiers avec moi" (p. 376) and had left the day before. This appears to be an example of Voltaire's technique, conscious or otherwise, of successfully linking the fairy-tale with the philosophical. During the first part of the story the exact time references lend an ironical authenticity to a fabulous narrative, but these same references, if maintained during the section dealing with the various countries visited, would tend to distract the reader, serving to underline the unlikely aspects, which it is now Voltaire's purpose to conceal.

As for the problems of space, however, they are treated in a regular fashion, with the two travellers making a fairly logical journey from the Far East, through northern Europe, to Italy and back through France to Spain, returning to Babylon through Egypt. Except for the unorthodox method of travelling and the compressed time schedule, necessary in a short work of this kind, and also better suited to Voltaire's purpose, the path followed by the two characters is quite normal.

Once again, however, there is an error in Voltaire's technique, which this time is more serious and less readily explicable. This occurs as Formosante finally manages to sail to England, just missing Amazan as he is returning to Holland. From here the progress of Amazan is carefully followed through Italy to Paris, but Formosante is totally neglected by the author until she reappears, also in Paris. Yet she has no means whatever of knowing that Amazan is in France at all, much less in Paris, unless she had followed Amazan as before. Nothing is said about any further travels, so it must be concluded that Voltaire intended Amazan to go on alone. The reason becomes a little clearer when it is seen exactly what Voltaire wished to bring before the reader's critical eyes in Venice and in Rome: the public prostitutes and the cardinals with homosexual tendencies.

As well as being more practical to take Amazan by himself, there is also a literary reason which again demonstrates Voltaire's ability in construction. At this particular stage in the story, the author is preparing the climax, which is precisely the surprise discovery of Amazan in the arms of the "fille d'affaire". This

element of surprise would be reduced if Voltaire had not managed to "lose" Formosante during her travels, in order to make her reappear at the crucial moment.

The second use of the voyage form for the philosophical writer is as the most appropriate and exact image of human life. Existence seen as a journey is an old technique found throughout literature and it is understandable that Voltaire should have found it so attractive. The fluctuations of chance which accompany the travellers illustrate perfectly the changes of fortune found in life. McGhee discussing the structural plan of the contes[1] puts La Princesse de Babylone in the "vacillating fortune" type, as opposed to the "direct plan" to which Micromégas, l'Ingénu, Le Taureau blanc and l'Histoire de Jenni belong. Both Zadig and Candide are in the same category as La Princesse de Babylone and both have a similar pattern, consisting of a long journey, a search and a final reconciliation. The parable of human existence is possibly more apparent in Candide than in La Princesse de Babylone, but the underlying purpose is the same in both. Whereas the "vacillating fortune" in Candide stems from the various events which take place, in La Princesse de Babylone it comes rather from a fluctuation of emotions in Amazan and Formosante, as well as from the inevitable divisions caused by the various stages of pursuit. The continual hope of finding Amazan, succeeded by the same strong disappointment, carries the narrative along the already advancing path. In this way the structural style

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[1] Ibid., p. 43.

of the work is a successful reflection of a philosophical attitude and plays its part in the expression of a commentary made on human life. The full significance of this commentary will be discussed in chapter three of this study.

With the events of the story so closely linked to the more serious purpose behind the work, it is clear that Voltaire was obliged to find the medium which would allow him to intertwine the plot with the philosophical content. It will be seen in the next chapter that the philosophical content, although less apparent in the first part of the story, that is until the departure of Formosante for China, is nevertheless present and of considerable importance. In the second part of the work, as the didactic purpose rises to the surface, Voltaire never allows it to obscure the narrative which runs like a delicate thread through a mass of coarser material.

The amount of direct comment on particular countries during the last thirty pages of the sixty page conte is very slight and is varied enough to keep the pace alive and moving. The way that Voltaire achieves this is a good illustration of his skill as a narrator.

The most direct method is to involve the characters in each of the situations that occur, and to link this involvement in some way with the intrigue. Thus Voltaire introduces the theme of fidelity, placing Amazan in continually renewed situations where the temptations of love are offered him. This is perhaps little more than the "serial story" technique, which consists primarily of recreating a suspense, which provokes a rise and fall of emotion in the reader.

This alone, however, would not be enough, so Voltaire has

brought a variation of events into play, which relieves any hint of monotony or boredom. In Siberia Formosante meets her cousin Aldée under surprising circumstances, and little is said concerning the country itself. The comments on the countries of the North are more explicit, but in all cover no more than three pages, before Amazan passes to Holland and, after a brief remark on the nature of Dutch women, is quickly on his way to England. Here the "unfaithful lover" danger is again used to offset a discussion on the English constitutional system, but even more effective is the brilliant character sketch of the English lord, which is one of the outstanding features of the work. In Venice and Rome the comments are such, as has been pointed out,[1] that there is no difficulty in establishing a direct link with Amazan, both as a character and as an observer.

Paris sees the reuniting of the two, and after a renewal of the pursuit, this time in reverse, the fairy-tale element is brought back, following the rescue from the Spanish Inquisition, which in itself is the signal for the return of the fabulous and unlikely constituents of the story.

Even more subtle is the way in which Voltaire has chosen to look at the various countries, combining variation with a technique that permits the author to pass comments, while remaining practically hidden behind the characters. This he does by using different characters to look at different places. It will be noticed that China and Siberia are described by Formosante, that in Russia it is

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[1] Supra, p. 41.

the phoenix who enters upon a long conversation with the "seigneur cimmérien", that in Scandinavia and Poland it is Amazan who witnesses the political trends. Thus, although travelling separately, they are linked together, as far as the observations are concerned: "Ils traversèrent ainsi toute la Germanie; ils admirèrent les progrès que la raison et la philosophie faisaient dans le Nord." (p. 379) In Holland their experiences are once more apart and, until the two are found together again in Paris, the rest of the journey is portrayed through the eyes of Amazan. But at the same time the presence of the author, from this moment, begins to make itself felt in the quietest possible way. He mentions himself as the translator of "ces mémoires" (p. 381) and, at the end of the English episode, it is the author who, commenting on the nearness of the two ships, says: "Ah, s'ils l'avaient su! Mais l'impérieuse destinée ne le permit pas." (p. 386)

In Paris the author again interjects a brief remark on the situation at hand: "Quel exemple de la faiblesse humaine! (p. 394) In this way Voltaire maintains an illusion of variety, which in a philosophical commentary is, to say the least, unexpected, but which fits the basic mood of the narrative so well that the whole becomes a single unity.

The importance of the climax in the contes has already been mentioned briefly[1] and some more should be said about its position in

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[1] Supra, p. 41.

La Princesse de Babylone, and its relation to the conclusion. In this story, as in Candide, the final climax is reached when the two main characters meet. The suspense seems resolved, although Voltaire has in fact played a slight confidence trick. The climax turns out to be also a heightening of suspense, as the chase is renewed, leading to the secondary climax, which consists of the rescue of Formosante in Spain. The secondary climax allows Voltaire to return to the fairy-tale style, and thus to round off the story in the most satisfactory manner. Conscious that, if prolonged any further, the conte would become tedious, Voltaire has chosen to conclude with almost a literary shrug of the shoulders. There is a feeling that the author has finally become a little weary of telling his story and wants to finish it as quickly as possible. The events which took place are, he says, commonplace and known by everybody: "Chacun sait comment le roi d'Ethiopie devint amoureux de la belle Formosante... on se souvient qu'Amazan... on n'ignore pas qu'Amazan... Ces prodiges ne sont-ils pas écrits dans le livre des chroniques d'Egypte?" (pp. 404-5)

All this is very flattering for the reader who feels himself standing on the same level as Voltaire, looking over his shoulder at the story that has just been told. This lulls the reader into a conniving unawareness, helping him to accept without too much question, all that the writer has chosen to include of a philosophical nature. Bénac has something similar in mind when he says:

> "Voltaire semble avoir renoncé à la puissance suggestive du conte pour augmenter son potentiel d'idées que l'irréalité flagrante du récit fait éclater avec tant de

> force que nous avons l'impression d'être toujours face à face avec l'auteur."[1]

Yet the feeling is stronger than this, and the reader, because of the ironical attitude adopted by Voltaire towards his characters, feels himself practically in league with him.

The last two pages of the text are added rather as an appendix, and are principally devoted to an expression of hope for the future of La Princesse de Babylone, and to a series of attacks on Voltaire's favourite enemies in the literary field. This small addition has practically no relation to the text itself and can be considered irrelevant to a discussion of the form of the conte, as far as the style and general shape are concerned.

In La Princesse de Babylone Voltaire's use of language and his general literary technique reflect the philosophical purpose which underlies the work. This is exactly what is meant by a successful style in any given author: a style conspicuous, not by its absence, but by its apparent absence. That which seems at first relatively simple and straightforward, shows itself, upon analysis, to be complex and particular.

The vocabulary used in La Princesse de Babylone, like most of the ideas, can be found in earlier works. Voltaire shows himself eager to use correct, or what was conventionally thought to be correct vocabulary, in an attempt to convince the reader that what is being said is the truth. This also comes from the eighteenth century

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[1] Voltaire, Romans et contes, (ed. H. Bénac), Paris: Garnier, 1960, p. vi.

encyclopaedic spirit, with its thirst for knowledge, and consequently a desire for exactitude.

The Orient that Voltaire describes is not a desert land of heat and dryness, but one of splendour and plenty. Pomeau comparing the Orient pictured in Le Taureau blanc with that of La Princesse de Babylone, has this to say:

> Cet Orient ne brille pas d'un coloris aussi vif
> que celui de la Princesse de Babylone, où parfois
> s'annonçaient les tons ardents de Salammbô."[1]

The opening description of the palace of Bélus, whatever its exaggerations, transports the reader immediately into the heart of the fairy-tale East, which is already to be found in the Arabian Nights. Voltaire combines, however, a picture of the Orient with one of antiquity. His purpose in selecting an antique and oriental setting is certainly an attempt to lend philosophic depth to the whole. The entire question of irony throughout La Princesse de Babylone will be discussed later, but it will suffice for now to indicate the ways in which Voltaire has achieved this position.

As in Zadig, the use of a vocabulary which is traditionally associated with the Orient, gives an authentic, if not accurate, touch to the work. The exotic plant descriptions of the opening paragraph are sufficient to convince the average reader that he is being taken into a genuinely eastern world:

> "...sur cette terre on avait élevé des forêts
> d'oliviers d'orangers, de citronniers, de palmiers,

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[1] Voltaire, Le Taureau blanc, (ed. R. Pomeau), Paris: Nizet, 1956, p. lxvii.

> de gérofliers, de cocotiers, de canelliers, qui formaient des allées impénétrables aux rayons de soleil." (p. 343)

However real or accurate all this may be, the exaggerated flood of colourful language fits the general scheme of over-emphasis, particularly at the beginning of the conte. Apart from the humour which comes from such a handling of vocabulary, it also serves to ensure that the reader enters into the spirit of the pseudo-oriental tale, while not allowing him to be carried so far that he ignores the more serious aspects of the content.

The humour increases with the descriptions of the arrival of the three monarchs: the king of Egypt riding the "boeuf Apis" and offering to Formosante "les deux plus beaux crocodiles du Nile, deux hippopotames, deux zèbres, deux rats d'Egypte, et deux momies", the king of India presenting one hundred elephants, and the king of Scythia giving one hundred war-horses covered with black-fox skins. There is in this an almost Rabelaisian delight in invention and in imagination let loose.

Throughout the first half of tale, the writer's inventiveness contrives to pour into the story all the elements of an amusing and exciting adventure from the East. The talk of unicorns and griffins adds a whimsical excitement, and for good measure the phoenix is introduced. The phoenix tradition runs through mythology, although it seems possible that d'Herbelot's Biblithèque orientale may well have inspired Voltaire in this direction. Under the article Smorg there is the following description:

> "Ce mot Persien signifie proprement cet Oiseau fabuleux, que nous appelons Gryphon & qui nous est venu de l'Orient."

