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Helen Grace Heller

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A STUDY OF VOLTAIRE'S PRINCESSE DE BABYLONE

by

Helen Grace Heller

Department of French

Submitted in partial fulfilment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

Faculty of Graduate Studies
The University of Western Ontario
London, Ontario
May 1989

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ABSTRACT

One of Voltaire's longest philosophic tales, La Princesse de Babylone 1768, has been neglected by modern scholarship, yet it figured prominently in early editions of Voltaire's Romans et contes and inspired four operas.

This oriental fairy tale is strikingly different in tone from Candide 1759, L'Ingénu 1767 and from L'Homme aux quarante écus 1768. A study of Voltaire's correspondence for the period covering the genesis, composition, and publication of the conte, shows that the optimistic, light-hearted tone of La Princesse de Babylone reflects a singularly happy moment in Voltaire's life when he enjoyed domestic harmony, a sense of personal fulfilment in his role of Ferney's beneficent patriarch, satisfaction in his personal victories in the ongoing struggle against the infâme, and an optimistic view of the future of the Enlightenment.

The conte is part of the Mille et une nuit tradition of oriental fairy tales. A comparison of Voltaire's oriental contes shows how he drew on the Mille et une nuit tradition; it also focusses attention on Voltaire's comprehensive approach to the Orient in La Princesse de Babylone which parallels that found in La Philosophie de l'histoire 1765.

Voltaire's uninhibited delight in and treatment of fantasy is linked to his admiration for Ariosto's Orlando furioso. Using Propp's system of analysis I show that La Princesse de Babylone is a soundly constructed fairy tale. The conte mirrors the literary currents of primitivism, pastoralism, and republicanism, even more prominent in Voltaire's tragedy Les Scythes 1766. The utopian view of the Land of the Gangarides is a fictional transposition of Voltaire's enthusiasm for India in 1767.

Voltaire's appraisal of the progress of the Enlightenment in eighteenth-century Europe, his satirical description of its peoples, and his attacks in the conte's "coda" on the enemies who threaten the fortunes of his tale, constitute the conte's philosophic content which is presented critically, followed by an analysis of how skilfully the author has unified the conte by integrating this material and the fairy tale using the device of the imaginary journey.

The enduring appeal, spontaneity, and vitality of this enlightened magic-oriental tale result from the complex ways in which Voltaire fuses reality with fantasy and mythology.

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My husband Lane's generous and unfailing support has sustained me throughout. He also taught me the little I know about computers and, backed by the prowess of Dr. Ian Richmond, rescued me from many a technological problem.

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ABBREVIATIONS AND CONVENTIONS USED

- (p.) - All quotations from La Princesse de Babylone are taken from the Pléiade edition of Voltaire's Romans et contes.
- Best. D - This convention designates the number of a letter quoted from the definitive edition of Voltaire's Correspondence, edited by Theodore Besterman, vols. 85-134 of The Complete Works of Voltaire (Toronto: University of Toronto Press; Oxford: The Voltaire Foundation, 1968-1977), e. g. Best. D14739.
- M - Refers to the Moland edition of Voltaire's Oeuvres complètes, 52 vols. (Paris: Garnier, 1877-1885). Quotations taken from this edition are indicated by the letter M., followed by volume and page number: M. XI, 103.
- Pléiade - Designates the Pléiade edition of Voltaire's Romans et contes. I use this abbreviation when citing other oriental contes by Voltaire, Deloffre's "Introduction générale", Deloffre's and Hellegouarc'h's "Notice" and "Notes" for La Princesse de Babylone.
- SVEC - Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century

In the quotations taken from the Correspondence, Voltaire's spelling has been retained. No changes have been made in quotations taken from eighteenth-century editions of other texts.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Since the publication of the definitive edition of Voltaire's Correspondence begun in 1968, there has been a great surge of scholarly interest in Voltaire; one indication of this is the fact that the series Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century has expanded to two hundred and forty-five volumes. Of all Voltaire's vast literary production, it is the contes that are most read to-day and which have inspired lively discussion by the critics. Attention has been largely focussed on Candide, Voltaire's longest and best-known philosophic tale, and on Zadig. With the exception of Micromégas, subject of a penetrating analysis in Ira O. Wade's critical edition¹, the short tales have only received summary comment in general introductions to various editions of the Romans et contes.

Three of Voltaire's longer tales, L'Ingénu 1767, La Princesse de Babylone 1768, L'Homme aux quarante écus 1768, were written within a twelve-month period. Whereas in-depth studies have been made of L'Ingénu and of L'Homme aux quarante écus², La Princesse de Babylone has received very little scholarly attention, although Jacqueline Hellegouarc'h's critical edition of the conte is due to be

published as part of the Oeuvres complètes.

To date there exist only seven articles which deal specifically with some aspect of La Princesse de Babylone: Herbert Dieckmann's "Zu Voltaire's Zadiq und La Princesse de Babylone" in Studien zur Europäischen Aufklärung 1974, pp. 456-60 of which only the last two paragraphs concern La Princesse de Babylone; Madeleine Field's "La Première édition française de La Princesse de Babylone", SVEC, No. 18 (1961), 179-182; J. Hellegouarc'h's "Quelques mots clins d'oeil chez Voltaire", Le Siècle de Voltaire, 1987, II, 537-544; R.P. Legros' "L'Orlando furioso et La Princesse de Babylone de Voltaire", Modern Language Review 22, 155-161, April 1927; S.B.Liljegren's "Voltaire et l'Angleterre d'après La Princesse de Babylone", in Mélanges de philosophie offerts à M. Johan Melander 1943, pp. 222-234; P. C. Mitchell's "An Underlying theme in La Princesse de Babylone", SVEC, No. 137 (1975), 31-45; and Jean Tannery's "L'Édition originale de la Princesse de Babylone", Bulletin du bibliophile et du bibliothécaire, No. 13, 198-203, May, 1934, which has been discredited by A. Brown's and Kølving's findings in "Voltaire and Cramer?", Le Siècle de Voltaire, 1987, I, 165. The Pléiade edition of Voltaire's Romans et contes includes a "Notice" of seventeen pages by F. Deloffre and J. Hellegouarc'h which establishes a date of composition for this conte, mentions its major sources, and comments

briefly under the following headings: Un Voyage philosophique dans l'Europe des lumières, Le Rôle de l'Orient, Fantaisie et réalisme, and Le Plaisant.

La Princesse de Babylone figured prominently in many eighteenth and early nineteenth-century editions of Voltaire's Romans et contes³ and inspired four operas.⁴ Stendhal and Arnold Bennett pay it tribute in Le Rouge et le Noir and in Clayhanger respectively. Stendhal has Mathilde de la Mole come to her father's library anxious to read more of La Princesse de Babylone which she has found stimulating reading:

Mademoiselle de la Mole avait le secret de voler des livres dans la bibliothèque de son père, sans qu'il y parût. La présence de Julien rendait inutile sa course de ce matin, ce qui la contraria d'autant plus qu'elle venait chercher le second volume de La Princesse de Babylone de Voltaire, digne complément d'une éducation éminemment monarchique et religieuse, chef-d'oeuvre du Sacré-Coeur! Cette pauvre fille à dix-neuf ans, avait déjà besoin du piquant de l'esprit pour s'intéresser à un roman.⁵

Bennett's protagonist Edwin Clayhanger turned to Voltaire's contes expecting to find something closely argumentative, violent, and arid. Instead he found gaiety, grace, and the funniest jokes so that "for some time afterwards Candide and La Princesse de Babylone and a few similar witty trifles were the greatest stories in the world for him".⁶ These examples demonstrate the complex appeal of this tale. Why then has it been neglected by modern scholars?

No thorough synthetic study has been made of La Princesse de Babylone, an oriental fairy tale so different in content from L'Ingénu and L'Homme aux quarante écus which date from the same time, so unique in its lighthearted tone and in its blend of fantasy and realism, so world-wide in its setting, and so broad in its philosophic comment. It is precisely to remedy this lack that I undertake an analysis of this highly entertaining and instructive oriental tale. I shall show how it represents literary trends of the period, what it reveals of Voltaire's preoccupations, interests, and state of mind in 1767, its literary merits, and in what ways this tale is unique among Voltaire's contes.

Before discussing in what way various critics view La Princesse de Babylone, it would seem pertinent to give a summary of the storyline. The first part of the story is set in the fabulous court of ancient Babylon. King Bélus wishes to find a worthy husband for his beautiful daughter Formosante. Those who would compete for her hand must meet certain conditions dictated by an oracle. Lavish festivities are planned. On the day fixed for the trials, three royal contenders, the kings of Egypt, India, and Scythia, fail the required tests and much to their chagrin, are outdone by an unknown godlike youth who in his brief appearance at the trials wins the admiration of all before

being summoned away on receiving news of his father's death. As a pledge of his love for her, Formosante's mysterious admirer leaves in her care his unique bird later identified as the phoenix.

Bélus has not succeeded in securing a husband for his daughter. When consulted a second time, the oracle insists that Formosante travel and it is agreed that she will make a pilgrimage to Bassora to the temple of a saint who promotes happy marriages. In the meantime Bélus continues to entertain the royal suitors with a magnificent banquet. At this event Formosante showers all her attentions on the Phoenix who speaks Chaldean and can tell her all she wishes to know about his master Amazan, with whom she has fallen in love. The King of Scythia seeks consolation in the charms of Formosante's cousin Aldée. The Kings of Egypt and of India, humiliated in defeat and angered by Formosante's patent indifference to them, plot a military coup against Bélus. When drunk, the King of Egypt shoots the Phoenix with an arrow, but before expiring the bird is able to instruct Formosante to carry its ashes to Happy Arabia and there expose them to the sun. Things go from bad to worse: the royal suitors depart without taking leave of their host, Formosante sets off for Arabia, and King Bélus declares war on Scythia when he discovers that the King of Scythia has abducted Princess Aldée.

The reader's attention is now focussed on the adventures of Formosante as she hastens on her way to fulfill the Phoenix's wishes. After three days of travel, the Princess has the misfortune to be waylaid at an inn by the vengeful King of Egypt who would force her to dine with him and share his bed. In truly masterful fashion, Formosante outwits her foe by flattery and a kiss, and having drugged his wine, she continues on her way to Bassora disguised as a priest. From there she crosses the Ormus Strait to Happy Arabia where she witnesses the rebirth of the Phoenix who is to be her devoted ally in her attempts to be united with Amazan. Together they travel by air on a griffin-drawn settee to Amazan's home in the idyllic country of the Gangarides, only to learn that Amazan has left his home in mad despair because he believes that Formosante has betrayed his love. This conviction is based on the report of his spy, a blackbird, who witnesses the scene in the inn where Formosante was kissed by the King of Egypt, the man guilty of killing the Phoenix. We are also informed that Amazan is Formosante's cousin.

Formosante and the Phoenix resolve to track down Amazan to persuade him of her innocence and love. Now begins the chase. They follow Amazan to China, Scythia, Russia, Scandinavia, Poland, "Germania", Holland, England, and on to Italy, in each case missing him only by a day or

two. Amazan cannot linger in any one place because, in his lovesick madness, he has resolved to travel the globe and remain true to Formosante. But wherever he goes, ladies try to seduce him and he is forced to move on. Formosante's disappointment on learning on her arrival in a country of his recent departure is tempered by new proof of his love for her. This frenetic chase across Europe gives Voltaire ample opportunity to lightly satirize mores and to appraise the level of enlightenment in each kingdom visited.⁷

A climax is reached when Formosante does catch up with her lover in Paris only to find him in the arms of a "fille d'affaire".⁸ Amazan who had refused the loveliest princesses in the world for love of Formosante, has succumbed to temptation in frivolous Paris. Outraged that he has betrayed her for a common wench, Formosante refuses the Phoenix's advice to be patient and pardon the offender. She takes flight and ends up in Seville with the plan of returning home to Babylon by sea. In Seville she falls into the hands of the Inquisition and is arrested as a witch for consorting with the devil disguised as a bird [the Phoenix].

Meanwhile Amazan, filled with remorse, sets out in pursuit of Formosante. He is met at the Spanish border by the Phoenix who tells him of Formosante's plight. Amazan is transformed into a heroic warrior determined to annihilate her captors. Assisted by the mounted Gangarides

of Formosante's suite, he slaughters the Inquisitors, throws himself at Formosante's feet, and is pardoned at once.

Happily reconciled, the couple are received as honoured guests by the king of Spain who is grateful to Amazan for delivering the country from the scourge of the Inquisition. When they tell the king of their plan to return to Babylon to be married, he warns them that King Bélus is attempting to wage war against the combined armies of the kings of Egypt, India, and Scythia. Amazan is determined to rescue Bélus, to claim his own rights as heir to the throne of Babylon, and to marry Formosante. With an army of Spanish, Basque, and Gangaride troops and a Spanish fleet, the lovers set out on their perilous voyage eastward. All ends happily. Despite unpleasant interaction with the Ethiopians, Amazan defeats Bélus' enemies, is proclaimed heir to the throne, and is married to Formosante amid festivities of unprecedented grandeur.

This tale of whirlwind action and romance is laced with sparkling humour and offers to the observant reader the full gamut of Voltaire's ideas as well as a satirical sociological sketch of some thirty countries of Europe and Asia within the framework of an oriental fairy tale some sixty-five pages long. Yet, as previously stated, critical comment on La Princesse de Babylone has been minimal. One wonders whether the cursory judgments found in prefaces to

editions of the Romans et contes or in works on Voltaire's contes in general, are based on a close reading of the text. Let us survey the full range of critical comment.

In his powerful and enlightening study, Voltaire dans ses contes: de Micromégas à l'Ingénu, Jacques Van den Heuvel suggests that the literary and intrinsic value, the very living essence of the contes from Micromégas 1752 to L'Ingénu 1767 results from the way in which Voltaire has used the genre as a confessional, as a vehicle for probing the personal anxieties and metaphysical problems which disturb his peace of mind. He claims that this fusion of Voltaire's inner experience with fiction is lacking in the later contes (he clearly includes La Princesse de Babylone in this category), and that they are therefore second-rate. He goes on to say that contes such as La Princesse de Babylone, while not without charm, are mainly derivative of the earlier ones.⁹

In his introduction to la Princesse de Babylone et autres contes par Voltaire, Pierre Grimal also comments on the absence of personal disquietude in this conte.¹⁰ In my view the serenity and optimism so characteristic of La Princesse de Babylone may be equally as revealing of Voltaire's state of mind in 1767-68 as was the evidence of intellectual and emotional unrest in earlier contes. Grimal thinks of Voltaire in 1768 as a dogmatic, pessimistic old

man whose creative powers are failing. His judgment on La Princesse de Babylone is chiefly negative. His most devastating criticism concerns the unity of the conte.

Le manque même d'harmonie entre les deux parties de cet ouvrage, la juxtaposition d'une aventure orientale et d'un voyage philosophique à travers l'Europe, d'un conte de fées et d'une satire sociologique témoignent d'un fléchissement dans l'invention qui doit avoir recours, pour se soutenir, à deux procédés, tous deux éprouvés, mais tous deux déjà usés près d'un demi-siècle après Les Lettres Persanes.¹¹

Chapter IX of this study will be devoted to a close examination of the problem of unity and of the way in which Voltaire skilfully integrates a rich variety of material into the fabric of his fairy tale.

Frédéric Deloffre also comments on the hybrid character of La Princesse de Babylone, calling attention to three major components: the mock-heroic tone of the romantic idyll, the philosophic critique of Europe, and Voltaire's patent enthusiasm for India seen in his utopian presentation of the Land of the Gangarides.¹² This utopian theme with its primitivist values will be examined in Chapters VI and VII.

The problem of aesthetic unity in L'Ingénu has provoked much controversy. The very focus of John S. Clouston's book Voltaire's Binary Masterpiece; "L'Ingénu" Reconsidered is to show that the apparent duality of tone between reason and sentiment, far from betraying, an

aesthetic flaw, constitutes instead the essential power of the work. This study of La Princesse de Babylone leads to a similar conclusion. May not the interaction of fantasy and reality, the fusion of myth time and real time found in this conte, create a valid literary dynamic?

René Pomeau suggests that the lovers' mutual pursuit is a mere pretext for a satirical overview of Europe and that Voltaire's interest lies in the countries visited by his characters rather than in the characters themselves.¹³ Yet elsewhere he explains that Voltaire had a personal need to escape from the many daily demands made on him during the Ferney period by losing himself in the intellectual expanse of universal history or in a fantasy world:

Voltaire, qui se sent menacé par la mesquinerie, aspire aux larges horizons. [...] Pointilleux, mais impatient, Voltaire a besoin de s'exercer sur de grands objets. Il lui plaît de s'occuper des empires immenses de l'Orient: Russie, Indes, Chine [...] le bonheur de Voltaire est de s'échapper. En imagination il fend les airs avec la princesse de Babylone; il sillonne les espaces intersidéraux en compagnie de Micromégas. Le ciel de Newton le comble d'aise.¹⁴

This would indicate that Voltaire took personal delight in the imaginary voyage and did not consider it a mere plot device.

Jacques Scherer also denounces the use of the lovers' chase as a contrived mechanical device, considers that the interaction of the characters is psychologically unsound,

and goes so far as to speak of the "brutalité non dissimulée des techniques romanesques" in La Princesse de Babylone; yet even he admits that this conte continues to charm its readers.¹⁵

On the positive side nearly all critics remark on the conte's "joie de vivre". The authors of the Pléiade "Notice" attribute its charm in large part to its "liberté d'allure"¹⁶ and praise Voltaire's "traitement réaliste du merveilleux" which results in "une curieuse cohérence de la fiction".¹⁷ Pomeau concedes that although many references it contains to contemporary people and events are obscure to modern readers, Voltaire's defence of the principles of freedom and tolerance are as relevant to-day as ever. He goes on to say that the reader shares Voltaire's intense delight in the fabulous court of Babylon and in a veritable "débauche d'inventions orientales" that could exist only in legend.¹⁸ His personal liking for La Princesse de Babylone is shown by the fact that he includes several excerpts from it to exemplify Voltaire's imaginative gifts in a selection of texts in his Voltaire for the series Ecrivains de toujours.¹⁹ An earlier critic, Gustave Desnoiresterres, describes La Princesse de Babylone as "l'un des plus jolis et ingénieux romans".²⁰

What record is there of comment by Voltaire's contemporaries? In the Mémoires secrets, a literary review

journal, Bachaumont included the following entry for March 27, 1768:

La Princesse de Babylone est un roman de M. de Voltaire, espèce de féerie ou folie. Il y règne une grande gaieté à laquelle il a su adapter des traits très philosophiques, comme aussi des satyres contre des personnages qu'il aime à remettre sur la scène.²¹

On April 18, 1768 Edward Gibbon wrote to his stepmother Dorothea Gibbon promising to send her La Princesse de Babylone, a "very agreeable absurd trifle".²² Catherine the Great paid tribute to Voltaire's continuing creative powers in a witty letter written during December 1768. She tells how she summoned the English doctor, Thomas Dimsdale to St. Petersburg to introduce inoculation against smallpox in Russia and, on the basis of her personal experience, recommends that any person who feels discomfort after being inoculated read Voltaire's latest works in order to feel fine.

J'oubliois, Monsieur de Vous dire, que j'ai augmenté le peu ou point de médecine qu'on donne pendant l'inoculation de trois ou quatre excellent spécifique que je recomande à tout home de bon sens de ne point négliger en pareille occasion. S'est de ce faire lire L'Ecossaise, Candide, L'Ingénu, L'Homme aux quarante écus, et La Princesse de Babilone, il n'i a pas moyen après cela de sentir le moindre mal.
(Best. D15396)

I have presented the critics' comments on plot motivation, on the issue of the conte's unity, and on its

imaginative charm. Other questions must be raised. Any complex philosophic tale can be read on different levels. La Princesse de Babylone is acknowledged to be very entertaining. It is also categorized as an oriental tale, as a fairy tale, and as a work of satire and propaganda. These facets of the conte must be examined in turn.

How typical is La Princesse de Babylone of the oriental tale and fantasies so popular in eighteenth-century France? To understand Voltaire's narrative techniques, it will be necessary to situate this conte in the literary tradition of eighteenth-century France. Similarly one must compare La Princesse de Babylone with Voltaire's other oriental tales in order to appreciate its uniqueness.

I shall study Voltaire's use of the imaginary journey as part of his fairy tale and as a means of allowing for philosophical comment and for satirical description of social manners in countries visited. It is worthy of note that in La Princesse de Babylone Voltaire has not used the voyage idea in the same way as in Candide and in L'Histoire des voyages de Scarmentado. Readers will recall that in the latter two contes the journey serves not only to satirize the institutions and thinking of mankind, but also to develop and temper the protagonist's mind and character. The world proves to be a dangerous and disillusioning place.

In La Princesse de Babylone on the other hand, the lovers emerge from their adventures unharmed and unchanged. The tone is lighthearted and optimistic. Indeed the optimism found here exceeds that seen in L'Ingénu and in Zadig. In L'Ingénu the hero may be well-equipped to be a leader of men of the future but the heroine dies. As for Zadig, it is not easy for the reader to reconcile the happy ending with the conte's general mood of distress and uncertainty as to whether a good man may expect to achieve happiness in this world.

What does this new optimism signify? A close examination of Voltaire's correspondence for the period November 1766 to April 1768 will reveal that this optimism relates directly to Voltaire's personal situation and aspirations at that time.

Unlike Zadig ou la destinée and Candide ou l'optimisme, La Princesse de Babylone has no illuminating subtitle to direct the reader's attention to the ideological thrust of the conte. As this study progresses, I shall explore Voltaire's intentions in writing it and seek to determine whether or not it does convey a particular message. Deloffre and Hellegouarc'h see in it a political thrust, a vision of an enlightened European utopia in the making and the suggestion that any means to further this end are justified.

"La morale est partout la même", telle est la phrase qui donne la clé idéologique de La Princesse de Babylone. La morale est partout la même, parce que l'esprit humain est partout le même. Dans cette perspective, les différences qui séparent les pays visités par les héros du conte, tout comme le pays mythique des Gangarides, ne représentent que des étapes dans une marche de l'humanité vers le progrès, depuis ceux qui sont encore soumis à l'obscurantisme (Rome, l'Espagne), non sans des espérances de progrès d'ailleurs, ou ceux qui sont encore dans une situation où les forces s'équilibrent à peu près (d'où ce portrait de la France en deux tableaux antithétiques) jusqu'à ceux qui sont déjà parvenus ou parviennent à la "lumière" (les peuples du Nord), et ceux qui resplendent de tous les feux de la raison (le pays des Gangarides). [...] En niant l'importance des différences entre les peuples, nées de leur histoire, des conditions génétiques ou géographiques, Voltaire justifie d'avance l'entreprise de ceux qui, sous prétexte qu'ils auront trouvé leur vérité, voudront l'exporter de force.²³

Is it possible to read one unifying idea into the rich complexity of La Princesse de Babylone or can its very essence be better defined by the unique blend of its many components? These are the problems I propose to examine in this study of La Princesse de Babylone.

NOTES TO CHAPTER I

¹Ira O. Wade, Voltaire's Micromégas, a study in the fusion of science, myth, and art (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1950).

²See John S. Clouston's Voltaire's Binary Masterpiece: "L'Ingénu" Reconsidered (Berne: Peter Lang, 1986) and Nuçi Kotta's L'Homme aux quarante écus, a study of Voltairian themes (The Hague: Mouton, 1966).

³In the following editions La Princesse de Babylone is placed well forward, often first in a volume: Romans et contes philosophiques par M. de Voltaire (London, 1775); Romans et contes par M. de Voltaire (Paris, 1780); Romans et contes de M. de Voltaire (Londres, 1781); Romans de Voltaire (Paris, 1808-09); Romans de Voltaire (Paris, 1821); Romans de Voltaire (Paris, 1823); Romans de Voltaire (Paris, 1827); Romans de Voltaire (Paris, 1829).

⁴In chronological order these are: (1) Joseph Martin, La Princesse de Babylone, music by A. Salieri, (Paris: Denné, 1791), [opera in four acts]; (2) Daniel Steibelt, La Princesse de Babylone, performed in St. Petersburg at the Théâtre lyrique in 1808; (3) M. Vigée, La Princesse de Babylone, music by M. Kreutzer, (Paris: Académie impériale de musique, 1815, [opera in three acts]; and (4) Claude Arrieu, La Princesse de Babylone, 20th century opéra-bouffe mentioned in vol. 2 of Histoire de la musique, Encyclopédie de la Pléiade, p.1218. Of these I have obtained the text for Martin and Vigée.

⁵Stendhal, Romans et nouvelles (Paris: Gallimard, 1952), p.453.

⁶Arnold Bennett, Clayhanger (Penguin, 1975), p.259.

⁷Although Voltaire alludes to contemporary events, he generally designates countries by their Latin or Greek name to maintain a legendary atmosphere. Spain becomes La Bétique; England, Albion; Russia, Cimmeria; etc.

⁸Amazan falls under the spell of a pretty singer who is a member of the opera company. Voltaire replaces "fille d'opéra" with the expression "fille d'affaire" (p.401, p.402) to suggest that the girl is a sort of courtesan with the easy morals of the theatrical world. I shall simply refer to her as the opera girl.

⁹Voltaire dans ses contes (Paris: Librairie Armand Colin, 1967), Part 5, Chapter 2, "Les derniers contes".

¹⁰Pierre Grimal ed., La Princesse de Babylone et autres contes par Voltaire (Paris: Librairie Armand Colin, 1963), p.34.

¹¹Ibid., p.35.

¹²F. Deloffre in his introduction to the Pléiade edition of Voltaire's Romans et contes (Paris: Gallimard, 1979), p. lxiv.

¹³René Pomeau in "Note sur La Princesse de Babylone" in the Garnier-Flammarion edition of Voltaire's Romans et contes (Paris, 1966), p.446.

¹⁴Pomeau, Voltaire (Editions du Seuil, 1955), pp. 93-94.

¹⁵Scherer, "L'univers en raccourci: quelques ambitions du roman voltairien", SVEC, No. 179 (1979), 124-25.

¹⁶Pléiade, p. 1020.

¹⁷Ibid., p.1017.

¹⁸Pomeau, ed., Romans et contes, p.447.

¹⁹Pomeau, Voltaire, pp. 113-16 and 122-23.

²⁰Desnoiresterres, Voltaire et la société au XVIII^e siècle, 2nd ed. (Paris: Didier, 1871-76), VII, 241.

²¹L. P. de Bachaumont ed., Mémoires secrets pour servir à l'histoire de la république des lettres en France depuis 1762 jusqu'à nos jours (London chez John Adamson, 1780, III.

²²J. E. Norton, ed., The Letters of Edward Gibbon (London, 1956), I, 227 quoted in commentary to Best. D14964.

²³Pléiade, p. 1013.

CHAPTER II

LA PRINCESSE DE BABYLONE: A MEASURE OF VOLTAIRE'S SERENITY AND OPTIMISM, 1766-1768

In 1767 Voltaire wrote three contes: L'Ingénu, L'Homme aux quarante écus, and La Princesse de Babylone. The best known of these is L'Ingénu, a novel describing the formation of a modern man but also a passionate attack on social injustice in eighteenth-century France. L'Homme aux quarante écus is a circumstantial piece in the guise of a tale, written in response to Le Mercier de la Rivière's proposed tax reform; it deals with Voltaire's views on taxation, with the urgent need for the creation of a just, written penal code in France, and attacks monasticism and fanaticism. These two contes were used as weapons in Voltaire's campaign to stamp out intolerance, superstition, and social injustice.

La Princesse de Babylone, slightly longer than the other two, is written in a very different mode. In it Voltaire's philosophic ideas are integrated into an oriental fairy tale full of fun and fancy. In fact, the happy optimistic tone of this conte is not found in any other major conte by Voltaire. Gone is the cynical view of human nature so characteristic of Zadig's world where one man in sixty-four is honest¹, and where one woman in one hundred is

incorruptible.² The storyline is free from the endless incidents of barbaric cruelty, lust, mutilations of the human body, beatings, the butchery of war, the horrors of disease and of natural disasters found in Candide. How is one to account for the lighthearted, optimistic tone so distinctly characteristic of La Princesse de Babylone?

With the exception of Besterman whose Voltaire includes a short chapter entitled "The prodigal years, 1767-1768",³ none of Voltaire's biographers makes a detailed study of the period covering the genesis, composition, and publication of La Princesse de Babylone.⁴ To seek an explanation for the unique character of this conte, I have turned to Voltaire's correspondence, the primary source of information and insight into Voltaire's life. I have made a study of the 1259 letters in volumes 115 - 117 of Besterman's definitive Correspondence which fall between November 1766 and April 1768: my timeframe begins in November 1766 because that is the month in which Voltaire wrote Les Scythes (Best. D13676), the ill-starred tragedy so closely related to La Princesse de Babylone (see Chapter VII), and ends in April 1768 soon after the first mention of the publication of La Princesse de Babylone in Best. D14873, written on March 22, 1768. I accept Deloffre's and Hellegouarc'h's judgment that the conte was actually composed between April and August 1767, then set aside until

the end of the year when Voltaire reread it and sent it to his publisher.⁵

Researchers have long been aware of Voltaire's reticence about the composition of his contes. Since such well-known works as Candide and L'Ingénu were not mentioned in Voltaire's correspondence until they had appeared in print, it is not surprising that no direct mention of the composition of La Princesse de Babylone is found in his letters. Nevertheless a thorough study of Voltaire's correspondence for this time gives one a true account of his personal situation, frame of mind, and philosophic outlook that explains the mood of La Princesse de Babylone which is so strikingly different from that of other contes. This biographical chapter will portray the man and his mood at the time of writing La Princesse de Babylone and will show that the tone of the conte is directly linked to Voltaire's outlook at this specific date.

* * *

Voltaire was seventy-three years old in 1767 in the middle of the Ferney period which extends from 1759 to 1778, the year of his death. The convenient label of patriarch of Ferney, linked as it is with one or two familiar prints showing Voltaire strolling, book in hand, on the grounds of his chateau, conjures up a mental picture of the man that cannot possibly hold true for the entire period of his

residence at Ferney. It would be well to begin this biographical account with a portrait of Voltaire as he really was in 1767.

An interesting description of Voltaire is found in Best. D14630, a letter written by Paul Claude Moultou to Jakob Meister, December 30, 1767.

Rassurez vous, monsieur, sur les inquiétudes que vous avez à l'égard de m. de Voltaire. Ce grand homme, accoutumé à dire qu'il se meurt depuis plus de cinquante ans, se porte à merveille. Il se plaint d'être sourd & aveugle. Le fait est qu'il lit encore sans lunettes, & qu'il a l'ouïe très fine. Il est sec & ingambe: il est peu courbé. Le jour que j'ai eu l'honneur de le voir, il avait de gros souliers, des bas blancs roulés, une perruque naissante, des manchettes d'entoilage qui lui enveloppaient toute la main, une robe de chambre de Perse. Il nous fit beaucoup d'excuses de n'être point habillé: mais il n'est jamais autrement. Il parut à l'entremets. On avait réservé un grand fauteuil à bras, où cet illustre vieillard se mit, mangea rondement des légumes, des pièces du four, des fruits, etc. Il pétilla d'esprit⁶.

Voltaire was always thin; now he was like a skeleton (Best. D14385). Indeed he joked about his seeming fragility: "je diminue à vue d'oeil et je serai bientôt réduit à rien" (Best. D14506). He mentioned loss of hair (Best. D14800), impaired hearing, and occasional days when he felt unwell (Best. D14413). His most frequent complaint was that of poor sight (Best. D14388). Winters at Ferney were rigorous. Voltaire would have enjoyed being snowbound, had it not been for the fact that the dazzling winter light was very hard on his eyes (Best. D14187, Best. D14259). His capacity for

hard work remained undiminished but he claimed not to have the strength to personally pen his letters which he preferred to dictate to his secretary Wagnière.

Voltaire's general sense of well-being characteristic of his letters at the time of writing La Princesse de Babylone, resulted in large part from his decision to settle at Ferney close enough to the Swiss border to enable him to escape quickly if pursued by French authorities, and, at the same time, to enable him to live peacefully and independently as a nominally Catholic Frenchman somewhat removed from Genevan politics and yet enjoying the advantages offered by that community. The geographic location of Ferney ensured him the maximum security possible within his beloved France.

When in 1758 Voltaire purchased Ferney and the neighbouring estate of Tournay, in all a territory about a mile square⁷, Ferney was a poverty-stricken hamlet of fifty people in a depopulated countryside, a short drive from Geneva across the French border. We know that by the mid-seventies Ferney had become a prosperous community of twelve hundred people complete with a thriving clock industry, and that the chateau was a handsome country seat. What point had been reached in the development of Voltaire's property in 1767 and in what did Voltaire's role as landowner consist?

Letters of this period indicate that Voltaire's efforts had been chiefly devoted to transforming the chateau into a tastefully appointed, handsome country house on classic lines and to making the land productive (Best. D14834). Voltaire spoke with pride of his home with its magnificent mountain prospect as "assurément un des plus agréables châteaux de France" (Best. D14874). These improvements had been made at considerable expense for his niece, Madame Denis, and the entire property was in her name (Best. D13824, Best. D14197, Best. D14907).

Voltaire had arrived at a profound belief in the primary value of agriculture as the basis of national prosperity. He found his own experiments in agriculture an absorbing interest. In this regard his chief confidant was one François Moreau, seigneur de La Rochette, a private philanthropist who had recently founded a charity school of agriculture as a training centre for foundlings (Best. D14190). In a letter dated June 1, 1767, Voltaire told La Rochette that since arriving at Ferney he had succeeded in draining marshy land, had failed in an attempt to grow madderwort, had planted more than twenty thousand saplings from Savoie, nearly all of which had died, and four times over had attempted to line the road leading up to the chateau with walnut and chestnut trees, three-quarters of which had not survived. He remained undaunted: "cependant

je ne me suis pas rebuté, et tout vieux et infirme que je suis, je planterais aujourd'hui, sûr de mourir demain. Les autres en jouiront" (Best. D14206).

Happy to patronize La Rochette's charitable establishment that so obviously made a great practical contribution to the welfare of France, Voltaire went on to order two hundred elms and one hundred ash to plant the following spring. La Rochette sent three hundred saplings (Best. D14481) and instructions as to how to prevent winter kill (Best. D14736). The trees were duly planted and in December Voltaire sowed wheat on his land (Best. D14574).

The planting of trees was excellent therapy for Voltaire. Not only did it appease his distress at the gradual deforestation of France⁸, but it linked him with future generations: "Je sens [...] le ridicule de planter à mon âge; mais ce ridicule est bien compensé par l'utilité dont il sera à mes successeurs, et au petit pays inconnu que j'ai tâché de tirer de la barbarie et de la misère" (Best. D14516). Learning to make his land productive was to be in daily contact with reality, to be useful, to look forward with anticipation, to cultivate his garden in the most literal sense.

As for the village of Ferney, Voltaire had attracted some new inhabitants including a merchant and a surgeon, and was seeing that dwellings were built to house them (Best.

D14206). As early as 1761 he had erected a church to his liking complete with a small tomb for himself⁹. The reader of the Correspondence for this period senses that Voltaire had settled permanently at Ferney. At the time of writing La Princesse de Babylone Voltaire was aware that he had started a veritable colony which he must not abandon: "Figurez vous que j'ai fondé une colonie à Ferney; que j'y ai établi un marchand, un chirurgien; que je leur bâtis des maisons; que si je vais ailleurs ma colonie tombe" (Best. D14159). Voltaire felt a sense of accomplishment in having created a thriving community and enjoyed his status as its head.

In 1767 Voltaire's household at Ferney was a sizable one. Madame Denis, Voltaire's niece and mistress of the house, often referred to as "maman", was happiest when entertaining visitors from far and wide. Such a scale of hospitality was made possible by maintaining a staff of some twenty people of whom the two most prominent members were Jean-Louis Wagnière and Father Adam (Best. D14789). Wagnière was Voltaire's secretary who spent long hours daily taking dictation and who was the one person closely involved in all Voltaire's projects of revision and editing (Best. D14865). Father Adam, an ex-Jesuit, was Voltaire's chaplain. His chief usefulness was his willingness to play chess with Voltaire every day and to allow himself to be

beaten. He also had to endure the anticlerical jests of the philosopher crowd (Best. D14861).¹⁰

Gracious asylum was extended on a permanent basis to one Daumart, a partially paralysed cousin who had been with Voltaire for nine years (Best. D14237). For the first six months of 1767 Voltaire harboured at Ferney a certain Brother Bastian known at Ferney as Ricard, a Capuchin friar who had left his convent in Savoie; however, after enjoying Voltaire's hospitality over a two-year period, he vanished in July 1767 taking with him money, jewels, and some manuscripts (Best. D14316). Other Ferney residents completely dependent on Voltaire included Marie Corneille Dupuits, the grandniece of Corneille whom Voltaire had taken in, educated, and married to M. Dupuits de La Chaux in 1763. Ferney was home to Marie, her husband, and her children (Best. D14237).

In October 1766 the Duc de Richelieu entrusted an impossibly unruly but talented protégé, Claude Gallien, to Voltaire in hopes that the latter would succeed in making something of the young man (Best. D13632). Voltaire made Gallien part of his household, did his utmost to steady him, put up with unpleasantness and abuse, and only sent him packing in January 1768 when all attempts at control failed (Best. D14651, Best. D14696).

It is to be noted that the greater number of this

extended Ferney family were relatively young. It was a lively household and Voltaire found this atmosphere conducive to maintaining buoyant spirits. Voltaire took particular delight in surrounding himself with young writers of talent whom he could help professionally and who held future promise. In 1767 two men who would later be named to the French Academy were in residence at Ferney. Michel de Chabanon, 1730-92, whom Voltaire described as a musician, poet, and philosopher, was at Ferney from April to November working on a tragedy Eudoxie. Voltaire's favourite and most brilliant pupil, Jean François de La Harpe, 1739-1803, already known as the author of a successful tragedy Warwick, was also at Ferney with his wife Marie-Marthe. Thinking to pass on his mantle to this talented youth, Voltaire did all in his power to help him, even going so far as to request that a pension in his name be transferred to La Harpe (Best. D14356). La Harpe was awarded prizes for the poems "La Délivrance de Salerne" and "Le Poète" in January 1767 (Best. D13863), and Le Prix d'Eloquence for his Eloge de Charles V roi de France in July 1767 (Best. D14297). His play Barmecide was also completed in July (Best. D14257). This young man who was to become a famous critic, did not hesitate to criticize his mentor's plays. The fact that Voltaire, whom La Harpe called "papa grand homme", allowed him to take the liberty of suggesting specific revisions,

was a measure of his esteem for him¹¹.

Voltaire's greatest pleasure and the chief form of entertainment for the Ferney household was to perform Voltaire's plays in his own theatre. Chabanon recorded his general impressions of these theatrical ventures in his memoirs.

Rien de si solennel que nos représentations. On y accourut de Genève, de la Suisse et de la Savoie. Tous les lieux circonvoisins étaient garnis de régimens français, dont les officiers affluaient à notre théâtre. Nos habits étaient propres, magnifiques, conformes au costume des pièces que nous représentions. La salle était jolie, le théâtre susceptible de changemens et digne de rendre la pompe¹²

The winter months of 1767 were given over to rehearsing Les Scythes. Voltaire, Madame Denis, Gallien, M. et Mme Dupuis, M. et Mme de La Harpe all participated but the La Harpes were the stars of the show. September brought rehearsals of Charlot, a new comedy paying tribute to Henry IV, and Adélaïde du Guesclin, an early tragedy by Voltaire. In a letter to Damilaville Voltaire announced with pride:

je m'égaie à voir embellir par des acteurs qui valent mieux que moi, une comédie qui ne mérite pas leur peine. Nous avons trois auteurs [Voltaire, Chabanon, La Harpe] dans notre troupe. Vous m'avouerez que cela est unique dans le monde; et ce qu'il y a de plus beau encore, c'est que ces trois auteurs ne cabalent point les uns contre les autres; nous sommes plus unis que la Sorbonne.