This, and a similar mention under Anka, possibly lies behind both the phoenix and the griffin episodes in La Princesse de Babylone.

It is particularly in the small, apparently unnecessary, details that Voltaire excels, in such a way as to create a rich and complete picture. The exactitude of the phoenix' age: "Vingt-sept mille neuf cent ans et six mois" or the fact it speaks "il pur chaldéen", the fact that the phoenix not only knows two friendly griffins who live in "l'Arabie Heureuse", but that he will write to them "par la poste aux pigeons" (p. 367), the knowledge that the four thousand mandarins each present Formosante with a message of welcome, written on "une feuille de soie pourpre" (p. 372), all these pieces of information add nothing to the development of the narrative, but are at the basis of the mood created throughout. They are all part of the sugar-coating around the philosophical pill being offered by Voltaire.

The carefully worked out time schedule of the early part of the story has already been examined,[1] but there is yet another dimension which Voltaire has taken to objectivize the conte, and also to add to the whimsical interest. This he has done by setting the story at a point in ancient history and by then making references to events in more recent history, thus again lending a tone of authenticity to the narrative. Voltaire tells about "les jardins de

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[1] Supra, p. 39.

Sémiramis, qui étonnèrent l'Asie plusieurs siècles après" (p. 343), or describes "cette partie du monde qu'on nomme Europe." (p. 351) The Trojan war is mentioned in the following terms as a point of comparison with the war about to take place around Babylon:

> "On sent bien que la guerre de Troie, qui étonna le monde quelques siècles après, n'était qu'un jeu d'enfants en comparaison." (p. 363)

In this way the writer hides behind his style in such a manner that, when the time comes to make criticisms of contemporary institutions, he can do so with comparative impunity. It will be seen that when Voltaire comments on the various countries visited by Amazan and Formosante the time unity is not respected. The ruler seen in China is identified as Yung-cheng who was emperor from 1723 to 1736, whereas the monarchs visited in Europe are all contemporaries of Voltaire. It is therefore important that the time references in the early part of the story be inexact and vague enough to permit the same juggling with history as the same lack of particularity allows with the geography. Only in a fairy-tale narrative, or one of supernatural order such as Le Diable boiteux, can the author permit himself such liberties of movement, and at the same time successfully create a convincing literary unity.

The proper names that Voltaire has adopted are worth some commentary. Neither Amazan nor Formosante appear to be particularly oriental names, and it seems that Voltaire has made no attempt at authenticity in this direction, although for the eighteenth century they would have had quite an exotic ring. Certainly the text is full

of genuine references to people, gods and books belonging to the East, such as Apis, Veidam and Xaca, as well as the place names and the general direction taken. The return to Babylon from Egypt follows a regular route, although the names were already antiquated in Voltaire's time; Memphis, Héliopolis, Arsinoé, Pétra, Artémite, Sora and Apamée: all these Voltaire has put in, largely with the same gusto that had accompanied the names of so many exotic plants and trees earlier. It reminds one of passages from Candide such as the description given by Cacambo of his journeys:

> "Ce pirate ne nous a-t-il pas menés au cap de Matapan, à Milo, à Nicarie, à Samos, à Pétra, aux Dardanelles, à Marmora, à Scutari." (Bénac, p. 212)

The technical value is nil, but as an artistic style it is convincing and amusing.

The name Amazan bears some resemblance, as has been pointed out, to the name of the hero of the conte en vers, Azolan. But it is a name which seems to have appealed to Voltaire, perhaps for no other reason than the sound. In Le Taureau blanc the king's name is Amasis while his daughter is called Amaside. Without searching too far there can be found Azora in Zadig together with a character called Arimaze, while Amabed gives his name to the group of pseudo-oriental letters.

Formosante seems modelled on some of the proper names of the Orlando furioso. Legros points out that the following names appear in Ariosto's work: Agramante, Sacripante, Bradamante, Aquilante, Fulvirante and Lamirante. This suggests that Voltaire has adopted

this pattern of using a classical Latin base meaning "beautiful", with a modern Italian suffix.

For the various countries described, Voltaire goes to even greater lengths to emphasize the authenticity of his narrative, generally by the means of straightforward description and the inclusion of accurate proper names, as already mentioned.

Usually Voltaire keeps close to the conventional as far as these descriptions are concerned, although for the twentieth century critic there is no means of estimating how much of what Voltaire says was already convention at that time, or how much Voltaire contributed to the establishment of that convention. The description of the Chinese mandarins must have been quite recognizable at the time, as must have been the comment on the Dutch women: "si froides qu'aucune ne lui fit d'avances comme on lui en avait fait partout ailleurs." (p. 380) The satirical picture of milord What-then was certainly familiar enough to Voltaire's contemporaries and the snatches of English: "How dye do" and "roast-beef" (p. 382) together with the meal of "poudings" (p. 383) are sources of amusement to the Frenchman of today, just as in the eighteenth century.

Similarly in Italy, the picture of the castrati and the morals of the cardinals, plus some more snatches of the native tongue: "San Martino, che bel ragazzo! San Pancratio, che bel fanciullo." (p. 389), quickly offer a typical impression of the place.

There are two reasons for suggesting that Voltaire's picture

of the various countries is conventional rather than new satire: the first is that in nearly every case he is reporting things that he has read elsewhere, or at least has incorporated into his own earlier works; and the second is that if it is to be fully effective as satire the reader must be able to recognize a large proportion of what is being said, and to identify it with his own views on the matter.

Without making a complete analysis of the vocabulary it is not possible to make any sharp division between the concrete and abstract nouns used by Voltaire. What can be said is that in La Princesse de Babylone there is a predominance of both concrete nouns and descriptive adjectives. This is to be expected in the first half of the narrative and, for the sake of unity, should be expected to continue, at least partially, in the second half. Generally Voltaire has used concrete vocabulary in direct satire and more abstract vocabulary when he is offering praise of some particular virtue. The following two passages illustrate this variety of technique: the first attacking the ceremonial foolishness of the Roman Catholic church:

> "Lorsqu'on eut bien chanté, le Vieux des sept montagnes alla en grand cortège à la porte du temple; il coupa l'air en quatre avec le pouce élevé, deux doigts étendus et deux autres pliés, en disant ces mots dans une langue qu'on ne parlait plus: A la ville et à l'univers. Le Gangaride ne pouvait comprendre que deux doigts pussent atteindre si loin." (p. 388)

The second is Voltaire's comment on some of the political methods of the Scandinavian countries:

> "Ici la royauté et la liberté subsistaient ensemble par un accord qui paraît impossible dans d'autres Etats; les agriculteurs avaient part à la législation, aussi bien que les grands du royaume; et un jeune prince donnait les plus grandes espérances d'être digne de commander à une nation libre." (p. 378)

Voltaire's use of direct and indirect speech in La Princesse de Babylone is considerable. The direct form particularly has been used in all the contes, as well as in a number of philosophical dialogues, such as the article Fraude and the various Catéchismes in the Dictionnaire Philosophique. This serves a number of purposes, both literary and philosophical. From the literary point of view, directly reported speech makes for a clear and lively style, in which all unnecessary conjunctions and paraphrases are eliminated. This helps the philosophical purpose, for not only is the argument clearly and succinctly stated, but also both sides of the question can apparently be expressed. There is a certain authenticity in direct speech, which is lacking in other forms of narrative, even when the background is a fairy-tale.

All this is linked with the conte form in which a number of essentials must be found. The first of these, without which it would be incorrect to call the form a conte, is an awareness of the author's presence throughout. This has already been noticed when the variety of the philosophical commentary was discussed,[1] but by examining the text more closely it will be seen that the author has subtly introduced himself to the reader from the very beginning.

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[1] Supra, p. 44.

This is achieved partly by the nature of the story, for a third person is inevitably required in the case of events which are supposed to have taken place both in distant time and space, but Voltaire also takes care to involve himself and the reader in the action. After a brief description of Bélus, there is a comment on his belief that he was "le premier homme de la terre." (p. 343) The comment, which is: "ce qui pouvait excuser en lui ce ridicule..." (p. 343), is a piece of gentle irony, the source of which can only be the writer. The next sentence begins: "On sait que..." which, like the "chacun sait comment..." of the end of the story, immediately gives a feeling of almost confidential complicity to the reader. This almost unnoticeable involvement is heightened on the following page by an exclamation again uttered by the author: "Quelle différence, ô ciel! de l'original aux copies! " (p. 344). It is interesting that in the later Paris edition of 156 pages there occurs at this point a variation, which shows even more clearly how Voltaire is taking trouble to keep his presence constantly known. The edition at this point reads: "...et celle que le fameux Médicis acquit à tant de frais pour orner son palais. Mais quelle différence, ô Ciel! des copies que l'Europe a vues à l'original que possédait Bélus!" Once more there is a depth of irony which will later allow the almost unnoticeable instrusion of philosophy into a seemingly straightforward fairy-tale.

Even in the middle of the "exciting" description of the combat

with the lion, Voltaire cannot resist a remark which by its incongruity makes the situation humorous and, by its reference to a contemporary custom, maintains the total effect of irony:

> "Le jeune inconnu, touché du péril d'un si brave prince, se jette dans l'arène plus prompt qu'un eclair; il coupe la tête du lion avec la même dextérité qu'on a vu depuis dans nos carrousels de jeunes chevaliers adroits enlever des têtes de maures ou des bagues." (p. 349)

The passage just quoted indicates the tone of the whole conte, for there is throughout the feeling that Voltaire wrote an oriental tale very much with his tongue in his cheek. It might be going too far to call La Princesse de Babylone a satire of the oriental tale or of the Arabian Nights, but at no point in the early part is there any attempt to be genuinely serious. It is worth looking at a few of the devices used by Voltaire to create a humorous effect in the conte, and particularly in the first half, for it is by this means that the mood of irony can subsist, enabling the author to catch the reader unawares with his undercurrents of serious thought. This does not imply that the oriental and other influences are not therefore equally applicable, nor that the story could not be enjoyed in a more serious, if more naive, vein, but it does demonstrate that Voltaire has taken a genre which was in vogue at that particular time, using it in his own way for his own purpose.

The most immediately obvious way of creating a humorous effect is by the use of overstatement. The entire opening section is devoted to this, although other examples can be found later in the text. Here is the description of the refreshment arrangements made

for the comfort of the spectators at the combats:

> "Tandis qu'on préparait ces brillantes épreuves, vingt mille pages et vingt mille jeunes filles distribuaient sans confusion des rafraîchissements aux spectateurs entre les rangs des sièges." (p. 345)

All this is for an amphitheatre "qui pouvait contenir cinq cent mille spectateurs", while the Encyclopaedia Britannica gives the Colosseum as the largest known amphitheatre of the ancient world, and that capable of holding only 50,000, a mere tenth of the one in Babylon.

This form of exaggeration is complemented by another which is mock-heroic in nature. Here is the description of the king of Scythia, about to engage in combat with the lion:

> "Sa rare valeur ne lui permit pas seulement de se servir du secours de son tigre. Il s'avance seul, légèrement armé, couvert d'un casque d'acier garni d'or, ombragé de trois queues de cheval blanches comme la neige." (p. 349)

There is something very quixotic about the nobility that Voltaire describes, and it fits perfectly the mood of exaggeration which has been created by the picture of the court, the amphitheatre, the people and the difficulty of the feats that must be performed. This technique of overstatement and mock-heroics persists until the end of the story when Amazan prepares to rescue Formosante from the Inquisition:

> "Il s'arme d'une cuirasse d'acier damasquinée d'or, d'une lance de douze pieds, de deux javelots, et d'une épée tranchante, appelée la fulminante, qui pouvait fendre d'un seul coup des arbres, des rochers et des druides." (p. 399)

In this last quotation there are two further devices employed by Voltaire to obtain a humorous effect: the first is that which has

already been noted[1] in the list of proper names, the excessive use of detail, which adds nothing as far as knowledge of events or action is concerned. It is astonishing that Voltaire finds the space to add minute details such as "damasquinée d'or" in a text which barely occupied sixty pages. The second device is that of incongruity, which is linked with understatement and anticlimax. By placing the word "druides" at the end of the sentence Voltaire achieves a double effect: by equating "druides" with trees and rocks, the reaction is a humorous one, and at the same time a tone of seriousness is sounded as the reader realizes more vividly that something important is also implied. The name of the sword is probably another reflection of the Orlando furioso, both by its form, and by the fact that the sword is given a name at all.