(Best.D14416)

Evidently in 1767 a very high point had been reached in good fellowship and in domestic happiness. It seems quite

reasonable to suggest that this creative atmosphere contributed to the spirit of fun and vitality so evident in La Princesse de Babylone.

The year 1767 was atypical because of the French blockade of Geneva that began January 8th and lasted for eleven months. I include an account of this situation in so far as it affected Voltaire because his reactions to it illustrate the man's unusual resilience in 1767. Late in 1766 political dissension had flared up again in Geneva. To force the warring factions to accept the proposals made in March 1766 by French mediators, Choiseul, Minister of War, ordered French troops to lay siege to the republic by effectively cutting off all normal intercourse between Geneva and France. Geneva, a socially self-contained community with supply lines remaining open to Switzerland, did not suffer unduly from these economic sanctions¹³, but the very survival of the Ferney community was at risk for the small province of Gex, isolated from the rest of France by the Jura mountains, relied on Geneva for all supplies, monies, mail, and other contact with the outside world (Best. D13948).

On January 9th, Voltaire made his plight known to Choiseul in this playful tone:

Mon héros, mon protecteur,
C'est pour le coup que vous êtes mon Colonel. Le Satrape

Elchovis [anagram of Choiseul] environne mes poulaillers de ses innombrables armées, et le bonhomme qui cultive son jardin au pied du mont Caucase est terriblement embarrassé par vôtre funeste ambition. (Best. D13823)

Within ten days he had been granted special exemptions.

Choiseul wrote:

Pour ce qui nous regarde, je mande au chevalier de Jaucourt de vous procurer les commodités, aisances, comestibles, dont vous aurez besoin, et de faire pour vous une exception à la règle générale, parce que vous êtes excepté infiniment dans mon coeur.¹⁴

(Best. D13866)

Nevertheless Voltaire had reason to be concerned about the welfare of his fledgling community; the Gex area was placed in economic isolation, trade was at an end and the price of bread was high (Best. D14142, Best. D14159). The number of visitors to Ferney was reduced because of the necessity of applying for a special passport to obtain the right to reach Ferney via Geneva. There was further inconvenience. Wishing to co-operate with Choiseul, Voltaire and Madame Denis resolved to trade with Geneva as little as possible, to do their banking and to order all non-perishable goods via the Lyon mail service. This proved very unreliable for the mail service normally carried letters only, and the Lyon postal authorities resented handling Voltaire's numerous parcels. Voltaire complained about lengthy delays in receiving books from Paris (Best. D14046, Best. D14099).

One would expect that Voltaire would be irritated or embittered by the inconvenience he experienced during the blockade. On the contrary Voltaire was in such buoyant spirits during this period that he thrived on the challenge of coping under stressful circumstances known to be temporary. He found it stimulating to be in the midst of a political controversy while continuing to enjoy a privileged position with the Genevans and the French, both of whom regarded him as a neutral personage. From January 9th on, some thirty dragoons were quartered on Voltaire's land at Tournay. Ever anxious to be on good terms with the French government, Voltaire did not complain when the army was set at building a main road across four of his meadows and land already sown with wheat (Best. D14842).

Certainly the French military occupation was a peaceful one. Because it coincided with a particularly happy season in Voltaire's life, he enjoyed his role as a hospitable, prosperous landowner. In a letter dated August 19, 1767 Chirol, a book dealer for Cramer in Geneva, observed:

[Voltaire] travaille plus qu'il n'ait jamais fait; Et malgré cela il fait jouer la Comédie chez lui pour amuser Messr^s les Officiers qui sont en garnison aux environs de notre Ville. Il fait plus encore; il les régale en les accueillant chez lui et à sa Table. Vous seriez étonné, Monsieur, en ne voyant en lui presque qu'un squelette, d'y trouver tant de gaieté et de vivacité. C'est un feu qui pétille, ses yeux parlent pour lui. (Best. D14385)

During the last two months of the blockade, Ferney became the headquarters for the French troops (Best. D14427). Voltaire supplied the entire Régiment de Conti with blankets and loaned money to the officers so that their men might be paid on time (Best. D14842). The colonel, a M. de Chabrillant, stayed in the chateau and to Madame Denis' great delight, all the officers dined regularly at Ferney (Best. D14842).

The most gala event of the year took place on October 4th, Voltaire's name-day, when Madame Denis held elaborate celebrations in his honour. A magnificent banquet was served to some eighty guests. This was followed by a performance of Charlot, dancing, and fireworks (Best. D14401). Voltaire, dressed for the occasion (Best. D14475), was genuinely pleased. To Damilaville he wrote: "Madame Denis m'a donné en présence du régiment de Conti, et de toute la province, la plus agréable fête que j'aie jamais vue. Les princes en peuvent donner de plus magnifiques, mais il n'y a point de souverain qui en puisse donner de plus ingénieuse" (Best. D14464). Voltaire may well have transformed this event in fictional mode in La Princesse de Babylone. The gaiety of the fairy tale has its source in such personal experiences.

While Voltaire was not indifferent to the social

pleasures of such a great occasion, they taxed his strength. After the celebration described above, he wrote: "Je suis trop malade pour faire les honneurs du château. Je ne mange jamais au grand couvert; je serais mort en quatre jours s'il me fallait vivre en homme du monde" (Best. D14475). He was determined that they should not encroach on the time and energy he wished to devote to his work. One of the advantages of life at Ferney was that the aging Voltaire was his own master and could choose to devote himself to his work. He lived to write, and we shall see what a varied list of works he produced between November 1766 to April 1768, even if we only take into account works mentioned in the Correspondence¹⁵.

At the beginning of this chapter I mentioned the three contes written in 1767, but these represent only a fraction of his literary output during that period. In order to place La Princesse de Babylone in context with Voltaire's writings, I describe below the works mentioned in the Correspondence.

For the theatre, his first love, Voltaire wrote one comedy Charlot and a tragedy, Les Scythes. He also edited the opening volume of Théâtre français ou Recueil de toutes les pièces françaises restées au théâtre. Avec les vies des auteurs, des anecdotes sur celles des plus célèbres acteurs et actrices, et quelques dissertations historiques sur le

théâtre (Best. D14124, n.1).

His largest undertaking was a major revision of the Siècle de Louis XIV half again as long as the earlier one. The reader of the Correspondence sees Voltaire the researcher at work as he writes endless letters seeking confirmation of details and additional documentation. He also began the Histoire du parlement de Paris (Best. D14668 n3).

The Guerre civile de Genève begun in January 1767, was a satirical burlesque work in verse which in the end did make trouble for Voltaire locally but was not intended for publication. It was written as a private jest but also as an expression of his dislike of the prolonged Genevan crisis.

With the exception of La Princesse de Babylone, all the other works produced during this period were directly related to Voltaire's battle against injustice, superstition, and intolerance.

In March 1767 there appeared a new edition of the Commentaire sur le livre des délits et des peines inspired by Beccaria's Dei delitti e delle pene in which Voltaire expounds the need for judicial reform in France. The Relation de la mort du chevalier de la Barre, January 1768 demonstrated the monstrous lack of proportion between penalty and crime. The conte L'Homme aux quarante écus,

February 1768, addressed the same issue as well as criticizing a proposed tax reform. L'Ingénu, September 1767, Voltaire's famous sentimental novel, denounced corruption in high place and arbitrary power used against innocent people.

Certain shorter writings were occasioned by current events or incidents in the fight against superstition. The two Anecdotes sur Bélisaire were provoked by the Sorbonne's censure of Marmontel's work. Count Vorontsov, Catherine II's ambassador at the Hague, asked Voltaire to write the Essai historique et critique sur les dissensions des églises de Pologne (Best. D14393). He also completed the Lettre sur les panégyriques which contains a most flattering tribute to Catherine the Great, Voltaire's ally (Best. D14136, n1). La Défense de mon oncle, June 1767, was a passionate reply to an attack made on Voltaire's Philosophie de l'histoire 1765, by a representative of the reactionary Collège Mazarin.

The following may be classified as satirical propaganda pamphlets in Voltaire's ongoing struggle to change men's thinking particularly in connection with religious dogma and prejudice: Recueil nécessaire, Honnêtetés littéraires, Les Questions de Zapata, Le Sermon prêché à Bâle le premier jour de l'an 1768, Homélie prononcées à Londres, Examen important de milord

Bolingbroke, new edition, and Le Diner du comte de Boulainvilliers. This last work was considered to be a particularly dangerous attack against established religion; in fear of arrest, Voltaire disclaimed it at every turn.

Voltaire believed in the power of the printed word to enlighten men, to form public opinion. Wide scale reform would in time result from public education: "Ce public est toujours juge en première et dernière instance. Un mémoire attachant, éloquent, bien raisonné le persuade et quand le cri public s'élève et persévère, il force les juges à faire justice" (Best. D13308). The war against l'infâme could and must be waged largely by the pen. Voltaire's happy confidence in the effectiveness of this weapon was expressed thus: "j'écris pour agir" (Best. D14117); "Je n'ai point de sceptre mais j'ai une plume" (Best. D5067). And so in 1767 he wrote the polemical works mentioned above and in doing so was fully aware of his influence over an important thinking public and happy to be such an important part of the process of enlightenment. It was the need to give expression to this satisfaction and happiness that led Voltaire to write La Princesse de Babylone.

The Correspondence also tells the story of Voltaire's active role in pursuing justice for certain individuals and minorities. He found satisfaction in alleviating in some small degree the evil wrought by the arbitrary, barbaric

jurisprudence of the day. The Sirven case dominated 1767-68.

Voltaire's success in rehabilitating the Calas family in 1765 had won him the respect and admiration of Europe. He well knew that the Sirven case would be more difficult to win because the family accused of drowning an emotionally disturbed daughter in a well to prevent her from becoming Catholic, had fled the jurisdiction of Toulouse to avoid meeting the same fate as the Calas. By 1762 they had taken refuge in Switzerland and once the Calas affair was settled, Voltaire began a campaign on their behalf that was to go on for a full ten years. In 1767 Voltaire had an official brief of the Sirven case prepared for the Paris courts by Elie de Beaumont, a lawyer. He secured a "rapporteur", Chardon (Best. D14086) and a defense lawyer, Pierre Cassen (Best. D14097). In June Voltaire sent Sirven to Paris, entrusting him to the protective care of Damilaville while awaiting trial before the King's Council (Best. D14215). The case, postponed until January 23, 1768 (Best. D14723), was opened before the Council but was at once turned down on the grounds that the Toulouse Parliament alone had the right to judge the case (Best. D14730, Best. D14756). Sirven returned to Ferney (Best. D14763). Soon we learn that Voltaire intended to set Sirven and his daughters up in a small shop as a source of livelihood until something

further could be done (Best. D14945).

In the La Barre case, Voltaire had to content himself with offering help to La Barre's companion, Jacques Marie Bertrand Gaillard d'Etallonde who, although equally guilty of blasphemous acts, had fled to safety. Voltaire secured him a rank of ensign in Frederick the Great's army (Best. D14002).

Voltaire championed the cause of Protestant civil rights (Best. D14140). The only progress made in 1767 was the issuance in June of an "Edit du roi, concernant les arts et métiers" (Best. D14553). In late summer the stir caused by the arrest of Huguenots in the Bordeaux area, in one case charged with an illegal religious assembly to hear the Bible read (Best. D14497, Best. D14506), in another---the "aventure de Ste Foi"---charged with threatening priests (Best. D14268, Best. D14497), turned officialdom against liberal policy.

Individual cases of injustice, those of Martin, Fantet, and Le Clerc, won Voltaire's attention and efforts. Martin, an innocent man, died on the wheel before the true offender was found¹⁶; Fantet a publisher at Besançon, had been imprisoned for handling banned books (Best. D14034, Best. D14037, Best. D14806); Le Clerc had been thrown in the Bastille on the grounds of an accusation made by a Jesuit (Best. D13912, Best. 13974)¹⁷. Reminiscent as it was of

General Byng's end, the execution in 1766 of Lally-Tollendal, accused of treason after his defeat by the English in India, fired Voltaire's imagination and he resolved to clear his name (Best. D13303)¹⁸. I have cited these examples of Voltaire's humanitarian endeavours to show what cause he had for high self-esteem. He believed: "la vraie philosophie, elle est de pratique et non de théorie" (Best. D14337). Without abandoning his purely literary pursuits, Voltaire had found personal salvation in a life of action, in putting his pen to use as a social and political reformer, and in helping individuals.

Voltaire's roles as head of a community and household, as a writer addressing issues of the day, and as a philanthropist were practical ones. The Correspondence for this time also reveals his clear understanding of money matters and his expertise in defending his financial rights. The Genevan blockade had made any elaborate business correspondence difficult. When in late October the mail service became normal, Voltaire set out to put his financial affairs in order: "Il faut bien quelque philosophe que l'on soit, ne pas négliger absolument ses affaires temporelles" (Best. D14508).

Having signed over house and land to Madame Denis, Voltaire relied on income from a large fortune invested as early as 1752 with the Duke of Württemberg on mortgaged land

in France (Best. D14499, Best. D5012). In 1767 the Duke of Württemberg's affairs were in ruinous disorder and a full year's income was owed to Voltaire (Best. D14446). Other money had been loaned to the Maréchal de Richelieu and the Guise estate (Best. D14820). Here too, payments were in arrears. Voltaire was short of funds. For years household expenditures had been, in his view, excessively high, partly because of the high cost of living in Geneva, partly because of Madame Denis' delight in turning his home into a veritable hotel open to all comers. Summing up his situation in March 1768 Voltaire wrote:

J'ai dépensé plus de deux millions dans le païs barbare que j'habite depuis quatorze ans. [...] Nous avons été pendant quatorze ans les aubergistes de l'Europe, aux Délices, à Lausanne, à Ferney.

Joignez à tout celà l'agrément d'acheter tout à Genève le double plus cher qu'en France, et de paier toute la main d'oeuvre le double; vous verrez que le chapau de Fortunatus et les trésors d'Aboulcassem n'y suffiraient pas.

Je ne veux pas mourir ruiné. (Best. D14888)

Voltaire considered it his duty in advanced years to assure himself and his niece of financial security. By calmly but relentlessly pursuing his claims, he hoped to achieve this end by January 1769 (Best. D14820). That at age seventy-three he had the energy to deal courteously with the infuriating incompetence of bureaucracy, in addition to his other activities, is a measure of the man.

A study of Voltaire's relationship with friends gives

us an intimate look at the inner man at the time he wrote La Princesse de Babylone. Any one who had a mental image of Voltaire as a cynical, selfish, even vicious man, would be forced to change this opinion after reading the letters of this period. On the contrary, the character that emerges is that of a generous, forgiving, unselfish, mellowed man who has no quarrel with life: the same man whose presence we detect in La Princesse de Babylone. Among hundreds of letters there are only two or three that suggest ill humour. None are discourteous. Voltaire's wit and sensitivity appear in every line. Each letter is very personal and attuned to the needs of the correspondent. Voltaire expressed his particular regard for the person in question in the warmest terms possible. In most cases I detect no self-seeking motive; he sought to please out of genuine desire to maintain the bond of friendship. Of course it gave Voltaire immense satisfaction to correspond on terms of equality with enlightened monarchs such as Stanislas the king of Poland, Catherine the Great, and Frederick II. His gift for friendship is more clearly revealed in his correspondence with the Duc de Richelieu, the Comte d'Argental, Madame du Deffand, D'Alembert, Damilaville, and his young protégés.

The Duc de Richelieu, Governor of Guienne and of Gascogne since 1755 and a colourful character in all

respects, was a demanding friend who wanted first place in Voltaire's circle (Best. D14529). He gave Voltaire support in his theatrical ventures but did not hesitate to burden him with total responsibility for the troublesome Gallien, a charge which Voltaire accepted graciously. The bond between these men dated back to 1726 when both were imprisoned in the Bastille. The following excerpt is written in the bantering style that characterizes their correspondence.

Il y a environ quarante cinq ans que Monseigneur [le duc de Richelieu] est en possession de se moquer de son humble serviteur. Il y a trois mois que je sors rarement de mon lit, tandis que monseigneur sort tous les jours de son bain pour aller dans le lit d'autrui, et vous êtes tout ébahi que je me sois habillé une fois pour assister à une petite fête. Puissiez vous insulter encor quarante ans aux faiblesses humaines en ne perdant jamais ny votre appétit ny votre vigueur ny vos grâces ny vos railleries.

(Best. D14556)

A very affectionate tone characterizes letters to the Comte d'Argental, an old school friend and man of influence, whom Voltaire frequently consulted about his literary endeavours. During the summer of 1767 Madame d'Argental suffered a very serious illness. Voltaire's reaction to the alarming news was genuine concern:

Ah! mon dieu, on me mande que madd^e d'Argental est à l'extrémité. Je venais de vous écrire une lettre de quatre pages, je la déchire, je ne respire point. [...] Mon adorable ange, ordonnez que vos gens nous écrivent un mot. Nous sommes dans des transes mortelles. Un mot par un de

vos gens, je vous en conjure. (Best. D14358)

and when the crisis was past, joyous relief:

Bénis soient dieu et mes anges! [...] Dès que mad' D'Argental sera en pleine convalescence, et qu'elle pourra s'amuser de balivernes, adressez-vous à moi, je vous amuserai sur le champ; cela est plus nécessaire que des juleps de cresson. (Best. D14378)

Kind, supportive letters were sent to cheer the blind Marquise du Deffand, a friend of long standing. When she reproached him for not having written for some time, he replied:

Je n'écris point, Madame, cela est vrai, et la raison en est que la journée n'a que 24 heures, que d'ordinaire j'en mets dix ou douze à souffrir, et que le reste est occupé par des sotises qui m'accablent comme si elles étaient sérieuses. Je n'écris point, mais je vous aime de tout mon coeur. Quand je vois quelqu'un qui a eu le bonheur d'être admis chez vous, je l'interroge une heure entière. (Best. D14739)

The only well-known philosophe Voltaire corresponded regularly with at this time, was D'Alembert, a special friend with whom Voltaire could enjoy a frank exchange concerning their common struggle against superstition and injustice. D'Alembert and Voltaire also had friends in common. The Correspondence shows that D'Alembert shared Voltaire's interest in the future of younger writers such as Chabanon (Best. D14169 and Best. D14436) and La Harpe (Best. 14297, Best. D14782, and Best. D14829), and in the

welfare of Damilaville, a staunch supporter of the philosophers' cause (Best. D14531). D'Alembert could report on the latest developments in Paris; Voltaire could assist his friend by trying to expedite the printing of a second edition of a work on mathematics in Geneva (Best. D14376, Best. D14404, and Best. D14447). The friendship between the two men seems to have been a deep and lasting one based on mutual respect and admiration. The two exchanged compliments on recent works published: Voltaire praised D'Alembert's Mélanges (Best. D13698 and Best. D13710); D'Alembert admired L'Ingénu (Best. D14436) and Défense de mon oncle (Best. D14333). Voltaire addressed D'Alembert as "mon très cher philosophe" (Best. D14810) and as the "lumière du siècle" (Best. D13698). The younger man frequently used the salutation "mon cher et illustre maître" (Best. D13724). Having requested a small bust of Voltaire, D'Alembert wrote him this charming tribute:

Je puis donc me flatter, mon cher et illustre maître, d'avoir bientôt sur ma cheminée l'image de celui à qui j'offre depuis longtemps mon hommage au fond de mon coeur. Je lui brûlerai avec grande dévotion une chandelle tous les matins; je demanderai à dieu fort inutilement, la grâce de sentir, de penser et d'écrire comme lui; j'espère être plus heureux en demandant à l'original la continuation de son amitié, que je mérite bien par tous mes sentiments pour lui.
(Best. D13724)

Voltaire's friendship for D'Alembert was such that he did not resent D'Alembert's criticism of his inability to

refrain from writing stinging replies to those who had attacked him.¹⁹ Alluding to a letter Voltaire had sent Coger, D'Alembert says:

Je ne puis surtout approuver la peine que vous avez prise d'écrire à ce cuistre de collègue une lettre dont il se glorifiera, et qui lui fera croire que vous le craignez. Je suis toujours étonné que vous ne sentiez pas votre force, et que vous ne traitiez pas tous les polissons qui vous attaquent, comme vous avez fait Aliboron; [...] car répondre à cette canaille, c'est lui donner l'existence qu'elle cherche.
(Best. D14333)

Clearly Voltaire was generous enough to stand corrected.

Perhaps Voltaire wrote most frequently to Etienne Noël Damilaville, "premier commis au bureau des vingtièmes", a long-term civil servant whose position in the tax office gave him access to the Controller General of Finance's seal and the right to sign approval of all letters and parcels that passed through his hands. These privileges made him immensely useful to the philosopher camp whose cause he espoused. For Voltaire isolated at Ferney, this active younger man was a reliable source of Paris news and could render him many practical services. It was to him that Voltaire opened his heart. His genuine feeling for the man can be seen in his distress when Damilaville was stricken with throat cancer:

Mon cher ami, je reçois votre lettre du 5, et je suis pénétré d'une double peine: la vôtre et la mienne. Vous avez à vous plaindre de la nature, et moi aussi; nous sommes

tous deux malades, mais je suis au bout de ma carrière, et vous voilà arrêté au milieu de la vôtre par une indisposition qui pourra vous priver longtemps de la consolation du travail; consolation nécessaire à tout être qui pense, et principalement à vous qui pensez si sagement et si fortement.

N'êtes vous pas à peu près dans le cas où s'est trouvé m. Dubois? n'a-t-il pas été guéri? n'y a-t-il pas un homme dans Paris, qu'on dit fort habile pour la guérison des tumeurs? Mandez moi, je vous prie, quel parti vous prenez dans cette triste circonstance.

(Best. D14414)

When Damilaville was in danger of losing his post, Voltaire used his influence and worldly wisdom to help him; he even went so far as to find him a sinecure in the Gex area (Best. D14721), and to invite him to live at Ferney should he so choose (Best. D14528, Best. D14531, Best. D14532, Best. D14547, Best. D14564, Best. D14663, Best. D14688, Best. D14700).

Voltaire's magnanimity is most clearly illustrated by his attitude to La Harpe, his favourite protégé, who cruelly betrayed him and caused the separation of Voltaire and Madame Denis. Although these personal troubles befell Voltaire early in 1768 after La Princesse de Babylone was in the publisher's hands, I report them here because they reveal the generous spirit of the man at this time and because the break with Madame Denis is an important event in Voltaire's life.

In November 1767 La Harpe stole the manuscript of the second "chant" of the Guerre civile de Genève that

Voltaire had kept under lock and key because it dealt with the Tronchin family and political issues still hotly contested. He took it to Paris where he sold it knowing full well that its inflammatory contents, if published, would bring great discredit to Voltaire and trouble to Genevan friends²⁰. This treachery became clear when Voltaire questioned La Harpe about the missing manuscript on his return to Ferney at the beginning of February 1768. La Harpe denied his guilt. Voltaire's summary of the situation, addressed to La Harpe's wife, gives a clear account of the offence.

En vérité m. de La Harpe aurait bien dû se jeter avec confiance entre les bras de l'amitié, prendre sur lui de me parler avec quelque douceur, chercher avec moi les moyens de réparer le tort qu'il me faisait; il en était peut-être encore temps. Au lieu de prendre ce parti que je devais attendre de son amitié il me dit au bout de dix jours, C'est un nommé Antoine, sculpteur de la rue Hautefeuille, qui lui a donné la copie et qui le distribue dans Paris. J'envoie à Paris chez ce sculpteur, il répond que cela n'est pas vrai. Je me tais, et mon affliction redouble. Enfin m. Delaharpe m'écrit une lettre dure et insultante de sa chambre à la mienne, il part de chez moi sans donner la moindre marque d'attendrissement et de cordialité à son ami.

(Best. D14843)

Although this was not La Harpe's first indiscretion²¹, it was a serious betrayal of hospitality, trust, and affection. Worse still, it led to bitter quarrels with Madame Denis who did not wish the La Harpes to leave Ferney. The result was a complete breakup of the Ferney household.

In company with the Dupuits family, also implicated in the affair, Madame Denis left Ferney on March 1, 1768 without so much as bidding her uncle good-bye. They had lived together since 1754. That very day Voltaire wrote Madame Denis a letter declaring his profound attachment to her and wishing her a happy time in Paris:

Vous verrez m^f de Choiseul, de Richelieu, D'Argental. Vous adoucirez mes malheurs; c'est encor là votre destinée. Vous réussirez à Paris dans vos affaires et dans les miennes, vous reverez votre frère et votre neveu. Si je meurs, je meurs tout entier à vous, si je vis ma vie est à vous. J'embrasse tendrement m^f et m^e DuPui. Je les aime, je les regrette, j'ay le coeur percé...

(Best. D14789)

Letters were written to Parisian friends to announce her arrival, to give plausible reasons for her trip, to ensure her welcome, and to prevent scandalous talk. Voltaire urged his niece to let him sell Ferney at once so that she might take advantage of the seller's market created by Genevan patricians seeking to buy property out of the city where the bourgeois representatives triumphed. His own comfort was of no account; he would retreat to Tournay (Best. D14820).

The same remarkable forbearance is seen in Voltaire's first letter to La Harpe, written March 17, 1768:

Je ne vous dirai point quelles suites cruelles votre aventure a entraînés. Vous m'avez fait un mal que vous ne pouvez réparer, mais assurément vous n'avez pas eu la moindre intention de me nuire; il faudrait que je fusse un barbare pour avoir de l'aigreur contre vous. Vous avez fait

une grande étourderie; d'accord, mais j'en ai fait soixante et quatorze, attendu que j'ai 74 ans.

(Best. D14847)

This attitude of forgiveness is a product of Voltaire's new serenity of mind between November 1766 and March 1768. In the summer of 1766 he had been badly frightened when his Dictionnaire philosophique was found in La Barre's possession. At that time he had urged his fellow philosophes to retreat with him to Cleves where in unity and freedom they might wage war against l'infâme safely (Best. D13402, Best. D13449, Best. D13485), but with Diderot's definitive refusal to be part of such a venture (Best. D13605), the scheme was abandoned. In 1767 there no longer seemed cause for alarm.

The letters of the period show that Voltaire viewed the future and the progress of the Enlightenment with optimism. This new confidence is expressed very strongly in brief statements such as the following²²:

Toutes les misérables disputes théologiques sont bafouées aujourd'hui par les honnêtes gens d'un bout de l'Europe à l'autre. La raison a fait plus de progrès en 20 années que le fanatisme n'en avait fait en quinze cents ans.

(Best. D14613)

and in more eloquent passages:

On commence à ouvrir les yeux d'un bout de l'Europe à l'autre. Le fanatisme qui sent son avilissement et qui implore le bras de l'autorité, fait malgré lui l'aveu de sa

défaite. Les jésuites chassés partout, les évêques de Pologne forcés d'être tolérants, les ouvrages de Bolingbroke, de Fréret, et de Boulanger répandus partout, sont autant de triomphes de la raison. Bénissons cette heureuse révolution qui s'est faite dans l'esprit de tous les honnêtes gens depuis quinze ou vingt années; elle a passé mes espérances. (Best. D14211)

Voltaire predicted a period of international peace:

Je me flatte de deux choses que l'on a crues longtemps impossibles, le silence des théologiens et la paix entre les princes. Je ne vois de plusieurs années aucun sujet de rupture entre les souverains et les douze cent mille hommes armés qui font la parade en Europe pourront bien ne faire longtemps que la parade. [...] il n'y aura point de guerre. [...] Les militaires ou je me trompe fort seront réduits à être philosophes, jusqu'à ce qu'il arrive quelque grand événement dans l'Europe. (Best. D1475?)

Even in Geneva public attitudes had changed drastically:

Genève surtout commence une seconde révolution plus raisonnable que celle de Calvin. Les livres [philosophiques] sont entre les mains de tous les artisans. On ne peut voir passer un prêtre dans les rues sans rire. (Best. D14447)

The same hopeful philosophic outlook is found in La Princesse de Babylone. Not only is the conte itself extremely lighthearted, but the overview of the progress of the Enlightenment in Europe found in it is optimistic. In addition to praise of progress made in Russia, Poland, Denmark, and in the model state of England, Voltaire makes general statements such as the following:

ils admirèrent les progrès que la raison et la philosophie

faisaient dans le Nord; tous les princes y étaient instruits, tous autorisaient la liberté de penser; [...] Enfin les hommes osaient être raisonnables dans ces vastes pays. (p.386)²³

Voltaire's serenity and personal happiness in 1767 colour the fairy tale: Amazan's and Formosante's love is indestructible; no permanent harm befalls the lovers in their mad chase across the world and there is no serious suggestion that it could.

In his book Voltaire dans ses contes de "Micromégas" à "L'Ingénu", Van den Heuvel describes how Voltaire used his major contes published before 1768 as a vehicle for personal confidence so that we find in them a fictional transposition of his concerns, inner growth, search for happiness and for understanding of man's place in the world. For example, in Zadig we see a gifted courtier whose good fortune and personal happiness depend not on his own worth but on the whims of kings and on the vagaries of destiny. The innocent may fall victim to evil; such was the world as Voltaire perceived it in 1747, a time when he was fully aware of the insecurity of his place in Louis XV's court and of the instability of his personal happiness with Madame du Châtelet. Similarly Candide 1759, is an expression of the bitterness and pessimism Voltaire felt during a time of spiritual crisis that began with the death of Madame du Châtelet in 1749 and continued with his exile in Germany,

his troubles with Frederick II, a growing sense of homelessness, and the outbreak of the Seven Years' War. Men seemed bent on mutual destruction by war and the Lisbon earthquake, 1755, seemed proof that even the laws of the physical world could not be relied upon. How dared philosophers claim that this is the best of all possible worlds! The misfortunes of Candide reflect Voltaire's unhappy wanderings in search of a place in this world.

In La Princesse de Babylone there is no evidence of any personal anguish, of a search for identity or of any struggle with metaphysics. This leads Van den Heuvel to include La Princesse de Babylone among Voltaire's later contes which he judges to be inferior to earlier ones because, he claims, they lack a unity wrought of a blend of the author's inner consciousness and fictional content:

Ils [les derniers contes] nous montrent seulement, par ce qu'il leur manque---ce lien vivant entre l'expérience du créateur et la fiction--en quoi réside l'originalité des grands contes.²⁴

This statement cannot apply completely to La Princesse de Babylone. For one thing it fails to take into account the postscript in the form of an invocation of the Muses, a literary coda which makes explicit reference to the author's personal experience. In this coda, some of Voltaire's enemies are named and ridiculed in a manner that

relates directly to the conte itself. I shall treat this question in Chapters VIII and IX.

But even more important, in my view the very absence of autobiographical confidences of personal anguish or of struggle with doubts, is of great significance. It is replaced by a tone of sunny optimism new to Voltaire's contes, by irrepressible good spirits, mirth, gentle satire, delight in childlike fantasy and oriental splendour, and an optimistic philosophic outlook. These elements constitute a unique expression, a form of fictional transposition of Voltaire's profound contentment and serenity in 1767.

NOTES TO CHAPTER II

¹Pléiade, "La Danse", p.119: "Le roi fut fâché pour la nature humaine que de ces soixante et quatre danseurs il y eût soixante et trois filous."

²Ibid., "Les Yeux bleus", pp. 120-122.

³My study of the period differs from Besterman's in that it is based solely on the Correspondence; it gives a more complete picture of the man's character, friendships, domestic situation, and humanitarian endeavours in 1767.

⁴A definitive biography for the period 1759-1770 to be entitled Ecraser l'infâme, has been promised as volume 4 of the series being published under the direction of René Pomeau, but to date only the first volume has appeared.

⁵Pléiade, "Notice", pp. 1003-1005.

⁶With regard to spelling, punctuation etc., the text of letters from the Correspondence appears as edited by Theodore Besterman in his definitive edition entitled Correspondence and Related Documents, 51 vols. (Oxford: The Voltaire Foundation, 1968-1977).

⁷George R. Havens, Selections from Voltaire (New York: Appleton-Century, -Crofts, Inc., 1930), p.330, n.26.

⁸See Best. D14466: "Il est certain qu'on a trop négligé jusqu'ici les forêts en France, aussi bien que les haras. Je ne suis pas de ceux qui se plaignent à tort et à travers de la dépopulation; je crois au contraire la France très peuplée, mais je crains bien que ses habitants n'aient bientôt plus de quoi se chauffer."

⁹Havens, p.329.

¹⁰Desnoiresterres, VII, 269-273.

¹¹Van den Heuvel, Voltaire dans ses contes, p.310.

¹²Michel de Chabanon, Tableau de quelques circonstances de ma vie (Paris, 1795), pp. 137-140, quoted in Desnoiresterres VII, 170.

¹³Desnoiresterres, VII, 163.

¹⁴Choiseul had shown favour to Voltaire earlier in exempting the Ferney property from taxation (Best. D14237).

¹⁵On p.445 of the Garnier-Flammarion edition of Voltaire's Romans et contes, Pomeau lists "Lettre de l'archevêque de Cantorbéry" and "Relation du bannissement des jésuites de la Chine" as works written in 1767 but I found no mention of them in the Correspondence.

¹⁶Clouston, p.99.

¹⁷At first glance this is startling because the Jesuits were suppressed in France in 1764 and in Spain in 1767. Best. D13974 is a letter to the Comte de Cucé in which Voltaire asks that he and his mother-in-law, the Marquise de Bouflers, use their influence to free Le Clerc "qu'on dit fouré à la Bastille sur la dénonciation d'un Jésuite". I have been unable to discover who the accuser was or how he received a hearing. The very fact the Le Clerc's accuser should have influence in France in 1767 distresses Voltaire. See Best. D13912: "L'aventure de le Clerc me pénètre de douleur. Faut il donc que les jésuites aient encore le pouvoir de nuire et qu'il reste du venin mortel dans les tronçons de cette vipère écrasée".

¹⁸Haydn Mason, Voltaire, a Biography (Baltimore, Maryland: The John Hopkins University Press, 1981), p.150.

¹⁹I refer again to this problem in Chapter VIII.

²⁰Voltaire's fears were realized on March 5, 1768 when the poem was published in Switzerland. Five hundred demonstrators threatened Jacob Tronchin, "procureur général"

of Geneva, at his home. Police protection was necessary (Best. D14810).

²¹On two occasions he had caused Voltaire much unpleasantness by ridiculing the writer Dorat and his love affairs in verses attributed to Voltaire. This incident rankled for months. Voltaire wished to be on good terms with Dorat and had great difficulty in persuading him of his innocence and continuing goodwill (Best. D14791).

²²See also Best. D13909, Best. D14006, Best. D14034, Best. D14171, Best. D14404, and Best. D14661.

²³All references to La Princesse de Babylone incorporated in the text are to the Pléiade edition of Voltaire's Romans et contes (Paris, Gallimard, 1979).

²⁴Van den Heuvel, p.327.

CHAPTER III

EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY ORIENTAL TALES

THE LITERARY BACKGROUND OF LA PRINCESSE DE BABYLONE

Before situating La Princesse de Babylone in the oriental fairytale tradition, it is necessary to explain the meaning of the terms "romans" and "contes" in the eighteenth century, Voltaire's attitude towards this genre, and the place of the conte in his work.

It is difficult to determine exactly what was meant by the terms "romans" and "contes" because the words were often used interchangeably. In Moréri's Grand Dictionnaire historique 1716, there is no entry for "contes" but under "roman" we find:

Romans---on appelle ici des Histoires feintes, ordinairement amoureuses, écrites en prose ou en vers. [...] Il ne faut pas les confondre avec les Poèmes, ni avec les Tragedies dont le fonds de l'Histoire est véritable, quoiqu'ornées de circonstances fabuleuses; non plus qu'avec les comedies, qui ne sont pas faites pour un simple recit, mais pour la representation; ni avec les grandes fables des Poètes, ni avec les petites fables, semblables à celles d'Esopé; ni même avec des Histoires que l'on a ornées de fables. Dans le Roman tout est feint.¹

The article goes on to point out that the "roman" tradition is very ancient:

Les Egyptiens, les Arabes, les Perses, les Indiens et les Syriens sont les premiers qui ont inventé ces sortes d'Ouvrages; de-là ils ont passé aux Grecs et des Grecs aux

Romains.

The French tradition is said to begin with the Chanson de Roland, Chrétien de Troye's courtly romances, and Jean de Meun's Roman de la rose. These early works are dismissed as being "sans ordre et pleins de confusion". The Moréri article makes no mention of Rabelais but does point out that the "romans" genre evolved considerably in the seventeenth century.

M d'Urfé est le premier qui ait donné au commencement du XVII siècle un Roman mieux conduit et plus poli sous le nom d'Astrée. Le Cyrus, la Clelie de Mlle de Scudery; la Cassandre et la Cleopatre de Calprenede; Polexandre de Gomberville ont ensuite été en grande réputation. Parmi les Espagnols, le D. Quixote de Michel de Cervantes, n'est pas seulement un bon Roman, mais aussi une Satyre des autres Romans. [...] De nos jours on a vû la Princesse de Clèves, Zaïde, et plusieurs autres Romans plus courts que les anciens, dans lesquels on a joint la politesse du langage à l'agrément des aventures.²

In her article "Pour une définition du conte", Nicole Gueunier makes a direct comparison of "romans" and "contes":

Fable, Conte et Roman sont des récits fictifs mais le conte a trois points communs avec le roman auquel il emprunte notamment la multiplicité des épisodes, d'intérêts, de liens, de temps, de caractères. Il ne s'oppose à lui que par sa brièveté.³

Diderot recognized that many of his contemporaries considered the "roman" to be "un tissu d'événements chimériques et frivoles, dont la lecture était dangeureuse

pour le goût et pour les mœurs."⁴ This negative judgment was shared by the intellectual literary world in the first part of the eighteenth century.

Certainly it is a well-known fact that for many years Voltaire spoke disparagingly of his contes as mere entertaining trifles. Influenced by the classical education he had received at the Jesuit Collège Louis-le-grand, he, like the seventeenth-century masters, considered tragedy, epic poetry, and history to be the truly great literary genres and it was in these that he sought to achieve glory as a man of letters. Voltaire attached the utmost importance to his tragedies. How ironic that it is his contes that are most read to-day! Most modern critics consider his theatre mediocre; Voltaire's plays are rarely performed and are not often reprinted. As for Voltaire's universal history, the Essai sur les mœurs, it stands as a monumental contribution to the science of history, but, although it represents an important step in the art of critical documentation of the past, its length and scope discourage the casual reader. There can be no doubt that it is Voltaire's contes along with his correspondence, that have aroused the most critical interest in the twentieth century.