Understatement, although less frequently used, is just as much a source of humour as overstatement or exaggeration. In the description of Amazan's tribulations at Rome there is an example of both devices, each gaining in effect from its proximity to the other:

> "Il fut courtisé le reste de la journée par les seigneurs les plus importants de la ville: ils lui firent des propositions encore plus étranges que celle de baiser les pieds du Vieux des sept montagnes. Comme il était extrêmement poli, il crut d'abord que ces messieurs le prenaient pour une dame, et les avertit de leur méprise avec l'honnêteté la plus circonspecte. Mais, étant pressé un peu vivement par deux ou trois des plus determinés violets, il les jeta par les fenêtres, sans croire faire un grand sacrifice à la belle Formosante." (p. 390)

In the satirical picture of the Englishman the technique of

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[1] Supra, p. 52.

understatement reaches the absurd, thus underlining in the style the point being made as an idea. The national tendency to be reserved and unexcitable is thus made even clearer:

> "Dans l'excès de sa douleur, elle laissa traîner la lettre d'Amazan; milord Qu'importe la lut le lendemain matin. 'Voilà, dit-il en levant les épaules, de bien plates niaiseries'; et il alla chasser au renard avec quelques ivrognes du voisinage." (p. 386)

Also in the episode with milord What-then can be found a device which is similar in nature to the straightforward over-statement: this is the use of repetition for comic effect. The Englishman's traditional lack of conversation is in this way again reflected in the style:

> "Après un quart d'heure de silence, il regarda un moment Amazan, et lui dit: How dye do; à la lettre: comment faites-vous faire?"

This is repeated a few lines further on:

> "Il fut encore un quart d'heure sans parler; après quoi il redemanda à son compagnon comment il faisait faire et si on mangeait du bon roast-beef dans le des Gangarides." (p. 382)

Voltaire shows himself to be particularly fond of creating a humorous effect in the final part of a statement. This he does either in the form of an anticlimax or as a concluding remark which is in a serious vein and which points to the ridiculousness of what has gone before. In the following passage Voltaire deals a blow at over-optimism, by a final, brief, yet totally effective, statement:

> "Tout le monde avouait que les dieux n'avaient établi les rois que pour donner tous les jours des fêtes, pourvu qu'elles fussent diversifiées; que la vie est trop courte pour en user autrement; que les procès, les intrigues, la guerre, les disputes des prêtres, qui consument la vie

> humaine, sont des choses absurdes et horribles; que l'homme n'est né que pour la joie; qu'il n'aimerait pas les plaisirs passionément et continuellement s'il n'était pas formé pour eux; que l'essence de la nature humaine est de se réjouir, et que tout le reste est folie. Cette excellente morale n'a jamais été démentie que par les faits." (p. 346)

Here the technique is even more subtle, for couched in the middle of these things which have been disproved by nothing but experience, there is a typically Voltairian statement which remains undeniably true: "que les procès, les intrigues, la guerre, les disputes des prêtres, qui consument la vie humaine, sont des choses absurdes et horribles." By weaving that which is undeniably true into that which is undeniably false Voltaire uses a double negative device, which is then reinforced by the "n'a jamais... que" of the final sentence.

In addition to the above devices of humour there are other more obvious ones, such as straightforward punning:

> "La dame d'honneur, se mêlant de la conversation, dit que très souvent ce mot de berger était appliqué aux rois; qu'on les appelait <u>bergers</u>, parce qu'ils tondent de fort près leur troupeau." (p. 352)

Sometimes it is a dry, almost sarcastic, comment such as that made on the king of Egypt's ability to shoot a bow and arrow:

> "Quand il tirait au blanc, la place où l'on était le plus en sûreté était le but où il visait." (p. 361)

There is, too, the almost unnoticed comment which implies so much more than it expresses: an example of what might be termed suggestive irony. This is how Voltaire describes the saint at the shrine of Bassora, who is modelled on Priapus:

> "Le saint à qui ce temple avait été dédié était à peu près dans le goût de celui qu'on adora depuis à Lampsaque. Non seulement il procurait des maris aux filles, mais il tenait lieu souvent de mari. C'était le saint le plus fêté de toute l'Asie." (p. 363)

Enough examples have been taken to illustrate Voltaire's method, and to show how much of La Princesse de Babylone is to be read at a level above face value. The distinction between irony and humour is at best a very fine one, and in the case of Voltaire the two are practically equivalent. This particular tone of cynicism runs through the contes, and is a further demonstration of the destructive prose which belonged to the eighteenth century. For the Philosophe eager to spread his propaganda the conte emerges as the most efficient and acceptable form. Irony is the only literary technique in which the twin purposes "amuser et instruire" fully combine, for irony, by its very nature, amuses, and at the same time it forces the reader into an alertness which leaves him the choice of accepting or questioning that which is before him. Irony, it may be said, is the style proper to polemical writing, and Voltaire uses it to its fullest extent. The whole work from beginning to end is written in this ironical tone and to follow Wade's pattern of criticism,[1] one might call La Princesse de Babylone "a study in the fusion of irony, fairy-tale and philosophy."

To conclude, a word should be said on the art of characterization in La Princesse de Babylone. As in the other contes, with perhaps the exception of l'Ingénu, there is no development of characters at all, and throughout they appear very static. The past-

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[1] I. O. Wade, Voltaire's 'Micromégas', Princeton: University Press, 1950.

definite, which is generally used as the narrative tense in the contes, tends to make the characters seem very puppet-like, and it is difficult to see them used by the author for anything but the expression of ideas. La Princesse de Babylone certainly has something to say about human behaviour, but this is said in ways other than through the examples offered by the hero or heroine, within the context of the narrative. In a sense Voltaire is following the fairy-tale tradition, for the characters are sketched in the lightest way possible, and once again he has been able to turn this to his advantage in a philosophical work. As Hugo Friederich says commenting on Candide:

> "Voltaire ne cherche pas à dissimuler leur invraisemblance [des personnages]. Il l'exploite pour accuser le caractère de conte de fees qu'il veut donner à son recit, pour en attiser la malice-qui au contraire de l'humour s'allie tout naturellement à l'invraisemblance-et pour rendre plus saisissant le contraste des bons et des méchants, des habiles et des sots, des cyniques et des naïfs." [1]

This accounts, in part, for the exceptional nature of Amazan's character as well as that of Formosante. They, just as much as the minor characters, are recognizable as little more than a union of one or two moral attributes which are at play in the world of the author's pen. The one exception in La Princesse de Babylone is milord What-then, whom Voltaire has obviously taken a delight in painting as close to the original as possible, even if he is at the same time extremely stereotyped.

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[1] H. Friederich, "Candide", La Table Ronde, Vol. 122 (1958) 109-115.

From what has been said about the style and form of La Princesse de Babylone there has emerged a conception of a conte composed in the traditional Voltairian manner, but with a number of individual traits. The extent to which irony and humour have been used, has been even more heightened, because the work in itself has brought together so many of the traditional genres. That it is not a deliberate satire on these genres is probable although, while achieving so much else, there is all the time more than a suspicion of deliberate literary satire. The eighteenth century with its self-awarenesses was, before everything else, a century of deep sophistication. This is particularly so in the second half of the period and, for the most self-aware writer of the time to produce a work such as La Princesse de Babylone in 1768, he must have seen it as a most valuable form to use. How valuable will be shown in the final chapter of this study, which will be an appraisal of the philosophical content of the story.

IV

THE PHILOSOPHY

As in Candide, the philosophical content of La Princesse de Babylone can be taken on a number of levels. For the purpose of this study the philosophy will be looked at in four sections: the individual, which will consist of Voltaire's remarks concerning particular people or places with little reference to a general application; the universal, summarizing the ideas which concern humanity in the broadest sense; the social, which will study the comments made by Voltaire on man's institutions and, in particular, on religion; the political, which will treat the descriptions of the various countries and the forms of government found there. In a sense such divisions are arbitrary, for in practically every case the ideas overlap and frequently Voltaire has concealed a secondary subject within the first.

1

The Individual

The opening passages of La Princesse de Babylone are designed to make an impression of exaggeration and magnificence, setting the atmosphere of the conte. However, to understand the situation, the reader must know the significance of Babylon for Voltaire. In the correspondence of 1767 there occur a number of references to Babylon, the meaning of which is quite clear. In a letter written on the 9th January, 1767, to the Duc de Choiseul, during the period of the Geneva blockade, Voltaire says:

> "...et nous pauvres Persans, parce que nous sommes votre peuple, nous ne pouvons ni avoir à manger, ni recevoir nos lettres de Babilone, ni envoyer nos esclaves chercher une médicine chez les apoticaires de Scithopolis." (Best. 12930)

In addition to this, Voltaire frequently refers to the marquis de Florian as "Mon cher grand Ecuier de Babilone ..." (Best. 12950 & 13171) and in a letter to the comte d'Argental, also written in January, he begins: "Ce bon vieillard vous tend les bras de Scithie aux murs de Babilone." (Best. 12927) The implications are quite clear, and there is no reason to believe that less than a year later Voltaire's mood should have worked on a different pattern. Babylon is Paris and, because the inhabitants of Ferney are French, they are unable to reach Geneva, here called Scithopolis. Price, attempting to clarify the symbolism of Zadig, claims that Babylon represents one of four possibilities or a combination of them all: the Babylon of the ancient Chaldeans, the Egyptian Babylon, the Babylon of the Mohammedan califs: Bagdad, or the Babylon of Saint Peter: Rome.[1]

Whatever justification there may be for any of these symbolic explanations, Babylon remains before everything else, if it is to be taken as a symbol at all, a picture of Paris. This would be confusing if taken too far, for Amazan and Formosante eventually reach Paris itself, having set out from Babylon. The opening description leaves little doubt about the identity both of Babylon and the palace of Bélus, which, much as Versailles, is situated not far from the town:

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[1] Ibid., p. 87.

> "On sait que son palais et son parc situé à quelques parasanges de Babylone, s'étendaient entre l'Euphrate et le Tigre, qui baignaient ces rivages enchantés." (p. 343)

All this is criticism of the unneccessary and exaggerated splendour of the court in France, as well as having a wider significance which will be seen in the next section.

Of the life in Babylon there is not a great deal said, and most of Voltaire's comments on France are reserved for Amazan's visit to Paris. There are, however, a few minor points worth noting. One of these is the scientific development, which has certainly some reference to contemporary advances, although Voltaire's admiration for the Babylonian's knowledge of astronomy was considerable. He talks of "vos Babyloniens, qui se vantent d'avoir observé les astres pendant quatre cent trente mille années." (p. 385) Earlier Voltaire describes what is, in effect, a very sophisticated planetarium:

> "Au milieu des jardins, entre deux cascades, s'élevait un salon ovale de trois cent pieds de diamètre, dont la voûte d'azur semée d'étoiles d'or représentait toutes les constellations avec les planetes, chacune à leur véritable place, et cette voûte tournait ainsi que le ciel, par des machines aussi invisibles que le sont celles qui dirigent les mouvements célestes." (p. 354)

Voltaire here shows a great deal of foresight, since the first automatic planetarium of this type was not built until 1913, when Zeiss developed one in Germany.