When Voltaire published his first conte in 1747, he was over fifty. Even then he chose to label Zadig an

"histoire orientale" rather than a conte. Similarly Micromégas is an "histoire philosophique", Le Bon Bramin is a parable, L'Ingénu an "histoire véritable" and so on. In 1768 La Princesse de Babylone appeared in the supplement to the Cramer octavo edition of Voltaire's collected works, 1765-1776, in a volume entitled Nouveaux mélanges philosophiques, historiques, critiques.⁵ The first collection of Voltaire's contes entitled Romans, contes philosophiques appeared in 1771 as volume 13 of the Cramer quarto edition of Voltaire's works begun in 1768.⁶

Voltaire was extremely reticent about his contes in his correspondence. He even denied having written Zadiq (Best. D3757), Candide (Best. D8187), and L'Ingénu (Best. D14330). His scorn for "contes" and "romans" as a literary genre was expressed as early as 1734. In the thirteenth "lettre philosophique", Voltaire deplores the fact that the public prefers "romans" to philosophy:

Divisez le genre humain en vingt parts: il y en a dix-neuf composées de ceux qui travaillent de leurs mains et qui ne sauront jamais s'il y a un Locke au monde; dans la vingtième partie qui reste, combien trouve-t-on peu d'hommes qui lisent! Et parmi ceux qui lisent, il y en a vingt qui lisent des Romans, contre un qui étudie la Philosophie. Le nombre de ceux qui pensent est excessivement petit⁷

He admits that this is because philosophers do not try to make their writings palatable to the public, but the idea of conveying a philosophic message to readers in the guise

of amusing fiction did not occur to him until much later. Even when Voltaire was happily settled at Ferney and engaged in writing propaganda against social injustice and superstition, he did not regard the philosophic content of contes such as L'Ingénu and La Princesse de Babylone as a major weapon in the war against the "infâme". However, by the 1760s, and precisely at the time of writing La Princesse de Babylone, he came to recognize that his own contes were so popular that it would be profitable to publish them separately, even if they did represent an inferior genre.⁸

It is my view that Voltaire came to distinguish between the terms "contes" and "romans" in his own mind. As Jacques Scherer points out, Voltaire had a lofty concept of what a "roman" should be. It must duplicate the human experience of mind and heart.

Le roman qu'il admire et qu'il se sait incapable d'écrire, c'est celui qui parle au coeur, qui présente des situations aussi vraies que la vie réelle de son lecteur et qui, par ce réalisme supérieur, engage à l'action. Si le roman n'est pas à la fois peinture, sensible et règle de vie, il n'est rien.⁹

In L'Ingénu the Huron complains that the novels he reads fall short of reality; his personal feelings and situation go far beyond the fictional representation.¹⁰ Similarly in La Princesse de Babylone Voltaire alludes to the reader's need, so seldom satisfied, to identify with characters in

a novel. Formosante, detained on the coast of Holland for lack of a favourable wind to carry her on to England in pursuit of Amazan, tries to while away the time by having novels read to her. They do not hold her interest because in them she cannot find anything related to her own experience.¹¹

Scherer (see quote above) notes that Voltaire was incapable of writing a traditional novel in the modern sense. Of all the contes, only L'Ingénu is considered to be a short novel because in it the characters develop and evolve in a realistic, historic context. What the other contes have in common is the author's intention that they be read as fictions. We accept them as stories to amuse and instruct us, but not requiring the suspension of disbelief. Perhaps the following nineteenth-century definition of the conte describes the genre as Voltaire used it, as well as any.

Qu'est-ce qu'un conte? C'est un roman auquel personne ne croit, ni auteur, ni lecteur. [...] Tout le plaisir du roman consiste dans cette duperie à demi volontaire et charmante de nous-mêmes. Dans un conte, il n'en va pas de même: nous nous soucions fort peu du sultan Misapouf ou de la princesse Grisemine, eussent-ils même existé; mais nous nous amusons énormément de ce qu'ils disent, et de la façon dont ils le disent. Un conte nous intéresse ou par le mérite de la narration, ou par la drôlerie du sujet, ou par l'esprit, ou par les allusions, ou par la profondeur de la pensée.¹²

The shorter form of the conte proved versatile and open to

innovations. Voltaire found it particularly congenial to his talent and a welcome form of literary relaxation.

Although not highly regarded as a literary genre by the intellectuals, the conte was extremely popular in the eighteenth-century. Evidence of its versatility is seen in the many subgenres that form part of that literary tradition: oriental tales, fairy tales, moral tales, philosophic tales, licentious tales, and various combinations of these. Perhaps the most dominant trend seen is the pervasive oriental flavour found in different types of contes and the great popularity of oriental tales in particular, both of which exemplify the eighteenth-century's enthusiasm for the Orient. As La Princesse de Babylone is an oriental tale, it is pertinent to explore this vogue of the Orient and its impact on Voltaire's work in general, and to explain what is meant by the Mille et une nuits tradition. In doing so I shall rely in part on Pierre Martino's L'Orient dans la littérature française au XVII^e et au XVIII^e siècle. Then, after considering the characteristics of oriental tales, I shall go on to examine Voltaire's oriental tales and La Princesse de Babylone in particular.

The Vogue of the Orient in Eighteenth-Century France

From the middle of the seventeenth century until late

in the eighteenth century, the French people's interest was keenly aroused by all things oriental. This great vogue of the Orient affected the arts, the literature of the period, and many aspects of daily life. The term "oriental" as used in this study must be understood to refer to the Arabs, Persians, Turks, Tartars, and almost all the peoples of Asia as far as China, for the distinction between the Middle East and the Far East is a modern one.¹³ The Holy Land does not figure in this cultural phenomenon because it had been and continued to be closely associated with Christian doctrine.

The reasons for this great vogue of the Orient are complex. Travel accounts sent back from the East by French adventurers aroused the public's curiosity in things exotic. When Colbert, Louis XIV's great minister, came to power in the 1660s, he took a serious interest in information acquired by travellers and gave financial assistance and official protection to able, well-trained men of quality who set out to acquire first-hand knowledge of the geography, resources, customs, and language of eastern lands. Colbert's expansionist policies led to new attempts at French colonization in India and in Egypt, and to the founding of great trading companies: La Compagnie de la Chine 1660, La Compagnie des Indes orientales 1665, and La Compagnie du Levant in 1670.¹⁴ New political contacts with eastern lands led to the exchange of ambassadors, to reports

on oriental wars, and to French mediation particularly between the Turks and other European powers.¹⁵

Another important factor in the increasing public awareness of oriental civilizations was the glowing accounts sent back by Jesuit missionaries of their efforts to christianize the Chinese. The century-long dispute between the Jesuits and rival religious orders such as the Dominicans and the Franciscans as to whether the Jesuits were guilty of compromising Christian doctrine in their efforts to conciliate followers of Confucius, was ever in the news and fostered a growing inclination to compare the relative merits of different ideologies.¹⁶

According to Martino all these developments had a very real effect on the French public, particularly in Paris. More than one hundred different, authoritative travel accounts of the Orient were published in France between 1710 and 1730, the most famous written by Thévenot, Tavernier, Chardin, and Bernier.¹⁷ These had tremendous appeal, firing the imagination and broadening the public's vision of mankind. In general this travel literature provided descriptions of oriental governments, religious practices, dress, and mores. Eastern man is portrayed as physically attractive, sociable, and tolerant. Much is made of oriental voluptuousness, polygamy, eunuchs, sexual indulgence, and violent passion. The taste for the exotic

established by travel literature was reinforced by the introduction into daily life of foreign products such as coffee, tea, spices, silk, oriental rugs, and lacquered boxes. The visits of authentic oriental ambassadors to Paris representing first-hand contact with the East, caused great excitement. The detailed accounts of oriental pomp and pageantry in the Mercure galant bear witness to the public's fascination with these events, and it is no accident that Molière's Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme 1670 followed hard upon the Paris visit in 1669 of the Turkish ambassador, Soliman Muta Ferraca, and that Montesquieu's Lettres persanes appeared in 1721, the very year in which another Turkish ambassador, Céléby Méhemet Effendi, visited Paris.¹⁸

Voltaire and the Orient

The total impact of the Orient on Voltaire's thought must not be underestimated. Voltaire was keenly interested in documentary accounts of eastern civilizations. The catalogue of books in Voltaire's library lists an awesome number of serious works on the history of Asian peoples and includes a large collection of travel works¹⁹, all part of Voltaire's extensive scholarly documentation for his Essai sur les moeurs et l'esprit des nations, first published in 1756 and reworked periodically until the end of his life.

In this vast universal history, "le livre du XVIII^e siècle où il est le plus et le mieux parlé de l'Orient"²⁰, there are sixteen chapters that deal with Persia, Arabia, Turkey, Scythia, India, China, and Japan.

As for Voltaire's tragedies, he, like other contemporary dramatists, thought the genre might be renewed and revitalized by the introduction of oriental themes and by the use of exotic costumes and the more elaborate stage sets that such themes would require. Greek and Roman subjects of tragedy had been overworked.²¹ Eager to try something new, Voltaire used his historical sense and sound documentation to introduce oriental themes, characters, and colourful settings in tragedies such as Zaïre 1732, Mahomet 1741, Sémiramis 1748, and L'Orphelin de la Chine 1755.

It is in Voltaire's oriental tales that we see his work influenced in a positive way by the tremendous popularity of the oriental fairy tale or magic-oriental tale, the subgenre initiated by the appearance in 1704 of the first volume of Les Mille et une nuits, the translation of Arabian tales by orientalist Antoine Galland.

The Mille et une nuits Tradition

The Orient did not figure prominently in seventeenth-century contes. Its sudden appearance in 1704 in the fanciful Mille et une nuits known in English as The Arabian

Nights, was a revelation to the public. Galland claimed that the stories would have documentary value:

Ils doivent plaire encore par les coutumes et les mœurs des Orientaux, par les cérémonies de leur Religion, tant Païenne que Mahométane; et ces choses y sont mieux marquées que dans les Auteurs qui en ont écrit, et que dans les relations des Voyageurs. Tous les Orientaux, Persans, Tartares et Indiens, s'y font distinguer, et paraissent tels qu'ils sont, depuis les Souverains jusqu'aux personnes de la plus basse condition. Ainsi, sans avoir essuyé la fatigue d'aller chercher ces Peuples dans leur Pays, le Lecteur aura ici le plaisir de les voir agir et de les entendre parler.²²

Eighteenth-century readers did absorb much realistic detail about life in eastern countries but the appeal of these stories of Aladdin, Sindbad, Ali Baba, and countless others, which have become part of world literature, was then as now in their imaginative inventiveness and in the endless surprises of a fantasy world abounding in hidden treasure, genies, sorcerers, and fabulous beasts. A few examples taken from well-known stories in Les Mille et une nuits will show the flavour of these tales.

Christmas pantomimes still feature Aladdin and his magic lamp which, when rubbed, produces a genie ready to grant his every request, a genie capable of creating overnight a magnificent, bejeweled palace and of transporting it from China to Africa and back.²³ Another well-known motif is that of the flying carpet found in the "Histoire du Prince Ahmed et de la fée Pari-Banou". Prince

Houssain paid a great price for what looked like an ordinary six-foot-square rug; its value lay in the fact that when the Prince seated himself upon it, he had only to wish to reach some distant place and he would find himself transported there instantaneously.²⁴ A more macabre note is struck by the tale of Dr. Douban's severed head that pronounced judgment on his executioner.²⁵

One of the more surprising tales is that of the young king whose unfaithful wife turned the lower half of his body into stone and beat him every day about the shoulders with one hundred strokes of a bull's pizzle because the king had wounded and insulted her lover. Not content with these acts of vengeance, she destroyed his kingdom by turning it into a pond and by transforming the people into coloured fish--white for the Moslems, red for the Persians who worship fire, blue for the Christians, and yellow for the Jews.²⁶

Another example is Sindbad the Sailor's account of his seven perilous voyages in each of which he is shipwrecked on a mysterious island and has thrilling adventures. On his second voyage Sindbad attaches himself with the cloth of his turban to the foot of a roc, an immense fabulous bird, who carries him off to a new land strewn with diamonds. On the sixth voyage Sindbad proves himself to be equally at home underground as in the air for, in order to escape dying of starvation on a lonely shore,

Sindbad builds a raft and follows an underground river for days until at last he is carried into a utopian land where he receives honours and riches.²⁷

Les Mille et une nuits published in twelve volumes between 1704 and 1717, L'Histoire de la sultane de Perse et des visirs 1707, and Les Mille et un jours, contes persans 1710, the latter two translated into French by another orientalist, François Pétis de la Croix,²⁸ received public acclaim. The demand for more collections of stories prompted Thomas Simon Gueulette to write oriental tales of his own based on borrowings from La Bibliothèque orientale 1697 compiled by Barthélemy d'Herbelot and Antoine Galland, and from the Lettres édifiantes et curieuses, écrites des missions étrangères, par quelques missionnaires de la Compagnie de Jésus. Gueulette's first collection entitled Les Mille et un quarts d'heures, contes tartares 1715, was so successful an imitation of Galland's and Pétis de la Croix's translations that it passed for being the translation of an original manuscript. He went on to publish Les Aventures merveilleuses du mandarin Fum-Hoam, contes chinois 1723, Les Sultanes de Guzarete ou les songes des hommes éveillés, contes moguls 1732, and Les Mille et une heures, contes péruviens 1733-1759.

Let us examine more closely the characteristics of these tales. Perhaps the most evident similarity between

these collections of tales is that each is unified by a story-frame to justify the telling of a great many tales in sequence. So it is that in Les Mille et une nuits Scheherezade prolongs her life day by day, by enchanting the Sultan Schahriar with her stories. In Les Mille et un jours²⁹ an old nurse attempts to restore Princess Farrukhnaz's faith in men by telling her tales of faithful lovers in brief instalments while the Princess has her daily bath. In Les Aventures merveilleuses du mandarin Fum-hoam, Fum-hoam fulfills his promise to give an account of his fabulous adventures to his Queen in daily instalments before the supper hour. At the outset the reader's interest is aroused by the mandarin's claim:

j'ai paru dans toutes les parties du monde sous des formes très opposées, j'y ai été par conséquent de toutes sortes de religion et de tout sexe [...] notre âme est comme un caméléon, qui suivant les differens corps où elle passe, y prend des impressions différentes et y est sujette à toutes les passions du corps qu'elle occupe³⁰

In these stories we find a seemingly authentic oriental setting and normal everyday human emotions allied with fantasy and magic of every kind. Adventures are limited only by the author's imagination. The tales in Les Mille et une nuits are simply told and give the impression of being part of an oral tradition, despite the fact that we read them in prose that Georges May describes as

"exquisément littéraire"³¹. A common theme is the confusion of dreams with reality. The device of telling a tale within a tale, is used very frequently and often results in what might be termed a "shaggy-dog story".

In order not to offend the sensibilities of his readers, many of whom were ladies of quality, Galland was careful to leave out of his translation explicit indecencies which were not needed to make a story understandable.³² Even so, many tales have an erotic dimension. In the very story-frame of Les Mille et une nuits is an account of how two kings, Schahzenan and Schahriar are cuckolded. It is Schahriar's rage on witnessing the sexual orgy that takes place in the palace garden when he is presumed absent, that makes him resolve to slaughter each new wife after her wedding night and take another.³³ This is why Scheherazade must use her art of storytelling to postpone her execution. The two kings mentioned above are also forced to make love to a beautiful woman who, though the mistress of a vigilant and jealous genie, has made it her business to have one hundred lovers.³⁴ Martino shows that the erotic suggestiveness of Les Mille et une nuits led to the frankly licentious tales of Crébillon fils.³⁵

The public's enthusiasm for the oriental tale can be accounted for in part by its novelty and by its appearance at the time that the Orient was in vogue. An editor of the

day gives this explanation:

Les petites histoires françaises ont ordinairement une intrigue, un plan et un objet qui se développe avec ordre; mais l'habitude où nous sommes de les lire nous fait trop aisément prévoir le dénouement, au lieu que les histoires orientales n'ont souvent qu'un seul objet dont l'effet est d'exciter la surprise, en voyant que les plus petits incidents amènent les plus grandes révolutions. C'est en cela que consiste presque tout leur attrait.³⁶

Exotic titles and names such as Badr-al-Budor, Fatimah, Caramalzaman, and Aboulcasem Basry had great appeal for western readers. The magic element provided them with a means of escape from everyday humdrum existence and with an opportunity to participate vicariously in superhuman feats. The portrayal of shameless passion in the mysterious harem setting made titillating reading.³⁷ The public's appetite for these stories was insatiable and the supply inexhaustible. Many inferior collections of tales were written and the oriental conte continued to be cultivated throughout the century; Jacques Cazotte's oriental tales, Continuation des mille et une nuits appeared as late as 1788-89.

It was obvious that the oriental tale could be used for satiric purposes. Interest in the Orient led naturally to a comparison of French and Eastern cultures not always favourable to France. Authors of travel literature reflected on the curious differences between East and West.

In his Voyage autour du monde, Le Gentil asks:

Si quelqu'un de ces Chinois que nos missionnaires amènent en France écrivait en son pays tout ce qu'il voit en Europe, en bonne foi, monsieur, quel portrait ne ferait-il pas point de nos coutumes? [...] Le Français n'est-il pas lui-même un barbare aux yeux des Chinois?³⁸

The technique of forcing the public to look at their own country through the eyes of an oriental visitor became popular. Montesquieu's Lettres persanes 1721 is the most famous example of this type of satirical oriental roman and is one in which the author has made good use of the voluptuous Orient---eunuchs, harem intrigues, women's passions, violence---to capture the reader's interest and to make social criticism entertaining. Knowledge of eastern religions and systems of government provided a new point of departure for philosophic comment. The oriental tale could be used to propound philosophic ideas in palatable form. As we shall see, Voltaire was a master in the art of the philosophic oriental tale.

It is not surprising that this great vogue of the oriental tale should have its critics. Anthony Hamilton, an English general who followed James II to France and settled at the St. Germain-en-Laye court, had great scorn for "cette inondation subite de califes et de sultans"³⁹ that so charmed fashionable ladies. Accordingly he himself wrote contes to ridicule the frivolous genre labelled

"contes arabes et persans" and to prove to his lady friends that it was not difficult to invent such extravaganzas and to parody their faults at the same time. In his best known contes Fleur d'épine and Le Béliier published in 1730, he carried out his plan, but in the doing succeeded in charming his readers, the critics, and himself.⁴⁰ Be that as it may, the narrative techniques parodied by Hamilton are clear, particularly so in Le Béliier.

Le Béliier is a lengthy fairy tale⁴¹ in which the principal incident is a contest between a prince metamorphosed into a ram, and an ugly giant for Alie, the beautiful daughter of a druid. It is humorous, farcical, melodramatic, and fantastic. Great events announced come to nought. The storyline is frequently broken as characters appear and then are dropped from view. The tale itself is interrupted by the insertion of several tales told by different characters. The longest of these, "L'Histoire de Pertharite et de Férandine" constitutes a third of the text and is told in instalments by the ram to the giant. It is a long, rambling, repetitious, muddled tale. Even the untutored giant has trouble following it and has the wits to protest that the teller should begin at the beginning⁴², that he constantly strays from the point, and burdens the listener with extraneous material.⁴³

Hamilton's parody becomes explicit when he makes

direct allusions to Les Mille et une nuits: at the outset he announces that unlike Scheherezade, he will not masquerade his tale "sous l'arabesque antiquité"⁴⁴; when driven mad by love, Alie, the heroine, an avid reader of Les Mille et une nuits, fancies that she has become Scheherezade, is under threat of death, and consequently tells her life story to Dinarzade.⁴⁵ It is impossible to mistake the caricature intended in Le Béliet, impossible to unravel the story, and yet it is also impossible not to enjoy it.

All these tales---translations of oriental tales, oriental tales written by French authors, parodies of these, as well as the licentious, satirical and philosophic oriental tales to which the former gave rise---fall within the tradition of Les Mille et une nuits, the first and best known example of the magic-oriental genre.

There is no doubt at all that Voltaire was well acquainted with this body of literature. Born in 1694, Voltaire belonged to a generation raised on fairy tales.⁴⁶ In 1714 Fénelon commented on the popularity of fables and fairy tales: "Les fables mêmes qui ressemblent aux contes des fées, ont je ne sais quoi qui plaît aux hommes les plus sérieux: on redevient volontiers enfant, pour lire."⁴⁷ In his eighties Voltaire could truthfully say, "J'aime les contes de ma mère l'oye, comme si j'avais dix ans" (Best.

D19801). Although no volumes of contes written by contemporaries remain in Voltaire's library (a further indication of his tendency to consider "romans et contes" an inferior literary genre), he knew Hamilton's work.⁴⁰ Deloffre states that Hamilton was "celui de tous les prosateurs français que Voltaire estimait le plus".⁴¹

As for Les Mille et une nuits, Voltaire possessed a 1747 edition. In 1759 he wrote to his lifelong friend and confidant, Madame du Deffand, that his personal choice of entertaining fiction included Les Mille et une nuits:

je ne lis que l'ancien Testament, trois ou quatre chants de Virgile, tout l'Arioste, une partie des mille et une nuit; [...] on ne peut pas tout lire, et il faut bien se livrer à son goût. (Best. D8484)

Voltaire's oriental tales, of which La Princesse de Babylone, after Zadig, is the most important, are very much a part of the Mille et une nuits tradition.

NOTES TO CHAPTER III

¹Supplément du grand dictionnaire philosophique de Mre Louis Moréri (Amsterdam, 1716), p.441.

²Ibid.

³Nicole Gueunier, "Pour une définition du conte" in Romans et Lumières au dix-huitième siècle (Paris: Ed. Sociales, 1970) quoted in A. C. Bertrand-Guy's Voyages et mouvements dans les contes philosophiques de Voltaire, p.62.

⁴Denis Diderot, "Eloge de Richardson" in Oeuvres complètes (Paris: Garnier, 1875), V, 212 quoted in Van den Heuvel's Voltaire dans ses contes, p.17.

⁵Nouveaux mélanges, 6^e partie du Supplément aux éditions Cramer 1765-1776, Genève, 1768. At Bibliothèque nationale see Rés Z Bengesco 487(6) and Rés Z Beuchot 28(6).

⁶Romans, contes philosophiques, Volume 13 of Collection complète des oeuvres de M. de Voltaire (Genève: Cramer, 1771). 45 volumes in 4°. At Bibliothèque nationale see Rés m. 2587 and Bengesco 2137.

⁷Voltaire, Lettres philosophiques (Paris: Classiques Garnier, 1951), pp.68-69.

⁸On writing to his Paris publisher Lacombe shortly after the publication of L'Ingénu, Voltaire made this suggestion: "Il me semble que vous pouriez faire une jolie édition avec des estampes, de tous les contes en vers et en prose; je suis persuadé que tant qu'il y aura des hommes oisifs on ne perdra pas son argent à faire de telles éditions." See Best. D14423 which is dated September 14, 1767.

⁹Scherer, "L'Univers en raccourci; quelques ambitions du roman voltairien", SVEC, No. 179 (1979), 119-120.

¹⁰L'Ingénu in Voltaire's Romans et contes, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade (Paris: Gallimard, 1979), p.326.

¹¹Pléiade, p.388.

¹²Paul Morillot, Le Roman en France depuis 1610 jusqu'à nos jours (Paris: Masson, 1892), p.155.

¹³Pierre Martino, L'Orient dans la littérature française au XVII^e et au XVIII^e siècle (Genève: Slatline Reprints, 1970), p.23. The following summary account of the development of the oriental vogue is based on this work, as well as on René Etiemble's L'Orient philosophique au 18^e siècle (Paris: Centre de Documentation universitaire, 1956-58), 2 vols.

¹⁴Martino, p.44.

¹⁵Ibid., p.86.

¹⁶See Voltaire, Siècle de Louis XIV, final chapter, "Disputes sur les cérémonies chinoises".

¹⁷Thévenot, Récit d'un voyage fait au Levant 1665; Suite du voyage au Levant 1674; Voyages (Inde) 1684; Tavernier, Voyages en Turquie, en Perse et aux Indes 1676; Relation d'un voyage fait aux Indes orientales 1677; Chardin, Voyages en Perse et autres lieux de l'Asie 1686; and Bernier, Voyages (Inde) 1699. Listed in Martino, p.54, n.2.

¹⁸Martino, p.100.

¹⁹A study of the Catalogue des livres de la bibliothèque de Voltaire (Moscou-Leningrad: Editions de l'Académie des Sciences de l'URSS, 1961) is essential for any intellectual biography of Voltaire.

²⁰Martino, p.319.

²¹In writing to his publisher Lacombe on February 7, 1767, Voltaire attributes the lack of interest in his play Le Triumvirat to its Roman subject matter. "Il n'y a certainement pas dans Paris 1200 personnes qui s'intéressent aux affaires de l'ancienne Rome. Cela était bon du temps du Cardinal de Richelieu et du Cardinal de Retz." Best. D13929.

²²Antoine Galland, Les Mille et une nuits (Paris: Classiques Garnier, 1955), I, xxxi in "Avertissement".

²³Les Mille et une nuits, III, 55-168, "Histoire d'Aladdin, ou la lampe merveilleuse".

²⁴Ibid., 313-373.

²⁵Les Mille et une nuits, I, 52-55, "Histoire du roi grec et du médecin Douban".

²⁶Ibid., pp.64-76, "Histoire du jeune roi des îles". The "Histoire du roi grec et du médecin Douban" and the "Histoire du jeune roi des îles" are two of four tales within the "Histoire du Pêcheur", Mille et une nuits, I, 40 and following, told by various characters.

²⁷Ibid., 175-229, "Histoire de Sindbad le marin".

²⁸Les Mille et un jours translated by Pétis de la Croix was given final form by his collaborator Lesage. See Martino, p.254.

²⁹In the Mille et une tradition, there are generally not one thousand and one different tales, but certainly several hundred.

³⁰Thomas Simon Gueulette, Les Aventures merveilleuses du mandarin Fum-hoam, contes chinois (Paris, 1723), I, 4.

³¹Georges May, Les Mille et une nuits d'Antoine Galland, "Ecrivains" series (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1986), p.43.

³²May, p.51.

³³Les Mille et une nuits, I, 2-3 and 12.

³⁴Ibid., 9-11.

³⁵See Martino, pp.264-65. Le Sopha 1741 is the best known example.

³⁶From the preface to volume I of Caylus' Contes orientaux (Paris, 1743), quoted in Martino, p.255.

³⁷The "Histoire racontée par le pourvoyeur du Sultan de Casgar", Mille et une nuits, I, 310-324, is one that is particularly intriguing to western readers because it describes the violent and unconventional behaviour of an oriental lady. The favourite lady-in-waiting to the Caliph's wife takes a fancy to a young merchant whom she meets while shopping for her mistress in Bagdad. At great risk she has her eunuchs smuggle him into the Caliph's palace in a chest and hide him in the women's quarters. The Caliph's wife grants permission for the lady-in-waiting to marry the merchant and elaborate ceremonies and festivities take place. However, the young merchant has the misfortune of neglecting to wash his hands after partaking of a garlic stew before joining his bride in the nuptial chamber. There she turns on him in a rage, beats him mercilessly with a bull's pizzle, and has him held down by women servants so that she can cut off his thumbs and big toes to punish him for touching her with hands stinking of garlic.

³⁸Le Gentil, Voyage autour du monde 1728, III, 140 quoted in Martino, pp.281-282.

³⁹See "Notice de M. de Lescure" in Les Quatre Facardins, vol.3 of Contes d'Hamilton, Les Petits Chefs d'oeuvre (Paris: Librairie des Bibliophiles, 1873).

⁴⁰Martino, pp.263-264. See also the introduction to vol. 2 of Contes d'Hamilton in which Voltaire's protégé, La Harpe, known to be a stern critic, is quoted as praising

Hamilton's graceful style and "la vérité charmante dans les caractères et dans les situations".

¹¹The 1730 Paris edition of Le Béliet conte par M. le comte Antoine Hamilton was 330 pages long.

¹²"Béliet, mon ami, lui dit le géant en l'interrompant, je ne comprends rien à tout cela. Si tu voulois bien commencer par le commencement, tu me ferais plaisir; car tous les récits qui commencent par le milieu ne font que m'embrouiller l'imagination. ---Eh bien, dit le Béliet, je consens, contre la coutume, à mettre chaque chose à sa place: ainsi le commencement de mon histoire sera à la tête de mon récit." Le Béliet, Contes d'Hamilton (Paris, 1873), I, 79.

¹³When the Béliet announces that he will discontinue the story of the princess and the white fox, and instead take up that of the prince, her brother, the Giant complains: "Si cela est [...] je compte que je ne la reverrai plus, ni son renard blanc, car tu ne fais que tarabuster mon attention d'un endroit à un autre. N'y auroit-il pas moyen de finir ce qui les regarde avant que d'aller courir après une autre aventure?" Le Béliet, p.95.

¹⁴Ibid., p.36.

¹⁵Ibid., pp.50-51.

¹⁶In his preface to Cadichon et Jeannette, Caylus born in 1692 states: "Les contes de fées ont été longtemps à la mode, et dans ma jeunesse on ne lisait guères que cela dans le monde." This quotation comes from the C. J. Mayer edition of Le Cabinet des fées (Amsterdam and Paris, 1785-1789), XXV. 379 and is cited in Jacques Barchilon's article "Uses of the fairy tale in the eighteenth century", SVEC, No. 24 (1963), 112.

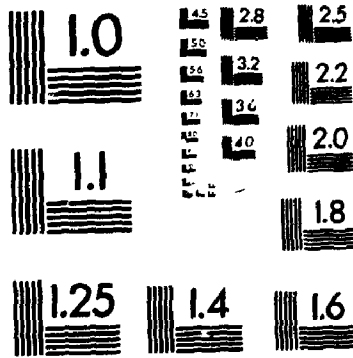
¹⁷Fénelon, Oeuvres complètes (Paris, 1848-1852), VI, 655 quoted in Barchilon, SVEC, No. 24 (1963), 113.

¹⁸In the entry for Hamilton in Michaud's Biographie

universelle ancienne et moderne, Paris, 1843-65, it is stated that Voltaire praised the opening part of Hamilton's Le Bélier which was written in verse. Voltaire did possess Hamilton's Mémoires du comte de Grammont, Paris, 1749; this work appears as item 1592 in the Leningrad catalogue of Voltaire's library.

"Pléiade, "Introduction générale", p.lv.

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CHAPTER IV

LA PRINCESSE DE BABYLONE AND VOLTAIRE'S OTHER ORIENTAL TALES

No comparative study of all Voltaire's oriental contes is to be found; therefore I propose to examine Voltaire's oriental tales and relate them to the Mille et une nuits tradition. In the last chapter we noted the enthusiasm in eighteenth-century France for the Orient and the discovery of the magic-oriental tale with the publication of Les Mille et une nuits. The magic-oriental tale is a highly imaginative, entertaining, episodic tale that transports the reader to an exotic, eastern world of splendour and of enchantment. It contains the following characteristics: action, the element of surprise, fantasy and magic, dreams, passionate love and an erotic dimension, and fabulous beasts that interact with people. The term "oriental tale" may be applied to a conte in which the Orient plays only a small part, whether it be a conte with an oriental setting or one with a thin veneer of oriental atmosphere. My purpose will be to show how greatly Voltaire's oriental tales vary in purpose, length, and tone, how the Orient is treated in each one, and how skilfully Voltaire has drawn on the Mille et une nuits tradition for

his own ends. (See Appendix I). Such a comparative study will lead to an evaluation of La Princesse de Babylone as an oriental tale.

If one defines "oriental conte" as one in which the action is set in the Orient, a list of Voltaire's oriental contes would include Le Crocheteur borgne 1715¹, Le Monde comme il va, Vision de Babouc 1739-47, Zadig ou la destinée 1745-47, Lettre d'un Turc 1750, Les Lettres d'Amabed written in 1753-54 and reworked and published in 1769, Histoire d'un bon bramin 1759, Le Blanc et le noir 1763-64, Aventure indienne 1766, La Princesse de Babylone 1767, and Le Taureau blanc 1772-73.

Although they are not presented as oriental tales, the Histoire des voyages de Scarmentado écrite par lui-même and Candide ou l'Optimisme deserve mention because each contains oriental components. The former, written during the winter of 1753-54, is a seven-page², first-person account of Scarmentado's educational world tour through Rome, France, England, Holland, Spain, Turkey, China, India, and Africa in the early seventeenth century. It is a tale told with great bitterness and constitutes a biting denunciation of religious intolerance and of the barbarous cruelty of which man is capable. But, although Scarmentado's travels take him to the Middle and Far East, the Orient is merely another part of a hostile world in

which evil triumphs. Voltaire does go so far as to suggest that in the Orient, evil is likely to take the form of direct, undisguised cruelty or violence, whereas in Western Christendom more devious methods are used to achieve the same results.³ This conte is less a philosophic tale than an outpouring of spleen.⁴ It is in no sense a magic-oriental tale: it does not seek to amuse; it has no picturesque element, no magic, no splendour, no humour, no love affair---nothing but unrelieved bitterness.

Candide 1759, is not primarily an oriental tale but rather a philosophic tale in the picaresque tradition. Voltaire's aim is to refute Leibnitzian optimism. The greater part of the action takes place in Europe and in South America, although it is true that chapters XI and XII include an account of the "vieille's" sufferings at the hands of African pirates and of her experiences as a slave in North Africa and in a Turkish harem, that in chapter XXVII Candide discovers Pangloss and the Baron de Thunder-ten-tronckh serving as Turkish galley slaves, and that Candide's search for Cunégonde takes him to Turkey where he settles down to cultivate his garden, chapter XXX. Voltaire's pessimistic view of the world was based in part on the Orient.

Candide might be said to be almost the antithesis of a typical oriental tale by reason of its black portrait

of the violence and injustice endured by mankind, and by its seriousness. There is no ordinary magic in this conte. Eldorado is fantastical in that it is better than real life; however, Candide rejects this ideal world. In doing so he is quite unlike the Mille et une nuits characters who accept and revel in the delights and luxuries of a fantasy world.

Of those tales which I classify as oriental but not as magic-oriental, the first chronologically is Le Monde comme il va, Vision de Babouc écrite par lui-même, 1739-47. Le Monde comme il va is a gently satirical moral tale, fifteen pages long, which has been given an oriental flavour by the use of a Biblical tone suggestive of the Middle East, by the use of words such as "archimandrite", "satrape", "eunuchs", and "mages". The story has a Babylonian setting which is not developed. It is soon apparent that the oriental labels "Perses" and "Persépolis" are to be translated respectively as Parisians and Paris; here the Orient serves as a flimsy disguise for satire of the Parisian world. Babouc the "Scythe," represents natural man, and Ituriel, a deity who is like the God of the Old Testament, is called the genie of "Haute Asie".⁵ Babouc is sent by the genie to judge Persepolis. His conclusion is that though moral decadence is present, Parisian society is charming. Accordingly the divine power decides not to interfere with "le monde comme il va" which, if not perfect,

is at least "passable".⁶

Like Le Monde comme il va, Lettre d'un Turc 1750, Histoire d'un bon brahmin 1759, and Aventure indienne 1766 are not patterned after the Mille et une nuits; they cannot be said to be magic-oriental tales. Yet the fact that all three of these very short tales are set in India shows that Voltaire was clearly attracted by the oriental mode so popular at the time and that he found an eastern setting, however vaguely indicated, a useful vantage point from which to comment on human values⁷, to criticize religious orders⁸, and to deplore intolerance.⁹

Histoire d'un bon brahmin, only two pages long, is a simple parable about a wise Indian of the Hindu priestly caste and a stupid, bigotted, old Indian woman. The brahmin's keen intellect serves only to make him unhappy and dissatisfied. He envies the stupid woman's contentment but would not exchange his mental anguish for her stupidity. The conclusion of this moral tale is that we should prize intelligence over happiness. Voltaire gives an eastern setting that he does not elaborate, to a sober, reflective, philosophic piece.

In his three-page Lettre d'un Turc sur les fakirs et sur son ami Babadec 1750, Voltaire gives an amusing, satirical description of the life-styles of contemplative fakirs and of Bababec, a gymnosophist fakir, seen through

the eyes of a Turkish observer. Following in the tradition of the Lettres persanes, Voltaire uses this oriental sketch to express his view that the sterile religious life devoted to forms and rites is worth nothing compared with that of an honest, useful citizen. His primary purpose is not to amuse but to instruct with mockery.

The third such tale is Aventure indienne 1766, two pages long. Despite its Indian setting, its allusions to a unity of nature in which men, plants, and animals can communicate, and to the transmigration of souls, Aventure indienne has none of the characteristics of the magic-oriental tale. Here again, Voltaire's purpose is not to amuse but to denounce religious fanaticism and ignorance by means of a somber anecdote in which Pythagoras, the Greek philosopher and mathematician, witnesses preparations to burn two heretics at the stake. Outraged, he puts a stop to the proceedings, only to fall victim himself to intolerance.¹⁰

Another much longer oriental tale, Les Lettres d'Amabed, calls to mind the Histoire des voyages de Scarmentado 1753-54, because of its virulent, abusive tone. It is interesting to note that the original version of this epistolary tale also dates from the winter of 1753-54 and that the arbitrary imprisonment of Amabed and Adaté, a newly-wed Indian couple, and the sexual assault on Adaté

were inspired by the unhappy experiences of Voltaire and his niece Madame Denis at the hands of Frederick's agents in Frankfort, June 1753.¹¹ Indeed a study of Voltaire's correspondence for September to January 1753-54 has convinced F. Deloffre and J. Hellegouarc'h that the first version of this tale was intended primarily as a denunciation of Frederick's treatment of Voltaire.¹² However, in its final form published in 1769, the conte is an attack on the Inquisition and on the Catholic church. Voltaire described it as the story of the adventures of a newly-wed Indian couple who fall victims to the Inquisition in Goa during the papacy of Leon X and are taken to Rome to be judged (Best. D15668). Voltaire gave the conte a specific, historic context and used precise documentation to denounce injustice.

Les Lettres d'Amabed can be said to be a satirical, oriental tale in which naive Orientals judge the religion of the West; however, its virulent tone is not typical of the Lettres persanes or of the Mille et une nuit tradition. Les Lettres d'Amabed is embedded in historical reality and lacking in any suggestion of magic, surprise, mystery, or even of the exotic per se, apart from some information given about the Hindu religion.

The remaining five oriental contes---Le Crocheteur borgne, Zadig ou la destinée, Le Blanc et le noir, La

Princesse de Babylone, and Le Taureau blanc--- are truly in the Mille et une nuits tradition. Le Crocheteur borgne and Le Blanc et le noir are "contes oniriques"; dreams are presented as reality. Many of the adventures that befell simple folk in Les Mille et une nuits were taken for dreams because they were so inexplicable.

Le Crocheteur borgne, Voltaire's first-known oriental tale, dates from the very period in which Les Mille et une nuits was published; it was improvised orally about 1715 at the Duchesse du Maine's court at Sceaux.¹³ This tale describes the erotic dream of Mesrour, a one-eyed black porter in Bagdad. Mesrour comes to the rescue of a lovely blond princess who faints away, making it possible for him to ravish her under cover of night. The porter's bliss must end with the dawn when the princess will see him as he is, but, magically, he is transformed into an Adonis. The fairytale lovers find themselves in an enchanted palace where Mesrour commands at will the services of countless genies. This dazzling experience is but a dream. The illusion is shattered when a servant girl empties a basin of dirty water out a window, onto Mesrour asleep by the roadside. Mesrour attributes his dream to drink and looks forward to repeating the experience.

Here is a magic-oriental tale complete with surprise, enchantments, splendour, and the fusion of dream and

reality. In naming his protagonist Mesrour, Voltaire drew on Les Mille et une nuits in which a character named Mesrour appears as head eunuch of Caliph Haroun-al-Rachid in the "Histoire de trois calenders, fils de Rois et de cinq Dames de Bagdad" where the scene is set in Bagdad and where three one-eyed "calenders" (mendicant dervishes) find themselves together with a porter and Mesrour, chief eunuch, being entertained by very beautiful ladies.¹⁴ The porter's adventure also mirrors that of the "Dormeur éveillé", another Mille et une nuits tale.¹⁵ Voltaire's early conte, only five pages long, has negligible philosophic content. The moral, suggesting that a one-eyed man who sees only the good in life, is happier than are those who are aware of life's evils, was a mere point of departure. Voltaire's aim was to entertain. Le Crocheteur borgne is an early example of the licentious tales so popular in the seventeen-thirties and forties.¹⁶

Voltaire exploits the Mille et une nuits tradition in writing Zadiq ou la destinée 1745-47 and Le Blanc et le noir 1764 in which he raises questions about the problem of free will. In Le Traité de métaphysique 1734 Voltaire had affirmed that man, created by an all-powerful, free God, is himself free to act according to his will. Yet in the Métaphysique de Newton written in 1739 and published in 1740, he recognized "la difficulté d'accorder la liberté de

nos actions avec la prescience éternelle de Dieu"¹⁷ and concluded:

Une seule réflexion console: c'est que, quelque système qu'on embrasse, à quelque fatalité qu'on croie toutes nos actions attachées, on agira toujours comme si on était libre.
(M. XXII, 416-417)

At the time of writing Zadig, Voltaire's happiness seemed precarious. This led him to reflect again on the role Providence plays in our lives. Through his protagonist Zadig, Voltaire asks probing questions: what are man's chances of happiness on earth? does he enjoy the happiness he deserves? can undeserved misfortune be justified? Many of Zadig's adventures mirror Voltaire's personal experiences at court and in love.

The choice of the magic-oriental genre to explore the issue of free will and to question the inequalities of fortune among mankind was peculiarly appropriate because the Mille et une nuits stories relate the mysterious destinies of individuals. Jacques Van den Heuvel states, "La grande leçon qui se dégage des Mille et une nuits par quoi elles accèdent souvent à un humanisme du fabuleux, c'est que l'existence, avec ses détours imprévus, est la plus grande merveille du monde".¹⁸ Human life is seen to be precarious for a man may fall victim to magic spells, to a despot's whim, to an envious plot. Occasionally a

character such as Sindbad the porter is moved to rail against Providence who has treated others more graciously than him.¹⁹ But in general, the characters in Les Mille et une nuits marvel at life's surprises and ask no questions. This fatalistic attitude reflects the Islamic doctrine that Allah predestines all things and that the individual must submit to the divine will.²⁰

It is then natural for Voltaire to introduce the question of the individual's destiny in a magic-oriental tale. Having done so, he has his protagonist, Zadig, behave like a true philosophe in attempting to see clearly, to reduce superstitious arguments to absurdity²¹ and conflicting religious views to a deistic common denominator²², and to substitute common sense for medical myths.²³ But the mysteries of Providence defy explanation. When ordered by the angel Jesrad to submit and adore Providence, however unfair its decrees, Zadig protests ---"Mais"---before yielding.²⁴ In this conte the magic or supernatural element is reserved for inexplicable Providence.

Zadig is the only conte which Voltaire subtitled "Histoire orientale". The conte is preceded by the "Epître dédicatoire de Zadig à la sultane Shéraa"; Voltaire's contemporaries believed that the Shéraa was the Marquise de Pompadour, Louis XV's mistress.²⁵ Voltaire begins in florid oriental style:

le 18 du mois de schewal,
l'an 837 de l'hégire.

Charme des prunelles, tourment des coeurs, lumière de l'esprit, je ne baise point la poussière de vos pieds, parce que vous ne marchez guère, ou que vous marchez sur des tapis d'Iran ou sur des roses. Je vous offre la traduction d'un livre d'un ancien sage, qui, ayant le bonheur de n'avoir rien à faire, eut celui de s'amuser à écrire l'histoire de Zadig; ouvrage qui dit plus qu'il ne semble dire.

(Pléiade, p.55)

In this playful manner Voltaire states his intention of giving his tale a philosophic purpose without marring its entertainment value. He then links his conte explicitly to the Mille et une nuits tradition.

Il fut écrit d'abord en ancien chaldéen, que ni vous ni moi n'entendons. On le traduisit en arabe, pour amuser le célèbre sultan Oulong-beg. C'était du temps où les Arabes et les Persans commençaient à écrire des Mille et une Nuits, des Mille et un Jours. (Pléiade, p.56)

Apart from its treatment of a metaphysical problem, Zadig is a true magic-oriental tale packed with exotic atmosphere, surprising adventures, and Mille et une nuits characters such as the envious neighbour, the jealous despot, the Arab merchant, and the fisherman. Zadig's fortunes range from the fame and glory of being chief minister at court to the humiliation of slavery. Like his prototypes, he uses his wits and ingenuity to better his lot; Sétoc the Arab merchant who purchased Zadig as a slave,

is so impressed by his wisdom that he makes him his chief adviser. The scene is the Middle East: Voltaire describes the court at Bagdad, a journey by camel across the Arabian desert, and a fair at Bassora. The love story ends happily. In this long oriental tale---sixty-eight pages if one includes the two added chapters²⁶, it is clear that Voltaire has thoroughly understood and absorbed the mechanisms, techniques, and themes of Les Mille et une nuits, enjoys them thoroughly, and uses them to great advantage to serve his own ends.

The question of free will is treated more lightly in Le Blanc et le noir 1764. In this highly entertaining, twelve-page conte, Voltaire tells us the adventures of Rustan, a young Persian prince, who, against his family's wishes, sets out on a perilous voyage to meet his true love, the Princess of Cachemire. Rustan has a good genie, "le blanc", and an evil genie, "le noir". The former is determined to prevent Rustan from going to Cachemire; the latter tries to ensure that Rustan does reach Cachemire. The two genies use magic powers and take on the forms of eagle and vulture, elephant and rhinoceros, zebra and its owner, to battle together in a struggle to control their common master.²⁷ Rustan reaches Cachemire and claims the princess only to have her mistake him for his rival, wound him, and then kill herself in remorse. This sad turn of

events makes Rustan angry at both genies. In their own defence they say that they have done what they could in the best and worst interests of Rustan, but that inexorable destiny rules events in the end. Anyway it was all a dream. Voltaire seems to say that any attempt at a metaphysical explanation of life's experience is merely the stuff of dreams.

Le Blanc et le noir has many features of the Mille et une nuits stories: dream mistaken for reality, a vivid portrayal of the eastern world of Persia, Afghanistan, and India, a prince and princess in quest of love, much use of magic, a lively tone, and rapid-paced action.

Voltaire's last oriental tale, Le Taureau blanc 1772-73, thirty-three pages long, is also a full-blown magic-oriental tale but one that has a strong satiric intent. The story is set in Egypt in Biblical times. Voltaire mixes history and fantasy by including historical description of ancient religious customs and by choosing, as fictional characters, two historic kings from the sixth century B.C.: Amasis, the second-last Egyptian Pharaoh and Nebuchadnezzar, king of ancient Babylon. The basic story recalls the fairy tale about beauty and the beast, a theme Hamilton parodied so cleverly in Le Béliar. A princess is forbidden to love her father's enemy, Nebuchadnezzar, who has been metamorphosed into a white bull. Bull and princess are

sentenced to a bloody death, only to be reprieved at the last moment thanks to the wiles of old Mambres, the eunuch sage responsible for the princess. Apis the bull, the highest Egyptian deity, has just died; Mambres arranges that the "taureau blanc", alias Nebuchadnezzar, shall replace Apis. The reader is entertained by farcical dialogue and by religious pomp and circumstance. The spell cast upon Nebuchadnezzar wears off at the crucial moment, he reappears as a handsome king, marries the princess on the spot, and all ends happily.

As in Le Blanc et le noir, the human and animal worlds are closely linked. In addition to the metamorphosis of Nebuchadnezzar into a bull, three Old Testament prophets, Daniel, Ezekiel, and Jeremiah, are changed into magpies. The serpent of the Genesis creation story, a minor character, helps guard the white bull and tells stories to the princess---here the narrator adds, "les contes amusent toujours les filles, et ce n'est que par des contes qu'on réussit dans le monde".²⁸ With rollicking humour, Voltaire debunks the validity of Old Testament stories by reducing the most revered gods, prophets, and sacred animals of the Jewish and Egyptian religions to the level of other mythical characters.

Voltaire wrote this irreverent spoof on completion of his final version of the Questions sur l'Encyclopédie,

a vast work containing 423 articles. In the Pléiade "Notice" to Le Taureau blanc, Deloffre stresses the links between this conte and the anti-biblical propaganda found in specific articles of the Questions sur l'Encyclopédie such as "Ane" (1770), "Déluge universel" (1771), "Ezechie" (1771), and concludes:

Ainsi Le Taureau blanc peut à juste titre être considéré, non seulement comme le divertissement d'un érudit qui badine sur le travail dont il sort à peine, mais aussi comme une oeuvre qui prolonge, auprès d'un public différent, l'oeuvre de propagande accomplie dans les Questions sur l'Encyclopédie.²⁹

Voltaire attacked Biblical tales as irrational and mere fantasy.

Once again Voltaire has placed his tale in the mainstream of the Mille et une nuits tradition by saying that Le Taureau blanc was "traduit du syriaque par M. Mamaki interprète du roi d'Angleterre pour les langues orientales"³⁰ and so claims to follow in the footsteps of Galland and Pétis de la Croix, the orientalist responsible for translating into French oriental tales found in manuscript form.

To sum up, Le Taureau blanc is a highly satirical, humorous, magic-oriental tale of passionate love in an exotic middle-eastern decor. The characters speak and react normally in the midst of a surprising and enchanted world;

there is treatment of dreams and a tale told within the tale. Although the setting is limited to ancient Egypt, Voltaire finishes this conte with a sweeping gesture towards the Orient as a whole by saying that Nebuchadnezzar ruled happily over

le royaume de Memphis, celui de Babylone, de Damas, de Balbec, de Tyr, la Syrie, L'Asie Mineure, la Scythie, les contrées de Chiraz, de Mosok, du Tubal, de Madaï, de Gog, de Magog, de Javan, la Sogdiane, la Bactriane, les Indes et les îles. (Pléiade, p.560)

La Princesse de Babylone

Having examined Voltaire's other oriental contes, we are now in a position to appreciate the unique qualities of La Princesse de Babylone. By reason of its length alone--equal to that of Zadig, it is clear that La Princesse de Babylone is a most important oriental tale. Unlike Zadig ou la destinée this conte was not prompted by Voltaire's need to explore and work out a metaphysical problem causing him personal anxiety. Nor does Voltaire use it as a vehicle to convey a particular piece of propaganda as he does in Les Lettres d'Amabed or to ridicule orthodox belief as he does in Le Taureau blanc. Although La Princesse de Babylone does contain a wealth of philosophic comment and a satirical overview of many countries in Europe and Asia, these components do not outweigh the effect of the oriental fairy tale whose purpose is to entertain the reader. By fusing

witty comment on the contemporary scene with a lavish dose of fantasy, Voltaire produced an enlightened magic-oriental tale whose narrative has more fairytale charm than do his other major oriental contes (See Chapter V).

La Princesse de Babylone has, of course, many features in common with the Mille et une nuits tradition. The conte begins in true fairytale fashion with a prince and princess falling in love; misunderstandings between them lead to an endless, highly episodic chase before the two are united in the happy ending. The magnificence of the Babylonian court and the extravagant, dazzling festivities held there in connection with the competition of suitors for the hand of Princess Formosante, recreate the charm of lands of enchantment in Les Mille et une nuits. Amazan's store of immense diamonds, his unicorns, and his fabulous rare bird intensify the atmosphere of magic, mystery, and fairytale aura which dominates the first half of the conte. The erotic element also has its place when Amazan, renowned for his faithfulness to Formosante, succumbs to the charms of a Parisian opera girl and is discovered by Formosante in her arms.

Like the Mille et une nuits tales, La Princesse de Babylone has its share of surprising events: Amazan's bird turns out to be the phoenix of legend, the King of Egypt waylays and plans to rape Formosante at an inn, Princess

Formosante falls into the hands of the Spanish Inquisition. On at least two occasions Voltaire interrupts the primary storyline by narrative digressions which alter the rhythm of the conte in the manner of a tale within a tale: the first such instance is when the Phoenix tells Formosante of his origins and describes the land of the Gangarides (pp. 363-365); the second instance is when an English member of Parliament gives Amazan a brief account of England's constitutional history (pp. 390-392). The element of surprise and the use of a tale within a tale are characteristics of the Mille et une nuits tales.

La Princesse de Babylone is unique among Voltaire's oriental contes in its portrayal of many parts of the Orient. We began by pointing out that in eighteenth-century literature no distinction is made between the Middle East and the Far East, that the term oriental refers to Arabs, Persians, Turks, Tartars, the peoples of India and of all Asia. La Princesse de Babylone is the only tale in which Voltaire takes a documentary interest in portraying different eastern lands: ancient Chaldea, Arabia, Egypt, Scythia, the Ganges region of India, China, and Russia. Voltaire had taken this same comprehensive approach to the Orient in his universal social history, the Essai sur les moeurs 1756 which includes historical documentation on Arabia, Persia, Egypt, Scythia or Tartary, India, Turkey,

that Russia under Catherine the Great has become a civilized, prosperous state. He takes the lovers to Russia to provide himself with an opportunity for eulogizing Catherine, his royal friend, correspondent, and admirer, whom he considered to be an enlightened ruler, a powerful ally, and a force in the struggle to wipe out fanaticism and superstition.³⁹ Reference is made to her improvements to Moscow. Voltaire declares Catherine to be a great legislator whose primary concern has been to establish and maintain religious tolerance at home and in adjacent lands. Voltaire praises her armed intervention in Poland on behalf of religious dissidents in the spring of 1767, an act of aggression made in the name of religious tolerance, and he approves it despite his hatred of war.

Avant elle, des hommes malheureusement puissants envoyaient des troupes de meurtriers ravir à des peuplades inconnues et arroser de leur sang les héritages de leurs pères; on appelait ces assassins des héros; leur brigandage était de la gloire. 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; et ses étendards ont été ceux de la concorde publique. (p.385)

The reason given for the Empress' absence from Moscow on Formosante's arrival is that she has undertaken a tour of her vast domains in an attempt to learn more about her subjects, "pour juger des maux et porter les remèdes, pour accroître les avantages, pour semer l'instruction" (p.383).

One of the main purposes of La Philosophie de l'histoire is to prove just this---that amid all the complexities and absurdities of superstition, polytheism and idolatry, one can detect, at any rate in the minds of the sages, a recognition of the existence of one omnipotent creator. The Chaldeans, the Parsees, the Arabians, the Chinese, the Indians, the Egyptians, the Greeks and the Romans---Voltaire searches all their religions for signs that they recognised the supreme being, and needless to say he is always successful in finding them.³³

So in La Princesse de Babylone Voltaire finds support for the views of the Enlightenment in the just, tolerant, deistic Chinese regime and in the peaceful Gangarides' practice of deism.

A fundamental theme of La Philosophie de l'histoire is that human nature is one in all times and places: "la nature étant partout la même" (M. XI, 15). The same idea is expressed in La Princesse de Babylone: "si les cultes sont différents, la morale est partout la même" (p.385). When Amazan commits a single act of infidelity, Formosante's maid comments:

voilà comme sont faits tous les jeunes gens d'un bout du monde à l'autre; fussent-ils amoureux d'une beauté descendue du ciel, ils lui feraient dans de certains moments, des infidélités pour une servante de cabaret.

(p.402)

This similarity of philosophic outlook between La Princesse de Babylone and La Philosophie de l'histoire supports Castex's judgment that:

L'oeuvre de Voltaire, si diverse soit-elle, possède une unité profonde parce que, de l'un à l'autre des genres cultivés, circule le même esprit et sont utilisées, selon les normes de chaque genre, les mêmes données d'expérience. Voltaire conteur, c'est encore Voltaire historien, mais un historien qui domine de plus haut sa matière et qui, surtout, l'utilise avec plus de désinvolture.³⁴

As a setting for the exposition of his fairy tale which constitutes roughly a third of the text of La Princesse de Babylone, Voltaire chooses the court of ancient Babylon in Chaldea. To historically sound details such as the practice of consulting oracles on important matters and the description of the Babylonian palace complete with hanging gardens and waterfalls, Voltaire adds lavish touches of oriental splendour equal to any found in Les Mille et une nuits to create an atmosphere of oriental extravaganza and fantasy. The banquet hall is described as follows:

Au milieu des jardins, entre deux cascades, s'élevait un salon ovale de trois cents pieds de diamètre, dont la voûte d'azur semée d'étoiles d'or représentait toutes les constellations avec les planètes, 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. Cent mille flambeaux, enfermés dans des cylindres de cristal de roche, éclairaient les dehors et l'intérieur de la salle à manger. Un buffet en gradins portait vingt mille vases ou plats d'or; et vis-à-vis le buffet d'autres gradins étaient remplis de musiciens. Deux autres amphithéâtres étaient chargés, l'un des fruits de toutes les saisons, l'autre, d'amphores de cristal où brillaient tous les vins de la terre.³⁵

(p.360)

Voltaire was not concerned as to whether King Bélus, the

heroine's father, was a true historical figure or not. In the Essai sur les moeurs he wrote:

Babylone était probablement une très ancienne bourgade avant qu'on en eût fait une ville immense et superbe. Mais qui a bâti cette ville? je n'en sais rien. Est-ce Sémiramis? est-ce Bélus? est-ce Nabonasser? Il n'y a peut-être jamais eu dans l'Asie ni de femme appelée Sémiramis, ni d'homme appelé Bélus. [...] De plus, l'histoire de Sémiramis, ressemble en tout aux contes orientaux.

(M. XI, 30)

It sufficed that his name like that of Queen Sémiramis was associated with Babylon and exotic adventure.

Exotic oriental elements are introduced in the first chapter of the conte by the appearance of three kings from the East who present themselves as suitors for the hand of the Princess. Each arrives with ceremonial magnificence, proffering gifts representing his national heritage. The hot-tempered King of Egypt comes mounted on Apis the sacred bull and offers as gifts:

les deux plus beaux crocodiles du Nil, deux hippopotames, deux zèbres, deux rats d'Egypte et deux momies, avec les livres du grand Hermès, qu'il croyait être ce qu'il y avait de plus rare sur la terre. (p.351)

The King of India gives the Princess one hundred elephants and the Véda, sacred Hindu writings. The warlike King of Scythia mounted on a huge tiger, presents the Princess with one hundred warhorses robed in black fox skins.

The presentation of the Orient develops further

during Formosante's journey to "L'Arabie heureuse" or present-day Yemen. Following the Phoenix's instructions, she sets sail from Bassora or Basra, the very port from which Sindbad the sailor embarked on each of his voyages, travels the length of the Persian Gulf, and proceeds via the Ormus Strait to the coast of Southern Arabia, east of Aden, a land unique amid arid surroundings for its fertility and for its gardens which symbolized Paradise to desert peoples.

C'est cet Eden dont les jardins furent si renommés qu'on en fit depuis la demeure des justes; ils furent le modèle des Champs-Élysées, des jardins des Hespérides et de ceux des îles Fortunées; car, dans ces climats chauds, les hommes n'imaginèrent point de plus grande béatitude que les ombrages et les murmures des eaux.³⁶

(p.372)

In chapters III and IV of the conte, there is an idyllic description of the country of the Gangarides, an Indian people settled since Antiquity on the eastern bank of the Ganges near the delta area at the mouth of that great river. Voltaire's enthusiasm for and utopian view of the Gangarides' society will be discussed in Chapter VI. As Amazan the hero is a Gangaride, the description of his country is easily integrated into the plot line.

Formosante's pursuit of Amazan takes her to Cambaluc (Peking) in China, and on to Scythia and Russia. These eastern countries are not merely listed as in Histoire des

voyages de Scarmentado. Some critical description of each society is given.

The Chinese episode (pp. 379-381), provides Voltaire with an opportunity to praise the enlightened Emperor Young-Tching for being a just, polite, and wise ruler responsible for encouraging agricultural development in China, for inaugurating official rewards for virtue, and for expelling the Jesuits from China to preserve religious tolerance.³⁷ A description of the ceremony by which Formosante is welcomed to China adds additional exotic colour:³⁸

Dès que l'empereur de la Chine eut appris que la princesse de Babylone était à la porte de la ville, il lui dépêcha quatre mille mandarins en robe de cérémonie; tous se prosternèrent devant elle et lui présentèrent chacun un compliment écrit en lettres d'or sur une feuille de soie pourpre. (p.379)

The action moves to Scythia, a primitive part of Asia just north of Afghanistan, peopled by the war-like Scythians or Tartars known since Antiquity for their conquests throughout Asia. Formosante finds Scythia to be a vast, empty, frightening land lacking any veneer of civilization. "On ne voyait que de vastes prairies et des nations entières sous des tentes et sur des chars" (p.382). Voltaire has a dual purpose in including this oriental country in La Princesse de Babylone. His first reason for placing Scythia on the lovers' itinerary is to give greater unity to the

plot line by tightening the links between the secondary romance, that of Princess Aldée, Amazan's sister, with the King of Scythia, one of Formosante's rejected suitors, and the romance of the protagonists, Formosante and Amazan. His second is to strengthen the philosophic commentary made concerning China and Russia. The barbaric state of Scythia makes an effective contrast with the intrinsic worth of China's ancient civilization and enhances the account of progress made in Russia, "l'empire des Cimmériens", another vast, underpopulated land with a harsh climate.

To-day Russia is considered more a part of Europe than of the Orient. Until the eighteenth-century it was a little-known land far to the East. In the Essai sur les mœurs, Voltaire states:

La Russie, jusqu'au czar Pierre, resta presque inconnue aux peuples méridionaux de l'Europe, ensevelie sous un despotisme malheureux du prince sur les boyards, et des boyards sur les cultivateurs. (M. XIII, 135)

In describing the violence associated with the rise and fall of Russia's early czars, he comments:

Toutes ces aventures, qui tiennent du fabuleux, et qui sont pourtant très-variés, n'arrivent point chez les peuples policés qui ont une forme de gouvernement régulière.

(M. XIII, 135)

In La Princesse de Babylone Voltaire makes it clear

that Russia under Catherine the Great has become a civilized, prosperous state. He takes the lovers to Russia to provide himself with an opportunity for eulogizing Catherine, his royal friend, correspondent, and admirer, whom he considered to be an enlightened ruler, a powerful ally, and a force in the struggle to wipe out fanaticism and superstition.³⁹ Reference is made to her improvements to Moscow. Voltaire declares Catherine to be a great legislator whose primary concern has been to establish and maintain religious tolerance at home and in adjacent lands. Voltaire praises her armed intervention in Poland on behalf of religious dissidents in the spring of 1767, an act of aggression made in the name of religious tolerance, and he approves it despite his hatred of war.

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This too is an allusion to a contemporary event. Catherine II did make such a journey in May 1767 prior to presiding in June 1767 at a special meeting of deputies assembled for the purpose of composing a new code of laws.⁴⁰

In the conte's fairytale denouement, Amazan, Formosante, and their army land in Egypt on the advice of King Charles III of Spain to seek military assistance from the King of Ethiopia who has successfully invaded Egypt. At this juncture the reader might well expect some commentary on Egypt. Voltaire, however, chooses not to break the accelerated rhythm of the final pages of the conte. From Chapter I on he has already made it clear that the Egyptian king is a cowardly, violent man. His superstitious reliance on the powers of the deities Apis and Osiris in competing for the hand of the Princess, supports the statement in Chapter VI of the conte that Egypt is a land particularly guilty of superstition, prejudice, and national pride:

les Egyptiens, si fameux par des monceaux de pierres, se sont abrutis et déshonorés par leurs superstitions barbares. Ils croient les autres nations profanes, ils ne communiquent point avec elles, et, excepté la cour qui s'élève quelquefois au-dessus des préjugés vulgaires, il n'y a pas un Egyptien qui voulût manger dans un plat dont un étranger se serait servi. Leurs prêtres sont cruels et absurdes.

(p.384)

La Princesse de Babylone is the only conte in which

Voltaire chooses to depict a wide spectrum of oriental lands. Following in the Mille et une nuits tradition he chooses the fabulous Middle East, Chaldea and Arabia, so often associated with fantasy, myth, and legend, to provide an exotic setting for his fairy tale. Descriptions of Scythia and of the land of the Gangarides are clearly connected with the plot. But as Voltaire works out the lovers' imaginary voyage, he chooses to include other eastern lands---China and Russia--- for the purpose of philosophic or satiric comment. These episodes do not further the plot-line in any way but are skilfully integrated into the story's fabric.⁴¹

NOTES TO CHAPTER IV

¹I give the presumed date of composition as cited in the Pléiade edition of the Romans et contes, pp. xxii-xxv.

²The page-length of each conte is that found in the Pléiade edition.

³In both Histoire des voyages de Scarmentado and Candide allusions are made to the sudden, brutal executions of vizirs and to the practice in Turkey of commonly punishing offenders by a form of torture consisting of beating the soles of the feet. See Pléiade, pp.139, 226, 227.

⁴Jacques Van den Heuvel believes that this tale reflects Voltaire's black outlook in the winter of 1753-54 following his break with Frederick the Great and his humiliation at Frankfort. All doors seemed closed to him and Voltaire had to camp out in Alsace. Voltaire dans ses contes, pp.218-220.

⁵Voltaire used Persians and Scythians in his tragedy Les Scythes 1766 to contrast civilized, sophisticated man with natural man. In the same context these terms refer also to the French and the Genevans. See Chapter VII.

⁶Pléiade, p.54.

⁷Histoire d'un bon bramin.

⁸Lettre d'un Turc.

⁹Aventure indienne.

¹⁰Aventure indienne reflects Voltaire's discouragement following the execution of the young Chevalier de la Barre in 1766. Pléiade, pp. 964-65.

¹¹Ibid., p.1095.

¹²Ibid., pp.1097-99.

¹³See "Genèse d'un conte de Voltaire" by Jacqueline Hellegouarc'h in SVEC, No. 176 (1979), 7-36. Le Crocheteur borgne was not published until 1774.

¹⁴Les Mille et une nuits, I, 76-174.

¹⁵Pléiade, p.665. See "Histoire du dormeur éveillé", Mille et une nuits, II, 389-422 and III, 7-55. For a thorough documentation of details in Le Crocheteur borgne which Voltaire borrowed from Les Mille et une nuits, see Hellegouarc'h's "Genèse d'un conte de Voltaire" cited in note 13 above.

¹⁶Initially inspired by the erotic dimension of the Mille et une nuits tradition, the licentious tale characterized by a cerebral eroticism expressed in a refined manner, reflected the social mores of the decadent eighteenth-century aristocracy. Crébillon fils is the most famous author of this type of licentious tale. C. P. Duclos and Abbé Voisenon are also of note.

¹⁷M. XXII, 415.

¹⁸Voltaire dans ses contes, p.184.

¹⁹In this instance the porter compares his fate to that of Sindbad the sailor. "Le porteur, qui avait ouï parler des richesses de Sindbad ne put s'empêcher de porter envie à un homme dont la condition lui paraissait aussi heureuse qu'il trouvait la sienne déplorable. L'esprit aigri par ses réflexions, il leva les yeux au ciel, et dit assez haut pour être entendu: Puissant créateur de toutes choses, considérez la différence qu'il y a entre Sindbad et moi; je souffre tous les jours mille fatigues et mille maux; et j'ai bien de la peine à me nourrir, moi et ma famille de mauvais pain d'orge, pendant que l'heureux Sindbad dépense avec profusion d'immenses richesses et mène une vie pleine de délices. Qu'a-t-il fait pour obtenir de vous une destinée si agréable? Qu'ai-je fait pour en mériter une si rigoureuse?" Les Mille et une nuits, I, 175-176.

²⁰See "Islam", The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church, ed. F.L. Cross, p.706.

²¹See Zadig, ch. vii "Les disputes et les audiences".

²²Ibid., ch. xii "Le souper".

²³Ibid., ch. xvi "Le basilic".

²⁴Ibid., end of ch. xviii "L'ermite".

²⁵Henri Bénac in Voltaire's Romans et Contes, Classiques Garnier, p.616.

²⁶"La Danse" and "Les Yeux bleus" given as an appendix, Pléiade, pp.117-123. These chapters were first printed posthumously in the Kehl edition of Voltaire's works, 1784.

²⁷The interaction of the good and evil genies is interpreted as Voltaire's examination of manichean dualism according to which reality is torn between powers of good and evil. This philosophic doctrine, Persian in origin, was in fashion in the mid-eighteenth century. Pléiade, p.952.

²⁸Pléiade, p.551.

²⁹Pléiade, p.1148.

³⁰Pléiade, p.527.

³¹See Essai sur les moeurs re Arabia, chapter VI; Persia, V, CLVIII, CXCI; Egypt, CLIX, Scythia, LX, CLVI; India, III, IV, CLVII, CXLIII; Turkey, XCI, CXCI; Japan, CXCVI; China, I, II, CXC; and Russia, CXC.

³²J. H. Brumfitt ed., La Philosophie de l'histoire, vol. 59 in The Complete Works of Voltaire, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1969), p.35.

³³Ibid., p.51.

³⁴Pierre-Georges Castex, Micromégas, Candide, L'Ingénu, 2nd ed. (Paris: Sedes, 1982), p.221 quoted in Clouston, pp. 81-82.

³⁵In this passage Voltaire promotes his favourite values of luxury, science, and commerce, suggesting that they have contributed to this splendid civilization.

³⁶See also L'Essai sur les mœurs, M. XI, 44-45 where Happy Arabia is described as "le pays le plus agréable de la terre. L'air y est parfumé, dans un été continuel, de l'odeur des plantes aromatiques que la nature y fait croître sans culture. Mille ruisseaux descendent des montagnes, et entretiennent une fraîcheur perpétuelle qui tempère l'ardeur du soleil sous des ombrages toujours verts.

C'est surtout dans ces pays que le mot de jardin, paradis, signifia la faveur céleste."

³⁷Young-Tching reigned from 1677 to 1735. See Grimal, p.79, note 1.

³⁸Voltaire had long been interested in Chinese customs and ceremonies. See L'Essai sur les mœurs, M. XI, 175.

³⁹Voltaire did his best to convince himself of Catherine's innocence with regard to the deaths of her husband, Peter III, and of Prince Ivan. See Best. D14697: "Il faut rétablir sa réputation à Paris chez les honnêtes gens. J'ai de fortes raisons de croire que M^{re} les ducs de Praslin et de Choiseul ne la regardent pas comme la dame du monde la plus scrupuleuse; cependant je sais autant qu'on peut savoir qu'elle n'a nulle part à la mort de son ivrogne de mari: un grand diable d'officier aux gardes, Preobazinski, en le prenant prisonnier lui donna un horrible coup de poing qui lui fit vomir du sang; il crut se guérir en buvant continuellement du punch dans sa prison, et il mourut dans ce bel exercice. C'était d'ailleurs le plus grand fou qui ait jamais occupé un trône. L'empereur Venceslas n'approchait pas de lui.

A l'égard du meurtre du prince Yvan, il est clair que ma Catherine n'y a nulle part. On lui a bien de l'obligation d'avoir eu le courage de détrôner son mari, car elle règne avec sagesse et avec gloire."

⁴⁰Re dates see Best. D14091, and Best. D14219. In Best. D14091 Catherine, speaking of the text of her Instructions to the commissioners for composing a new code of laws 1767, says that its

underlying premise is that religious tolerance is conducive to public order. See also Best. D13433 and Best. D14439. The Instructions is an impressive document, twenty-two chapters long, containing highly enlightened recommendations concerning criminal justice and a conception of the state's obligations to its citizens which anticipates the modern welfare state. See W. F. Reddaway's Documents of Catherine the Great (New York: Russell & Russell, 1931).

⁴¹See Chapter IX.

CHAPTER V

FAIRYTALE FANTASY IN LA PRINCESSE DE BABYLONE

THE INFLUENCE OF ARIOSTO'S ORLANDO FURIOSO

At the close of Chapter III I noted the great popularity of the fairy tale in the eighteenth century. Rather than follow in the tradition of seventeenth-century writers such as Charles Perrault and Madame d'Aulnoy who wrote simple fairy tales in a pure form,¹ eighteenth-century writers often wrote fairy tales in an oriental mode or with a licentious flavour, or used the fairy tale to serve philosophic and satirical ends. The fact that Le Cabinet des fées 1785-1789, a collection of forty volumes of fairy tales with biographical notes on ninety authors who had composed tales since 1690, represents only a selection of the fairy tales of the period, is a measure of the importance of this genre.

La Princesse de Babylone, with its story of the love of a prince and princess, is primarily a fairy tale. When it appeared in March 1768, Bachaumont described it as an "espèce de féerie ou folie".² Twentieth-century critics have commented on Voltaire's unusual indulgence in fantasy in La Princesse de Babylone. P. C. Mitchell states: "this work may be distinguished from earlier contes by the fact that there is a much more conspicuous and widespread use

made of patent fantasy".³ Henri Bénac speaks of the "irréalité flagrante du récit" and sees in the conte "une fantaisie et un mépris total de la vraisemblance qui dépassent Candide et rendent l'oeuvre très différente de L'Ingénu et de Zadig."⁴ Jacques Van den Heuvel points out that here for the first time "Voltaire s'abandonne non sans délices aux vraisemblances de l'imagination romanesque."⁵

These critics refer not only to mythical oriental splendour, to the consultation of oracles, and to the fabulous beasts---unicorns, griffins, and the Phoenix---all of which play a part in the conte, but also to Voltaire's obvious, keen enjoyment and childlike delight in free-flown flights of fantasy. The most obvious example of this is Formosante's air-borne journey from Happy Arabia to the Land of the Gangarides, arranged by the Phoenix.

"Il faut aller trouver Amazan par le plus court chemin, c'est-à-dire par les airs. Il y a dans L'Arabie Heureuse deux griffons, mes amis intimes, qui ne demeurent qu'à cent cinquante milles d'ici: je vais leur écrire par la poste aux pigeons; ils viendront avant la nuit. Nous aurons tout le temps de vous faire travailler un petit canapé commode avec des tiroirs où l'on mettra vos provisions de bouche. Vous serez très à votre aise dans cette voiture avec votre demoiselle. Les deux griffons sont les plus vigoureux de leur espèce; chacun d'eux tiendra un des bras du canapé entre ses griffes. Mais encore une fois, les moments sont chers." Il alla sur-le-champ avec Formosante commander le canapé à un tapissier de sa connaissance. Il fut achevé en quatre heures. On mit dans les tiroirs des petits pains à la reine, des biscuits meilleurs que ceux de Babylone, des poncires, des ananas, des cocos, des pistaches et du vin d'Eden, qui l'emporte sur le vin de Chiraz autant que celui de Chiraz est au-dessus de celui de Suresnes.

Le canapé était aussi léger que commode et solide. Les deux griffons arrivèrent dans Eden à point nommé. Formosante et Irla se placèrent dans la voiture. Les deux griffons l'enlevèrent comme une plume. Le phénix tantôt volait auprès, tantôt se perchait sur le dossier. Les deux griffons cinglèrent vers le Gange avec la rapidité d'une flèche qui fend les airs. On ne se reposait que la nuit pendant quelques moments pour manger, et pour faire boire un coup aux deux voituriers. (p.374)

Voltaire has improved on the flying carpet motif⁶ of the Mille et une nuits by devising a luxurious, refined yet practical conveyance fit for an eighteenth-century princess. The intimate tone, the domestic details as to the choice of dainties to be eaten, are all inspired by a spirit of fun. If Voltaire in one sense parodies the Mille et une nuits flying carpet, he enjoys inventing a more civilized version of it. The reader imagines the winged griffins with their bird's head and lion's body, bearing the sofa and its occupants across the skies at top speed under the surveillance of the colourful Phoenix. It is a futuristic if not a surrealistic vision of rapid transit over a great distance. The reader senses Voltaire's pleasure in escaping imaginatively from the limitations of earth-bound mortals.

René Pomeau explains the presence of fantasy in the work of a writer who prided himself on the rational view, on exposing superstition and the church's view of history as false or unsound. In his insightful study Voltaire, Pomeau describes the author as a master of detail, as a man

who excelled in writing letters and short articles for the Lettres philosophiques, L'Essai sur les moeurs, and the Dictionnaire philosophique, as a man who dealt promptly with each complication of his personal financial situation and regulated his complex household at Ferney, as a man who gave intense concentrated attention to the matter in hand. As a result he had particular need to sooth his mind and renew his energy from time to time through the beauty of physical surroundings:

Voltaire, qui se sent menacé par la mesquinerie, aspire aux larges horizons. On le comprend mieux quand on a vu sa Terre promise, Ferney. Il faut, par un clair après-midi d'été, regarder de la terrasse du château le paysage qu'il aimait. Les prés descendent doucement jusqu'au pli de terrain qui cache Genève et le lac; par delà, le soleil éclaire la chaîne des Alpes, et sur l'horizon jaillit le triangle glacé du mont Blanc. Tout le paysage est baigné d'une large lumière. Voltaire a été heureux ici; ici son esprit se dégageait des pensées étroites, respirant enfin dans la vaste étendue.⁷

Pomeau goes on to speak of Voltaire's need to escape mentally from the many exacting, frustrating demands of his life through his imagination: "le bonheur de Voltaire est de s'échapper. En imagination, il fend les airs avec la princesse de Babylone."⁸

What could be more natural than that Voltaire in a happy frame of mind should indulge in the pleasure of writing a fanciful conte? It is generally accepted that the popularity of fairy tales reflects a basic human need

to escape briefly from mundane reality to a world of fancy where happy endings are the rule.

On le sait, les contes finissent toujours bien. Les moyens mis en oeuvre pour amener le dénouement sont merveilleux, c'est-à-dire qu'ils contreviennent aux lois de fonctionnement de la réalité physique. La récompense obtenue (la main de la princesse, la moitié du royaume, la noyade du seigneur, etc.) est naturelle, mais utopique; elle contrevient aux lois de fonctionnement de la société. Ainsi le conte a visiblement pour fonction l'accomplissement imaginaire d'un désir impossible à réaliser dans la réalité.⁹

Voltaire sought release from care in writing a fanciful tale in which his imagination could take flight.

In all the literature surveyed, I found no attempt to deal with this conte as a fairy tale. As a preliminary step in the analysis of the conte's structure, I shall divide the conte into three parts: the exposition, the love quest, and the conclusion. The exposition of the tale, Chapters I to IV pp. 349-378, is simple and straightforward; by using the dazzling splendour of ancient Babylon as the setting for the opening scenes, Voltaire recaptures the exotic charm of the Mille et une nuit tradition. The conclusion of the tale, Chapter XI pp.410-412, has the same legendary quality as the exposition. The central part of the conte, Chapters V to XI pp. 379-410, describes the fairytale love quest. This section is characterized by a lively fusion of fantasy and reality because Voltaire takes

advantage of the imaginary voyage inherent in the love quest to weave into the texture of the fairy tale, philosophic and satirical comment on eighteenth-century Europe.

The conte's philosophic propaganda component, to be analysed in Chapter VIII, has received more attention from critics than the rest. Herbert Dieckmann interprets the presence of serious philosophic comment in this conte as a sign that Voltaire loses interest in the fairy tale itself.¹⁰ Scherer and Mylne claim that it mars the unity of the conte. In Chapter IX of this study, which is devoted to the problem of unity, I shall show how well Voltaire has integrated this material. The fairy tale is never lost sight of in the central portion of the conte.

Such an elementary analysis serves only to point out the primary divisions of the story. I now propose to examine the fairy tale on its own merits using Vladimir Propp's system of structural analysis of fairy tales according to functions.