The brief mention of "la petite révolution du ciel que vos mages appellent la précession des équinoxes" (p. 357) had been studied by Newton and had already been praised by Voltaire more than

thirty years before in the Lettres philosophiques.[1] It had also been the subject of a more recent work by d'Alembert: Recherches sur différents points importants du système du monde (1754-56).

Among other contemporary allusions in the Babylonian descriptions is one which is also an indication of Voltaire's source. This is the mention of the diamonds brought by Amazan and the remark that "on ne connaissait pas encore cette magnificence dans la superbe Babylone." (p. 350) Although the diamond had been known at a much earlier period, according to the Encyclopaedia Britannica[2] it was not until 1746 that it became popular in France as a precious stone. However, Jean-Baptiste Tavernier (1605-89) had visited most of the Indian diamond mines between 1638 and 1665 as a dealer, and he described in his writings the methods used. Both as a piece of scientific popularisation and as a recognizably contemporary reference, the mention of diamonds must have been a very deliberate one on the part of Voltaire.

Interspersed with the travel commentary there are two remarks which refer to races outside those visited by Amazan and Formosante. The first concerns the Jews, whom Voltaire totally disliked, as is shown by a number of articles in the Dictionnaire philosophique. In La Princesse de Babylone the attack is a mild one, but is present

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[1]Voltaire, Lettres philosophiques, (ed. F. A. Taylor), Oxford: Blackwell, 1961, p. 67.

[2]For sources of general information see the Encyclopaedia Britannica or the book or article listed in the bibliography appropriate to the particular country.

nevertheless as Voltaire talks of "la petite mer Méditerranée, que les ignorants Hébreux ont depuis nommée la Grande Mer." (p. 363)

The other remark concerns the Egyptians and their superstitions:

> "C'est ainsi que les Egyptiens, si fameux par des monceaux de pierres, se sont abrutis et déshonorés par leurs superstitions barbares." (p. 377)

As Bénac points out in his notes, Voltaire had already shown a similar attitude to the Egyptians in his Philosophie de l'histoire.

The rest of the remarks concerning individuals and places must be looked at under the headings of the particular countries visited. In some, the criticisms have a wider significance, but these will be discussed under the appropriate headings. It will suffice here to give a brief summary of the references made, for Voltaire enters into no discussion of them, and they are included for little more than their topical value or because what he is saying belongs to a traditional pattern of satire: in Russia he mentions the absence of Cathering II, who is travelling in Asia at the time: "elle voyageait alors des frontières de l'Europe à celles de l'Asie pour connaître ses Etats par ses yeux." (p. 378) It is significant that on the 29th May, 1767, the Empress had written to Voltaire saying: "Me voilà en Asie, j'ai voulu voir cela par mes yeux." (Best. 13325) The fact that Catherine's phrase, "voir cela par mes yeux" had remained so fresh in Voltaire's mind is one of the reasons for suggesting that La Princesse de Babylone was completed as early as August or September, 1767. The other reasons are based on

Voltaire's attacks on the critics of Bélissaire, which will be discussed later. Votlaire's admiration for Catherine at this period was considerable and the praise that he extends to her is a reflection of the tone in his correspondence.

In Holland Voltaire, drawing presumably on personal experience or impressions, links the frigidity of Dutch women with the narrative, showing how Amazan "s'il avait voulu attaquer ces dames, il les aurait toutes subjuguées l'une après l'autre, sans être aimé d'aucune." (p. 380) This he follows by an attack on the Dutch printers who have profited from the publication of pirate editions: "comme ils étaient les facteurs de l'univers, ils vendaient l'esprit des autres nations, ainsi que leurs denrées." (p. 381) The mention of the printer Marc-Michel Rey shows how much Voltaire's own experience with these same men has embittered his outlook.

The books that Voltaire places in the hands of Formosante, La Paysanne parvenue, Le Sopha and Les Quatre facardins, by Crébillon and Hamilton, were, according to Martino,[1] used as satires of the oriental tale, which explains why Voltaire should have included them in La Princesse de Babylone. It also suggests that Voltaire may have been attempting to write a genuinely oriental tale, free of the pornographic eroticism of which Crébillon and Hamilton complained. Incidentally there is in Crébillon's Le Sopha a

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[1] Ibid., p. 264.

character called Amanzei, a name which may well have contributed to that of Amazan.

Milord What-then is, without doubt, one of the finest caricatures produced by Voltaire. The mixture of humour and sympathetic satire have produced a picture which, in spite of belonging to an old-established view, is equally alive and appropriate today. From an examination of the list of Voltaire's British visitors[1] there is no reason to suppose that his picture of the English lord was affected in any way by a recent renewal of acquaintance with any particular individual. Indeed in a letter written to Madame du Deffand dated the 30th March, 1768, Voltaire shows himself to be discontent with his British visitors:

> "J'ai été pendant quatorze ans l'aubergiste de l'Europe, et je me suis lassé de cette profession. J'ai reçu chez moi trois ou quatre cent Anglais, qui sont tous si amoureux de leur patrie que presque pas un seul ne s'est souvenu de moi après son départ." (Best. 13951)

In his collection Sir Gavin de Beer lists approximately eighty visitors, compared with the four hundred that Voltaire mentions, so it is possible that further research may reveal a visitor of significance, towards the end of 1767. The only man to see Voltaire in the years previous to La Princesse de Babylone, who may have rekindled the idea of the typical Englishman, was James Boswell who, with his eccentricities, visited Voltaire in 1764 towards Christmas, speaking with him on several occasions and staying at Ferney for a while.

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[1] Sir Gavin de Beer, "Voltaire's British Visitors", Studies on Voltaire, Vol. 4(1957) & Vol. 18(1961).

More important is the fact that in 1765 there is record of a conversation held by Voltaire with a certain Major W. Brown, in the course of which they discussed Pope, Swift and Gay. This implies that, more than thirty years after his own visit to England, Voltaire was still full of the knowledge which he had acquired there, and was just as interested in discussing the same subjects.

Equally one might say that Voltaire's picture of the Englishman's wife is drawn from his own, more pleasant, experience in England. Generally no more favourable to English women than to Dutch women, Voltaire makes an exception of this one:

> "La maîtresse de la maison n'avait rien de cet air emprunté et gauche, de cette mauvaise honte qu'on reprochait alors aux jeunes femmes d'Albion; elle ne cachait point, par un maintien dédaigneux et par un silence affecté, la stérilité de ses idées et l'embarras humiliant de n'avoir rien à dire: nulle femme n'était plus engageante." (p. 382)

Indeed from the negative description she becomes the exception which proves the rule, and Voltaire is offering more criticism than praise.

Also in the description of Amazan's experiences in England Voltaire includes a brief remark which, although directed towards the English workmen, might equally apply to men of a similar position in any nation. Resenting Amazan's interfering help, they become angry until his power subdues them and they ask for some money to buy a drink:

> "Des rustres du voisinage, étant accourus, se mirent en colère de ce qu'on les avait fait venir inutilement, et s'en prirent à l'étranger: ils le menacèrent en l'appelant <u>chien d'étranger</u>, et ils voulurent le battre. Amazan en saisit deux de chaque main, et les

> jeta à vingt pas; les autres le respectèrent, le saluèrent, lui demandèrent pour boire." (p. 381)

Leaving England Amazan passes through Germony, commenting briefly on the large number of princes and beggars, and reaches Venice. Here he describes the situation of the city and what presumably is the carnival:

> "Le peu de places publiques qui ornaient cette ville était couvert d'hommes et de femmes qui avaient un double visage, celui que la nature leur avait donné, et une face de carton mal peint, qu'ils appliquaient par-dessus: en sorte que la nation semblait composée de spectres." (p. 387)

The narrative theme of Amazan's faithfulness reappears as a corollary to the picture of the large number of public prostitutes who "faisaient sans aucun risque un trafic toujours renaissant de leurs attraits." (p. 387)

In the tradition of Du Bellay, Voltaire leads Amazan past the "ondes jaunes du Tibre, des marais empestés" (p. 387) to the disappointments of the city of Rome. Instead of a powerfully armed garrison he finds "pour toute armée, une trentaine de gredins montant la garde avec un parasol, de peur du soleil." (p. 388); instead of the fine monuments, he was shown "des masures où un muletier ne voudrait pas passer la nuit." (p. 389)

On top of these disappointments, Amazan is bewildered by the castrati, is accosted by homosexuals, and learns with disgust and amusement the customary manner of approaching the "Vieux des sept montagnes." This is an opportunity for Voltaire to indulge in another attack on the temporal power of the Church of Rome, and the influence wielded by the priests in the various Catholic countries:

> "... ces prophètes ... nourris aux dépens des peuples; ils annoncent de la part du ciel que mon maître peut avec ses clefs ouvrir et fermer toutes les serrures, et surtout celles des coffres-fort." (p. 390)

From Rome Amazan travels to Paris, where the scene, like that in Candide or Babouc, is a mixture of gaiety and corruption: "une ville dont la moitié était très noble et très agréable, l'autre un peu grossière et ridicule." (p. 391) The life of pleasure being led by the citizens blinds them to serious affairs, and they are governed like children "à qui l'on prodige des jouets pour les empêcher de crier." (p. 391) There are the priests, "une troupe de sombres fanatiques" (p. 391) and the lawyers, "les conservateurs d'anciens usages barbares contre lesquels la nature effrayée réclamait à haute voix." (p. 392) This last remark offers Voltaire the chance to introduce the example of the Chevalier de la Barre, whose trial and execution in 1765 had profoundly shocked him:

> "On punissait une étourderie de jeune homme comme on aurait puni un empoisonnement ou un parricide. Les oisifs en poussaient des cris perçants, et le lendemain ils n'y pensaient plus, et ne parlaient que de modes nouvelles." (p. 392)

The affair was still very much in Voltaire's mind and, although he never achieved any satisfaction in this case and had to give up his attempt to change the original verdict, it never ceased to be his concern.

There follows a brief glance at the greatness of the seventeenth century, "un siècle entier pendant lequel les beaux-arts s'élevèrent à un degré de perfection qu'on n'avait jamais osé espérer; les étrangers venaient alors, comme à Babylone, admirer les grands monuments d'architecture, les prodiges des jardins, les sublimes efforts de la

sculpture et de la peinture. Ils étaient enchantés d'une musique qui allait à l'âme sans étonner les oreilles." (p. 392) This is followed by praise for classical poetry, still found in the theatres, although these are not well attended largely because of the decline in the number of good writers.

This leads Voltaire naturally enough to attack the critics, whom he blames for the situation in which "la décadence fut produite par la facilité de faire et par la paresse de bien faire, par la satiété du beau et par le goût du bizarre." (p. 392) Voltaire shows himself to favour the "moderns" in the Querelle which was still a cause of dissension late in the eighteenth century:

> "La verité protégea des artistes qui ramenaient les temps de la barbarie." (p. 392)

This is linked with a mention of the over-sensitive poetry critics earlier in the story who, on hearing the madrigal composed by Amazan, had accused him of bad style:

> "Il fut critiqué par quelques seigneurs de la vieille cour, qui dirent qu'autrefois dans le bon temps on aurait comparé Bélus au soleil, et Formosante à la lune, son cou à une tour et sa gorge à un boisseau de froment. Ils dirent que l'étranger n'avait point d'imagination, et qu'ils s'écartait des règles de la veritable poésie." (p. 348)

Parodying the biblical Song of Songs, Voltaire is primarily attacking the critics who prevent the good writers from flourishing: "les frelons firent disparaître les abeilles." (p. 393) This is perhaps a sly criticism of his old enemy Fréron, whom he had on other occasions nicknamed "Frelon".

Voltaire concludes with a few remarks on the ecclesiastical

writers, the "druides", "ex-druides" or "archi-druides" whose writings on a variety of religious arguments were apparently being published at approximately this time. The "ex-druides" are the Jesuits who had been expelled from France in 1764.