In Morphology of the Folktale (1928)¹¹, the Russian formalist Propp analysed the structure of one hundred fairy or mythical tales. He described each tale "according to its component parts and the relationship of these components to each other and to the whole".¹² The basic components of a tale are functions:

Function is understood as an act of a character, defined from the point of view of its significance for the course of the action. . . . Functions of characters serve as stable, constant elements in a tale, independent of how and by whom they are fulfilled.¹³

Despite their seeming diversity Propp concluded that all tales are of one type in regard to their structure of functions. He isolated thirty-one distinct functions within which the action of all tales develops. The relative sequence of these functions is always identical, though some may be absent from any given tale.¹⁴ Many tales are composed of two series of functions or two moves combined into a single tale.¹⁵

What constitutes a tale? Morphologically a tale may be defined as any development proceeding from a lack and/or a villainy through intermediary functions to liquidation of misfortune or lack, followed by wedding or reward. A new move is initiated by a new lack or misfortune.¹⁶ The functions are assigned to various key dramatis personae whose roles may be defined as those of Villain, Hero-seeker, Victimized hero, Donor, Helper, and Dispatcher.¹⁷ Propp intended that his scheme of functions be used to measure and define individual tales. Carol Sherman has shown that Propp's functions can prove useful in analyzing Voltaire's contes.¹⁸ Let us see whether La Princesse de Babylone can be classified as a true fairy tale according to Propp's system.

In La Princesse de Babylone the King of Egypt is the principal villain; the Phoenix is the donor-helper of the seeker; Formosante is the heroine-seeker transformed in the second move of the tale into a victimized heroine; Amazan is first a victimized hero, momentarily a villain, and lastly a hero-seeker. King Bélus acts as dispatcher in the first move.

According to Propp, a tale's initial situation often presents a picture of "unusual, sometimes emphasized prosperity"¹⁹; the members of the family are named and the future hero may be introduced. La Princesse de Babylone begins with a description of King Bélus' magnificent court and of the lavish festivities and competitions planned in the hope of finding a worthy husband for his beautiful daughter, Formosante. In addition to three official suitors who come to contend for her hand, a godlike youth, Amazan appears; it is obvious that he has the physical talents required even though he insists that he is only a shepherd, not a prince. However he disappears suddenly on hearing of his father's death.

Formosante is acutely aware of her desire to be with Amazan. His disappearance creates a lack. It is the Phoenix who initially suggests that Formosante seek out her lover; Formosante is eager to go. She is officially dispatched by her father who sends her on a journey in the

direction of Arabia; Bélus is unaware of his daughter's intentions---a typical pattern²⁰---and assumes that she will make a pilgrimage to a particular temple as instructed. Formosante becomes a heroine-seeker and departs in quest of Amazan.

The jealous, spiteful King of Egypt commits an initial villainy by fatally wounding the Phoenix before Formosante can start out on her quest. His chief villainy is his attempt to waylay and rape Formosante at an inn where she stops after the third day of her journey. Although Formosante foils him and succeeds in reviving the Phoenix, villainy leads to complication, for a Gangaride spy, a blackbird who witnesses part of the encounter, misconstrues the evidence and reports to Amazan that Formosante is faithless to him. The blackbird's role is one of notification. The Phoenix who plays the role of helper and donor to Formosante, provides the magical means---the airborne sofa---of spatially transferring Formosante to Amazan's home. Her quest is greatly prolonged because of the far-reaching consequences of the King of Egypt's villainy. Amazan, mad with grief on learning of the Princess' faithlessness to him, leaves home in an act of self-banishment, still determined to remain true to his love. In so doing he becomes the victimized hero. Aided by the Phoenix, Formosante continues her quest until at last

she catches up with Amazan the object of her search. Her lack is liquidated.

At this point the narrative reaches a peak, but not its denouement. The moment when the lack is liquidated only marks the end of the first move. This is because it coincides with a new instance of villainy, this time on the part of Amazan who betrays Formosante by succumbing to the charms of a Parisian opera girl. This villainy triggers the second move and brings about a reversal of roles. Formosante, who has played the seeker, becomes a victimized heroine. She flees from the scene creating a new lack. Amazan, formerly the victimized hero, becomes the seeker in quest of Formosante.

Filled with remorse Amazan finds it easy to trace Formosante to Spain. Thanks to notification by the Phoenix that Formosante is to be the victim of an auto-da-fé, Amazan rushes to her rescue. The lovers are united and reconciled--end of lack and villainy--but before Amazan, the hero, can receive the ultimate reward---wedding---of being wedded to the Princess and of being recognized as the rightful heir to the throne of Babylon, he takes upon himself the difficult task of vanquishing the mighty armies of King Bélus' foes. This he does successfully, and all live happily ever after.

All the components of Voltaire's fairy tale fit

perfectly into Vladimir Propp's scheme of structural analysis (See tables following). According to his system, La Princesse de Babylone is a soundly constructed fairy tale. Voltaire had the instinctive artistry needed to create a true folk or fairy tale with its inherent logic, before modern structural analysis was invented.

LA PRINCESSE DE BABYLONE, A DOUBLE-MOVE TALE

MOVE I

<u>Initial Situation</u>	-the Babylonian court -King Bélus wishes to find a husband for Formosante. -Appearance of Amazan, future hero.
<u>Absentation</u>	-Amazan disappears, creating a <u>lack</u> .
LACK	-Formosante needs Amazan. -Phoenix as <u>helper</u> encourages Formosante re <u>quest</u> .
<u>Dispatch</u>	-King Bélus sends Formosante on a pilgrimage.
<u>Villainy</u>	-Formosante waylaid by King of Egypt at inn, but escapes.
<u>Complication</u>	-Blackbird misconstrues evidence.
<u>Notification</u>	-Blackbird reports to Amazan that Formosante has betrayed him.
<u>Banishment</u>	-At this news Amazan becomes <u>victimized hero</u> and leaves home. -Formosante revives Phoenix, <u>helper-donor</u> , who assists her throughout her <u>quest</u> for Amazan.
<u>Spatial Transference</u>	-As donor Phoenix provides Formosante with an airborne canapé ride to Gangaride land.
<u>Quest prolonged</u>	-Formosante finds Amazan gone. Pursuit.
LACK IS LIQUIDATED	-Formosante finds Amazan in Paris [END OF MOVE I] in act of <u>villainy</u> [trigger for MOVE II].

End of Move I coincides exactly with the start of Move II

MOVE II

<u>Villainy</u>	-Amazan is seduced by Parisian opera girl.
<u>Flight</u>	-Formosante, <u>victimized heroine</u> , flees, creating a <u>lack</u> .
LACK	-Amazan needs Formosante and wants to win her back.
<u>Quest</u>	-Amazan becomes <u>hero-seeker</u> and leaves in quest of Formosante.
<u>Danger</u>	-Formosante in prison, is condemned to auto-da-fé.
<u>Notification</u>	-Phoenix, <u>helper</u> , notifies Amazan.
<u>Rescue</u>	- <u>Hero</u> Amazan rescues <u>victimized heroine</u> .
LACK IS LIQUIDATED	-Lovers are united and reconciled.
<u>Difficult Task</u>	-Amazan defeats King Bélus' enemies.
<u>Return</u>	-to Babylon.
<u>Wedding</u>	-Amazan is declared heir to the throne and marries Formosante.

End of Move II

Ariosto's Orlando furioso and La Princesse de Babylone

In Chapters III and IV I described how Voltaire's oriental contes were influenced by the Mille et une nuit tradition. Two other works contributed directly to the genesis of La Princesse de Babylone: Voltaire's play Les Scythes and Ariosto's Orlando furioso. I shall discuss the role of Les Scythes in Chapter VII in connection with the themes of primitivism and the return to nature. Ariosto's work must be included in this discussion of La Princesse de Babylone as a fairy tale because it is in his treatment of fantasy in this conte that Voltaire was strongly influenced by Ludovico Ariosto (1474-1533) and his verse epic romance, Orlando furioso.²¹ Pomeau comments on Ariosto's influence on Voltaire in his Introduction to the Garnier-Flammarion edition of the contes.²² René Legros studies the links between the Orlando Furioso and La Princesse de Babylone in his article "L'Orlando furioso et La Princesse de Babylone de Voltaire" published in The Modern Language Review, XXII (1927), 155-161. I accept Legros' findings without question as have Deloffre and Hellegouarc'h who cite his work in the Pléiade "Notice" to La Princesse de Babylone.

Voltaire discovered Ariosto's work during his stay in England in the late 1720s.²³ Over the years his admiration for the Italian master grew until in 1761 he wrote to Mme

Du Deffand:

L'Arioste [...] est mon dieu! Tous les poèmes m'ennuient, hors le sien; je ne l'aimais pas assez dans ma jeunesse; je ne sçavais pas assez l'italien. Le pentateuque et L'Arioste font aujourd'hui le charme de ma vie.

(Best. D9542)

In 1764 he ranked Ariosto over La Fontaine²⁴ and in 1774 was explicit in enumerating the qualities of Ariosto's writing that made him superior to La Fontaine.

L'Arioste est supérieur à lui [La Fontaine] et à tout ce qui m'a jamais charmé! par la fécondité de son génie inventif, par la profusion de ses images, par la profonde connaissance du coeur humain, sans faire jamais le docteur, par ces railleries si naturelles dont il assaisonne les choses les plus terribles! J'y trouve toute la grande poésie d'Homère avec plus de variété; toute l'imagination des mille et une nuit; La sensibilité de Tibulle, les plaisanteries de Plaute, toujours le merveilleux et le simple.

(Best. D19189)

In the Dictionnaire philosophique we find these comments on Ariosto's Orlando furioso:

Ce qui m'a surtout charmé dans ce prodigieux ouvrage, c'est que l'auteur, toujours au-dessous de sa matière, la traite en badinant. Il dit les choses les plus sublimes sans effort, et il les finit souvent par un trait de plaisanterie qui n'est ni déplacé ni recherché.

(M. XVIII, 573)

In 1769, just one year after the publication of La Princesse de Babylone, Voltaire voices the same enthusiasm for Ariosto: "Autrefois nos compatriotes faisaient un pèlerinage à Notre-dame de Lorette; j'en ferais un au tombeau de Messer

Ariosto, si je n'étais pas trop près du mien" (Best. D16041).

Ariosto's influence on La Princesse de Babylone is seen in the way in which Voltaire fuses realistic, practical detail with myth and fantasy and presents the magical in an ordinary, everyday way.²⁵ Legros analyzed many similarities in plot, psychology, and in specific detail between Orlando furioso, and La Princesse de Babylone. In summarizing specific borrowings by Voltaire from Orlando furioso, I shall draw on Legros' work.

Ariosto's epic romance, forty-six cantos long, takes up the story of Charlemagne's defence of Christian Europe against the infidel. As in The Song of Roland, Orlando [Roland] is Charlemagne's champion. In Orlando furioso Christendom is threatened when Orlando, the most stalwart defender of the faith, is driven mad by his unfortunate and unrewarded passion for Angelica, daughter of the Great Khan of Cathay.

This work is a sequel to the unfinished and lesser-known poem Orlando innamorato by Matteo Maria Boiardo (1441-1494), in which Orlando falls in love with Angelica at the court of Charlemagne. Legros points out that the similarities between the opening scenes of Orlando innamorato and those of La Princesse de Babylone are so striking that one must assume that Voltaire used Boiardo as

a source also.²⁶ Following in the Chrétien de Troyes tradition, Boiardo opens his poem with a description of brilliant festivities at Charlemagne's court that attracted knights from far and wide. A great joust is preceded by a magnificent banquet during the course of which a mysterious, beautiful princess appears accompanied by giants. Orlando is moved by love for the first time. All the knights wish to fight for Angelica's hand, but before Orlando gets an opportunity to win her by combat, she disappears on horseback. In La Princesse de Babylone the banquet, the trials for the hand of a princess, the sudden appearance of an anonymous godlike stranger accompanied by fabulous beasts, Formosante's love for Amazan, and his disappearance parallel scenes in Boiardo.

An important part of the action in Orlando furioso and in La Princesse de Babylone turns upon the fact that the hero is driven mad by love on learning of the faithlessness of his beloved. Voltaire and Ariosto seem to agree that love is a disorder of the mind.²⁷ Orlando is forced to believe that Angelica is united to Medoro because he sees with his own eyes the lovers' inscriptions carved on trees and Medoro's verses written in a grotto, and hears the story of their love from the shepherd who sheltered the lovers. The knowledge drives him raving mad;²⁸ naked and frenzied he runs wild, making havoc on all sides. Amazan's madness

which is triggered by the blackbird's false report of Formosante's betrayal, is less severe. Although it drives him out on a course of restless wandering from country to country, his appearance, deportment, and mental capacities win him the admiration of all whom he meets. As the Chinese emperor puts it: "C'est bien dommage que son chagrin lui dérange quelquefois l'esprit" (p.380). Prior to his madness Orlando had travelled the world in search of Angelica just as Formosante pursues Amazan.

Voltaire and Ariosto share an ironic view of life. Both show themselves to be cynically aware of the unpredictableness and inconsistency of human behaviour. Angelica and Amazan, royal paragons who could have the prince or princess of their choice, succumb to the charms of a person of lowly birth. Angelica chooses to give herself to Medoro, a humble soldier. Amazan who has proudly resisted the amorous advances of lovely princesses, lets himself be seduced momentarily by a Parisian chorus girl.

Ariosto's work has its share of supernatural beings, allegorical figures, monsters, and magic devices which are integrated into the story in a matter-of-fact way. He also permits himself some pure fantasy in the description of Astolfo's journey to the moon in a divinely powered chariot to fetch back Orlando's wits.²⁹ This passage reminds one of Voltaire's airborne canapé but does not convey Voltaire's

sense of exultation in breaking free from the constraints of the earthbound.

The griffins that draw the canapé call to mind the hippogriff, or winged horse, that figures prominently in Orlando furioso. Ariosto insists that the hippogriff is a natural species born of a mare and a griffin:

His horse was not a fiction, but instead
 The offspring of a griffin and a mare.
 Its plumage, feet, muzzle, wings and head
 Like those of its paternal parent were.
 The rest was from its dam inherited.
 It's called a hippogriff. Such beasts, though rare,
 In the Rhiphaean mountains, far beyond
 The icy waters of the north are found.³⁰

Voltaire's griffin, unicorn, and phoenix are mythical creatures.

There are allusions to the phoenix in Orlando furioso. The warlike African princess Marsifa has a phoenix crest on her helmet to signify that she is unique in prowess.³¹ Ariosto has Astolfo, an English prince, cross Happy Arabia, home of the phoenix.

Felix Arabia his steps explore,
 A land of fragrant incense, rich in myrrh,
 Which, of all other lands, was chosen for
 The phoenix as its home.³²

Voltaire may have been influenced by these allusions in giving an important role to the Phoenix in La Princesse de Babylone and in making its home Happy Arabia rather than

India."³³

Legros points out the fact that Amazan's sword has a name as has Orlando's sword Durindana.³⁴ Amazan's sword is called "la fulminante". Even before Amazan uses it to rescue Formosante from certain death by slaughtering her captors, the inquisitors, we are told that this sword "pouvait fendre d'un seul coup des arbres, des rochers et des druides" (p.406). "La fulminante" seems to come directly from the Song of Roland epic tradition. Legros considers the name Formosante to be reminiscent of several names found in Orlando furioso: Sacripante, Archidant, Bradamante, Agramante, Balugante, Folvirant, Farivante.

To my mind an important similarity between Ariosto's poem and Voltaire's conte is the fact that both authors comment on contemporary events. Ariosto interrupts his narrative of eighth-century legendary events to praise the Emperor Charles V³⁵, to rebuke Christian monarchs of his day for their failure to stand united against the Turkish menace³⁶, and to exhort Pope Leo X to defend the Christian world³⁷. Voltaire integrates the eighteenth-century European scene into the plot of the fairy tale. His praise of Catherine the Great (pp. 384-385) is not unlike Ariosto's tribute to Charles V.

NOTES TO CHAPTER V

¹Perrault is known for Contes de ma mère l'Oye, 1697; Aulnoy for Contes de fées, 1697.

²Bachaumont ed., Mémoires secrets pour servir à l'histoire de la république des lettres en France depuis 1762 jusqu'à nos jours, III, 358.

³P.C. Mitchell, "An Underlying theme in La Princesse de Babylone", SVEC, No.137 (1975), 31.

⁴Voltaire, Romans et contes, ed. Henri Bénac (Paris: Garnier, 1960), p.v and p.vi.

⁵Voltaire dans ses contes, p.320.

⁶Les Mille et une nuits, III, 317 and following. "Histoire du Prince Ahmed et de la fée Pari-banou".

⁷René Pomeau, Voltaire, p.93.

⁸Ibid., p.94.

⁹Michèle Simonsen, Le Conte populaire français (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1981), p.120.

¹⁰Herbert Dieckmann, "Zu Voltaire's Zadiq und La Princesse de Babylone" in Studien zur europäischen Aufklärung (München: Fink, 1974), p.460.

¹¹Vladimir Propp, Morphology of the Folktale, trans. Laurence Scott, 2nd ed. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1968). References are to this edition. When Propp's work appeared in English translation in 1958, it gave a great impetus to the development of structural analysis and to the work of critics such as Lévi-Strauss, Dundes, Bremond, Greimas, and Todorov. See Dundes' introduction to the edition cited. A French translation Morphologie d'un conte by Marguerite Derrida and Tzvetan Todorov appeared in 1965 in a Le Seuil edition.

¹²Ibid., p.19.

¹³Ibid., p.21.

¹⁴Ibid., pp. 21-22. Underlined words are Propp's terms of definition as given in the English translation.

¹⁵Ibid., p.59.

¹⁶Ibid., p.92.

¹⁷Ibid., p.79 and p.84.

¹⁸In her book Reading Voltaire's Contes, A Semiotics of Philosophical Narration, Sherman has applied Propp's functions to Micromégas, Zadig, Candide, and L'Ingénu, contes which are more removed from the fairytale genre than is La Princesse de Babylone. Sherman pays Propp this tribute:

"The Proppian functions have revealed themselves to be useful in many areas other than that of Russian folklore, and they have stood up against efforts at their so-called improvement or alteration by A.J. G. Greimas." Ulterior attempts to modify his functions have done nothing to invalidate their usefulness. Their application to the "artificial" creations by Voltaire isolates the constants, and their adaptation to his satires shows how the units contribute to the transmission of a particular philosophical message even as they correspond to a pattern that is timeless. Propp's functions are useful, and the points of deviation in their application to the philosophe's stories mark the difference between the didactic tale and the traditional framework of heroic adventures." Sherman, Reading Voltaire's Contes (Chapel Hill: North Carolina Studies in the Romance Languages and Literatures, No. 223, 1985), p.38.

The note refers to several publications by Greimas: Ccommunications 8 (1966), 28-59; Sémantique structurale (Paris: Larousse, 1966); Du Sens (Paris: Le Seuil, 1970); Maupassant, la sémiotique du texte; exercices pratiques (Paris: Le Seuil, 1976).

¹⁹Propp, p.85.

²⁰Ibid., p.37.

²¹In discussing Voltaire's enthusiasm for Ariosto and specific similarities between La Princesse de Babylone and Orlando furioso, I rely heavily on René P. Legros' article "L'Orlando furioso et La Princesse de Babylone de Voltaire" which appeared in Modern Language Review, 22 (April 1927), 155-161.

²²p.11.

²³Pléiade, Notice, p.1006.

²⁴"Discours aux Welches" 1764 in Voltaire's Mélanges, Pléiade edition, p.699.

²⁵Pléiade, "Notice", p.1011.

²⁶Legros, p.159.

²⁷Chrétien de Troye's Yvain may have been Orlando's prototype.

²⁸Ariosto, Orlando furioso, Canto XXIII, stanzas 105-136.

²⁹Ariosto, Canto XXXIV, stanzas 68-87.

³⁰Orlando furioso, trans. Barbara Reynolds (Penguin Classics, 1975), I, 182. Here is the original:

Non è finto il destrier, ma naturale,
 ch'una giumenta generò d'un grifo:
 simile al padre avea la piuma e l'ale,
 li piedi anteriori, il capo e il grifo;
 in tutte l'altre membra pareva quale
 era la madre, e chiamasi ippogrifo;
 che nei monti Rifei vengon, ma rari,
 molto di là dagli aghiacciati mari.

Canto IV, stanza 18

³¹Ariosto, Canto XXXVI, stanzas 17 & 18.

³²Penguin, I, 456. Here is the original:

Vien per l'Arabia ch'e detta Felice,
Ricca di mirra e d'odorato incenso;
Che per suo albergo l'unica Fenice
Eletto s'ha di tutto 'l mondo immenso;
Canto XV, stanza 39

³³Encyclopedia Britannica. Entry for "phoenix" states that in literature its home is normally given as in Arabia or India, near the rising sun.

³⁴Legros, p.160.

³⁵Ariosto, Canto XV, stanzas 24-26.

³⁶Ibid., Canto XVII, stanzas 74-75.

³⁷Ibid., Canto XVII, stanza 79.

CHAPTER VI

LA PRINCESSE DE BABYLONE: A REFLECTION OF VOLTAIRE'S ENTHUSIASM FOR INDIA IN 1767

A careful reading of La Princesse de Babylone shows us to what extent Voltaire's enthusiasm for India in 1767 affected this imaginative conte. La Princesse de Babylone contains an Indian utopia, the Land of the Gangarides, and themes such as the relationship of men and animals in the order of being, the nature of the soul, and the possibility of resurrection, all of which were inspired by Voltaire's recent discovery of important Indian texts.

It was in the 1740s that Voltaire began to assemble documentation on India for use in his world history. At that time little was known in Europe about India's history and religion. Voltaire acquired travel accounts by Chardin, Tavernier, Bernier, and by Jesuit missionaries;¹ the former were little concerned with spiritual matters and the latter were biased in what they did report about Indian customs and religious practices. Voltaire mentioned contradictions found in these sources² and was aware of their general inadequacy as a basis for scholarly research:

Il est vrai qu'il faut lire avec un esprit de doute presque toutes les relations qui nous viennent de ces pays éloignés. On est plus occupé à nous envoyer des côtes de Coromandel et de Malabar des marchandises que des vérités.

Un cas particulier est souvent pris pour un usage général.³

And so he proceeded with caution.

At first Voltaire was mainly intrigued by India's exoticism, that is to say its customs, beliefs, and ways of life that differed so radically from the European. In Zadig 1747, he denounces the horrifying practice of suttee, "le bûcher du veuvage" which required that a widow be burned alive on her husband's funeral pyre. The episode in Chapter XI where Zadig saves Almona from the flames, takes place in Arabia but in the Essai sur les mœurs Voltaire states clearly that suttee was established in India by the brahmins (M. XI, 188). In the 1756 edition of the Essai sur les mœurs, Voltaire mentions Indian contributions to Western culture such as the game of chess and Arabic numerals. On the negative side he again deplores the practice of suttee but goes on to speak highly of the ancient brahmins' concept of God.⁴ Voltaire's attitude towards India was ambivalent until in October 1760 he read a French translation of a Sanscrit manuscript, the Ezour-Védam, brought from India by Louis Laurent de Féderbe.⁵

Voltaire believed that this Ezour-Védam, written as a dialogue in which Chumontou tries to convert Biache to the monotheism of the Veda, four sacred Hindu writings, was an authentic document dating back to the fourth century

before Christ.⁶ It seemed to him to supply partial proof that the Judaic-Christian tradition had evolved from a superior and ancient form of deism, not unlike Voltaire's personal preference. In his enthusiasm for this view, in 1761 he added a new section to the Essai sur les moeurs, Chapter IV entitled "Des Brachmanes, du Veidam et de l'Ezour-Veidam", in which he wrote:

Si l'Inde, de qui toute la terre a besoin, et qui seule n'a besoin de personne, doit être par cela même la contrée la plus anciennement policée, elle doit conséquemment avoir eu la plus ancienne forme de religion Les premiers brachmanes, étant donc à la fois rois et pontifes ne pouvaient guère établir la religion que sur la religion universelle.

(M. XI, 190)

In his study "L'Inde de Voltaire", D. S. Hawley explains that the Ezour-Védam which Voltaire received was not authentic. Its authorship remains unknown. What is certain is that it was a piece of modern religious propaganda written by a missionary who, in his desire to convert Indians, painted God as just and beneficent, quite unlike the cruel, judgmental God of the Old Testament so repugnant to Voltaire.⁷

Voltaire never lost faith in this source in which he believed he had found historical justification for natural religion and for his personal preference for deism. His satisfaction in the Ezour-Védam coloured his perception

of India in general. In La Philosophie de l'histoire 1765, we find an idealized vision of the Ganges region, home of the ancient brahmins and in La Princesse de Babylone a utopian vision of the same area. It is ironic that Voltaire who read travel accounts of India critically, should base his writings on India in the 1760s unquestioningly on unauthentic material such as the Ezour-Védam and then on the work of Holwell whose findings have also been disputed.

Voltaire's enthusiasm for India reached still greater heights on reading Interesting Historical Events Relative to the Provinces of Bengal and the Empire of Indostan by John Zephaniah Holwell (1711-1798), the leader of the British defenders of Calcutta.⁸ Holwell survived imprisonment in the Black Hole and in 1759 was made governor of Bengal, a post which he held briefly before returning to England to devote himself to literary pursuits.⁹ During his thirty years in India, Holwell had spent his leisure hours collecting materials relative to the transactions of the East India Company, to political events, and to the customs and religious tenets of the Indian people.

The chief purpose of Holwell's Interesting Historical Events was "to rescue the originally untainted manners and religious worship of a very ancient people from gross misinterpretation".¹⁰ He deemed it most unjust that the wisdom and tenets of Brahma and of the ancient brahmins

should be maligned by being identified with the strange innovations and practices of their modern brethren.¹¹ Holwell's book contained a translation of part of the Shasta of Brahma, Hindu religious law, which Holwell said was four thousand, eight hundred and sixty-six years old.¹² Holwell believed that the Egyptians', Greeks' and Romans' mythology and cosmogony were borrowed from the doctrines of the brahmins.¹³ Hawley maintains that Holwell's work contained basic misconceptions because he did not know Sanskrit.¹⁴

Voltaire believed that Holwell had translated the Shasta from Sanskrit. One can imagine how excited Voltaire was to find source material prepared by such an enlightened man. He accepted Holwell's work without question. In it he believed that he now had definitive proof that Indian theism was more ancient than the Judaic-Christian heritage.

The proposed contents for Holwell's complete text as listed in Part I of the first edition, include three chapters particularly relevant to Voltaire's interests: Chapter four, "The religious tenets of the Gentoos¹⁵"; Chapter five, "A short account from the Shasta of the creation of the universe"; and Chapter eight, "The doctrine of metempsychosis". Voltaire is believed to have read a review of Holwell's book early in 1767 in The Annual Register for 1766; the review included Holwell's translation of the five sections of the first book of the Shasta and of

the eighth section of the second book, quite enough to satisfy Voltaire as to the brahmins' belief in one all-powerful, provident, creator God and in a future state of rewards and punishments.¹⁶ Voltaire was now willing to assert openly that India is the source of modern philosophy and knowledge, that Christian theology and myths have evolved from the natural religion of the ancient brahmins.¹⁷

By early December 1767 Voltaire had his own copy of the second edition of Holwell's Interesting Historical Events.¹⁸ From this point on his views on India remained constant. Because what he had learned about the beliefs of the ancient brahmins served his philosophic views, Voltaire indulged in a utopian vision of India that differed greatly from the reality. He even spoke idly of travelling to India: "Je suis las des impertinences de l'Europe. Je partirai pour l'Inde quand j'aurai de la santé et de la vigueur" (Best. D14575).

This euphoria coincided with the period in which La Princesse de Babylone was written. Deloffre and Hellegouarc'h state that allusions in the conte and in the Correspondence to contemporary events make it clear that Voltaire had begun writing La Princesse de Babylone by April 1767.¹⁹ We know that it was given to the publisher at the very end of the year because in the last sentence Voltaire says the conte is to be given to his "libraire", "pour ses

étrennes" (p.414). It is not surprising then, that we find Voltaire's fervour for India and its philosophy transposed into La Princesse de Babylone as the Land of the Gangarides, an Indian utopia. It also explains the inclusion of themes mentioned in Holwell's work such as the revalorization of animals in the order of being, the nature of the soul, and the possibility of resurrection.²⁰

The Land of the Gangarides, an Indian utopia

The eighteenth-century philosophes believed in progress. Critical of French society as it was at the end of the Ancien Régime, they speculated upon the possibilities of improving man's lot. It was natural that they should envisage an ideal society or utopia in which happiness for all would be possible. So it was that the literary utopia became a popular genre; it enabled reformers to suggest daring new conceptions of political and social organization and, under the guise of harmless fiction, to uphold moral and religious values at variance with those held in eighteenth-century France. The utopian element is present in the work of most of the great writers of the period--- Marivaux, Lesage, Voltaire, Diderot, Montesquieu, Rousseau, and Sade.²¹

What was Voltaire's attitude to utopias? Although he did create literary utopias, Voltaire was a realist, an historian, and in later life a practical man of action

rather than a dreamer. He used his pen and his gifts of wit and irony to point out the need for reforms, to denounce wrongs, to ridicule existing absurdities. Fully aware of the limitations of the human condition and of the impossibility of achieving anything approaching a utopian state of affairs in Europe in his lifetime, he found personal satisfaction in achieving specific small reforms such as his tax reform of the county of Gex, and in waging war against fanaticism, superstition, and injustice by defending the cause of individual families such as the Sirvens and the Calas. If he did not create a true miniature utopia in Ferney, he did succeed in transforming it over a period of almost twenty years from a poverty-stricken hamlet into a prosperous community supported by the manufacture of watches, tiles, leather and silk products.²²

In a crisis Voltaire might yield momentarily to a nostalgic yearning to leave behind the threats and harassments of the real world and to retreat into a utopian community of enlightened intellectuals. This was the case in the summer of 1766 when La Barre was executed. Voltaire's Dictionnaire philosophique had been found in La Barre's possession. Voltaire thought it might be necessary to flee France and tried to persuade Damilaville, D'Alembert, and Diderot to join him in creating at Cleves

"une petite cclonie de gens savants et sages" (Best. D14087), who, under the protection of Frederick II, would seek to enlighten mankind.²³

In Candide Voltaire devoted two chapters to the description of Eldorado, a fictional utopia rejected by the protagonist Candide in favour of the real world. The utopian element in La Princesse de Babylone is less known but is of considerable importance. Voltaire's choice of the Land of the Gangarides for a utopia is a clear indication of his intense enthusiasm for India in 1767 for up to this date India had served merely as an indication of oriental setting in three contes: Histoire d'un bon bramin, Le Blanc et le noir, and Aventure indienne.²⁴

In La Princesse de Babylone Amazan, the idealized hero, is a Gangaride, "peuple vertueux et invincible qui habite la rive orientale du Gange" (p.364). The description in the conte of the Land of the Gangarides is very similar to the description of the Ganges region found in La Philosophie de l'histoire, which Voltaire was to use as the "Discours préliminaire" of the 1769 edition of the Essai sur les mœurs.²⁵ The striking parallels between section XVII "De l'Inde" of La Philosophie de l'histoire and the Land of the Gangarides result from the fact that Voltaire was re-editing his Essai sur les mœurs in July 1767 (Best. D14257) and confirm his euphoric view of India at this time. "De

l'Inde" begins with the claim, also alluded to in the conte²⁶, that the Gangarides are the most ancient society in the world because their land is blessed with a favourable climate that ensures that all man's wants are supplied by nature. As a result of nature's bounty, the Gangarides have not been tempted to seek conquests elsewhere. Prosperity is based on lush pastureland and the raising of sheep; the wool trade is the basis of commercial prosperity in La Princesse de Babylone's Land of the Gangarides (p.364). In "De l'Inde" Voltaire calls the Land of the Gangarides "un paradis terrestre" (M. XI, 54); the enumeration of natural foods to be found there and of refreshing fruit drinks (M. XI, 49), is very like the sumptuous, vegetarian meal served to Formosante on her arrival at Amazan's home (p.375). Voltaire pictured India as a place where man's needs were supplied by nature.

There are some similarities between Voltaire's two literary utopias, Eldorado of 1759 and the Land of the Gangarides of 1767. In both lands the people are free from worry about material things. Both countries are blessed with such great wealth that precious stones are valueless; Eldorado's gold, rubies, and emeralds are replaced by diamonds in the Land of the Gangarides. In both utopias there is cultivation of the arts and an interest in science. In both the people are deists whose religion consists of

adoring and giving thanks to God. They practise natural religion which Voltaire defined as follows: "Le vrai culte, la vraie piété, la vraie sagesse est d'adorer Dieu comme le père commun de tous les hommes sans distinction, et d'être bienfaisant" (Best. D15985).

The differences between the two utopias show that Voltaire's thinking has evolved considerably between 1759 and 1767. The political organization of the two utopias differs. Eldorado is ruled by an enlightened monarch. The Land of the Gangarides is a prosperous republic whose citizens are represented on a governing council. Eldorado is entirely fictitious. Surrounded by mountains, it is totally inaccessible and its precise location is not known. There is no crime because the people are innocent and protected from outside evil influences. It is a genuine utopia ---no real place. On the other hand the Land of the Gangarides has a specific location on the eastern bank of the Ganges. The Gangarides practise foreign trade. Amaran comes and goes at will. Despite this contact with the outside world, there is no crime because the Gangarides are born just and virtuous. The Gangarides are also said to be invincible. This is accounted for in part by the character of the people, and in part by the speed and power of the unicorns, a great natural asset in time of war. Voltaire has fused a geographic reality with an idealized conception

of India, and to this he has added mythical elements such as unicorns, quite acceptable in a fairy tale. To give verisimilitude to Amazan's character he ascribes the virtue of being capable of great romantic passion and of being constant in love to all Gangarides.

There is a striking difference of tone in the way Voltaire has handled each utopia. In keeping with the light-hearted tone of La Princesse de Babylone as a whole, the Land of the Gangarides is a fairytale utopia to which it would be pleasant to return. The Land of the Gangarides reflects Voltaire's enthusiasm for India but is not presented as a serious alternative to eighteenth-century European life.

In Candide Voltaire treats Eldorado seriously. He paints a happy virtuous society safe from the world's evils, offers it as a refuge to Candide who has every reason to wish to withdraw from the real world in which he has encountered cruelty, deceptions, and abuse; yet Candide rejects it:

Candide ne cessait de dire à Cacambo: "Il est vrai, mon ami, encore une fois, que le château où je suis né ne vaut pas le pays où nous sommes; mais enfin Mlle Cunégonde n'y est pas, et vous avez sans doute quelque maîtresse en Europe. Si nous restons ici, nous n'y serons que comme les autres; au lieu que si nous retournons dans notre monde seulement avec douze moutons chargés de cailloux d'Eldorado, nous serons plus riches que tous les rois ensemble, nous n'aurons plus d'inquisiteurs à craindre, et nous pourrons aisément reprendre Mlle Cunégonde.

Ce discours plut à Cacambo: on aime tant à courir, à se faire valoir chez les siens, à faire parade de ce qu'on a vu dans ses voyages, que les deux heureux résolurent de ne plus l'être et de demander leur congé à sa Majesté.

(p.190)

Voltaire shows that when offered an existential choice between the real world and a utopia, man's greed, restless yearnings and ego lead him to reject a utopian state.

Man, Animals, and the Soul

In La Princesse de Babylone and in the Essai sur les moeurs much is made of the absence of alcohol and the Indian's vegetarian diet. Both are explained as necessitated by climatic conditions:

Nos maisons de carnage, qu'on appelle des boucheries, où l'on vend tant de cadavres pour nourrir le nôtre, mettraient la peste dans le climat de l'Inde; il ne faut à ces nations que des nourritures rafraichissantes et pures.

(M. XI, 187)

and are praised as being conducive to the development of a gentle, peace-loving, national character:

Les hommes alimentés et abreuvés de liqueurs fortes ont tous un sang aigri 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.

(p.365)

The emphasis on vegetarianism in La Princesse de Babylone, a theme absent from Eldorado, is directly related to the

Indian doctrine of metempsychosis or the transmigration of souls featured in Holwell's work. Voltaire attached great importance to this doctrine. He realized its social utility: "la crainte de tuer son père ou sa mère en tuant des hommes et des animaux leur [aux Indiens] inspira une horreur pour le meurtre et pour toute violence, qui devint chez eux une seconde nature."²⁷

Whether or not an animal might be considered one's "semblable" was a controversial issue in the eighteenth century. There was much speculation as to the exact nature of man, of animals, and of the soul. In 1739, to please a lady friend, Guillaume Hyacinthe Bougeant wrote a one hundred and fifty-seven page treatise entitled Amusement philosophique sur le langage des bestes²⁸ in which he concluded that animals communicate among themselves but that their "language" lacks grammatical structure and cannot deal with abstractions. The 1739 edition of this work also included an anonymous study entitled "Reflexions sur l'ame des bestes en forme d'amusements philosophiques". The subject was one of general interest and was keenly debated by philosophers.

Materialists such as La Mettrie and D'Holbach maintained that animals were machines without feelings or knowledge. As early as the Lettres philosophiques 1733 Voltaire expressed the opposite view:

Les bêtes ont les mêmes organes que nous, les mêmes sentiments, les mêmes perceptions; elles ont de la mémoire, elles combinent quelques idées.les bêtes ne sont point de pures machines.²⁹

Again in the Dictionnaire philosophique 1764, Voltaire insists that God has bestowed on animals the gifts of "sentiment", memory, and a limited number of ideas, and that it is useless for man to attempt to analyse the nature of a human or animal soul. Such matters are beyond his ken.³⁰

In Holwell, under the heading "The religious tenets of the Gentoos", we read that it is wrong to eat bird, goat, sheep or cow, the favoured animals of God; that every animal form is endowed with cogitation, memory, and reflection; that every distinct species of animal creation has a comprehensive mode of communicating their ideas.³¹ Voltaire echoes these ideas in La Princesse de Babylone. One of the unique features of the Land of the Gangarides is that it is the only country left where men and the animal kingdom live in harmony, where men love, respect, and communicate with animals, and where it is considered a terrible crime "de tuer et de manger son semblable" (p.364).

In La Princesse de Babylone there is also an eloquent passage in praise of the maligned animal kingdom in which the Phoenix explains that if animals have renounced speaking to men, it is because men treat them so cruelly.

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 avons ce qui s'appelle une âme tout comme eux; [...] Nous sommes tellement vos frères que le grand Etre, l'Etre éternel et formateur, ayant fait un pacte avec les hommes³², nous comprit expressément dans le traité. Il vous défendit de vous nourrir de notre sang, et à nous de sucer le vôtre.

(p.363)

Voltaire's views on the subject were coloured by his reading of the Shasta in Holwell.

Resurrection

Voltaire links man and the animal kingdom in La Princesse de Babylone by choosing the Phoenix, an animal albeit a mythical one, to play a major role. The choice of the Phoenix is related to Voltaire's interest in the immortality of the soul, seen also in his fascination with the Indian doctrine of metempsychosis already clearly set forth in "De l'Inde", La Philosophie de l'histoire:

Ce qui me frappe le plus dans l'Inde, c'est cette ancienne opinion de la transmigration des âmes qui s'étendit avec le temps jusqu'à la Chine et dans l'Europe. Ce n'est pas que les Indiens sussent ce que c'est qu'une âme: mais ils imaginent que ce principe, soit aérien, soit igné, allait successivement animer d'autres corps. [...] Nous verrons bientôt que tous les grands peuples avaient une idée d'une autre vie, quoique avec des notions différentes. Je ne vois guère, parmi les anciens empires, que les Chinois qui n'établirent pas la doctrine de l'immortalité de l'âme.

(M. XI, 50)

The Phoenix has the unique capacity to be resurrected. The fact that the Phoenix is reborn in the flames of its pyre, naturally leads to a discussion of resurrection and the soul. Formosante witnesses the rebirth of the Phoenix and in wonder exclaims: "Je ne croyais point à la résurrection; mais mon bonheur m'en a convaincu" (p.373). The Phoenix makes the disarmingly profound reply that "il n'est pas plus surprenant de naître deux fois qu'une" (p.373). Formosante is puzzled as to how personal immortality can be possible. "Qu'est devenu votre âme pendant que je vous portais dans ma poche après votre mort?" (p.373). Again the Phoenix's reply shows a willingness to believe and a capacity for wonderment at the power of God.

Eh! mon Dieu, Madame, n'est-il pas aussi facile au grand Orosmade de continuer son action sur une petite étincelle de moi-même que de commencer cette action? Il m'avait accordé auparavant le sentiment, la mémoire et la pensée: il me les accorde encore; qu'il ait attaché cette faveur à un atome de feu élémentaire caché dans moi, ou à l'assemblage de mes organes, cela ne fait rien au fond: les phénix et les hommes ignorent toujours comment la chose se passe. (p.373)

This spirit of humble acceptance and the optimistic hope expressed in this explanation can be found in earlier works by Voltaire such as La Métaphysique de Newton, but have a new, refreshing quality when encountered unexpectedly in a

conte.

Obviously it is possible to find elsewhere pessimistic, negative statements made by Voltaire about the immortality of the soul. This does not mean that hopeful, religious affirmations such as the above, are discredited. This brief passage on resurrection is quite in keeping with René Pomeau's findings in La Religion de Voltaire, 1969. He claims that while Voltaire was never without grave doubts as to the immortality of the soul, he continued to the very end to hope that there was some measure of personal life after death.

Malgré tout, Voltaire espère: que la pensée soit matière ou propriété de la matière, n'exclut pas la possibilité de la survie. Pourquoi la pensée ne resterait-elle pas, après la mort, attachée à l'un des atomes de notre organisme décomposé? Voltaire revient fréquemment sur cette idée.³³

Although Voltaire recognized that the soul's immortality could not be proven by argument, he wanted to believe in it, not only for his own peace of mind, but also because it would help to resolve the problem of evil and suffering. Voltaire believed in God the creator, and would have Him be a just God. Since justice is not universally found in this world, there must be hope of "une vie meilleure qui réparera tout".³⁴

In his introduction to La Princesse de Babylone et autres contes par Voltaire, Pierre Grimal states that in

the later contes Voltaire no longer shows signs of mental disquiet on metaphysical questions and has become dogmatic.³⁵ Surely this is an exaggeration! If Voltaire seems less tormented by questions that should concern him even more as he approaches death, it is not that he has found certainty. The questions remain unresolved, but the Ferney patriarch has chosen to use his energies more effectively, to be a force for good in the world, and to hope. Pomeau agrees: "Il se contente d'espérer et de parier. Voltaire se souvient-il de Pascal, quand il dit que le plus sûr est de vivre comme si Dieu devait juger l'âme immortelle?"³⁶

I strongly disagree with another of Grimal's claims. Referring to Voltaire in the 1760s he says:

Voltaire reste heurté aux problèmes du mal et de l'irrationnel, les deux faces d'une même énigme, mais l'acceptation quasi religieuse du mystère a fait place à un pessimisme radical. On dirait que la vieillesse a desséché en lui le pouvoir d'admettre autre chose que les évidences de la raison.³⁷

The Phoenix's affirmation concerning resurrection serves to refute such a view. It is not surprising that a particularly hopeful statement should be found in La Princesse de Babylone, a conte so remarkable for its high spirits and optimistic view.

NOTES TO CHAPTER VI

¹Jean Chardin, Voyages de monsieur le Chevalier Chardin en Perse et autres lieux de l'Orient, 1711; Jean Baptiste Tavernier, Les Six Voyages de Jean-Baptiste Tavernier en Turquie, en Perse et aux Indes, 1679; François Bernier, Suites des mémoires sur l'empire du Grand Moqul, 1671 and Voyage contenant la description des états du Grand Moqul, 1725; and Lettres édifiantes et curieuses par quelques missionnaires de la Compagnie de Jésus, 1707-1776. These works are cited in Daniel S. Hawley's study "L'Inde de Voltaire", SVEC, no. 120 (1974), 142 and 175-177. See also Chapter III, n.17. Jean de Thévenot's Voyage contenant la relation de l'Indostan, 1672 is listed in the Havens, Torrey catalogue of Voltaire's library as item #2823, but it does not appear in the Leningrad catalogue.

²Essai sur les moeurs, M. XII, 437.

³Ibid., pp. 370-371.

⁴Hawley, "L'Inde de Voltaire", SVEC, No. 120 (1974), 166.

⁵Ibid., p.143.

⁶Ibid., p.144.

⁷Ibid., p.145 and p.168.

⁸John Zephaniah Holwell, Interesting Historical Events Relative to the Provinces of Bengal and the Empire of Indostan (London: T. Becket & P. A. DeHondt, 1765).

⁹Dictionary of National Biography.

¹⁰Holwell. See "Dedication" to Part II of 2nd ed. printed in London 1767.

¹¹Ibid., p.10.

¹²Hawley, p.153.

¹³Holwell, Interesting Historical Events. See the "Preliminary discourse" of Part I, 1st ed., 1765.

¹⁴Hawley. p.146 and p.154.

¹⁵The term Gentoos means the followers of the Shasta of Brahma.

¹⁶Hawley, p.146 and p.154.

¹⁷Ibid., pp.169-171.

¹⁸Best. D14575, Dec. 7, 1767. Holwell's book is item #1666 in the Leningrad catalogue of Voltaire's library.

¹⁹Pléiade, "Notice", pp. 1003-1004.

²⁰Interesting Historical Events, chapters 4 and 8.

²¹Raymond Trousson, "Orientation et problèmes de l'utopie au siècle des lumières: rapport de synthèse", SVEC, No. 191 (1980), 615.

²²Nuçi Kotta, L'Homme aux quarante écus (The Hague: Mouton & Co., 1966), p.83.

²³Haydn Mason, Voltaire (Baltimore, Maryland: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981), p.105.

²⁴See Appendix I.

²⁵See M. XI, 49-54.

²⁶Amazan: "On pense dans mon pays que l'homme est originaire de l'Inde" (p.409).

²⁷Essai, M. XI, 50.

²⁸G. H. Bougeant, Amusement philosophique sur le langage des bestes (Paris, 1739). Voltaire possessed a 1750 edition of this work in his library. Leningrad catalogue #494.

²⁹Lettres philosophiques, Classiques Garnier, "Treizième lettre", p.67.

³⁰See Dictionnaire philosophique, "Bêtes".

³¹Holwell, 2nd ed. Part 2, p.84.

³²Note in the text itself: allusion to Genesis, Ch. ix, v.4, God's instructions to Noah.

³³Pomeau, La Religion de Voltaire (Paris: Librairie Nizet, 1969), p.405.

³⁴Ibid.

³⁵Grimal, p.34.

³⁶La Religion de Voltaire, pp. 405-406.

³⁷Grimal, p.34.

CHAPTER VII

PRIMITIVISM, PASTORALISM, REPUBLICANISM IN LA PRINCESSE DE BABYLONE AND LES SCYTHES

Voltaire's portrayal of the utopian Land of the Gangarides in La Princesse de Babylone reflects the following intellectual and literary trends of his time: primitivism, pastoralism, and the cult of the republican ideals of Antiquity. These three dimensions are very strongly expressed in Voltaire's unsuccessful tragedy, Les Scythes, written in a ten-day period in November 1766 (Best. D13676) and published at the very end of the year by Cramer (Best. D13703, Best. D13704, Best. D13788). Voltaire was actively involved in writing, revising, and in ensuring the production of Les Scythes from early November 1766 until the end of March 1767¹, the period immediately preceding the writing of La Princesse de Babylone.

We have seen in what ways Voltaire was influenced by the Mille et une nuit tradition and by Ariosto's Orlando furioso in writing La Princesse de Babylone. In the case of Les Scythes, the play is so closely linked to La Princesse de Babylone not only as to date of composition but also with regard to themes and ideas that it must be considered a major factor in the genesis of the conte. As Deloffre and Hellegouarc'h so aptly phrase it, Les Scythes

serves literally as a sort of prologue to La Princesse de Babylone.² I shall illustrate this by comparing Voltaire's treatment of primitivism, pastoralism, and the cult of republican ideals in the two works.

Primitivism

According to J. A. Cuddon, primitivism expresses a form of nostalgia for a primitive way of life often envisaged as a golden age in the remote past. For him primitivists are anti-civilization, anti-materialism, anti-industrialism, anti-progress, and pro-Nature.³

In eighteenth-century France there was also keen interest in contemporary primitive societies encountered by travellers and missionaries in remote places, notably South America, the West Indies, Canada, and Tahiti. Gilbert Chinard gives an account of this trend in his book L'Amérique et le rêve exotique dans la littérature française aux XVII^e et XVIII^e siècles.⁴ Influenced by Jesuit missionaries' enthusiastic reports of the fraternal, simple, non-materialistic way of life of the Indians, many believed firmly in the concept of the noble savage. Others saw the American Indians as tribes of fierce savages leading a bestial existence.

Certainly the call for a return to nature is a strong theme in French literature of the second half of the

eighteenth century. Although it is true that Rousseau's doctrine that man who is naturally good is corrupted by society and by civilization, dates from the mid-century--his Discours sur l'inégalité appeared in 1754 and its theory as applied to life in La Nouvelle Héloïse in 1761 and Emile 1762---, writers such as Fénelon and Prevost had already voiced the idea that the simple life in the midst of natural surroundings is more conducive to virtue than city life. In general, eighteenth-century primitivism was concerned with finding a balance between nature and culture. Even Rousseau did not believe that modern man could return to a true state of nature. A moderate form of primitivism made it possible to attack certain weaknesses of contemporary society without condemning the whole concept of civilization.⁵

Voltaire is often thought of as a defender of civilized refinement and luxury as expressed in Le Mondain 1736. However primitivist themes appear in the Ferney period in Jeannot et Colin, a conte published in 1764, as well as in Les Scythes and La Princesse de Babylone. Obviously Voltaire's position evolved somewhat. He never went so far as to say that man is naturally good, although he came close to it in the Dictionnaire philosophique 1764 where he says: "L'homme n'est point né méchant; il le devient, comme il devient malade" (M. XX, 54).⁶ Voltaire

himself spent the greater and most productive part of his life in the rural settings of Cirey and Ferney, far from the intrigue and distractions of Paris and the court.⁷ His use of primitivist themes may reflect his personal experience as well as the intellectual trends of the time. Pierre Grimal interprets the presence of a primitive utopia in La Princesse de Babylone as a concession to literary fashion.

Voltaire, qui a reflété son siècle au moins autant qu'il l'a formé, cède à la mode [....] Sa Princesse de Babylone développe longuement les avantages d'une vie "naturelle", où l'on ne mangerait pas la chair des animaux, où l'on ne commettrait aucun crime, où la famille serait sacrée. Tableau d'irréalité, mais dont l'ampleur même est significative [....] C'était la revanche de Rousseau.⁸

Although Voltaire is no doubt going along with this trend, the primitivist element in La Princesse de Babylone is directly linked to the primitivism in Les Scythes which, I believe, reflects Voltaire's perception of his personal situation in 1767. Like Sozame, an important character in Les Scythes, Voltaire is banished from Paris, the Babylon of his world, and has settled down to a peaceful existence in a much more primitive part of the world.

In the 1767 "Préface" to Les Scythes, Voltaire states clearly that the dominant theme of his tragedy is "l'état de nature mis en opposition avec l'état de l'homme artificiel tel qu'il est dans les grandes villes" as seen

in "le tableau contrasté des anciens Scythes et des anciens Persans" (M. VI, 267). The moral attitudes of the Scythians and the Persians are contrasted throughout the play. When brought into contact with the sophisticated Persians, the primitive Scythian warriors try to preserve their noble way of life from corruption by refusing to accept the Persians' lavish gifts, "présents corrupteurs", "ennemis de la simple nature" (M. VI, 278). Tradition held that Scythians were just, open, and sincere. Although Voltaire disputes the good character of the Scythians in the Essai sur les mœurs (M. XI, 42-43), he conforms to this popular conception in Les Scythes and La Princesse de Babylone.

In the play, Sozame, an aged Persian general who once enjoyed wealth and honours at the Persian court, has fallen from favour and been obliged to flee the kingdom in danger for his life because he had dared to oppose the amorous advances of Athamare, a married royal prince, towards Sozame's beautiful daughter, Obéide. He takes permanent refuge in Scythia, a rude, primitive land where life remains close to nature and free of corruption. Yet Scythia is no utopia. Obéide regrets the glamorous life at the Persian court and speaks bitterly of Scythia's poverty, harsh climate, and remoteness.

Scythia figures prominently in the subplot of La Princesse de Babylone. Like Obéide, Princess Aldée is taken

away from a luxurious court and transplanted to primitive Scythia; however, she goes willingly because she is in love with the King of Scythia and because his promise of one day restoring her to her rightful place as heir to the throne of Babylon, gives her hope for the future. As one reads in Moréri, in the eighteenth century Scythia was identified as being within Tartary, a vast region of Asia, northwest of the Himalayas. The Scythians or Tartars were said to be a tall race of nomads dressed in skins of sheep or fox, and known for their warlike skills, especially as bowmen. Scythia is described as a land with no towns and few laws where people live by raising sheep and goats, rather than by cultivating the soil.⁹ Formosante's impression of Scythia corresponds to Moréri's description:

Point de villes en Scythie, par conséquent point d'arts agréables. On ne voyait que de vastes prairies et des nations entières sous des tentes et sur des chars. Cet aspect imprimait la terreur. (p.382)

The King of the Scythians, originally a contender for Formosante's hand, is an amusing caricature of the Scythian described in Moréri.

Primitivism per se in La Princesse de Babylone is embodied in the Land of the Gangarides where the natural order has been preserved. In Chapter VI the Gangaride utopia was discussed as a manifestation of Voltaire's

enthusiasm for India in 1767. Here we must re-examine the same material in the context of the return to nature theme as found in this conte. We are carried back to a time-free golden age when man and the animal kingdom lived in harmony. The Gangarides communicate with animals as did men of legendary antiquity. Voltaire treats this aspect of the return to nature theme with rollicking good humour. The Phoenix tells Formosante that for purposes of worship, humans and animals assemble and then divide up into separate groups:

les hommes dans un grand temple de cèdre, les femmes dans un autre de peur des distractions; tous les oiseaux dans un bocage, les quadrupèdes 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.365)

In another humorous scene the birds join the Gangarides in song to serenade Formosante as she partakes of a delicious collation while reclining "sur un lit de roses".

deux cents oiseaux, cent bergers et cent bergères lui donnèrent un concert à deux chœurs; 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.375)

Voltaire's spirit of fun leads him to suggest that this union of human and animal kingdoms might have had disadvantages; luckily for Formosante, the peacocks who

fanned her with their wings were "heureusement muets" (p.375).

In La Princesse de Babylone much emphasis is placed on the fact that the Land of the Gangarides is blessed with an ideal climate. There is a glorious profusion of flowers and of bird life. "Dictame", a plant known for its power to heal wounds, is found there. All wholesome natural foods--fruits, grains, vegetables---grow in abundance. Formosante is served:

cent mets délicieux, parmi lesquels on ne voyait aucun cadavre déguisé: c'était du riz, du sagou, de la semoule, du vermicelle, des macaronis, des omelettes, des oeufs au lait, des fromages à la crème, des pâtisseries de toute espèce, des légumes, des fruits d'un parfum et d'un goût dont on n'a point d'idée dans les autres climats; c'était une profusion de liqueurs rafraîchissantes supérieures aux meilleurs vins. (p.375)

The return to nature theme, treated so lightly in La Princesse de Babylone, indicates an aesthetic preference for simple natural beauty over a more contrived splendour. When comparing the reception given her at Amazan's home to festivities in Babylon, "La Princesse [Formosante] avoua que, s'il y avait plus de magnificence à Babylone, la nature était mille fois plus agréable chez les Gangarides" (p.375).

Voltaire did point out that the primitivism he endorses in La Princesse de Babylone is an enlightened one. Amazan, the chief representative of the Gangaride people,

is said to spend his time doing good, cultivating the arts and studying natural science (p.366). If Voltaire deplored excessive and superficial worldliness, he believed that developing one's knowledge was a good thing.

Pastoralism

Pastoralism, a term derived from the Latin pastor pastoris meaning shepherd, is a form of primitivism dating from Antiquity which idealizes shepherd life in representing it as a simple, peaceful, innocent, paradisial existence in harmony with nature.

Pastoralism is manifest in Les Scythes. Voltaire first alluded to that play as "une tragédie de bergers" (Best. D13676). In the "Préface" Voltaire states that he has been truly innovative in juxtaposing a shepherd, Indatire, and a prince, Athamare, in main roles. In French classical tragedy, the protagonists were always of noble birth, a convention deemed appropriate to serious subject matter. Voltaire protests:

on peut faire parler des pâtres guerriers et libres avec une fierté qui s'élève au-dessus de la bassesse que nous attribuons très injustement à leur état, pourvu que cette fierté ne soit jamais boursouflée, l'ampoulé ne convient pas même à César. Toute grandeur doit être simple. [...] On peut enfin étaler dans des cabanes des sentiments aussi touchants que dans des palais. (M. VI, 267)

Voltaire broke with convention. Whether or not the public

would accept the casting of a shepherd opposite a prince would depend on the artistic skill of the actors.

The Scythians are described as warlike shepherds. The action takes place in Scythia and the setting is pastoral. The stage indications are as follows: "Le théâtre représente un bocage et un berceau, avec un banc de gazon; on voit dans le lointain des campagnes et des cabanes" (M. VI, 277). The wedding scene is also pastoral. In Act II, Scene III Indatire, the flower of Scythian youth, is wedded to Obéide in a simple outdoor ceremony witnessed by young comrades, before a torch-lit altar bedecked with garlands of flowers. To mark the joyous event, the Scythian men, led by Indatire, participate in warlike games. In describing Scythian life, Voltaire also alludes to "nobles amusements", "champêtres jeux" for women (M. VI, 279). The shepherd people enjoy freedom, peace, equality, and "les biens du premier âge" (M. VI, 313), precious attributes long lost to the decadent Persians. In a heavy-handed moralizing manner, Voltaire supports the view that the primitive pastoral life promotes virtue and valour. Athamare, the Persian prince, is astounded at finding that his rival in love is a common shepherd. Voltaire makes it clear that Indatire's worth as an individual and to his country is equal to if not greater than Athamare's.

As one might expect, Voltaire makes use of the

pastoral convention in La Princesse de Babylone in a light-hearted, witty manner. All who witness Amazan's exploits and gallantry at the trials in Babylon assume that the unknown hero is a wealthy prince. They are much amazed to learn from Amazan's servant that he is a shepherd's son. Formosante expresses their perplexity: "est-il possible que le plus grand des hommes, et peut-être le plus aimable, soit le fils d'un berger?" (p.359). By playing on the uses of the word "berger", Voltaire inserts, in the reply given, a jibe at kings who fleece their subjects:

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 bergers, parce qu'ils tondent de fort près leur troupeau; que c'était sans doute une mauvaise plaisanterie de son valet; que ce jeune héros n'était venu si mal accompagné que pour faire voir combien son seul mérite était au-dessus du faste des rois, et pour ne devoir Formosante qu'à lui-même. (p.359)

Formosante, infatuated with her admirer, insists on knowing his true identity. She asks the Phoenix: "quel est le nom de ce héros? comment se nomme son empire? car je ne croirai pas plus qu'il est un berger, que je crois que vous êtes une chauve-souris" (p.364). The Phoenix replies that the hero's name is Amazan and that he is a shepherd as are his compatriots. Voltaire takes this opportunity to contrast a realistic sketch of shepherd life with a more idealized one.

Mais n'allez pas vous imaginer que ces bergers ressemblent aux vôtres, qui, couverts à peine de lambeaux déchirés, gardent des moutons, infiniment mieux habillés qu'eux; qui gémissent sous le fardeau de la pauvreté; et qui payent à un exacteur la moitié des gages chétifs qu'ils reçoivent de leurs maîtres. Les bergers gangarides, nés tous égaux, sont les maîtres des troupeaux innombrables qui couvrent leurs prés éternellement fleuris. (p.364)

Voltaire also refers jokingly to romantic pastoral poetry:

Elle passa toute la nuit à parler d'Amazan. Elle ne l'appelait plus que son berger; et c'est depuis ce temps-là que les noms de berger et d'amant sont toujours employés l'un pour l'autre chez quelques nations. (p.366)

Hellegouarc'h states that Voltaire's frequent repetition of the word "berger"---thirteen times in the first chapters---was also intended as a playful reminder to readers in-the-know of the use of the terms berger and bergère to designate lovers in the Duchesse du Maine's social circle which Voltaire had frequented.¹⁰ It is clear that Voltaire was fully aware of just how he was availing himself of the pastoral convention in this conte.

In the pages which describe Formosante's brief visit to the Land of the Gangarides, the servants are styled "sous-bergers" and "sous-bergères"; the choristers "bergers" and "bergères". It is soon made clear that Amazan is indeed a prince and the rightful heir to the throne of Babylon. His mother is a Gangaride. The pastoral theme ends abruptly

at this point.

Republicanism

For several decades prior to the French Revolution, intellectuals unhappy with the arbitrary Ancien Régime, disturbed by France's loss of prestige in the Seven Years' War, and hostile to official Christianity whose teachings were discredited by the Church's dogmatic intolerance and its wish to repress man's nature rather than to perfect it, turned to classical antiquity and its moral philosophers in a search for values that would promote public spirit and inspire moral regeneration.¹¹ In analyzing the moral foundations of Rome's greatness in Considérations sur les causes de la grandeur des Romains et de leur décadence 1734, Montesquieu had imprinted on the minds of his contemporaries, an image of Roman republicanism based on love of freedom, moral rectitude, and pride in citizenship. In the 1760s it was generally held that the most natural form of government in a simple society was the republic which could safeguard the common interest. This ideal state could exist only in a small, closely-knit country; in a large wealthy state, man's greed and self interest led to moral decadence and arbitrary power.

Republican ideals were associated with a return to a natural, more primitive way of life. Very often the term

"republican" referred not to a particular political structure, but rather to a society where the public interest is defended and where men stand equal before the law, the opposite of arbitrary despotism; consequently the term could apply to certain monarchies such as England whose civic liberties were much admired by Voltaire. We know that Voltaire's admiration for English government dates back to his stay there from 1726-1729 and even beyond. He also had first-hand experience of republican government in Holland and in Geneva. Voltaire's personal political preference was for an enlightened monarchy.

A writer of tragedy in the eighteenth century sought to move and to edify the public by presenting examples of moral greatness.¹² Voltaire expressed republican ideals in his Roman tragedies: Brutus 1730, La Mort de César 1736, Rome sauvée 1750, and Le Triumvirat 1764. Les Scythes 1766 was also a strong vehicle for republicanism both in the broad meaning of the term and also in the more limited, political sense.

In Les Scythes Voltaire set out to contrast "les mœurs d'un peuple libre aux mœurs des courtisans" (Best. D13744). The Scythians prize their freedom above all. Although poor in material comforts, they are a virile, upright, courageous people, equal before the law. The Persians are portrayed as dishonest, avaricious, and guilty

of intrigue associated with the search for personal glory in a prince's court. Voltaire's praise of republican ideals in Les Scythes is a way of lamenting the lack of personal freedom, justice, and integrity in Louis XV's France.

In Les Scythes Voltaire saw fit to pay tribute to republican Geneva near which he had taken permanent refuge after the bitter disillusionment and misfortunes experienced at the French court and in Prussia. In the "Préface" he warns the reader that the Scythians and Persians represent "quelques nations modernes" (M.VI, 267). In a letter to Frederick II dated April 5, 1767, he is more precise. "Ce sont plustôt les petits cantons suisses et un marquis français que les Scites et un prince persan" (Best. D14087). In the performance of Les Scythes at Ferney, Voltaire played the part of Sozame, the aged Persian patriarch, banished from his own land.¹³ A personal testimonial rings out in this speech:

Bientôt dans vos forêts, grâce au ciel parvenu,
 J'y trouvai le repos qui m'était inconnu.
 J'y voudrais être né. Tout mon regret, mon frère,
 Est d'avoir parcouru ma fatale carrière
 Dans les camps, dans les cours, à la suite des rois,
 Loin des seuls citoyens gouvernés par des lois.
 (M. VI, 284)

And with a certain bravado he adds:

Oubliant tous les rois dans ces heureux climats,
 Je suis oublié d'eux, et je ne les crains pas.
 (M. VI, 286)

Just as Les Scythes's pastoralism was echoed in bantering fashion in La Princesse de Babylone, so republicanism, a central theme with double significance in Les Scythes, is touched on in La Princesse de Babylone. The utopian Land of the Gangarides is a republic. The Phoenix makes it very clear that Amazan is not a king. "Il n'est pas roi; et je ne sais même s'il voudrait s'abaisser à l'être; il aime trop ses compatriotes: il est berger comme eux" (p.364). As good republicans, the Gangarides are just and invincible.

During the course of Amazan's European tour, Voltaire's republican ideals find expression in a broader sense in the form of a lengthy tribute paid to the development of a successful constitutional monarchy in England (pp. 390-392). Praise is also given to Holland which is described as "quelque faible image du pays des heureux Gangarides" (p.387) because it can boast of freedom, equality, cleanliness, prosperity, and tolerance, and to Poland, Sweden and Denmark whose rulers seem to be enlightened and where a measure of freedom of thought is enjoyed.

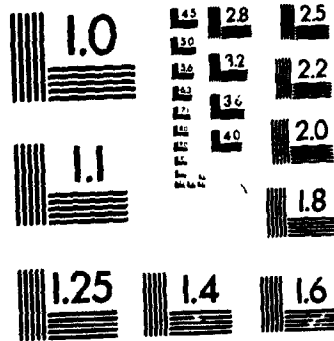
* * *

Voltaire's correspondence for the period November 1766 to April 1767 shows how very preoccupied he was with

Les Scythes. Believing as he did that a writer's literary reputation must depend on the tragic genre, he hoped fervently that Les Scythes with its sentimental tone and strong love element would succeed where Le Triumvirat 1764, a stern Roman tragedy, had failed. Indeed his zeal did not abate until September 1767 when Voltaire was forced to give up hope of having the play performed at Fontainebleau (Best. D14427 and Best. D14443). This time-frame covers the period in which La Princesse de Babylone was composed. Although Voltaire presented his conte to friends as a mere amusing trifle¹⁴, his enthusiasms, preoccupations, and philosophic ideas are woven into its fabric. The themes of primitivism, pastoralism, and republicanism in La Princesse de Babylone, themes which are treated seriously in Les Scythes, are significant even though they are less prominent and treated in a facetious vein.

Writing Les Scythes and the struggle to ensure its success in the theatrical world served as a mental preparation for the creation of La Princesse de Babylone, a conte in which Babylon and Scythia are important. The very language used by Voltaire in his personal letters during this period is evidence of the link between the two works. Allusions to relations between Geneva and France are couched in Scythian and Babylonian terms. I quote a typical example taken from a letter written to D'Argental

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in Paris, in which Voltaire refers to himself as a Persian exile: "Ce bon vieillard vous tend les bras de ses neiges de Scythie aux murs de Babilone" (Best. D13820). Again in the "Épître dédicatoire" of Les Scythes Voltaire describes his personal situation in 1766-67 and the composition of the play in language very reminiscent of Les Scythes, though in a much lighter vein:

Il y avait autrefois en Perse un bon vieillard, qui cultivait son jardin; [...] et ce jardin n'était pas auprès de Persépolis, mais dans une vallée immense entourée des montagnes du Caucase, couvertes de neiges éternelles; et ce vieillard n'écrivait ni sur la population ni sur l'agriculture, comme on faisait par passe-temps à Babylone, ville qui tire son nom de Babil; mais il avait défriché des terres incultes, et triplé le nombre des habitants autour de sa cabane.

Ce bonhomme vivait sous Artaxercès, plusieurs années après l'aventure d'Obéide et d'Indatire; et il fit une tragédie en vers persans, qu'il fit représenter par sa famille et par quelques bergers du mont Caucase; car il s'amusa à faire des vers persans assez passablement, ce qui lui avait attiré de violents ennemis dans Babylone [...] et c'était pour être loin de cette racaille qu'il s'était retiré avec sa famille auprès du Caucase, où il cultivait son jardin.

(M. VI, 263)

Clearly the theme of a return to nature is present in the play and the conte. While Voltaire incorporates Scythia into the conte, he does not give it a prominent place as he had done in Les Scythes. Instead he relegates Scythia to the subplot and features the Land of the Gangarides as a primitive utopia in La Princesse de Babylone. This shift from Scythia to India can be explained

by Voltaire's enthusiasm and excitement on discovering Holwell's new and precious documentation on India early in 1767, as discussed in Chapter VI.

NOTES TO CHAPTER VII

¹The play was produced at Ferney in mid-March and was performed in Paris on March 26, 1767 before an audience of 1052 people, but only had a four-day run (Best. D14038, Best. D14045, Best. D14071 note 2).

²Pléiade, "Notice", p.1005.

³J. A. Cuddon, A Dictionary of Literary Terms (London: André Deutsch Ltd., 1977), pp.529-530.

⁴Gilbert Chinard, L'Amérique et le rêve exotique dans la littérature française au XVII^e et XVIII^e siècles (Paris: Droz, 1934).

⁵R. S. Ridgway, Voltaire and Sensibility (Montreal and London: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1973), p.8.

⁶Voltaire expressed the same view in Candide 1759. Jacques the Anabaptist says: "Il faut bien que les hommes aient un peu corrompu la nature, car ils ne sont point nés loups, et ils sont devenus loups". See Ch.4, Pléiade, p.154.

⁷Cirey 1734-1749; Ferney 1759-1778.

⁸Grimal, p.35.

⁹Louis Moréri, Le Grand Dictionnaire Historique (Amsterdam: Brunel, 1724), 11th edition. See Vol. III, Supplément, "Tartares", pp. 440-441.

¹⁰Hellegouarc'h, "Quelques mots clin d'oeil chez Voltaire" in Le Siècle de Voltaire (Oxford: The Voltaire Foundation, 1987), II, 538-539. "Le vieux poète Saint-Aulaire s'intitulait le berger de la duchesse à qui il faisait la cour, et celle-ci en retour se disait sa bergère. La plaisanterie fit fureur dans les conversations, poésies et lettres de cette petite société." (p.538)

¹¹For a discussion of French idealistic republicanism in the eighteenth century, see R. S. Ridgway, Voltaire and Sensibility, pp. 96-99.

¹²Ridgway, p.109.

¹³Pomeau, Voltaire, p.20 and Best. D14173.

¹⁴ On April 20, 1768, in writing to his niece Madame Denis who was in Paris, Voltaire states: "Chenevieres me mande qu'il vous a envoie une princesse; ce sont des amusements qui ont occupé un moment mon loisir, et que j'oublie ensuite pour jamais" (Best. D14967).

CHAPTER VIII

A PHILOSOPHIC JOURNEY

PHILOSOPHIC PROPAGANDA, SATIRE, AND PERSONAL INVECTIVE

In this chapter my purpose is to analyze the extensive material in La Princesse de Babylone which may be described as philosophic propaganda, witty sociological satire, and personal invective, and to explain how Voltaire uses the traditional fictional device of the imaginary journey as a means of introducing his views into the fairy tale. The result is an enlightened magic-oriental tale. The problem of unity and the unique fusion of reality and fantasy that characterizes La Princesse de Babylone will be treated separately in chapters IX and X.

The Voyage Motif

In La Princesse de Babylone Voltaire uses the imaginary journey as a vehicle for his philosophic views and as an opportunity to satirize the distinctive character of many European peoples, as well as those of Asia already studied. At the same time, the imaginary journey is an essential part of the fairy tale: the quest of one lover for the other. In speaking of La Princesse de Babylone Grimal describes the philosophic, satirical, imaginary voyage as a device "déjà usé près d'un demi-siècle après les Lettres persanes".¹ Yet Bertrand-Guy in her book Voyages et

mouvements dans les contes philosophiques de Voltaire denies

that the imaginary journey, though an accepted formula in the eighteenth century, was overworked:

un élément de suspense persiste dans le recours à cette formule de composition du conte. Le lecteur prévoit l'apparition du voyage mais non sa forme, sa durée et sa signification; [...] Il n'y a aucune garantie que le voyage se déroule selon des normes strictes, qu'il ne soit pas interrompu par des causes nouvelles, ou au contraire par des causes déjà présentes dans ce qui précédait. Le voyage est le représentant symbolique de l'inconnu de la vie chez le lecteur, chez le voyageur et chez l'homme en général.²

The interest of the voyage motif is as lasting as interest in life itself.

I shall show how Voltaire has used the imaginary journey motif to integrate certain elements of realism into the fairy tale: fanciful modes of travel are juxtaposed with realistic means of transport; a precise geographic itinerary is assigned to the fairytale lovers; there is much praise of progress made towards Enlightenment in Europe in the late 1760s; there are also specific references to contemporary events.

With the exception of King Bélus, all the main characters in La Princesse de Babylone travel. Language problems are ignored as realistic treatment of this aspect of travel would be burdensome in such a fast-moving conte. In most cases Voltaire assigns his travellers a means of land or air transport that is whimsical or fanciful. In

the opening scenes the King of Scythia arrives in Babylon mounted on a tiger, the King of Egypt on Apis the bull, the King of India in a two-wheeled cart drawn by twelve elephants, and Amazan on a unicorn. Separately, Amazan and Formosante cover great distances in a carriage drawn by six unicorns, an excellent means of rapid transit. Although Formosante initially sets out from Babylon in conventional fashion on horseback, as soon as she can avail herself of the Phoenix's help, she is wafted through the sky to India on a griffin-drawn settee. On the other hand Voltaire is realistic in his choice of sea travel to carry Amazan and Formosante to the seafaring nation of England and in using a Spanish fleet to carry the united lovers from the southern coast of Spain, the length of the Mediterranean on their return journey to Babylon.

Anyone who has read Micromégas, Zadig, Candide and La Princesse de Babylone would agree with J. Scherer that "le voyage est l'un des principaux moteurs du roman voltairien".³ Voltaire exploits his knowledge of geography, a science that evolved rapidly in the seventeenth century. I have already mentioned Voltaire's extensive collection of travel works. His passion for geography has been affirmed by Numa Broc: "Il n'est pas douteux que Voltaire ne se soit, durant toute son existence, passionné pour la géographie."⁴ In keeping with his personal enthusiasm for geography,

Voltaire belittles King Bélus in La Princesse de Babylone as one "qui ne savait pas un mot de géographie" (p.367). When Amazan who comes from a legendary pre-geography culture, is given a map by a learned Englishman, it seems to him magical that he should see "l'univers en raccourci", "une grande partie de la terre sur une feuille de papier" (p.393). Thus Voltaire expresses his own wonder and delight in the world's complexity as well as his admiration for England's scientific maps.⁵ He has no trouble in choosing for the lovers' mutual pursuit, a precise geographic itinerary that can be followed on a map: India, east to China, back westward to Scythia, north to Moscow, from there to Sweden, Denmark, Poland, the Germanic states, Holland, by sea to England and back, southeast to Venice and Rome, back to France, south to the Basque country, still further south to Seville, and later by boat through the Mediterranean to the Egyptian Port of Canopus. For the return from Egypt to Babylon, in the final sequence of fairytale events, Voltaire lists a series of ancient centres---Memphis, Heliopolis, Arsinoe, Petra, Artemite, Sora, and Apamea---little known to the modern reader but which convey an aura of legend and exoticism.

In two earlier contes, the Histoire des voyages de Scarmentado 1753-54 and in Candide 1758, Voltaire used the imaginary journey to appraise Europe's moral climate. In

the former Voltaire gave a bitter, despairing summary of the obstacles to Enlightenment in Europe, an account of intolerance and barbaric cruelty.⁶ The virulent tone of this conte was prompted by Voltaire's personal depression which resulted from ill-treatment at court in France and in Prussia and from his difficulty in securing for himself a satisfactory haven. The world seemed to him a frightening and wicked place. Again in Candide the voyage was used to convey a pessimistic view of a world where war and injustice dominate. But by 1767 France was at peace. Voltaire had found permanent refuge at Ferney and personal fulfillment in participating actively in a verbal war against the infâme. His efforts to assist individual victims of injustice such as the Calas, had aroused interest abroad and were succeeding. The support given Voltaire by various monarchs of Northern Europe was a sign that the moral climate was changing. Voltaire felt confidently ready to reappraise the progress of Enlightenment in Europe in an entertaining conte. The imaginary journey served his purpose admirably.

Philosophic propaganda

Frédéric Deloffre classifies La Princesse de Babylone, and other contes written from 1766 on, as a "conte militant" or a "conte de propagande"⁷ because in it

Voltaire cannot resist using material to attack the infâme, that is to say superstition and intolerance. In the preceding chapters I have shown to what extent La Princesse de Babylone's value lies in its oriental fantasy. But it is also a conte philosophique; so the utopian element, reflections on the nature of the soul and of man's place in the world, and the theme of the return to nature, are important, as we have seen. Philosophic propaganda is another important component but one that in no way overshadows the oriental fairy tale. Voltaire praises and publicizes progress made towards tolerance and freedom; he makes critical and thought-provoking comparisons between standards achieved by France and its rival England; he denounces religious orders and the papacy with its farflung power, particularly as exemplified in the Spanish Inquisition.

What is new here is confirmation that Europe is well on its way to becoming a true "Europe des Lumières", for the survey of northern Europe found in La Princesse de Babylone justifies Voltaire's optimistic view of the future. The fairytale protagonists observe:

les progrès que la raison et la philosophie faisaient dans le Nord; tous les princes y étaient instruits, tous autorisaient la liberté de penser; leur éducation n'avait point été confiée à des hommes qui eussent intérêt de les tromper ou qui fussent trompés eux-mêmes; on les avait élevés dans la connaissance de la morale universelle et dans

The peoples of Sweden, Denmark, and Poland enjoy a measure of freedom under the rule of enlightened monarchs. Without actually naming them, Voltaire praises Gustave III of Sweden, Christian VII of Denmark, and Stanislas of Poland. Gustave III, who actually became king in 1772, as prince had signed an edict granting freedom of the press in December 1766⁸; in La Princesse de Babylone he is described as "un jeune prince [qui] donnait les plus grandes espérances d'être digne de commander à une nation libre" (p.385). Young Christian VII of Denmark who had spontaneously written to Voltaire sending help for the rehabilitation of the Sirvens, was an absolute monarch; because in his letter to Voltaire he had expressed regret that he had not been able to grant civil liberty to his subjects⁹, Voltaire considered him to be an enlightened despot and described him in the conte as "le plus jeune et le plus juste des rois" (p.385). Stanislas of Poland who had also sent money for the Sirvens (Best. D13913) and declared himself to be Voltaire's admirer (Best. D13988), is seen by Amazan as "un philosophe sur le trône" (p.386).