The praise for Madame Geoffrin and her salon which appears in the first text, was completely reversed in the 156-page edition, and instead of "Il goûta fort cette dame et la société rassemblée chez elle.", the sentence reads: "Il goûta peu cette dame et la société rassemblée chez elle." The reason for the change is unknown, but it is possible that it has something to do with her opinion of Stanislas-Poniatowski and Catherine II. Madeame Geoffrin visited Poland in 1766 and from the correspondence of 1767 it is known that Voltaire's views were at variance with hers. In a letter to Voltaire on the 8th March, 1767, Marmontel says of Madame Geoffrin:

> "Elle m'a dit depuis, qu'il n'y avait rien de plus malheureux au monde qu'un Roi qui n'était pas roi; et qu'il n'y avait plus aucune intelligence entre le Roi de Pol. et l'impératrice de Russie. Cela vous affligera, mon illustre maître, et j'en suis fâché; mais c'est la verité toute pure." (Best. 13127)

Truth or not, Voltaire was unable to accept such an opinion of his enlightened idols of the North. So it is that a week later Voltaire, in a letter to Christin (14th March, 1767), says:

> "Puisse la France imiter bientôt la Russie et la Pologne. L'Impératrice de Russie et le Roi de Pologne, me font l'honneur de m'écrire de leur main qu'ils font tous leurs efforts pour établir la plus grande tolérance dans leurs états." (Best. 13138)

Voltaire neatly brings the commentary on Paris back to the fairy-tale narrative by introducing Amazan to a "fille d'affaire" at

the opera. His consequent seduction and discovery form the climax of the story and, by juxtaposing or interweaving the philosophy with the fairy-tale, there is no artificial break.

The "opéra comique" was introduced to French audiences at the beginning of the eighteenth century, in 1714. Its career was not smooth and it was suppressed in 1718 and again in 1745. In 1752 it had reopened but, finding collaboration a safer principle than competition, it had joined forces with the "Comédie Italienne" as recently as 1762, and it was from this date that interest in opera really grew, making it very natural that Voltaire should talk about it in 1768.

Before taking him from France, Voltaire gives Amazan the opportunity to make a remark comparing the French, the En lish and the Germans, which, although only half-serious contains a basis of turth:

> "Les Germains, disait-il, sont les vieillards de l'Europe; les peuples d'Albion sont les hommes forts; les habitants de la Gaule sont les enfants, et j'aime à jouer avec eux," (p. 397)

In Spain Amazan notes in passing the Basque love of dancing, and the taciturn inhospitable air of the Spanish themselves. He sees the fate of the Jewish moneylenders who "en prêtant sur gages à cinquante pour cent, avaient tiré à eux presque toutes les richesses du pays." (p. 398) and suffer at the hands of the "anthropokaies". The destruction of the Inquisition, which fits well into the mood of the tale, has a more serious point, for under the reign of Charles III, who makes a brief appearance here, the Jesuits had been

banished, largely through the influence of the count of Aranda. The banishment had taken place at the end of March 1767, and again there is evidence from the correspondence to show how strongly Voltaire was impressed by the event. In a letter to the marquis de Villevieille dated the 27th April, 1767, he writes:

> "Le Japon commença par chasser ces fripons-là, les Chinois ont imité le Japon, la France et l'Espagne imitent les Chinois." (Best. 13251)

Although the Inquisition had not in fact been destroyed, its power had certainly been limited by Aranda, and to Voltaire this was at least a step in the direction of enlightenment.

Before the return to Babylon, Voltaire is unable to leave Spain without some humour at the expense of Spanish cooking:

> "On dîna au palais, et on y fit assez mauvaise chère. Les cuisiniers de la Bétique étaient les plus mauvais de l'Europe. Amazan conseilla d'en faire venir des Gaules." (p. 401)

The point is subtly driven home in the description of the food that the King sends with them:

> "Il fit charger leurs vaisseaux ... d'oignons, de moutons, de poules, de farines, et de beaucoup d'ail." (p. 403).

This is a strange set of provisions if the previous pleas for vegetarianism can be taken seriously!

In the final section of the work, which is rather an appendix with little reference to the actual text, Voltaire turns to the critics of Marmontel's Bélisaire which had been condemned by the Sorbonne during 1767. He precedes his comments by a prayer to the Muse that La Princesse de Babylone should not suffer the fate of Candide,

l'Ingénu and La Pucelle, in having a parody made of it:

> "Empêchez que des continuateurs téméraires ne gâtent par des fables les vérités que j'ai enseignées aux mortels dans ce faible récit." (p. 406)

The bitterness with which Voltaire speaks of the "détestable Cogé" and "pédant Larcher" (p. 405) points to October, 1767, as the date of composition, for it was during October that Voltaire expressed most strongly his feelings on the matter, talking in a letter to d'Alembert of "un autre faquin nommé Coger, dit Cogé pecus, régent de Rhétorique au collège Mazarin dont Riballier est principal." (Best. 13383) and in a letter to Damilaville, dated the 2nd October, of Cogé as "mon Ravaillac". (Best. 13560)

Voltaire attacks Larcher particularly for several remarks about the morals of the Egyptian and Babylonian women, and goes as far as to insinuate that he is a pederast:

> "Il se répand en éloges sur la pédérastie; il ose dire que tous les bambins de mon pays sont sujets à cette infamie. Il croit se sauver en augmentant le nombre de coupables."

He includes some cutting remarks about Fréron "dont le Parnasse est tantôt à Bicêtre et tantôt au cabaret du coin" (p. 406), Bicêtre being the name of a Parisian prison designed for those guilty of leading an immoral life, and ends with a hope that La Princesse de Babylone will be condemned as "hérétique, déiste et athée" (p. 407), thus ensuring its success and popularity, and funds for the publisher.

From what has been written, it is clear that Voltaire was following no specific plan in his expression of individual thoughts and criticisms. There is no underlying pattern which would indicate an accurate organisation. Instead Voltaire has made a hotchpotch in which he has been able to include comments in traditional manner on individual people and places, as well as expressions of his own particular dislikes in a

variety of directions. There is something of the encyclopedic variety in this, which suggests that Voltaire's mind belonged totally to the eighteenth century in this respect. In the next section, however, the reverse is true, and the philosophical statements, which have a universal application, fit a more serious and logically organized side of Voltaire's thought.

2

The Universal

It is in the realm of the universal that Voltaire has been most successful in his contes, and it is this that raises them above the level of purely didactic literature in any immediate sense. It is this, too, that explains why the contes should have become the best known of Voltaire's works. By asserting a universal truth, the conte takes its place beside the great productions of seventeenth century theatre and thought. Indeed it might be said that Voltaire's contes represent his only successful attempt at theatre, and that, by taking the world as his stage, he has created a drama of vitality and significance. The scene is already set, for the different countries provide the necessary change of backcloth, and the protagonists, little more than figure-heads of destiny, can play out their rôles, express their ideals, face their conflicts and attempt to order their lives.

In La Princesse de Babylone there can be found: a picture of man, provided by the characters themselves, as well as by more general statements from the author; a representation of an ideal, found in the "pays des Gangarides", but also in a reflection of the characters; and a general view of man's existence, represented by the conte as a whole.

Amazan belongs to a pattern of male heroes in Voltaire, all of

whom show signs of weakness and imperfection. Zadig was described as "né avec un beau naturel fortifié par l'éducation."[1] and Candide was "un jeune garcon à qui la nature avait donné les moeurs les plus douces."[2]

The character of Amazan is even more perfect, and his appearance, already prepared by the descriptions of splendour at the court of Bélus, forms a climax of magnificence. The husband for Formosante, herself portrayed as "ce qu'il y avait de plus admirable à Babylone" (p. 344), would have to be capable of overcoming the trials of strength, but would, above all be "le plus magnifique des hommes, le plus vertueux, et posséder la chose la plus rare qui fût dans l'univers entier." (p. 344) The arrival of Amazan, thus prepared, is overwhelming to all that behold:

> "C'était, comme on a dit depuis, le visage d'Adonis sur le corps d'Hercule; c'était la majesté avec les grâces... tous les spectateurs, en comparant Formosante avec l'inconnu, s'écriaient: 'Il n'y a dans le monde que ce jeune homme qui soit aussi beau que la princesse.'" (p. 346)

His valour and talent are emphasized in the following pages, and he leaves Babylon as mysteriously as he came. An ideal picture of perfection has been created and it is this ideal that Voltaire now proceeds to destroy, not only as far as Amazan is concerned, but with reference to all men. After the postulation of perfection comes the actual state of weakness.

Bélus is a fine representative of human pride which would lead men to compare themselves with the supposed ideal of Amazan. Again the tone of irony makes its appearance:

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[1] Zadig, p. 2 (Bénac ed.).

[2] Candide, p. 137 (Bénac ed.).

> "Le vieux Bélus, roi de Babylone, se croyait le premier homme de la terre: car tous ses courtisans le lui disaient, et ses historiographes le lui prouvaient; ce qui pouvait excuser en lui ce ridicule, c'est qu'en effet ses prédécesseurs avaient bâti Babylone plus de trente mille ans avant lui, et qu'il l'avait embellie." (p. 343)

In other words nothing could excuse the ridiculousness of it all, and he was as ordinary as the next man. A similar misguided pride shows itself in the other three kings, and the extent of their mistaken attitude appears in the words of the almoner who, flattering the king of Egypt, says:

> "Vous vaincrez le lion, puisque vous avez le sabre d'Osiris. La princesse de Babylone doit appartenir au prince qui a le plus d'esprit, et vous avez deviné des énigmes. Elle doit épouser le plus vertueux, vous l'êtes, puisque vous avez été élevé par les prêtres d'Egypte." (p. 347)

Of course he fails to bend the bow and, when the time comes to face the lion, his very human nature takes the place of bravery and he considers it "fort ridicule d'exposer un roi aux bêtes pour le marier." (p. 348)

The king of Scythia fares little better but has at least a few redeeming features:

> "Le roi scythe, plus sensible à la reconnaissance qu'à la jalousie, remercia son libérateur ..." (p. 349)

but this does little to affect the underlying folly of the three kings who, after all, are mere mortals and really have little cause for pride.

During the rest of the story the picture is one of decline, mediocrity and weakness. Sometimes the imperfections are those of particular groups, such as those of kings and rulers. The kings of India and Egypt become the objects of Voltaire's irony when they set out to precipitate war with no respect for their subjects, believing that they have "assez de sujets qui se tiendraient fort honorés de mourir au service de leurs maîtres, sans qu'il en coutât un cheveu à

leurs têtes sacrées." (p. 348) The same idea is expressed in the words of the maid of honour who makes the pun that "très souvent ce mot de berger était appliqué aux rois; qu'on les appelait bergers, parce qu'ils tondent de fort près leur troupeau." (p. 352) There is even the suggestion that a man can be king and yet be ignorant, and, although the remark is directed against Bélus "qui ne savait pas un mot de géographie" (p. 360), the implication goes deeper and touches man in his imperfection.

Voltaire, as would be expected, returns to show war as the supreme example of human folly, "cette rage universelle qui désole le monde."[1] In the history of the "pays des Gangarides" Formosante is told about the king of India, who had foolishly attempted to conquer the country, and who thus represents the human race:

> "Les hommes alimentés de carnage et abreuvés de liqueurs fortes ont tous un sang aigre et aduste qui les rend fous en cent manières différentes. Leur principale démence est la fureur de verser le sang de leurs frères, et de dévaster des plaines fertiles pour régner sur des cimetières. On employa six mois entiers à guérir le roi des Indes de sa maladie." (p. 359)

In more ironical tone Voltaire compares the Trojan war and the one about to be declared by the four kings in Asia:

> "Mais aussi on doit considérer, que dans la querelle des Troyens il ne s'agissait que d'une vieille femme fort libertine qui s'était fait enlever deux fois, au lieu qu'ici il s'agissait de deux filles et d'un oiseau." (p. 363)

the cause being equally frivolous in both cases.

The restrictions of human knowledge come to light when the resurrection of the phoenix is questioned by Formosante. The reply of the phoenix sums up Voltaire's attitude to most metaphysical problems, whether it be the existence of God, the after-life or the soul:

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[1]Voltaire, Dictionnaire philosophique, (ed. J. Benda), art. Guerre, p. 232.

> "Les phénix et les hommes ignoreront toujours comment la chose se passe." (p. 367)

This is the typical eighteenth century scientific outlook, with its insistence on observed phenomena and a minimum of basic explanation.

The other examples of man's imperfect nature are all related to the narrative and the adventures of Amazan and Formosante. Throughout the tale, there are continual reminders of the virtue and goodness of Amazan. When Formosante speaks to Amazan's mother she hears that he is "le plus beau, le plus fort, le plus courageux, le plus vertueux des mortels, et aujourd'hui le plus fou." (p. 371) He is "le plus fou" because of his overwhelming love for Formosante and because of the unreasonable sadness which he feels because of her supposed infidelity. The emperor of China praises Amazan but regrets that "son chagrin lui dérange quelquefois l'esprit." (p. 373) Formosante, too, has fallen victim of her feelings for Amazan, and in Racinean style Voltaire talks of "la fatale passion dont son coeur était enflammé pour ce jeune héros." (p. 373)

There is in all this something of the atmosphere found in Zaïre, and both Amazan and Formosante have become weaker individuals, as reason has given way to passion. Amazan's mother hints at a tragic outcome, thus maintaining the suspense of the plot, even if the general mood is not one of tragedy:

> "Il ne pourra survivre à la douleur que lui a causée votre baiser donné au roi d'Egypte. (p. 371)

Amazan's sister underlines her mother's comment on the madness being suffered by him, and considers Formosante to be equally deranged:

> "Aldée trouva que la princesse sa cousine était encore plus folle que son frère Amazan. Mais comme elle avait senti elle-même les atteintes de cette épidémie ...

> comme les femmes s'intéressent toujours aux folies dont l'amour est cause, elle s'attendrit véritablement pour Formosante." (p. 376)

The example of Amazan's faithfulness provides the theme and interest of the second half of the story, and at each point his virtue is underlined, all the more so because he is unaware of the true state of things: "fidélité d'autant plus étonnante qu'il ne pouvait pas soupçonner que sa princesse en fût jamais informée." (p. 378) In this way the climax of the story is reached when Amazan, the paragon of virtue, succombs to the attractions of the "fille d'affaire". Thus the climax of the philosophical content corresponds to the climax of the narrative, and the situation is right for Voltaire to make the general moral application of the story. This he does by first interjecting his own comment: "Quel exemple de la faiblesse humaine" (p. 394), and then by putting words of consolation into the beak of the phoenix. These represent more than words of consolation, however, and must be seen as Voltaire's summary of the purpose of the conte:

> "Le phénix, qui était plus sage que Formosante, parce qu'il était sans passion, la consolait en chemin; il lui remontrait avec douceur qu'il était triste de se punir pour les fautes d'un autre; qu'Amazan lui avait donné des preuves assez éclatantes et assez nombreuses de fidélité pour qu'elle pût lui pardonner de s'être oublié un moment; que c'était un juste à qui la grâce d'Orosmade avait manqué." (p. 395)

This last piece of ironical quietism gently attacks the religious explanations for the imperfect state of man, and is an example of the adaptability of Voltaire's outlook on the world. At no point in his life did he attempt to find any set of rules by which man's life should be governed, and continually his own conduct demonstrated a mixture of the practical and the reasonable. His retreat to England in 1726, his care over censorship, and the very active side of the period at Ferney,

all show something which Formosante had appreciated but not applied. When intercepted by the king of Egypt she realizes that cunning is the better part of valour, knowing that "le bon esprit consiste a se conformer a sa situation." (p. 364)

The disappointments and hardships of Voltaire's life were enough to prevent him adopting any idealistic formula, but at the same time the practical elements of eighteenth century thought issued from a certain optimism, which could not lead to a totally negative disposition. This would explain the generally optimistic conclusions of Voltaire's contes, although it is significant that the contes belonging to the Ferney period of Voltaire's life are much more positive and sure than those of the earlier stage. L'Histoire de Jenni and La Princesse de Babylone have a new atmosphere about them, and as Pauphilet says in his introduction to La Princesse de Babylone: "tout finit pour le mieux sans avoir jamais été mal."[1]

In La Princesse de Babylone there is no conflict between good and evil, as in Le Blanc et le noir, no conflict between optimism and pessimism as in Candide. Instead there is a picture that reflects the positive activity of the last twenty years of Voltaire's life, showing the faith in humanity which, in another twenty years, would create the exuberance of revolution. The very fact that, after a climax of disillusionment, the solution should be one of compromise, implies that all is far from perfect in the world.

For this reason Voltaire and the eighteenth century thinkers generally, felt it necessary to postulate an ideal which, even if never attainable, would supply a goal for man's aspirations. In La Princesse

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[1]Voltaire, Contes et romans, (ed. A. Pauphilet), Paris: Piazza, 1927, p. vii.

de Babylone Voltaire achieves this in two ways. One is the apparent perfection of Amazan's character which, although at fault, remains an ideal. The other is in his description of the "pays des Gangarides" which is yet another in the Utopia-Eldorado series.

According to Martino the superman type came largely from oriental literature, developing from the wars with the Turks and an exaggerated conception of the enemy. Whatever the cause, Amazan fits the pattern of men who rise above national characteristics and appear as citizens of the world. That Voltaire was aware of this type is seen in the article Patrie in the Dictionnaire philosophique, in which he developes a similar theory:

> "Telle est la condition humaine que souhaiter la grandeur de son pays c'est souhaiter du mal à ses voisins. Celui qui voudrait que sa patrie ne fût jamais ni plus grande, ni plus petite, ni plus riche ni plus pauvre, serait le citoyen de l'univers."[1]

There may be irony behind this but the concept is clearly present.

The idea was also present in Goldsmith who published his Citizen of the World from 1760 to 1764. The very fact that this belongs to the "critical traveller" literature already suggests a link and the fact that there is a chapter dedicated to the supposed death of Voltaire[2] almost certainly ensured that Voltaire knew about it. The conception may go back further to Fougeret de Monbron who in 1750 published Le Citoyen du monde. It is worth noting, too, that in 1759 Monbron published a work called La Capitale des Gaules, the sub-title

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[1] Voltaire, Dictionnaire philosophique, art. Patrie. (My italics).

[2] Goldsmith, The Citizen of the World, letter 43.

of which was La Nouvelle Babylone. How far these links may be justified would be a subject for further work, but it would seem likely that the eighteenth century cosmopolitanism produced an ideal of supra-nationalism. This would explain Voltaire's fondness for situating his contes against a background of so many countries. The very fact that he is able to do so suggests that he regards himself as being in a position outside national considerations.

The "pays des Gangarides" is given a nebulously exact location by Voltaire, who describes it as being on "la rive orientale du Gange." (p. 358) In fact the source of the Ganges is called Gangotri which, as a place of Hindu pilgrimage, is supposed to wash away the sins of the devotee, assuring eternal happiness in the after-life. For Voltaire's purpose, however, the country is a non-existent utopia.

The first indication of the nature of the country, apart from the exceptional qualities of Amazan himself, is the description of the king given by Amazan's valet: "Son père est un vieux berger qui est fort aimé dans le canton." (p. 351) The phoenix later gives a fuller account of the nature of the country in which the shepherds "nés tous égaux sont les maîtres des troupeaux innombrables qui couvrent leurs prés éternellement fleuris." (p. 358) The sheep are never killed, for here animals are counted as equals and "c'est un crime horrible vers le Gange de tuer et de manger son semblable." (p. 358) The country is self-supporting and, although peace-loving, is perfectly capable of fighting in self-defence.

As the description continues, it becomes more and more apparent that this ideal is being treated ironically, presumably because there is

no real chance of it ever being attained. At times Voltaire lapses into whimsicality, as for example in the reply given by the phoenix to Formosante, when she asks if there is a religion in the country:

> "S'il y en a une? Madame, nous nous assemblons pour rendre grâces à Dieu, les jours de la pleine lune, les hommes dans un grand temple de cèdre, les femmes dans un autre, de peur des distractions; tous les oiseaux dans un bocage, les quadrapèdes sur une belle pelouse. Nous remercions Dieu de tous les biens qu'il nous a faits. Nous avons surtout des perroquets qui prêchent à merveille." (p. 359)

When Formosante reaches the "pays des Gangarides" she sees for herself the quiet splendour, the "sous-bergers et sous-bergères" (p. 368), the vegetarian meals, the choir of birds with apparently human voices: "les rossignols, les serins, les fauvettes, les pinsons, chantaient le dessus avec les bergères; les bergers faisaient la haute contre et la basse: c'était en tout la belle et simple nature." (p. 369) This last is perhaps a piece of humour at the expense of Rousseau, for what could be further from "la belle et simple nature" than birds which sing with human voices? Indeed the whole episode is very much a pastoral satire and, although there is a postulated ideal which no doubt is perfectly serious, Voltaire can not have intended to depict any ideal state. Certainly he is able to satirize the inequality and unhappiness of his contemporaries, but there is no serious attempt to draw a true utopia.

The whole subject of vegetarianism which appears on several occasions, can hardly have been intended seriously either, and the climax of irony is reached in the last chapter when, at the wedding of Amazan and Formosante "on servit à table le boeuf Apis rôti." (p. 405) There is no record to show that Voltaire favoured vegetarianism particularly, although there are references to it in other works. There are, however, more references to cruelty to animals in his other writings and he seems

to have genuinely felt sympathy for the lower forms of life. The phoenix, admittedly a fabulous bird and therefore not to be taken too much at face value, explains to Formosante why animals no longer speak to men:

> "Hélas! c'est parce que les hommes ont pris enfin l'habitude de nous manger, au lieu de converser et de s'instruire avec nous. Les barbares! ne devaient-ils pas être convaincus qu'ayant les mêmes organes qu'eux, les mêmes sentiments, les mêmes besoins, les mêmes désirs, nous avions ce qui s'appelle une âme tout comme eux; que nous étions leurs frères, et qu'il ne fallait cuire et manger que les méchants." (p. 357)

Underlying all this nonsense and irony there is a serious respect for life and creation in general.

In many ways the "pays des Gangarides" is close to the description of Eldorado in Candide, although there is more to be learned from the differences than from the similarities. In the first place the "pays des Gangarides" is more readily accessible, which suggests that if Voltaire was picturing an ideal state he at least considered it closer in 1768 than in 1759. In Candide the situation was much closer to that of the "Happy valley" in Johnson's Rasselas, whereas in La Princesse de Babylone the "paradis terrestre"[1] can be reached without too much difficulty.

The "pays des Gangarides" is much less closely described than Eldorado, which is a logical corollary if Voltaire's picture of the real world had become less pessimistic during the later period of his life. In this way there is less contrast between the real world and the postulated ideal, and indeed such a contrast would scarcely fit the pattern of the story, when Voltaire aimed to praise the enlightened despots of the North.

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[1] Voltaire, Candide, (ed. Bénac), p. 139.

It seems much more probable that the "pays des Gangarides" offers a satire of the utopian novel which, as has been seen, developed in the eighteenth century. If the country was such an outstandingly fine place it is all the more astonishing that Amazan should be content to finally settle in Babylon with little thought, apparently, of returning. It is possible that this supports even further Kahn's point[1] that the supposed ideal would in fact be totally inacceptable without any form of challenge or goal to work for. The eighteenth century secularisation which consisted of the substition of activity and life for religion would find the smug repose of paradise totally out of place.