As I mentioned in Chapter IV, it is to Catherine the Great of Russia that Voltaire chooses to pay special tribute for her contributions towards universalizing good

laws and towards religious tolerance. Seeing in her his strongest ally in his battle against the infâme, he was quite prepared to overlook her complicity in the death of her husband Peter III and of Prince Ivan, crimes of which she was commonly accused. In writing to Madame du Deffand on May 18, 1767 he says:

Il y a une femme qui s'en fait une [réputation] bien grande, c'est la Sémiramis du nord, qui fait marcher cinquante mille hommes en Pologne pour Etablir la tolérance et la liberté de conscience. C'est une chose unique dans l'histoire de ce monde, et Je vous réponds que cela ira loin. [...] Je sçay bien qu'on lui reproche quelques bagatelles au sujet de son mari, mais ce sont des affaires de famille dont je ne me mêle pas; et d'ailleurs il n'est pas mai qu'on ait une faute à réparer, cela engage à faire de grands Efforts pour forcer le public à l'estime et à l'admiration, et assurément son vilain mari n'auroit fait aucune des grandes choses que ma Catherine fait tous les jours. (Best. D14187)

The desire to remain in Catherine's good graces may account for the omission of Frederick II of Prussia from the list of enlightened European rulers. Voltaire's correspondance for 1767 shows that he was at that date on excellent terms with Frederick who had assisted him in his humanitarian ventures and shared his prejudice against religious orders; however, Frederick had refused to give Catherine the support expected from him in forcing the Polish bishops to tolerate religious dissidents.¹⁰

Voltaire thought of these northern countries, including the Germanic states and Holland, as a block free

from Rome's domination, a hard-core nucleus that would lead and inspire Catholic nations such as France to reform.¹¹ Yet none of these nations on the continent could compare with the shining example of the English nation whose insularity and national character had led to an historic evolution quite different from that of the others.

Voltaire's enthusiasm for England dates from his visit there in 1726-1729, an experience which was crucial to the evolution of his thought. In Chapter VIII of La Princesse de Babylone he cites England as a unique instance of a truly enlightened regime in the eighteenth century. Speaking with more assurance than he had expressed as a younger man in Les Lettres philosophiques, he holds up as an example England's constitutional monarchy safeguarded by the checks and balances of the party system, its judicial system, its concern for human rights, its religious tolerance, its prosperous economy, victorious fleet, and its phenomenal development of the sciences. Since England had previously passed through centuries of barbarism, fanaticism, and political chaos, Voltaire suggests that any nation, however benighted, may be reformed into an enlightened state. In after-dinner conversation at Milord Qu'importe's country house where Amazan is a guest, a member of Parliament, in what amounts to a brief lecture, outlines English constitutional history for the stranger and

exclaims:

Qui croirait que de cet abîme épouvantable, de ce chaos de dissensions, d'atrocités, d'ignorance et de fanatisme, il est enfin résulté le plus parfait gouvernement, peut-être, qui soit aujourd'hui dans le monde? Un roi honoré et riche, tout-puissant pour faire le bien, impuissant pour faire le mal, est à la tête d'une nation libre, guerrière, commerçante et éclairée. Les grands d'un côté, et les représentants des villes de l'autre, partagent la législation avec le monarque.

On avait vu, par une fatalité singulière, le désordre, les guerres civiles, l'anarchie et la pauvreté désoler le pays quand les rois affectaient le pouvoir arbitraire. La tranquillité, la richesse, la félicité publique, n'ont régné chez nous que quand les rois ont reconnu qu'ils n'étaient pas absolus. Tout était subverti quand on disputait sur des choses inintelligibles; tout a été dans l'ordre quand on les a méprisées. Nos flottes victorieuses portent notre gloire sur toutes les mers, et les lois mettent en sûreté nos fortunes; jamais un juge ne peut les expliquer arbitrairement; jamais on ne rend un arrêt qui ne soit motivé. Nous punirions comme des assassins des juges qui oseraient envoyer à la mort un citoyen sans manifester les témoignages qui l'accusent et la loi qui le condamne.

(p.391)

It is of course the French whom Voltaire calls upon to note the inadequacies of their political and judicial institutions, their lack of tolerance and of national spirit. In his appraisal of France he refrains from direct political comment but does speak bitterly of France's judicial code:

il n'y avait nulle proportion entre les délits et les peines. On faisait quelquefois souffrir mille morts à un innocent pour lui faire avouer un crime qu'il n'avait pas commis.

(p.399)

Turning to southern Europe, in particular to Italy

and Spain, Voltaire sees all progress blocked by dominant Catholicism. Yet, even here, there is a hopeful sign in Carlos III of Spain who expelled the Jesuits in 1767 and was trying to modernize Spanish laws.¹² In La Princesse de Babylone Carlos III plays a role in the fairy tale itself by giving assistance to the lovers as they plan to defeat King Bélus' enemies on their way home to Babylon. Carlos is portrayed sympathetically as an endearing old Spaniard, grateful to Amazan for delivering his country from the scourge of the Inquisition:

Un vieux monarque, la couronne en tête, s'avanceit sur un char trainé par huit mules attelées avec des cordes; cent autres chars suivaient. Ils étaient accompagnés de graves personnages en manteau noir et en fraise, montés sur de très beaux chevaux; une multitude de gens à pied suivait en cheveux gras et en silence.

D'abord Amazan fit ranger autour de lui ses Gangarides, et s'avança la lance en arrêt. Dès que le roi l'aperçut, il ôta sa couronne, descendit de son char, embrassa l'étrier d'Amazan, et lui dit: "Homme envoyé de Dieu, vous êtes le vengeur du genre humain, le libérateur de ma patrie, mon protecteur. Ces monstres sacrés dont vous avez purgé la terre étaient mes maîtres au nom du Vieux des sept montagnes [le pape]; j'étais forcé de souffrir leur puissance criminelle. Mon peuple m'aurait abandonné si j'avais voulu seulement modérer leurs abominables atrocités. D'aujourd'hui je respire, je règne, et je vous le dois."

(pp.407-408)

In this assessment of the relative state of Enlightenment on the political scene in Europe, Voltaire accumulates signs of progress didactically.¹³ He envisages the possibility of an enlightened Europe-to-be; for him such

an eventuality would represent a realistic utopia and one that must be attained by any means, even that of force. Deloffre and Hellegouarc'h state that in praising Catherine the Great's armed intervention in Poland in the name of religious tolerance (p.385), Voltaire sanctions war in the name of freedoms and human rights:

Un passage significatif confère le droit, sinon le devoir, au despote qui se prétendra "éclairé", de "communiquer la lumière de proche en proche" [p.381]---mais par quelle autre voie que la voie de la propagande, efficacement soutenue par la force, si besoin est?¹⁴

The passage referred to is the following:

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.
(pp.381-382)

In this conte Voltaire's desire to flatter Catherine leads him to praise her armed intervention in Poland despite his almost constant hatred of war.

The negative propaganda in this conte is typical of Voltaire's polemical writings in that it is directed at those religious institutions which in his eyes were responsible for promoting fanaticism, superstition, and obscurantism. Religious orders are denounced as being against nature and as contributing to the depopulation of

Europe. The rulers of northern Europe are praised for having banned this "usage insensé":

cette coutume [...] 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. (p.386)

The Chinese emperor is reported as having expelled the "bonzes étrangers" (p.379), or Jesuits, for having preached intolerance and for seeking material gain. The French Jansenists are described as "une troupe de sombres fanatiques" (p.399).

The chief targets of Voltaire's satirical pen are the papacy and the Spanish Inquisition. Both are cleverly integrated into the tale itself. In Chapter IX of the conte Amazan plays the naive observer in Rome. His curiosity about Rome and the pope, "le Vieux des sept montagnes" (p.395), is first aroused in England, whereupon he resolves to visit Rome, the seat of ancient grandeur and the home of the mysterious pope. On his arrival in Rome he finds poverty everywhere except in the Vatican which is extremely wealthy thanks to revenue collected from all the Catholic countries of Europe. Amazan has difficulty understanding how the pope, "serviteur des serviteurs" and originally "poissonnier et portier" (p.396), can have such extensive temporal power. His guide explains that the pope's army

consists of the clergy, described as four or five hundred thousand parasitic divine prophets distributed throughout Europe, who often have great influence even over kings. The papacy itself is ridiculed as being pretentious, the doctrine of infallibility as absurd, the pope's ritual blessing as meaningless hocus-pocus. When Amazan learns that if he is granted an audience with the pope, he must first kiss his feet, he bursts into hysterical laughter. The reader unwittingly reacts in the same way. Amazan is amazed at the practice of castrating young male singers for the musical edification of a few and is disgusted by the sexual advances made him by Vatican prelates. He makes a rapid departure.

Il quitta au plus vite cette ville des maîtres du monde, où il fallait baiser un vieillard à l'orteil, comme si sa joue était à son pied, et où l'on n'abordait les jeunes gens qu'avec des cérémonies encore plus bizarres. (p.398)

As for the Spanish Inquisition, as I noted in the structural analysis of the fairy tale, the Spanish inquisitors endanger Esmosante, prompting her rescue by Amazan and the lovers' subsequent reconciliation. To refer to this ecclesiastical judiciary instituted by the pope to fight heresy, Voltaire invents an amusing neologism "antropokaies" based on Greek roots meaning burners of men.¹⁵ Their function is to burn supposed heretics "à petit feu por

l'amor de Dios" (p.405), to seize the worldly goods of their victims, and to appear devout. In the actual auto-da-fé ceremony the chief inquisitor is likened to a large bird of prey, perched above the crowd and surrounded by his young. The inquisitors are destroyed by Amazan, an appropriate use of poetic justice. Carlos III, a voice from eighteenth-century reality, expresses his gratitude that Spain has been purged of these "monstres sacrés" (p.407) whose control over the Spanish people has rendered their king powerless.

Sociological satire

In Chapter III I spoke of the popularity in the eighteenth century of the satirical oriental tale which, while entertaining the reader, forced him to look at his own civilization through the eyes of an Oriental visitor. Given Voltaire's admiration for Rabelais and Swift, and his great interest in comparing the history and mores of the world's nations which found its fullest expression in the Essai sur les moeurs, it is fitting that in La Princesse de Babylone he should not only express his views as a philosophe, but also caricature the national traits of the European peoples encountered by his protagonists.

Satire succeeds only if the target is known to the reader. This explains why Voltaire's satirical sociological comments are limited to the European scene familiar to his

readers. To those acquainted with Voltaire's capacity for vicious, devastating satire, the satirical description of European societies in La Princesse de Babylone will appear as genial and goodhumoured. In this section I shall include a sampling of such comment but will dwell mainly on his treatment of the English and of his fellow countrymen.

Voltaire had a talent for delineating a national type with a few deft strokes of his pen. The Basques are said to be "les peuples qui sautent au pied des Pyrénées". Their homes are not "castels" but rather "chaumières" (p.410). The society of little principalities of southern Germany is said to consist of "un prince et une princesse, des filles d'honneur, et des gueux" (p.394). Dutch women are said to be "froides", the only women in the world indifferent to Amazan's charms (p.387). Voltaire mentions Holland's flourishing book trade and in particular Marc-Michel Rey, the Amsterdam publisher who was willing to publish anti-Christian writings:

La princesse fit acheter chez Marc-Michel Rey tous les contes que l'on avait écrits chez les Ausoniens et chez les Velches, et dont le débit était défendu sagement chez ces peuples pour enrichir les Bataves. (p.388)

To amuse the reader Voltaire assumes a false naiveté in describing literally what Amazan beheld on his arrival in Venice:

La mer formait les rues, les maisons étaient bâties dans l'eau. 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.394)

After these allusions to the canals and to the custom of wearing masks, Voltaire comments on the thriving trade done by the city's twelve thousand prostitutes.

Rome is treated less lightly. Voltaire contrasts the present-day poverty and decadence of Rome with its imperial grandeur of old. He is willing to grant that there are fine Renaissance paintings and some statues dating from Antiquity to be seen in eighteenth-century Rome, but accuses the Romans of being content to rest on past laurels. Amazan's Roman guide admits: "Nous sommes des espèces de fripiers qui tirons notre gloire des vieux habits qui restent dans nos magasins" (p.396).

The Spanish are caricatured as being somber, silent, devout Catholics garbed in black and rosary in hand, completely controlled by the Inquisition. Spanish food is said to be abominable, the worst in Europe. The Spanish ideal of feminine beauty is contrasted humorously with that of northern Europe in the Spaniards' disparaging remarks about Formosante:

elle n'est point si belle, il n'y a de beau que les teints basanés; elle étale une gorge d'albâtre qui est la chose la plus dégoûtante, et qu'on ne connaît point dans nos climats.
(p.405)

The royal progress of kindly old Carlos III must procede "au petit pas" in keeping with the style of "un peuple grave" (p.408). This amusing caricature of the Spanish fits in well with Voltaire's treatment of the crisis revolving around Formosante's rescue from the Inquisition, as a light-hearted burlesque.

Le phénix entre par une lucarne dans la prison où les Gangarides commençaient déjà à enfoncer les portes. L'invincible Amazan les brisait en dehors. Ils sortent tout armés, tous sur leurs licornes; Amazan se met à leur tête. Il n'eut pas de peine à renverser les alguazils, les familiers, les prêtres antropokaies; chaque licorne en perçait des douzaines à la fois. La fulminante d'Amazan coupait en deux tous ceux qu'il rencontrait; le peuple fuyait en manteau noir et fraise sale, toujours tenant à la main ses grains bénits por l'amor de Dios.

Amazan saisit de sa main le grand rechercheur sur son tribunal, et le jette sur le bûcher qui était préparé à quarante pas; il y jeta aussi les autres petits chercheurs l'un après l'autre. Il se prosterne ensuite aux pieds de Formosante.
(p.407)

When it comes to England, called Albion,¹⁶ and to France, Voltaire devotes a chapter to each. Chapter VIII of La Princesse de Babylone contains a most entertaining dramatic sketch in which Amazan meets representatives of the English gentry in the persons of Milord and Milady What-then. The name "What-then"¹⁷, which is used once and is then translated into French as "Qu'importe", is chosen to

characterize the phlegmatic, self-satisfied English country gentleman who is completely lacking in conversational skills and in curiosity about the outside world. This brutish Milord is unruffled by his lovely wife's flirtation with Amazan---with regard to the gentry's conjugal relations, Voltaire points out that husband and wife have separate beds! Nothing can disturb Milord provided that he can enjoy his dinner, drink heavily, smoke, and hunt foxes.

First, Amazan who is on his way to London, encounters Milord Qu'importe who has had a coach accident. With superhuman force Amazan rights the coach and in so doing incurs the anger of the local workman summoned for that purpose, who call Amazan "chien d'étranger" (p.389). Milord Qu'importe is reasonably grateful to Amazan, invites him to dine at his country home, and the two procede to their destination in Amazan's unicorn-drawn carriage. During this trip Milord Qu'importe barely responds when spoken to, but does go so far as to admire the unicorns:

Le voyageur lui dit que ses licornes étaient à son service; qu'il venait avec elles du pays des Gangarides; et il en prit occasion de lui parler de la princesse de Babylone et du fatal baiser qu'elle avait donné au roi d'Egypte: à quoi l'autre ne répliqua rien du tout, se souciant très peu qu'il y eût dans le monde un roi d'Egypte et une princesse de Babylone. Il fut encore un quart d'heure sans parler; après quoi il redemanda à son compagnon comment il faisait faire,¹⁸ et si on mangeait du bon roast-beef dans le pays des Gangarides. (p.389)

Voltaire had ample opportunity to observe this English type during his stay in England. Although his exact movements for the period May 1726 to February 1729 cannot be traced, it is known that much of his time was spent outside London. During the first few months of his exile he stayed at an unnamed country retreat.¹⁹ We know that he visited Lord Melcombe (Dodington) at Eastbury,²⁰ the Duchess of Marlborough at Blenheim,²¹ Pope at Twickenham, and the Bolingbrokes at Dawley near Uxbridge as well as in London.²² Many of his letters are dated at Wandsworth, a country village outside London.

The incident of the coach accident probably has its source in an accident that befell the poet Pope on September 9, 1726 as he was returning home from Dawley in Lord Bolingbroke's coach. As it was passing through a stream, the coach-and-six was overturned. Pope cut his fingers on the broken carriage glass as he was being rescued.²³ Voltaire's letter to Pope expressing his concern has come down to us: Best. D301.

In the next scene of the sketch we are presented with Amazan's hostess, Milady Qu'importe who is quite different from the common run of English women described by Voltaire as awkward, aloof, and disdainful in manner, a pose adopted to hide their lack of wit and of ideas. Milady Qu'importe is "charmante", "engageante", possessing all the social

graces and "une âme aussi vive et aussi sensible que celle de son mari était indifférente" (p.389). She is so enamoured of Amazan that "elle lui écrivit un petit billet, ne doutant pas qu'il ne vint lui faire la cour dans son lit, tandis que milord Qu'importe dormait dans le sien" (p.393). Amazan declines courageously and, hitching up the unicorns, makes his escape leaving Milady despondent.

The portrait of the captivating Milady Qu'importe is so convincingly real that the identity of the lady in question becomes an issue. In his article "Voltaire et l'Angleterre d'après La Princesse de Babylone", S. B. Liljegren seeks in vain for the personalities in question.²⁴ Here I shall digress from the subject of Voltaire's satirical comments on the English gentry in general in order to document my suggestion that Milord and Milady Qu'importe are no other than Henry St. John, Viscount Bolingbroke and his second wife Marie Claire Deschamps de Marcilly.

This hypothesis is based on a reading of Voltaire's correspondence for 1726-29 and of the notebooks which date from the English period. Lord Bolingbroke, English statesman and writer was Voltaire's first philosophic mentor. Bolingbroke, champion of the Tory party, left England in political disgrace on the accession of George I, settled on an estate near Orléans in France, and in 1720 married Marie Claire Deschamps de Marcilly, a wealthy

aristocrat, widow of the Marquis de Villette and influential in French society.²⁵ Voltaire visited the Bolingbrokes at Orléans and relied on their kindness to launch him in English society and the literary world in 1726.²⁶ In his book Voltaire's Visit to England, Archibald Ballantyne gives the text of a letter written in 1726 by Lady Bolingbroke on Voltaire's behalf to a Mrs. Howard, also known as Countess of Suffolk, who was in the intimate circle of the Princess of Wales who became Queen Caroline in 1727. The letter is a gracious request that Mrs. Howard ask the Princess of Wales to favour Voltaire.²⁷

My interest in the second Lady Bolingbroke as a model for Milady Qu'importe was kindled on reading a letter written by Voltaire in an unusually intimate tone to John Brinsden, Bolingbroke's secretary, for the specific purpose of asking for news of Lady Bolingbroke's health.

But dear John be so kind as to let me know how does mylady Ballingbrooke. As to mylord j left him so well j don't doubt he is so still. But j am very uneasie about mylady. If she might have as much health as she has spirit and witt, sure she would be the strongest body in england. Pray dear s^r write me something of her.

(Best.D338)

In the "Small Leningrad Notebook" Voltaire says that Bolingbroke was "as great whoremaster as great statesman",²⁸ suggesting that indeed one need not be concerned about his physical strength. The Dictionary of National Biography

describes Bolingbroke as acting the part of the country gentleman and farmer at Uxbridge, and as being a hard drinker and fond of hunting with country squires. It is possible that Voltaire had this side of Lord Bolingbroke in mind in portraying Milord Qu'importe. The fact that the second Lady Bolingbroke was French does not disqualify her as a model for Milady Qu'importe; on the contrary, it might account for her appeal in Voltaire's eyes. Lady Bolingbroke is reported to have been greatly admired for her wit and diplomacy in political circles.²⁹ In La Princesse de Babylone the fictional lady is portrayed as being hostess to a cosmopolitan group:

Plusieurs seigneurs albioniens étaient venus ce jour-là dîner avec elle. Il y avait des caractères de toutes les espèces; car, le pays n'ayant presque jamais été gouverné que par des étrangers, les familles venues avec ces princes avaient toutes apporté des mœurs différentes.

(p.389)

The evidence presented supports the view that the fictional characters presented in this sketch of the English gentry are based on Lord and Lady Bolingbroke.

Personal reminiscences seem to play a part only in the chapter on England. Voltaire's satire of the French, found in Chapter X of La Princesse de Babylone, is very different in spirit from that of the English. Despite the use of the past tense, he is not drawing on personal

memories but on his own perceptions of the contemporary French mentality.

Voltaire's attitude towards his native land was necessarily an ambivalent one. A Frenchman and a Parisian by birth, Voltaire's sentimental attachment to French life, culture and the arts was very great. All during the Ferney period, Voltaire kept abreast of the French political, intellectual, and artistic scene through his voluminous correspondence and by ordering French books.

In Chapter X of La Princesse de Babylone he describes Parisians as ignorant, frivolous epicureans completely given over to the incomparable pleasures of Parisian social life,³⁰ but apathetic to what Voltaire holds dear: justice, human rights, and artistic and intellectual excellence. He deplores their callous indifference to human suffering, to injustice, and to the practice of barbaric cruelty in cases such as that of the Chevalier de la Barre (p.399), and their lack of concern about the decline of the arts since the glorious days of Lous XIV:

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. La vanité protégea des artistes qui ramenaient les temps de la barbarie; et cette même vanité, en persécutant les talents véritables, les força de quitter leur patrie; les frelons firent disparaître les abeilles.

Presque plus de véritables arts, presque plus de génie; le mérite consistait à raisonner à tort et à travers sur le mérite du siècle passé; le barbouilleur des murs d'un cabaret critiquait savamment les tableaux des grands

peintres; les barbouilleurs de papier défiguraient les ouvrages des grands écrivains. L'ignorance et le mauvais goût avaient d'autres barbouilleurs à leurs gages; on répétait les mêmes choses dans cent volumes sous des titres différents. Tout était ou dictionnaire ou brochure.

(p.400)

In La Princesse de Babylone, in Les Scythes where Ecbatane means Paris, and in Candide, Voltaire implies that Paris breeds moral decadence. In Candide and in La Princesse de Babylone it is in Paris that the faithful lover is seduced by another woman---in Amazan's case by a woman of easy morals from the theatrical world, a singer at the opera, or as Voltaire puns, "une fille d'affaire" (p.401).³¹ Although Amazan realizes at once the enormity of his betrayal of Formosante, his new Parisian friends try to dissuade him from leaving the voluptuous life unique to Paris, and make light of his peccadillo. On learning that Formosante is Amazan's cousin, they say: "On se pardonne [...] ces petites frasques entre parents, sans quoi il faudrait passer sa vie dans d'éternelles querelles" (p.404).

Despite this satirical view of his countrymen, Voltaire betrays his fondness for them in the scene in which Amazan takes his leave:

enfin il prit congé d'eux en les embrassant, en leur faisant accepter les diamants de son pays les mieux montés, en leur recommandant d'être toujours légers et frivoles, puisqu'ils n'en étaient que plus aimables et plus heureux. "Les Germains, disait-il, sont les vieillards de l'Europe; les peuples d'Albion sont les hommes faits; les habitants de la

Gaule sont les enfants, et j'aime à jouer avec eux."
(p.404)

* * *

It is abundantly clear that the text of La Princesse de Babylone is very rich in content. In what is essentially an oriental fantasy Voltaire has incorporated political comment, satire, and his ideas on the state of the arts in France. Pierre Grimal sees this as a major weakness in the conte. He criticizes :

le manque [...] d'harmonie entre les deux parties de cet ouvrage, la juxtaposition d'une aventure orientale et d'un voyage philosophique à travers l'Europe, d'un conte de fées et d'une satire sociologique.³²

He sees a jarring duality in the work. Others see a complete divorce between the interests of the fairytale travellers and the philosophic and satiric comment on the countries they visit. I shall address this problem of unity in the next chapter, but before doing so I shall give an account of an even more disturbing addition to the conte: the last page and a half of La Princesse de Babylone contain a malicious invocation to the Muses in which Voltaire ostensibly begs for protection from his enemies whom he attacks with vicious humour.

Personal invective

There is no denying that Voltaire had an unusual

propensity for engaging in verbal feuds with those individuals who crossed him, who misrepresented his words, or who in Voltaire's eyes were symbols of the enemy l'infâme. Many of Voltaire's friends---Madame de Graffigny,³³ the Duchess of Saxe-Gotha (Best. D14350), Voltaire's Genevan doctor Théodore Tronchin,³⁴ D'Alembert (Best. D14333),³⁵ and Frederick II³⁶---regretted Voltaire's excessive sensitivity to attacks which should have passed without his taking notice, and the energy he expended in vindictive counteraction. Nuçi Kotta gives an account of letters exchanged between D'Alembert and Frederick II in which D'Alembert tells Frederick that although he too wishes that Voltaire could ignore the gadflies who disturb his peace, all attempts over the years to dissuade him from making a spectacle of himself by indulging in petty feuds and in so doing tarnishing his image as one who is at the service of mankind, have proven fruitless.³⁷

Without going into the details of the feuds which are alluded to in the surprising polemical outburst announced by the words "O Muses", I shall attempt to give a succinct explanation of the identity of the persons whom Voltaire attacks here and of his chief grievances against them.

First, without naming the offenders, Voltaire refers to those who have pirated editions of, or written apocryphal

sequels to Candide, L'Ingénu, and La Pucelle, as "continuateurs téméraires" (p.413).

The first individual attacked by name is Coger.

Voltaire beseeches the Muses:

imposez silence au détestable Coger, professeur de bavarderie au collège Mazarin, qui n'a pas été content des discours moraux de Bélisaire et de l'empereur Justinien, et qui a écrit de vilains libelles diffamatoires contre ces deux grands hommes. (p.413)

Coger was professor of rhetoric and secretary to Ribalier,³⁸ principal of Mazarin College, part of the Sorbonne (Best. D14368). Voltaire had championed Marmontel's philosophic didactic novel Bélisaire, published in February 1767 and promptly censured by the Sorbonne. Voltaire's defence of the work, Anecdote sur Bélisaire, was in circulation by the end of March.³⁹ Coger enraged Voltaire by denouncing Marmontel's attacks on Christianity in his Examen du Bélisaire de M. Marmontel which Coger was already circulating in a revised edition by mid-summer (Best. D14342). It is to these writings that Voltaire refers as "vilains libelles diffamatoires" (p.413).

Voltaire's most lengthy attack is directed at the learned scholar, Pierre Henri Larcher, known for his translations into French of various English works and of Euripides' Electra and of Herodotus' History as well as for his great classical erudition. In his Supplément à la

Philosophie de l'histoire published about March 20, 1767,⁴⁰ Larcher, himself a specialist in the history of the Ancients, pointed out the shoddy scholarship and prejudiced views to be found in Voltaire's Philosophie de l'histoire 1765, a work in which Voltaire debunks the traditional Christian view of world history by a comparative study of ancient traditions, and urges that critical reason be applied to historical material to determine what is true and what is myth or supposition. Larcher selected sixty passages of Voltaire's text and used them to point out errors, plagiarisms, faulty quotations, and misinterpretations, and to prove Voltaire's general incompetence in the realm of solid historic documentation.⁴¹ Although Voltaire knew that the Supplément à la Philosophie de l'histoire would be read only by scholars (Best. D14230), he could not bear to be so discredited, and dashed off a reply of 136 pages entitled La Défense de mon oncle.⁴² This appeared at the end of June 1767.

Not content with this formal counterattack, Voltaire availed himself of every opportunity to vent his spleen at Larcher's expense. In La Princesse de Babylone he calls Larcher a pedant and a paederast. As he had done in La Défense de mon oncle, he grossly distorts Larcher's arguments about the practice of prostitution in Babylonian temples⁴³ and about the practice of homosexuality in Persia.⁴⁴

Voltaire makes a charge of bestiality out of Larcher's reference to an Egyptian spiritual cult of Pan in the form of a ram.⁴⁵ With devilish wit and humour Voltaire makes Larcher appear lewd and ridiculous. No doubt Voltaire felt on firm ground in accusing Larcher of mistaking Abbé Gédoyne for the Abbé de Châteauneuf as a lover of the famous courtesan Ninon de l'Enclos, for Voltaire was personally acquainted with all three parties. The two abbés were family friends; it was the Abbé de Châteauneuf, Voltaire's godfather, who introduced the boy Voltaire to Ninon who, on her death, left one thousand francs to young Voltaire with which to buy books. José-Michel Moureaux points out that it was commonly reported that Nicolas Gédoyne had been a favourite of Ninon's in her sixties,⁴⁶ so Larcher probably had as much truth on his side as had Voltaire.

Voltaire could not neglect an opportunity to attack Elie Fréron, an influential literary critic and founder of the Année littéraire, with whom he had been engaged in a feud demeaning to both parties since 1749.⁴⁷ On the last page of La Princesse de Babylone he challenges Fréron to give a bad review of the conte, for in so doing people will be encouraged to read it. Less acceptable are his slanderous suggestions that Fréron was a Jesuit,⁴⁸ that he had been incarcerated at Bicêtre, a prison for criminals,⁴⁹ and that he was the son of another old enemy of Voltaire,

Abbé Desfontaines, a notorious homosexual.⁵⁰ Voltaire had the pleasure of confounding two enemies at once because it occurred to him that as a young man Fréron had his start in journalism with Desfontaines' review Observations sur les ouvrages des modernes.⁵¹ His implacable hatred led him to exult at his public mockery of Fréron in L'Ecossaise (p.414), a comedy written in 1760 in which Voltaire had Fréron appear as Frelon, a literary critic made into a figure of fun.

Finally the editor of the Jansenist publication Nouvelles ecclésiastiques, which Voltaire despised for its coverage of so-called miracles connected with convulsionaries such as the two named---Abbé Bécherand and Abraham Chaumeix⁵²---, is challenged to do his utmost to have La Princesse de Babylone condemned by the Sorbonne.

So ends La Princesse de Babylone. Even in the eighteenth century, many readers would be mystified by these echoes of Voltaire's personal enmities. Of course, those in the know would have found this diatribe particularly funny. Larcher had the good grace to find the remarks concerning him "fort plaisant, écrit avec beaucoup de grâces et de sel" (Best. D18104).⁵³ To-day's scholars also consider the "O Muses" passage a tour de force. Moureaux says that "Coger et Larcher y sont successivement pris à partie avec une drôlerie irrésistible".⁵⁴ Pomeau praises it as a

"morceau étourdissant, prodigieux de méchanceté amusante, et totalement imprévu"⁵⁵, and explains this inclusion of personal invective in the conte as a manifestation of Voltaire's exceptional exuberance and vitality that even in this area cannot be contained and spills over into the conte in hand.⁵⁶ I shall consider the effect and the merit of the "O Muses" passage on the unity of the work as a whole in the following chapters.

NOTES TO CHAPTER VIII

¹Grimal, p.35.

²Annie Christiane Bertrand-Guy, Voyages et mouvements dans les contes philosophiques de Voltaire (Ann Arbor, Michigan: University Microfilm International, 1978), p.135.

³Scherer, p.129.

⁴La Géographie des philosophes, géographes et voyageurs français au XVIII^e siècle (Paris, 1975), p.263, quoted by Scherer in "Quelques ambitions du roman voltairien", p.130.

⁵Scherer, p.131: "La carte de géographie est enfin l'indice d'une civilisation supérieure. Il est significatif que Voltaire ait tenu à mettre ces merveilles au crédit de l'Angleterre. Le don de la carte est le point culminant d'une série d'hommages par lesquels l'Angleterre acquiert dans La Princesse de Babylone un statut tout à fait privilégié."

⁶A 1768 edition of La Princesse de Babylone put out by Lejay, quai de Gèvres, Paris, in which the text was modified and divided into 22 chapters instead of 11, was entitled Voyage et aventures d'une princesse babylonienne Pour servir de suite à ceux de Scarmentado Par un vieux philosophe qui ne radote pas toujours. B.N. call number Rés. Z Beuchot 884.

⁷Pléiade, "Introduction générale", p.lxviii.

⁸Ibid., "Notice", p.1012.

⁹See Voltaire's reaction to Christian VII's letter in Best. D13917, Best. D13918, and Best. D14668.

¹⁰In a letter to Frederick written on March 3, 1767 Voltaire asks: "Est-ce le Roi de Pologne, qui ne pouvant par lui même venir à bout de ses Evêques s'est voulu

secrettement apuier de vôtre Majesté, de la Russie, de l'Angleterre et du Dannemarck, et qui n'est actuellement apuié que de la Russie? Est-ce L'impératrice de Russie qui soutient seule à présent le fardeau qu'elle avait voulu partager avec trois puissances?" (Best. D14012). Frederick in a letter written January 16, 1767, had clearly stated that he would not intervene in the Poland affair (Best. D13855).

¹¹In 1767 Voltaire's correspondence is filled with comments in this vein. "C'est dans le nord qu'il faudra voyager pour apprendre à penser et à sentir" (Best. D13917). "Tout vient du nord" (Best. D13918). "O Welches [Parisians], pauvres Welches, quand l'étoile du nord pourra-t-elle vous illuminer?" (Best. D14405).

¹²Pléiade, p.1053.

¹³The same optimistic assessment of the state of the enlightenment in Europe is tersely expressed in one page of text in L'Homme aux quarante écus published in Feb. 1768. In a chapter entitled "Le Bon Sens de M. André" which foreshadows L'Eloge historique de la raison written in 1774, Voltaire writes "la raison voyage à petites journées, du nord au midi, avec ses deux intimes amies, l'Expérience et la Tolérance." The North is won and there is even some hope in the South of Europe. Here Voltaire is more openly optimistic about France: "Elle [la Raison] a de temps en temps de cruels ennemis en France; mais elle y a tant d'amis qu'il faudra bien à la fin qu'elle y soit premier ministre" (Pléiade, p.469).

¹⁴Pléiade, "Notice", p.1014.

¹⁵Pléiade, p.1052.

¹⁶The entry for Albion in Moréri is as follows: "On connoit anciennement ce nom à la grande Bretagne à cause de ses falaises ou rochers qui paraissaient blancs à ceux qui s'en approchoient et qui faisoient découvrir cette Isle de loin."

¹⁷A twentieth-century equivalent might be Milord So what!

¹⁸A comical literal translation of "How dye do".

¹⁹See Besterman's commentary to Best. D299.

²⁰Archibald Ballantyne, Voltaire's Visit to England (Genève: Slatkine Reprints, 1970), p.95.

²¹Ibid., p.104.

²²Ibid., p.105.

²³See commentary to Best. D301 and Ballantyne, p.73.

²⁴S. B. Liljegren, "Voltaire et l'Angleterre d'après La Princesse de Babylone" in Mélanges de Philologie offerts à M. Johan Melander (Uppsala: Lundquist, 1943), p.233.

²⁵See Dictionary of National Biography (Oxford University Press), Vol. XVII, pp. 618-633 for a lengthy account of the Bolingbrokes.

²⁶Mason, Voltaire, p.6 and 14-16.

²⁷Ballantyne, pp. 65-66. Source - British Museum Add. MSS. 22,627; fol. 75.

²⁸Notebooks, vol. 81 of The Complete Works of Voltaire (Genève: Institut et musée Voltaire, University of Toronto Press, 1968), p.61.

²⁹See note 25.

³⁰In passing Voltaire pays a compliment to Madame Geoffrin and her social circle. See p.401 and Pléiade, p.1050, note 1.

³¹The choice of an opera girl was inspired by an unpleasant incident which occurred in 1767. Voltaire was wrongly accused of having written satiric verses against a M. Dorat ridiculing his poetry and making fun of his relations with his latest mistress who was an opera girl. See Best. D14617 and Best. D14791.

³²Grimal, p.35.

³³See Best. D1700 and Best. D1807 mentioned in Mason, p.96.

³⁴See Best. D6985 also quoted in Mason, p.96.

³⁵See also Kotta, pp. 137-138.

³⁶Kotta, pp. 137-138.

³⁷Ibid.

³⁸Ribalier is mentioned at the very end of the invocation (p.414) as one who as principal of Mazarin College might have La Princesse de Babylone censored by the Sorbonne. He was the representative of the Sorbonne who had registered official objections to Marmontel's Bélisaire (Pléiade, p.1057, n.5).

³⁹Mason, p.112.

⁴⁰Voltaire, La Défense de mon oncle, ed. José-Michel Moureaux, The Complete Works of Voltaire (Oxford: The Voltaire Foundation, 1984), Vol. 64, p.21.

⁴¹Moureaux, pp. 70-71.

⁴²La Philosophie de l'histoire was supposed to be the work of the late Abbé Bazin, edited and published posthumously by his nephew. For the sake of continuity Voltaire's reply to Larcher's corrections was entitled La Défense de mon oncle.

³See Moureaux's critical edition of La Défense de mon oncle, Chapter II and p.278, n.5.

⁴Ibid., Chapter V and notes on p.291.

⁵Ibid., Chapter VII and note 8, pp. 301-302.

⁶Ibid., notes 18 and 19, pp. 309-310. Ninon's sexual appeal at an advanced age was cited as comparable to that of the biblical Sara.

⁷Mason, pp. 94-95.

⁸Fréron was no more a Jesuit than was Voltaire. Both had attended the Collège Louis-le-Grand run by the Jesuits.

⁹Imprudent authors were detained at the Bastille not at Bicêtre as Voltaire well knew.

¹⁰The bad feeling between Voltaire and Desfontaines dates back many years. It began when Desfontaines responded to Voltaire's kindness in facilitating his release from Bicêtre in 1725 where he had been imprisoned for sodomy, by writing slander against him. This led to a feud whose climax was reached when Desfontaines published La Voltairomanie in 1738. In this case Voltaire's fury abated with time.

¹¹Pléiade, pp. 1056-57, n.3.

¹²Ibid., p.1050, n.3 and p.1057, n.4.

¹³Moureaux, p.98 and n.17.

¹⁴Ibid.

¹⁵Pomeau, "Introduction" to the Garnier-Flammarion edition of Romans et contes, p.16.

⁵⁶Pomeau, Romans et contes, Garnier Flammarion, p.447.

CHAPTER IX

THE PROBLEM OF UNITY

La Princesse de Babylone has been criticized for a lack of unity. I have noted that Grimal accused Voltaire of juxtaposing two unrelated modes: an oriental fairy tale and a satirical, philosophic critique of Europe. Vivienne Mylne praises the straightforward exposition of the oriental fairy tale found in Chapters I to IV; however, she claims that the section providing Voltaire with the opportunity for philosophic comment---namely Chapters V to X which describe Formosante's pursuit of Amazan from country to country---does not proceed naturally from Chapters I to IV; the tale seems to her disjointed.¹ René Pomeau calls the journey motif pure pretext for Voltaire's need to expound philosophic views.² Scherer states that in his opinion the satirical description of Europe is "sans rapport avec les sentiments réels des personnages".³ I have also noted the startling "O Muses" passage of personal invective appended to the fairy tale's denouement as a sort of coda and requiring an explanation. It is my purpose here to demonstrate the artistry and skill with which Voltaire has integrated his material, for I hold strongly that these charges of disunity and of poor motivation are false when one takes into account the literary devices and techniques

used in oriental tales of the time.