The "pays des Gangarides" suggests an ideal, the "heavenly city"[2] once again, but from the ironical way it is described Voltaire teaches a much more immediate and practical lesson, a lesson he himself had learned and followed throughout his life, but more particularly during the last twenty years. To Voltaire a moral code was a logical and natural institution which was universal in application. Much more serious in intention than the description of the "pays des Gangarides" is a brief interpolated generalisation such as the one made by the Russian who, speaking to the phoenix about Catherine's achievements adds: "Son puissant génie a connu que si les cultes sont différents, la morale est partout la même." (p. 378)

Finally, Voltaire uses La Princesse de Babylone to make a comment on the total picture of man's life. It is almost inevitable that a conte, which takes the form of a voyage, should become an

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[1] L. W. Kahn, "Voltaire's Candide and the Problem of Secularisation", P.M.L.A., Vol. 67 (1952) 886-888.

[2] Supra, p. 21.

allegory of life. In all the other contes that take this form Voltaire insists upon the uncontrollable nature of man's destiny, and again in La Princesse de Babylone the continual fluctuation in the fortunes of Amazan and Formosante offers a complete rejection of any organized pattern to life.

When Formosante follows Amazan to England, and the two boats pass within sight of each other, Voltaire adds ironically: "Ah, s'ils l'avaient su! Mais l'impérieuse destinée ne le permit pas." (p. 386) This sums up his whole attitude, for the variety of events in his own life had taken him beyond any belief in an personal providence.

In March, 1768, Voltaire's niece left Ferney without warning and went to Paris. In a letter written the same day (1st March), which is one of the most emotional among his correspondence, he says: "Il y a une destinée sans doute, et souvent elle est bien cruelle." (Best. 13864). This general statement is qualified in a letter to the Duchesse de Choiseul, written on the 2nd September, 1770, where Voltaire affirms:

> "Je ne crois pas du tout à la Providence particulière: les aventures de Lisbonne et de Saint-Domingue l'ont rayée de mes papiers." (Best. 15607)

The picture of life which Voltaire gives in La Princesse de Babylone is the one that is closest to his own life, and that of most men. The oracle consulted by Bélus, which represents the inscrutable destiny, replies in fairly certain but unhelpful terms:

> "Mélange de tout; mort vivant, infidélité et constance, perte et gain, calamités et bonheurs." (362)

Thus Voltaire has given, largely by implication but also more specifically, a comment on man, his strength and weaknesses, his ideals and possibilities, his life and destiny. The universal expression of

truth is the most important aspect of La Princesse de Babylone and, because the whole is woven into a mixture of irony and fairy-tale, the story remains very much alive today.

3

The Social

As always, Voltaire does not fail to seize an opportunity of making an attack on organized religion, and La Princess de Babylone, although set in an oriental atmosphere, contains several only very lightly-veiled pieces of satire concerning religion in the context of its social organization, as well as a few remarks more seriously directed against the bases of Christianity.

Religious ceremony and supersition particularly are the objects of Voltaire's satire. The arrival of the king of Egypt is beautifully described and, by its very splendour, the exaggerations make the whole procession rather ludicrous. The inclusion of the sacred Egyptian objects, whether intended or not, reflects Voltaire's criticism of similar Christian rites:

> "Le roi d'Egypte arriva le premier, monté sur le boeuf Apis, et tenant en main le sistre d'Isis. Il était suivi de deux mille prêtres vêtus de robes de lin plus blanches que la neige, de deux mille eunuques, de deux mille magiciens, et de deux mille guerriers." (p. 344)

The presence of the magicians indicates the direction that Voltaire's thought is taking, and the confirmation comes as the king of Egypt accepts the bow of Nemrod:

> "Le grand maître des cérémonies, suivi de cinquante pages et précédé de vingt trompettes, le présenta au roi d'Egypte, qui le fit bénir par ses prêtres; et l'ayant posé sur la tête du boeuf Apis, il ne douta pas de remporter cette première victoire." (p. 346)

The entire episode of the oracle follows up this idea of religious superstition, but also goes a little deeper and demonstrates the way in which man wants to be guided only in the manner that pleases him. When the oracle gives a reply which seems wrong or insufficient, the reaction of the ministers is very much as would be expected. Voltaire here makes fun of the very idea of divine intervention in the affairs of mankind, and slyly questions the divine right of rulers, as well as the temporal power of the church:

> "Tous les ministres avaient un profond respect pour les oracles; tous convenaient ou feignaient de convenir qu'ils étaient le fondement de la religion; que la raison doit se taire devant eux; que c'est par eux que les rois règnent sur les peuples, et les mages sur les rois; que sans les oracles il n'y aurait ni vertu ni repos sur la terre. Enfin, après avoir témoigné la plus profonde vénération pour eux, presque tous conclurent que celui-ci était impertinent, qu'il ne fallait pas obéir ... qu'en un mot cet oracle n'avait pas le sens commun." (p. 353)

After a second consultation of the oracle, Bélus, by his satisfaction in spite of his inability to understand, shows the ridiculousness of such ritual performance:

> "Ni lui ni son conseil n'y purent rien comprendre; mais enfin il était satisfait d'avoir rempli ses devoirs et dévotion." (p. 362)

As would be expected, the priests are among the targets for Voltaire's irony and he attacks them on four separate accounts. The first is the belief that a religious upbringing is a guarantee for virtue and success, all this in spite of Voltaire's own Jesuit training. The almoner explains to the king of Egypt why he cannot fail to win the princess Formosante:

> "Elle doit épouser le plus vertueux, vous l'êtes puisque vous avez été élevé par les prêtres d'Egypte." (p. 347)

An indirect piece of satire is levelled against the priests as Formosante and her servant Irla disguise themselves in order to escape from the king of Egypt:

> "Formosante et Irla passèrent à travers des haies de soldats qui, prenant la princesse pour le grand prêtre, l'appelaient mon révérendissime père en Dieu, et lui demandaient sa bénédiction." (p. 366)

This form of address, used particularly for Jesuit church dignitaries, subtly attacks the whole conception of the priesthood, and particularly the exterior show of dignity and holiness.

On rather a different level is the description of North Germany as seen by Amazan and Formosante, and in which they observe the abolition of convents and monasteries. In the Dictionnaire philosophique (Catéchisme du curé) Voltaire discussed the marriage of priests, and here he takes the idea one step further as he describes "un usage insensé":

> "Cette coutume était d'enterrer tout vivants, dans de vastes cachots, un nombre infini des deux sexes éternellement séparés l'un de l'autre, et de leur faire jurer de n'avoir jamais de communication ensemble. Cet excès de démence, accrédité pendant des siècles, avait dévasté la terre autant que les guerres les plus cruelles." (p. 379)

Perhaps even more serious are the accusations of homosexuality made against the cardinals and bishops in Rome:

> "Il vit bientôt défiler toute la cour du maître du monde: elle était composée de graves personnages, les uns en robe rouge, les autres en violet; presque tous regardaient le bel Amazan en adoucissant les yeux; ils lui faisaient des révérences, et se disaient l'un à l'autre: San Martino, che bel ragazzo! San Pancratio, che bel fanciullo." (p. 389)

The attack is not violent and it is made clear that the accusations apply rather to "les seigneurs les plus importants de la ville." (p. 390) Otherwise it is unlikely that one of the 1768 editions should have had as its subheading: "A Rome, avec la permission du Saint-Père."[1] George Saintsbury reports[2] that La Princesse de Babylone escaped censorship by Rome, in the first instance, although this is somewhat surprising in view of some of the comments that Voltaire makes about the resurrection.

The supernatural aspect of the phoenix is an easy opportunity for Voltaire to have a critical look at the divinity of Christ and the doctrine of the resurrection. When the princess hears the bird speak she falls to her knees in an attitude of adoration saying:

> "Etes-vous un dieu descendu sur la terre? êtes-vous le grand Orosmade caché sous ce beau plumage?" (p. 356)

The bird's rather mundane reply: "Je ne suis qu'un volatile" mocks the non-questioning and emotional acceptance of supernatural phenomena. Once again the eighteenth century scientific spirit clashes with religion at its very foundations.

The need to take the dead phoenix to "L'Arabie Heureuse" permits Voltaire to follow up his portrayal of the emotional response to religion with a comment on the inexact conceptions that accompany such emotions:

> "Vivre éternellement dans les cieux avec l'Etre suprême, ou aller se promener dans le jardin, dans le paradis, fut la même chose pour les hommes, qui parlent toujours sans s'entendre, et qui n'ont pu guère avoir encore d'idées nettes et d'expressions justes." (p. 366)

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[1] Quoted in: Voltaire, Romans (ed. P. Toulze), Paris: Hachette, 1952.

[2] Ibid., p. 390.

Voltaire is criticising man rather than God at this point, which again shows something of the eighteenth century idealism and faith in an improvement on an earthly plane.

When Formosante says that, by seeing the phoenix rise again, she now believes in resurrection, the phoenix' reply, after first demonstrating the ease of resurrection generally, ends by damning the Christian doctrine:

> "La résurrection, madame, lui dit le phénix, est la chose du monde la plus simple. Il n'est pas plus surprenant de naître deux fois qu'une. Tout est résurrection dans ce monde; les chenilles ressuscitent en papillons; un noyau mis en terre ressuscite en arbre; tous les animaux ensevelis dans la terre ressuscitent en herbes, en plantes, et nourrissent d'autres animaux dont ils font bientôt une partie de la substance: toutes les particules qui composent les corps sont changés en différents êtres. Il est vrai que je suis le seul à qui le puissant Orosmade ait fait la grâce de ressusciter dans sa propre nature." (p. 366)

This attack on the doctrine of resurrection is done in rather a clever fashion by using the eighteenth century naturalists' theory of a chain of being existing through the hierarchies of life. Science is thus elevated at the expense of religion.

From resurrection to the immortality of the soul is a short step and Formosante poses the question, which was by then a standard one in religious polemical discussion:

> "Je conçois bien que le grand Etre ait pu former de vos cendres un phénix à peu près semblable à vous, mais que vous soyez précisément la même personne, que vous ayez la même âme, j'avoue que je ne le comprends pas bien clairement. Qu'est devenue votre âme pendant que je vous portait dans ma poche après votre mort?" (p. 367)

The phoenix, while pointing out the lack of difficulty for an omnipotent God to perform such a thing, concludes that "les phénix et les hommes ignoreront toujours comment la chose se passe." (p. 367) thus taking

Voltaire as far as he would ever commit himself on most metaphysical problems. In all his satire on religious ceremony and superstition there is an undercurrent of sincere desire to establish an honest approach to truth, and it is in this that the positive side of Voltaire's thought can be found.

4

The Political

More than in any other conte Voltaire has used the plan of La Princesse de Babylone to bring a number of countries under review. His purpose in doing so is two-fold: firstly to give praise in a straightforward manner to those countries which, thanks to the enlightened principles of their rulers, have developed along the lines of Voltaire's own ideals; secondly, to offer a comparison with the situation in France, either by direct reference or by implication.

In China, Voltaire takes the reign of the emperor Yung-cheng to illustrate the doctrine of tolerance and to criticize the Jesuit missionaries. Just as much as the rulers of northern Europe, Yung-cheng belongs to the group of enlightened despots that ruled in the eighteenth century. Voltaire describes him in glowing terms:

> "C'était le monarque de la terre le plus juste, le plus poli, et le plus sage. Ce fut lui qui, le premier, laboura un petit champ de ses mains impériales, pour rendre l'agriculture respectable à son peuple. Il établit le premier, des prix pour la vertu." (p. 372)

After this praise, Voltaire goes on to discuss the banishing of the Jesuits from China, which occured in 1724[1]. This followed the "question des rites", a quarrel centred around the Roman Papacy's attitude which prevented Chinese novices from continuing to honour their ancestors

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[1] Wang Teh-chao, "La Chine in Voltaire", Chinese culture, Vol. 1 (1953) 96-120.

and Confucius in certain traditional rites. The affair had gone on for some time and had caused a great deal of controversy throughout Europe. The consequent banishing of the Jesuits had received the admiration of Voltaire, and in the same year as La Princesse de Babylone he published the Relation du banissement des Jésuites de la Chine. For Voltaire the event was one which, above all, offered the opportunity for him to underline the intolerance of the Christian religion and of the Jesuits in particular. It has already been seen how Voltaire showed his pleasure at a similar action in Spain at a much more recent date.[1] The episode in China illustrates well Voltaire's dual attitude to foreign countries, consisting partly of a genuine scientific interest and partly of a search for examples to clarify his philosophical outlook. In this particular case the doctrine of tolerance is of considerably more importance than the historical fact.

Travelling to Russia, the heroine passes through Scythia, or Siberia, where the primitive character of the country is an excuse for making a general comment on the progress that is made possible by enlightenment:

> "Dès qu'elle fut en Scythie, elle vit plus que jamais combien les hommes et les gouvernements diffèrent, et différeront toujours jusqu'au temps où quelque peuple plus éclairé que les autres communiquera la lumière de proche en proche, après mille siècles de ténèbres, et qu'il se trouvera dans des climats barbares des âmes héroïques qui auront la force et la persévérance de changer les brutes en hommes." (p. 375)

Going quickly to Russia, Voltaire gives a great deal of praise to Catherine II for the improvements which she had successfully carried

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[1] Supra, p. 78.

out, concluding:

> "Ainsi elle a mérité le titre de mère de la patrie, et elle aura celui de bienfaitrice du genre humain si elle persévère." (p. 378)

Apart from her tolerance and compassion towards her own people, "notre souveraine a une autre gloire: elle a fait marcher des armées pour apporter la paix, pour empêcher les hommes de se nuire, pour les forcer à se supporter les uns les autres." (p. 378) This is a reference to Catherine's intervention in Poland in 1767 supposedly to bring tolerance. Jean Fabre, analysing Voltaire's motives in supporting Catherine, suggests[1] he may have been influenced by gifts of money and luxuries which she sent him during the same year, and certainly Catherine seems to have gone out of her way to keep Voltaire's enthusiasm alive.

Whatever the case, Voltaire appears to have been misguided in his faith in Catherine's motives. Already on the 27th February, 1767, Voltaire was beginning to suspect that all was not quite as had at first appeared, and in a letter to Catherine he says:

> "Je ne suis pas fait pour pénétrer dans vos secrets d'état, mais je serais bien attrapé si Vôtre Majesté n'était pas d'accord avec le Roi de Pologne." (Best. 13097)

It has already been suggested[2] that this may have been the cause of the quarrel between Voltaire and Madame Geoffrin, although it was not until after the kidnapping of the king of Poland in 1771 that Voltaire began to feel that he had been deceived. After 1772 there began the partition

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[1] J. Fabre, "Stanislas-Auguste Poniatowski et l'Europe des lumières", Publications de la Faculté des Lettres de l'université de Strasbourg, 1952, p. 320.

[2] Supra, p. 76.

of Poland and the true motives of Catherine and Frederick began to emerge. It is significant that by 1775 Voltaire could write on the 15th February:

> "Je fus attrapé comme un sot, quand je crus bonnement, avant la guerre des Turcs, que l'impératrice de Russie s'entendait avec le roi de Pologne pour faire rendre justice aux dissidents et pour établir seulement la liberté de conscience." (Mol. 48, p. 133)

Voltaire had failed to realize that the wars and wrongs of enlightenment ideals could be as misguided and cruel as those of any religion. The enthusiasm of La Princesse de Babylone had grown very sour a few years later.

In Scandinavia, Voltaire's admiration continues to make itself apparent, noting the liberal situation in Sweden, where the king's power had been reduced to nothing after the revolution of 1720, and Voltaire accurately foretells the events of 1772 when Gustavus III restored the power of the monarchy. In 1767 Gustavus had been living in France and had gained a reputation of being "digne de commander à une nation libre." (p. 378) In Denmark, Voltaire remarks on the peaceful reign of Christian VII, a correspondent of Voltaire, although he is known to have been a degenerate and morbid king.

Returning to the subject of Poland, Voltaire adds a word of praise for Stanislas-Auguste Poniatowski whom he sees as "un pilote environné d'un éternel orage; et cependant le vaisseau ne se brisait pas, car le prince était un excellent pilote." (p. 379). Again Voltaire was to change from warm enthusiasm to cold disappointment, and after 1771 he wrote no more letters to Stanislas.

North Germany was the scene of more enlightenment and both Amazan and Formosante admire "les progrès que la raison et la philosophie faisaient dans le Nord." (p. 379) which was found in the many

princes brought up "dans la connaissance de la morale universelle, et dans le mépris des superstitions." (p. 379) This enlightment had shown itself in the abolition of the monasteries, an act for which Frederick earned the praise of Voltaire in 1767[1],

> "Votre idée de l'attaquer [la superstition] par les moines est d'un grand capitaine. Les moines une fois abolis, l'erreur est exposée au mépris universel." (Best. 13192)

It is logical that Voltaire should have included so much admiration for the countries of the North, when he wrote La Princesse de Babylone at the same period that he could write the following to Catherine:

> "Un temps viendra, Madame, je le dis toujours, où toute la lumière nous viendra du nord ... Les ténèbres Cimmeriennes resteront en Espagne, et à la fin même elles se dissiperont. Vous ne serez ni oignons, ni chats, ni veau d'or, ni boeuf Apis, vous ne serez point de ces dieux qu'on mange, vous êtes de ceux qui donnent à manger." (Best. 13097)

Holland was traditionally a country of liberty and it was there that many French thinkers, as well as those from other lands, had taken refuge at one time or another. Amazan is pleased to find there "quelque faible image du pays des heureux Gangarides: la liberté, l'égalité, la propreté, l'abondance, la tolérance." (p. 380), but having heard the praise of "une certaine île, nommé Albion" (p. 380) he sets sail for England.

There Voltaire puts into the mouth of a member of parliament a brief résumé of the British constitutional monarchy, showing the difficulties and struggles which were necessary before the present state could evolve. As he remarks:

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[1]Quoted in: Voltaire, L'Ingénu, (ed. W. R. Jones), Geneva: Droz, 1957, p. 108.

> "Qui croirait que de cet abîme épouvantable, de ce chaos de dissensions, d'atrocité, d'ignorance et de fanatisme, il est enfin résulté le plus parfait gouvernement peut-être qui soit aujourd'hui dans le monde?" (p. 384)

The wrongs of absolute monarchy are pointed out and the power of the British navy is praised; the British system of law and the two-party form of government, the advances in British scientific knowledge and discoveries, all are included by Voltaire on a single page. The object is achieved and the reader, with Amazan, can leave Albion with regret, after finding so much that is praiseworthy there. Voltaire's admiration for England seems to have remained as strong as it was forty years before, and it certainly out-lived his enthusiasm for the countries of the North run by enlightened despots.

The remaining countries are not viewed from the political angle, and it can be seen, from what has been said, that Voltaire's praise tended to restrict itself to a few countries in the North. That his views towards them should have changed in a few years after writing La Princesse de Babylone is relatively unimportant, for basically Voltaire's ideals never changed. Certainly he had been misguided enough to believe that all was perfect in the lands of the enlightened despots, but his hopes in those directions remain legitimate and are universally applicable. Tolerance and good government are sought after as much today as in the eighteenth century, and even if it might be said that there are many areas of enlightenment in the twentieth century, there remain, too, many areas of "ténèbres Cimmeriennes."

The section devoted to the philosophical content of "La Princesse de Babylone has demonstrated, in a practical way, the manner in which the Philosophes worked. The disregard of metaphysical thought, the concern for

the practical doctrine, the need to say something of universal application, the urge to spread the scientific spirit, both in the realm of pure science and in that of political thought, all these belong in the work of a Philosophe. An immediate reaction might be one of dismay at the variety and lack of single purpose, but in the context of the eighteenth century, the century of the Encyclopédistes, philosophy took on a new sense. The spirit of secularization, which is essential to Voltaire and his age, opened the way to a completely different attitude towards the world. It was but one step from the excitement of something new to the exuberance of revolution, and La Princesse de Babylone represents, more than any other of Voltaire's contes, the movement towards change and the beginnings of the modern world as we know it today.

CONCLUSION

That La Princesse de Babylone has faults goes without question. There are errors in construction, as well as an exaggerated amount of extraneous material. The abrupt end to the story and the satirical appendix point to a hurried and careless finish. Yet these faults, within the context of the eighteenth century, can and should be justified. Just as the works of Rabelais tend to suffer from the excitement that was peculiar to the early Renaissance writers, so La Princesse de Babylone and other works of Voltaire suffer from the spirit of the eighteenth century, which saw ideals within arm's reach and accordingly leapt before it looked. The ability to compare, balance, and reach a reasonable conclusion, was something which grew out of the eighteenth century critical attitude, but the century was unable to use this for itself. In such a century it is a natural enough phenomenon that literature should suffer at the hands of the humanitarian.

Inasmuch as La Princesse de Babylone is the work of Voltaire the humanitarian, it shows little development from his earlier contes. This is to be expected, for the reasonable ideals postulated by Voltaire as early as Les Lettres philosophiques (1734) were unlikely to alter very radically. There is a change in Voltaire as far as his general attitude to the world is concerned, and La Princesse de Babylone shows a distinct optimism which, if not totally lacking in earlier works, was by no means very strong.

The change to a more positive optimism, replacing the weaker ameliorism of the earlier period, reflects itself in the style of the work, and La Princesse de Babylone, written by a man of seventy-four,

marks something new. Certainly there were hints of it as early as Zadig, as has been shown in the study of the form, and the influence of other writers is not to be ignored. Yet for Voltaire this conte is an attempt at a style not yet tried. The total mixture of fairy-tale and irony, already found in small quantities in other works, gives something fresh and necessary to the eighteenth century.

This is not to say that La Princesse de Babylone belongs uniquely to the eighteenth century and has no application or real interest for the reader of the twentieth century. Bénac, in his introduction to the contes, has this to say about the modernity of Voltaire's tales:

> "Comme toutes les oeuvres de Voltaire, ils nous suggèrent une idée simple: ils nous apprennent à crier quand nous voyons tuer un homme ou attenter à sa dignité, sans qu'il ait réellement rien fait de répréhensible contre la morale ou l'ordre social. C'est pour cela que le temps n'est pas encore venu où l'on pourra se passer d'eux."[1]

It is true that the ideals of humanism which grew in the eighteenth century are equally valid today, but there is another reason which justifies the reading of Voltaire and particularly that of the contes. This reason stems from the attitude behind the work and the spirit which moved Voltaire to write it. This attitude is one of criticism, almost of cynicism, and it is part of the critical spirit which allows man to look twice at the picture of the world in front of him, seeing each time something different and enabling him to choose rather than merely to accept.

It has been seen why Voltaire adopted the conte form in the first instance and how he used existing genres for his own purposes. The style of La Princesse de Babylone has been studied and it has been

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[1] Ibid., p. xxi.

shown how closely the style is linked with the philosophical content. The whole work, whether written hurriedly or not, bears the mark of genius, both in its closely-knit harmony of texture and in its universality of application. That it belongs very much to the eighteenth century is certain, and that it is the work of the foremost of the Philosophes is equally certain. That it has an application to the twentieth century as well, is not a contradiction in ideas, for in many respects the thought of the eighteenth century fits the pattern of the present day more than that of the nineteenth century.

How close the work is to Voltaire's own time has been demonstrated by the number of references to contemporary events at various points in the conte. The correspondence, particularly of 1767, mentions almost all the subjects that appear in La Princesse de Babylone and it is not at all surprising that the work should have been written when it was. What is astonishing is that Voltaire, although aware that the conte was not counted among the "respectable" literary genres, should make no mention of it in his letters before the time of publication. It is even more astonishing that, at a time when he was concerned with so many other things, he should have found it possible to produce a work such as La Princesse de Babylone. It may not rank among the best of Voltaire's contes, but it is certainly among the most amusing and ironically light-hearted.

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