Eighteenth-century adventure tales, picaresque novels, and oriental contes are generally episodic in structure and with no compelling logical sequence of events.⁴ We have seen that the most famous collections of oriental tales, Galland's translation of Les Mille et une nuits and Pétis de la Croix's Les Mille et un jours, are collections of stories brought together on the tenuous pretext that they are told by the same narrator. Voltaire perfected the philosophic tale by adopting and adapting literary devices and techniques of his day.⁵ He was of course familiar with French satirical and philosophic oriental tales used to convey propaganda. In La Princesse de Babylone he combined the oriental fairy tale with the traditional love quest knowing that the journey motif inherent in the quest would also serve as a vehicle for his ideas. The journey motif, however complicated and repetitive in its components, was an accepted literary mode and one whose overall effect was to give coherence and unity to a tale.⁶ In Chapter V I demonstrated that according to Propp's system of analysis, La Princesse de Babylone has the inherent structure and logic of a fairy tale. I shall now go on to show how Voltaire unifies and integrates the satirical and philosophic elements of the conte into the whole.

There are many factors which contribute to the unity of La Princesse de Babylone. The first four chapters of the conte are devoted to the exposition of the oriental tale which, while conveying an Arabian Nights' atmosphere of splendour and fantasy, is clear and concise. Attention is focussed at once on the protagonists---Amazan, Formosante, and their helper, the Phoenix. At no time in the conte does the reader lose track of these three characters. The story's action is chronological and easy to follow. Despite the complexity of the imaginary journey, the reader is conscious only of following the wanderings of Amazan as victimized hero or of observing the desperate attempts of Formosante, the heroine-seeker, to catch up with him.

As in his more famous oriental conte Zadig, Voltaire chooses the city of Babylon as a basic setting for La Princesse de Babylone. Babylon is the "lieu central" which Scherer defines as "un endroit satisfaisant, malgré les inconvénients qu'il peut comporter, et où le personnage, qui y vit au début du roman et y revient après ses aventures, est heureux".⁷ La Princesse de Babylone begins with an elaborate description of the Babylonian court. Babylon is the scene of the entire exposition of the tale. King Bélus as head of state remains in Babylon to organize the defence of his kingdom against the threatened attack of the Kings of Egypt, India, and Scythia. All the other fairytale

characters are motivated to leave Babylon for various reasons, but in the end, all return there for the wedding of Amazan and Formosante.

Once the oriental fairy tale is firmly established, Voltaire is free to develop the love quest with its inherent journey. There can be no doubt at all about the motivation of the love quest. When Formosante learns from Amazan's mother that he, believing Formosante to be false to him, has set off in mad despair to wander through the world, she is ready to pursue him to the ends of the universe if necessary to put things to rights:

Mais où est Aldée-Amazan? où est mon parent, mon amant, mon roi? où est ma vie? quel chemin a-t-il pris? J'irais le chercher dans tous les globes que l'Eternel a formés, et dont il est le plus bel ornement. J'irais dans l'étoile Canope, dans Shcath, dans Aldebaran; j'irais le convaincre de mon amour et de mon innocence. (p.378)

Formosante follows Amazan to at least eleven destinations mentioned specifically. Her journey begins with her frightening encounter with the King of Egypt and ends with the auto-da-fé peril. One might expect the author of an oriental fairy tale to relate more dangers and obstacles met on such a quest. Voltaire does not do so. Instead he weaves satire and propaganda into the fabric of the long and complex journey.

La Princesse de Babylone has been criticized for the

fact that the eleven stages of Formosante's pursuit are based on one simple mechanism which the author sets forth brazenly at mid-point after Amazan's brief stops in Scandinavia and Poland:

En parcourant tous ces pays si différents de sa patrie, Amazan refusait constamment toutes les bonnes fortunes qui se présentaient à lui, toujours désespéré du baiser que Formosante avait donné au roi d'Egypte, toujours affermi dans son inconcevable résolution de donner à Formosante l'exemple d'une fidélité unique et inébranlable.

La princesse de Babylone avec le Phénix le suivait partout à la piste, et ne le manquait jamais que d'un jour ou deux, sans que l'un se lassât de courir, et sans que l'autre perdît un moment à le suivre. (p.386)

Scherer refers to this mechanism as an example of "la brutalité non dissimulée des techniques romanesques" in this conte, yet he is quick to add that La Princesse de Babylone's appeal triumphs over what he sees as technical weakness.⁹

In actual fact, with the exception of the perfunctory mention of Amazan's stops in Scandinavia and Poland which is followed by a reminder to the reader of the pursuit pattern (see quote above), admittedly a weak point in the texture of the fairy tale, Voltaire gives the visit to each country in the course of the philosophic journey a dramatic treatment so as to capture the reader's interest and to distract attention from the underlying mechanism. He does this by giving one of the three protagonists, Formosante,

Amazan, and the Phoenix, a solo role. (The lovers do not meet face to face until they are reconciled in Spain.) Formosante is featured in scenes rich in local colour and dialogue: the scene in which Formosante confronts Amazan's mother in the Land of the Gangarides, the scene in which Formosante dines with the Chinese emperor, and the scene in which Formosante is unexpectedly reunited with her cousin Aldée in Scythia. The Phoenix replaces Formosante as spokesman in Russia. When, weary from travelling, Formosante retires to her chambers, she leaves the wise bird to inquire of a senior Russian officer, who is appropriately also a naturalist, as to who is responsible for the startling progress made by that nation.

In England, Italy, and France it is Amazan who observes and reacts to what he sees about him. The satirical and philosophic comment here is more intense and far reaching because it concerns the English system of government that Voltaire admires and the papacy which he hates; it is destined for serious discussion by males, those who were generally more active in public life. I have already discussed the dramatization of the English visit and the clever satirical sketch of Amazan's brief stay in Venice and Rome.⁹

The itinerary Amazan follows is given plausibility for, in the journeys undertaken to England and to Italy,

the reader is made aware of Amazan's intellectual curiosity and intentions of visiting these places well in advance. While visiting Holland, Amazan learns of the fine reputation of England's constitutional monarchy:

Amazan avait entendu parler chez les Bataves avec tant d'éloges d'une certaine île nommée Albion, qu'il s'était déterminé à s'embarquer, lui et ses licornes, sur un vaisseau qui, par un vent d'orient favorable, l'avait porté en quatre heures au rivage de cette terre plus célèbre que Tyr et que l'île Atlantide. (p.387)

In England a member of Parliament arouses his interest in the power of ancient Rome and in the institution of the papacy; Amazan expresses a wish to visit a people who once had such power over England:

"m'ayant imposé la loi de courir le monde, et de m'éviter moi-même, je serais curieux de voir cette antique terre de Saturne, ce peuple du Tibre et des sept montagnes à qui vous avez obéi autrefois." (p.392)

When Amazan arrives in Paris, Voltaire shows us how the sternly virtuous hero is affected by the pleasures characteristic of Parisian social life with its conviviality, wit, fine cuisine, wine, beauty, and song.

Il sentait son âme s'amollir et se dissoudre comme les aromates de son pays se fondent doucement à un feu modéré, et s'exhalent en parfums délicieux. (p.401)

The way is prepared for Amazan's moral lapse.

In Zadiq and Candide Voltaire uses the cumulative

effect of a whole chain of instances of misfortune or injustice to drive a point home. Repetition is a tool of didacticism. In La Princesse de Babylone each stage of the quest-philosophic journey has a twofold cumulative effect, a telling indication of how cleverly Voltaire has integrated the two.

As far as the fairy tale is concerned, each stopping point serves to offer cumulative proof of Amazan's constancy in love and of Formosante's gratitude on learning this and of her ever-increasing desire to reach him. The lengthy duration of the love quest heightens the dramatic effect of the climax reached in Chapter X when Formosante at last finds Amazan asleep in the arms of the "fille d'affaire", the opera girl. The reader who has anticipated an instant reconciliation and rapturous reunion of the lovers, accepts the amusing reversal of roles brought about by Amazan's single infidelity and is carried rapidly on into the second and shorter move of the fairy tale in which Amazan becomes the seeker of Formosante, now the victimized heroine. This new development is quickly resolved into the expected happy ending in Chapter XI.

In the philosophic journey Voltaire uses the cumulative effect didactically by citing many hopeful signs of an enlightened Europe in the making and by repeating his negative judgments of Catholic institutions as the chief

opposition to intellectual, moral, and social progress.

The danger in the treatment of any episodic tale is that there may be a lack of balance between incidents or that the author may digress from the storyline in order to treat subjects of personal interest to him. On only three occasions in La Princesse de Babylone is the reader conscious of being lectured to or fed information in excess of comment which fits easily into the tale. These are as follows: the Russian officer's praise of Catherine the Great which is a page in length; the English member of Parliament's mini-lecture on British constitutional history, two and a half pages long; and the narrator's description of French apathy with respect to the practice of justice and of decadence in the arts, likewise two and a half pages long. Scherer criticizes the inclusion of this material as being totally unrelated to the interests of the protagonists and consequently a weakness in the conte:

Dans ces courses éperdues, il faut se hâter de procéder à la description satirique des lieux qui est le principal avantage littéraire du thème du voyage; encore cette description est-elle sans rapport avec les sentiments réels des personnages, et Voltaire a bien vu que cette absence de rapport serait, pour une esthétique humaniste, une cause de faiblesse du roman. Quand il est question des querelles religieuses à Paris, il remarque (Ch. 10): "Amazan ne savait rien de tout cela; et, quand il l'aurait su, il ne s'en serait guère embarrassé, n'ayant la tête remplie que de la princesse de Babylone, du roi de l'Egypte, et de son serment inviolable de mépriser toutes les coquetteries des dames, dans quelque pays que le chagrin conduisit ses pas."¹⁰

The quote above taken from p.400 of the conte, proves that Voltaire was very conscious at all times of the dual function of the imaginary journey. The narrator admits that Amazan is not interested in the state of the arts and in religious disputes in France, and with a graceful pirouette he refocusses our attention on the fairy tale itself. The narrative is swiftly resumed. With these three exceptions, the fusion of philosophic commentary and of fairytale content creates a blend of entertaining and thought-provoking content ideally suited to simultaneously please and instruct.

A strong unifying force in La Princesse de Babylone is the narrator's presence throughout. Although in the fairy tale itself, the narrator does not speak in the first person until Chapter VIII and then once only, there are many signs of his presence to be found in the narrative.

From the outset the narrator enters into a sort of complicity with the reader. In the very opening sentences of the conte Voltaire adopts a mock-heroic tone and a playful tongue-in-cheek attitude towards his fairytale protagonists and their adventures, indicative of his intention of parodying the Mille et une nuits tradition for his own and the reader's enjoyment:

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.349)

In this Voltaire was influenced by Hamilton's treatment of Le Béliet¹¹ in which Hamilton set out to ridicule the vogue of oriental contes and ended up beguiling himself and his readers. Vivienne Mylne states that Voltaire admired Hamilton's ironic comments as narrator and described Hamilton as "le premier qui ait fait des romans dans un goût plaisant, qui n'est pas le burlesque de Scarron".¹²

The narrator makes joking asides to us in an intimate conversational tone; for example, on the second page, in mentioning Praxiteles' supposed use of lovely Formosante as a model for his statues of voluptuous goddesses, he unexpectedly exclaims: "Quelle différence, ô ciel! de l'original aux copies!" (p.350). The text is dotted with humorous witticisms such as this grudging admiration for Amazan's elderly mother: "c'était une dame d'environ trois cents années; mais elle avait encore de beaux restes" (p.376). The conte is unified by the narrator's spirit of fun which is not only expressed in humorous remarks but in the telling of the fairy tale itself. It is particularly evident in the account of the reception given Formosante on her arrival in the Land of the Gangarides (See chapter VII),

in the rescue manoeuvre in Spain (See chapter VIII), in the melodrama of the scene in which Formosante finds her lover in "flagrant délit", and in the scene of recognition when Formosante learns that Amazan and his mother are closely related to Bélus, Princess Aldée, and herself. Here is the way in which Voltaire presents Formosante's long-awaited reunion with Amazan in Paris:

Elle se fit conduire à son hôtel; elle entra, le coeur palpitant d'amour; toute son âme était pénétrée de l'inexprimable joie de revoir enfin dans son amant le modèle de la constance. Rien ne put l'empêcher d'entrer dans sa chambre; les rideaux étaient ouverts: elle vit le bel Amazan dormant entre les bras d'une jolie brune. Ils avaient tous deux un très grand besoin de repos.

Formosante jeta un cri de douleur qui retentit dans toute la maison, mais qui ne put éveiller ni son cousin, ni la fille d'affaire. Elle tomba pâmée entre les bras d'Irla.

(p.402)

Jacqueline Hellegouarc'h has discovered another act of complicity on the part of the narrator in La Princesse de Babylone. In her recent article "Quelques mots clins d'oeil chez Voltaire", she documents Voltaire's repetitive use in this conte of certain seemingly innocent words or wordings which are in fact allusions either to incidents in Voltaire's past or to his current disputes. For instance, the heroine, Formosante, is designated by her title "Princesse de Babylone" in the title and more than twenty times in the conte, without apparent reason. Hellegouarc'h explains:

Désignée comme la Princesse de Babylone, l'héroïne perd de son individualité pour devenir un type, et l'attention est attirée sur Babylone. Les contemporains qui viennent de lire l'"Apologie des dames de Babylone"---chapitre 2 de la Défense de mon oncle--- feront le rapprochement: ils verront en elle la Babylonienne exemplaire, et, dans le récit du voyage qu'elle fait à travers le monde pour retrouver celui qu'elle veut épouser et auquel elle garde une fidélité inébranlable, une apologie en images de la "dame de Babylone" qui représente toutes les autres, et un nouveau refus d'admettre la prostitution sacrée.¹³

By repetition Voltaire catches the attention of a select group of readers in-the-know who might appreciate the point made.

Throughout the conte it is the narrator who comments on customs, geographical detail, and on historical matters whether relating to legends or to modern times. This knowledgeable documentation or informed opinion is expressed quickly, clearly, concisely, and often with wit. In Chapter IV we are told the routes taken by the Kings of India and of Scythia on leaving Babylon:

Le roi des Indes allait attendre son armée sur le grand et magnifique chemin qui conduisait alors en droiture de Babylone à Cachemire. Le roi des Scythes courait avec P'ée par la belle route qui menait au mont Imaüs. Tous ces chemins ont disparu dans la suite par le mauvais gouvernement. (p.369)

The temple to which Formosante is sent on pilgrimage is identified as follows:

Le temple où elle allait en pèlerinage était dans Bassora même. 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.370)

As the fairy tale nears its conclusion with the progress of Amazan's armed forces along the southeastern shore of the Mediterranean, we are set straight as to the origins of Carthage and told what existed on its site in Amazan's day, as well as the nature of the Port of Canopus at that time. None of this information is in any way essential to our understanding of the oriental fairy tale, yet it gives the reader a sense of the authoritative knowledge of the narrator.

Similarly the narrator supplies the reader with mythological data, as for example the information on Nembrod and his bow (p.350), of which he is likely to be ignorant and which is helpful in understanding the mythical content of the conte. Voltaire also makes comparative allusions to other legends, such as the Trojan war, that do not figure in the tale but which serve to multiply the mythological resonances of the text.¹⁴ Finally when, in his playful translation of a few English expressions, Voltaire does present himself as narrator-translator (p.388), he adds another note of authenticity to his text. He also demonstrates his linguistic prowess in playing on the words

"opéra" so that he can call the woman who seduces Amazan
 "une fille d'affaire":

Ce spectacle ... s'appelait opéra, ce qui signifiait autrefois dans la langue des sept montagnes travail, soin, occupation, industrie, entreprise, besogne [note sexual connotation], affaire. Cette affaire l'enchantait. Une fille surtout le charma par sa voix mélodieuse, et par les grâces qui l'accompagnaient; cette fille d'affaire, après le spectacle, lui fut présentée. (p.401)

Once the philosophic journey is underway, the third-person narrator becomes openly "engagé". He provides up-to-date information as to governing policies in places such as Scandinavia and Poland in order to underline more fully the progress made in Northern Europe. Repeated praise of rulers who promote tolerance, justice, and civil liberties, and repeated criticism of religious orders and of the papacy make it clear that the narrator has values to promote and a philosophic message to convey. He may direct the reader's thinking openly by such turns of phrase as "On doit considérer que" (p.369) or he may use single words that express a value judgment: for instance, in Chapter V he speaks of the Jesuits' "espoir insensé de forcer toute la Chine à penser comme eux"; the Chinese emperor rewards virtue but "les lois, partout ailleurs, étaient honteusement bornées à punir les crimes" (p.379).¹⁵

The narrator reveals his professional interests by poking fun at literary critics who prefer the Biblical style

of the Song of Solomon to the gallantry of Amazan's madrigal written to honour Formosante (p.354) and by referring to the art of novel writing and to the Dutch book trade:

La princesse fit acheter chez Marc-Michel Rey tous les contes que l'on avait écrits chez les Ausoniens et chez les Velches, et dont le débit était défendu sagement chez ces peuples pour enrichir les Bataves; elle espérait qu'elle trouverait dans ces histoires quelque aventure qui ressemblerait à la sienne, et qui charmerait sa douleur. Irla lisait, le phénix disait son avis, et la princesse ne trouvait rien dans La Paysanne parvenue, ni dans Tansaï, ni dans Le Sopha, ni dans Les Quatre Facardins, qui eût le moindre rapport à ses aventures; (p.388)

The passage quoted illustrates Voltaire's ability to fuse topical references to Rey and to novels of his day with the fairytale quest. Formosante must endure a week's delay in her pursuit of Amazan because unfavorable winds make it impossible to cross the English Channel; what could be more natural than to while away the time with a good book!

Another important element which unifies La Princesse de Babylone is the pleasant, good-humoured tone which is maintained throughout with one exception, the bitter and scathing denunciation of religious orders (p.386). Even war, a theme treated so bitterly in Candide, becomes a subject for lighthearted humour as Voltaire alludes to the causes, insignificant and petty in themselves, that provoke world conflicts.

Voilà donc la guerre la plus terrible allumée de tous les

côtés, et elle fut produite par les plaisirs de la plus belle fête qu'on ait jamais donnée sur la terre [Bélus' banquet]. L'Asie allait être désolée par quatre armées de trois cent mille combattants chacune. On sent bien que la guerre de Troie, qui étonna le monde quelques siècles après, n'était qu'un jeu d'enfants en comparaison; 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 [Princess Formosante, Princess Aldée, and the Phoenix]. (p.369)

A recurring motif that helps to unify La Princesse de Babylone is the conviviality of meals shared together.

In this conte meals are not a pretext for gathering people together for philosophical discussion as is the case in Zadig, Chapter XII "Le Souper", and in Candide, Chapter XXVI "D'un souper que Candide et Martin firent avec six étrangers, et qui ils étaient". Meals represent sociability seen at its best at Madame Geoffrin's supper party (p.401) where Amazan discovers a superior type of social intercourse possible only when truly in "bonne compagnie".

Twelve meals are mentioned in La Princesse de Babylone: 1) Bélus' banquet to honour royal guests (pp. 360-361); 2) Bélus' stag dinner (p.367); 3) Formosante's intimate dinner under duress with the King of Egypt (pp. 370-372); 4) Formosante's vegetarian collation on arrival in the Land of the Gangarides (p.375); 5) Formosante's dinner with the Emperor of China (p.380); 6) two meals in the country home of Milord Qu'importe at which Amazan is a

guest (pp. 389-390 and 393); 7) Amazan's dinner to music in Rome (p.397); 8) Madame de Geoffrin's supper (p.401); 9) another Parisian dinner (p.401); 10) a late supper for two--Amazan and the opera girl (p.401); 11) dinner at King Carlos' court in Spain (p.408), and 12) Amazan's and Formosante's wedding feast (pp. 412-413). In treating this theme the narrator is revealed as one who views man as a social being and who regards the conviviality of meals shared together as an important aspect of life. He is a keen observer of social behaviour and well aware that social gatherings kindle good and bad emotions and may trigger a whole chain of social repercussions.

The first meal described is the lavish banquet held by King Bélus to honour the three kings who had contended in vain for Formosante's hand and attended by the royal princesses, many great ladies, and princes. Voltaire's pleasure in describing in great detail this magnificent and successful event may reflect his personal pride in a gala celebration held at Ferney in his honour on October 4, 1767.¹⁶ Or, as Herbert Dieckmann suggests, it may reflect Voltaire's nostalgia for the lavish fêtes he had known in the Regency period, 1715-1723.¹⁷ King Bélus' party did have unexpected consequences: the Kings of India and Egypt were angered by Formosante's patent indifference to them and vowed to declare war on Babylon; it was also on this

occasion that the King of Scythia and Princess Aldée met and planned to elope.

The second dinner Bélus offered his guests was not a success for it was attended by men only.

C'étaient tous gens fort mal assortis: rois, princes, ministres, pontifes, tous jaloux les uns des autres, tous pesant leurs paroles, tous embarrassés de leurs voisins et d'eux-mêmes. Le repas fut triste, quoiqu'on y bût beaucoup.
(p.367)

The narrator's kindly insight into the aftermath of exciting social occasions is charmingly expressed in Bélus' admission of letdown when he finds himself alone once more: "Comme les grandes fêtes se terminent! disait-il, et comme elles laissent un vide étonnant dans l'âme, quand le fracas est passé!" (p.369).

Intimate suppers are seen as possible preludes to love making. The King of Egypt who waylays Formosante at an inn, Milady Qu'importe who seats Amazan beside her at table so that she may flirt with him, and the Parisian opera girl who enjoys an after-the-theatre meal with Amazan all intend to make the most of this advantage. Voltaire alludes three times to the dangerous effect of drinking wine freely: when he is "chaud de vin, pour ne pas dire ivre" (p.368), the King of Egypt mortally wounds the Phoenix with an arrow; Formosante abstains from drinking wine intended to make her receptive to the King of Egypt's amorous advances in order

that she may drug her captor's wine and escape; and finally Amazan lets himself be seduced when he has drunk too much wine. There is one mention of truly bad cuisine encountered in Spain. The fairy tale ends with Amazan's and Formosante's wedding feast that surpasses even the splendour of the initial banquet. The recurring theme of pleasant social intercourse at meals reinforces the sunny tone of the conte as a whole.

Against the charge of a lack of unity in La Princesse de Babylone I have brought forward numerous important factors which, on the contrary, attest to a high degree of unification: the geographical base and clear exposition of the fairy tale and its valid plot structure; the author's clever combination and effective use of the love quest and the philosophic journey resulting in a stimulating blend of fairytale and philosophic content; the artistically clever and varied treatment of episodes; and the narrator's manifest presence felt throughout as a witty intelligence, a fun-loving, sociable person, a translator, educator, and historical commentator. It remains for me to comment on the "O Muses" passage that follows hard upon the fairy tale's denouement and on its links with the conte itself.

An invocation of the Muses in which the writer, most often a poet, seeks divine inspiration and help, traditionally appears at the beginning of a literary work.

This invocation of the Muses placed at the end of La Princesse de Babylone with no intervening pause, is both startling and by virtue of its unusual position, essentially ironic: "O Muses! qu'on invoque toujours au commencement de son ouvrage, je ne vous implore qu'à la fin" (p.413). As the story finishes, Voltaire surprises us by bursting forth in person as narrator-author-public figure identifiable as Voltaire because of his acknowledgement of authorship of the comedy L'Ecoissaise (p.414). Voltaire speaks to the reader from outside the fairy tale and yet alludes to his story as just completed, not yet exposed to his enemies, but in the hands of his publisher, "mon libraire, à qui j'ai donné cette petite histoire pour ses étrennes" (p.414). This suggests that the narrator-author's complicity with the reader has been extended to giving him the first look at the conte.

With rhetorical flourishes Voltaire makes five direct appeals to the Muses, not for inspiration to write, but rather for protection against his enemies who threaten the success of the conte. He first requests that the Muses protect him from those who would deform or pirate his text. Judging from his past experience this was a reasonable fear. Indeed one of the better-known 1768 editions of La Princesse de Babylone entitled Voyage et aventures d'une princesse babylonienne /Pour servir de suite à ceux de Scarmantado /Par un vieux philosophe, qui ne radote pas toujours, is

just such a travesty of Voltaire's work and one that his friend D'Argental repudiated publicly in a letter that appeared in the December 1768 issue of the Mercure de France pp. 155-156. This abridged text, an example of a pirated edition which Voltaire anticipates in the "O Muses" passage, is subdivided into twenty-one sections each with a heading summarizing its contents. The "O Muses" passage is omitted, anti-Catholic satire is minimized, and Voltaire's compliment to Madame Geoffrin is twisted into criticism.¹⁸

Voltaire then asks the Muses to muzzle Coger and Larcher who have opposed him in the past and who will wish to have La Princesse de Babylone censured.¹⁹ In alluding directly to his argument with Larcher about the practice of prostitution in Babylonian temples, Voltaire presents the Princesses Formosante and Aldée as the ones maligned by Larcher in his Supplément à la Philosophie de l'histoire:

Mettez un bâillon au pédant Larcher qui [...] a eu l'impudence de soutenir que la belle Formosante, fille du plus grand roi du monde, et la princesse Aldée, et toutes les femmes de cette respectable cour, allaient coucher avec tous les palefreniers de l'Asie pour de l'argent, dans le grand temple de Babylone, par principe de religion.

(p.413)

Formosante and Aldée serve as irreproachable models of the respectable Babylonian ladies defended by Voltaire against Larcher's claims in Chapter II of La Défense de mon oncle.²⁰ By artfully treating his characters as real people under

attack with him in his feud with Larcher, Voltaire truly claims the conte as his own, as part of himself.

Voltaire goes on to address Fréron whom he expects will give the conte a bad review: "je vous recommande ma Princesse de Babylone; dites-en du mal afin qu'on la lise" (p.414) and jeeringly urges the editor of the Nouvelles ecclésiastiques to try to have the conte banned by the Sorbonne: "Tâchez surtout d'engager le sieur Riballier à faire condamner La Princesse de Babylone par la Sorbonne" (p.414).

All these direct references to the fairy tale itself from the "O Muses" passage appended to it, link the two and prolong the narrator's complicity with the reader. Voltaire makes his personal concern for the future success of the conte the reader's concern as well.

The question remains as to why Voltaire should choose to conclude this particular oriental fairy tale with a passage of malicious personal invective written in the first person. Voltaire has thoroughly enjoyed giving his fancy free reign and recreating a Mille et une nuits atmosphere. He has brought Formosante and Amazan to a happy reconciliation and seen them overcome King Bélus' enemies and all obstacles to their future happiness. As he reaches this fairytale happy ending, Voltaire reflects on how greatly this world of fancy differs from the stressful world

of reality in which he has always had many difficulties to contend with. This brings to mind his current enemies and arouses his anxiety for his new conte which he knows will be attacked for its anti-Catholic content. Voltaire does not want the propaganda content of the conte to be suppressed or distorted. He beseeches the Muses: "Empêchez que les continuateurs téméraires ne gâtent par leurs fables les vérités que j'ai enseignées aux mortels dans ce fidèle récit" (p.413). He resolves to have the last word and to take on his foes with the same sublime bravado that led Amazan to victory.²¹

Because he is basically a realist, Voltaire is generally reluctant to finish a major conte with an unqualifiedly happy ending. The banal ending of Zadig seems an unsatisfying answer to the probing questions as to man's chance of happiness in this world that constitute the real substance of that conte. Candide's realistic fate is a more satisfying one. In the case of La Princesse de Babylone, Voltaire's vitality and ego lead him past the fantasy ending to share with us an authentic personal reality of immediate concern, artistically shaped into an invocation of the Muses which Bertrand-Guy refers to as the second conclusion of La Princesse de Babylone.²²

NOTES TO CHAPTER IX

¹Vivienne Mylne, "Literary techniques and methods in Voltaire's contes philosophiques", SVEC, No. 57 (1967), 1064.

²Pomeau, "Note sur La Princesse de Babylone" in the Garnier-Flammarion edition of Romans et contes, pp. 445-446.

³Scherer, p.124.

⁴Mylne, pp. 1059-1061.

⁵Ibid., p.1065.

⁶Bertrand-Guy, p.134.

⁷Scherer, p.138.

⁸Ibid., pp. 124-125.

⁹See Chapter VIII.

¹⁰Scherer, p.124.

¹¹See Chapter III.

¹²M XIV, 78 quoted in Mylne, p.1067.

¹³Hellegouarc'h, "Quelques mots clins d'oeil chez Voltaire" in Le Siècle de Voltaire, II, 542. This interpretation is confirmed by Voltaire in the "O Muses" coda.

¹⁴See Chapter X for further treatment of this point.

¹⁵The underlining of the value-judgment words is mine.

¹⁶See Best. D14401, Best. D14464, Best. D14475.

¹⁷Dieckmann, "Zu Voltaire's Zadig und La Princesse de Babylone" in Studien zur Europäischen Anflklärung, p.460.

¹⁸For a more detailed description of this edition's discrepancies, see Pléiade, pp. 1024-1028.

¹⁹For particulars about Voltaire's feuds with these gentlemen, see Chapter VIII.

²⁰As seen earlier in this chapter, Hellegouarc'h, in "Quelques mots clin d'oeil chez Voltaire" pp. 541-542, claims that in the text of the fairy tale itself, Voltaire chooses to call his heroine by her title "la princesse de Babylone" much more frequently than by her Christian name, Formosante, because he is suggesting to the reader in-the-know that he is identifying her with Babylon and Babylonian ladies as discussed in Chapter II of La Défense de mon oncle.

²¹Pomeau takes a similar view. "Rien n'annonçait, rien dans le récit n'exigeait cette irruption à bras raccourcis sur Larcher, Fréron et consorts---sinon que l'histoire finie, il restait au narrateur à régler quelques comptes." Garnier Flammarion edition of Romans et contes, p.16.

²²Bertrand-Guy, p.191.

CHAPTER X

THE FUSION OF MYTH AND REALITY

A VALID LITERARY DYNAMIC

The primary characteristic of La Princesse de Babylone is the constant interplay of the real and the fanciful. This conte has been shown to be an oriental fairy tale in which Voltaire has indulged in unusually uninhibited flights of fancy, yet it also contains a serious, realistic portrayal of the political scene in eighteenth-century Europe in the context of the philosophic journey. The fairy tale itself is full of fancy, mythological elements, and allusions to myths, and is characterized by a lighthearted, gentle mockery of epic romance and of oriental fairy tales. At the same time La Princesse de Babylone is punctuated by a realistic narrator's comments; the author makes much use of realistic detail, everyday human reactions, real places, real or historical time, and in the "O Muses" coda speaks of the conte as a real work he has just written, that must be defended from his personal enemies.

The mythical and the real are seldom completely distinct. I use the term "mythical" in a broad sense to include what is fanciful and characteristic of the fairy tale, what pertains to legend, mythology, and imaginative literature, and what is superstitious or untrue. I use the

term "reality" to include objective reality, historical fact, and Voltaire's personal reality. Voltaire's playful fusion of myth and realism is a stylistic tool and also serves ideological ends. In this chapter it is my purpose to examine Voltaire's ways of linking myth and reality, thereby creating a valid and effective literary dynamic, or energizing force, for La Princesse de Babylone.

Voltaire's fusion of myth and reality is deliberate. At no time is the author taken in by fantasy or by oriental myth. Voltaire is fully aware of the fact that in La Princesse de Babylone he is offering the public a fashionable, episodic, oriental fairy tale beginning typically with a contest for the hand of a lovely princess and ending with the traditional wedding of the princess to the prince of her choice and the promise of happiness everafter, a story complete with fabulous beasts, a flying sofa, and a magic sword. While clearly enjoying the telling of his tale, Voltaire reminds us of the distinction between the world of fancy and the real world by occasionally inserting a prosaic detail into a dramatic scene---the King of India blisters his hands in his efforts to bend Nimrod's bow (p.353), or by making an ironic comment. An excellent example of this technique is seen in the following passage in which, clause by clause, Voltaire builds up the Babylonians' euphoria occasioned by the exciting events at

court, only to swiftly deflate it by a lucid, ironic comment:

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 consomment 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 passionnément 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. [And the narrator's comment] Cette excellente morale n'a jamais été démentie que par les faits. (p.352)

This attitude on the part of the narrator does not mar the reader's delight in Voltaire's flights of fantasy which André Delattre describes as a personal, poetic mythology with a surrealist quality:

Sa mythologie aux déplacements si brusques, mais dont l'agitation en style vif-argent n'est jamais brutale ni heurtée, cette mythologie vaguement surréaliste, rappelle aussi par sa maigreur agile celle de Chrétien de Troyes.¹

La Princesse de Babylone is primarily a tale of the passionate love of a fairy tale prince and princess reminiscent of the courtly romances of Béroul and Chrétien de Troyes, and very much in the manner of Ariosto's epic romance. It is love at first sight; love that gives rise to jealousy and separation which trigger a love quest; a love by which Amazan, like Ariosto's Orlando, Chrétien de Troyes' Yvain, and Hamilton's Alie in Le Béliier, is driven

mad. The protagonists vow to be eternally faithful. The concept of love in La Princesse de Babylone may be described as mythical or legendary in that, contrary to common experience, it is seen as indestructible despite the jealousy and anguish caused by the King of Egypt's kiss, the King of Ethiopia's assault on Formosante (p.412), and Amazan's single physical infidelity. All is forgiven and forgotten; the lovers seem destined for an eternity of fairy tale bliss.

Voltaire treats this idealized love in mock-heroic fashion to show that he recognizes it as unreal. With gentle humour he delights in melodramatic moments such as the scene in which the lovers' ships cross paths on the English Channel:

Comme il retournait en Batavie, Formosante volait vers Albion avec ses deux vaisseaux, qui cinglaient à pleines voiles; celui d'Amazan et celui de la princesse se croisèrent, se touchèrent presque: les deux amants étaient près l'un de l'autre, et ne pouvaient s'en douter. Ah, s'ils l'avaient su! Mais l'impérieuse destinée ne le permit pas.
(p.394)

Sometimes he writes dialogue in the tone of high tragedy. On arriving at Amazan's home and finding him gone, Formosante expresses her loss in very stilted terms: "je suis privée du héros gangaride, digne objet de mes très tendres et très impatients désirs." (p.375), and Amazan who wards off the advances of twelve thousand Venetian

prostitutes, invokes his beloved in this melodramatic way: "Sublime friponne [...] je vous apprendrai à être fidèle" (p.395). But when Amazan betrays Formosante with a common opera girl, Voltaire uses the servant Irla to remind us what true human nature is really like:

Madame, lui dit Irla, voilà comme sont faits tous les jeunes gens d'un bout du monde à l'autre; fussent-ils amoureux d'une beauté descendue du ciel, ils lui feraient, dans de certains moments, des infidélités pour une servante de cabaret. (p.402)

Voltaire treats the lovers' vicissitudes lightly. When reunited in Spain, they enjoy "les charmes de l'amour réconcilié, qui valent presque ceux de l'amour naissant" (p.410).

A more commonplace, realistic love is seen in the union of Princess Aldée and the King of Scythia which is based on opportunity, mutual attraction, and the prospects of eventually gaining rights to the throne of Babylon.

Not only is Formosante's and Amazan's love of legendary or mythical dimensions, the lovers too are heroic figures worthy of myth in that they possess attributes that exceed those encountered in reality. Formosante's beauty is unsurpassed (her very name is the Portuguese word for beautiful). Amazan is superhuman in many respects: he is handsome, courageous, invincible, the most passionate and the most constant of beings according to his mother's

testimony, and possesses great strength exhibited in the ease with which he rights Milord Qu'importe's carriage and in his massacre of the inquisitors. He appears wealthy, has a fine singing voice and enough poetic talent to write a madrigal for Formosante, and is magnanimous in rescuing his rival, the King of Scythia, from the lion's jaws. His youthful optimism and the self confidence that lead him to challenge all King Bélus' foes are equally attractive.

Voltaire gives his protagonists a heroic side in keeping with the opening grandiose oriental decor and appropriate for a tale of passionate love. But he also humanizes them. Both are young, naive, without experience of life or of the world. Despite the fact that Amazan is a "vainqueur des lions, donneur des plus gros diamants de l'univers, faiseur de madrigaux, possesseur du phénix" (p.382), his happiness is destroyed by something as extraordinary as a blackbird's testimony. In yielding to the opera girl's seductive powers, he proves capable of ordinary human weakness.

Even within the fairytale feminine psychology is surprisingly realistic. Formosante's character is quite fully developed. She is given a lively personality far beyond that of the puppet-like figures that people many of Voltaire's contes. We are aware that Formosante has led a sheltered existence at her father's court until the

excitement of her first love gives her the courage and determination to hunt down her elusive lover at any cost. It is the portrayal of eighteen-year-old Formosante's complex emotional states that brings her character to life in the following scenes. In her frustration at the death of the bird who had promised to take her to Amazan, Formosante's rage is quite naturally directed at the King of Egypt who is responsible. She would gladly kill him, but has to content herself with totally destroying his gifts!

Elle fit tuer, dans son dépit, les deux crocodiles, ses deux hippopotames, ses deux zèbres, ses deux rats, et fit jeter ses deux momies dans l'Euphrate; si elle avait tenu son boeuf Apis, elle ne l'aurait pas épargné. (p.368)

When adverse wind conditions delay Formosante's departure for England by a whole week, she battles depression and impatience, and finds the time desperately long.² On finding Amazan asleep in bed with the opera girl, Formosante's immediate reaction is to faint dead away. When she learns who her rival is, it becomes clear that her primary emotions are fury and hurt pride:

O juste ciel! ô puissant Orosmade! s'écriait la belle princesse de Babylone, tout en pleurs, par qui suis-je trahie, et pour qui! Ainsi donc celui qui a refusé pour moi tant de princesses m'abandonne pour une farceuse des Gaules! Non, je ne pourrai survivre à cet affront.

(p. 402)

Without any destination in mind she orders her carriage and rushes off vowing never to see Amazan again. The Phoenix soon persuades her that she has been hasty but she remains indecisive, torn between her love and wounded vanity, and all the while she is borne further away by the speedy unicorns. Although her only recourse seems to be to return to Babylon, she is still incapable of making any rational decision about the future:

Son dessein était de s'embarquer sur le Bétis pour retourner par Tyr à Babylone, revoir le roi Bélus son père, et oublier, si elle pouvait, son infidèle amant, ou bien le demander en mariage. (p.406)

The one flaw in this realistic character portrayal seems to me to be the unlikelihood of an inexperienced young girl outwitting the King of Egypt and of extricating herself so smoothly from a desperate situation. In this instance plot considerations take precedence over psychology.

In La Princesse de Babylone Voltaire takes a keener interest in feminine psychology than in Candide or Zadig. His account of the surprise reunion in a strange land of Aldée and Formosante, cousins between whom no love is lost, is a convincing analysis of female behaviour in such circumstances:

Leur réunion inespérée dans ces climats lointains, les

choses singulières qu'elles avaient mutuellement à s'apprendre, mirent dans leur entrevue un charme qui leur fit oublier qu'elles ne s'étaient jamais aimées; elles se revirent avec transport; une douce illusion se mit à la place de la vraie tendresse; elles s'embrassèrent en pleurant. (p.382)

From a psychological point of view the interview between Formosante and Amazan's mother is realistic. The elder lady is described as follows:

Elle ne marchait pas facilement: c'était une dame d'environ trois cents années; mais elle avait encore de beaux restes, et on voyait bien que vers les deux cent trente à quarante ans elle avait été charmante. (p.376)

All jesting aside Voltaire accords the elder lady who is mourning the death of her husband and the absence of her son, a dignity and graceful presence that do not fail to impress her young niece. The ladies vie with each other in declaring their woes. Amazan's mother is quick to accuse Formosante of being the cause of their misfortune: "vous m'arrachez mon fils; il ne pourra survivre à la douleur que lui a causée votre baiser donné au roi d'Egypte" (p.377). The Princess justifies herself and wins over her future mother-in-law by the strength of her passion for Amazan. When she sets off for China promising to bring Amazan back home in two weeks time, the two ladies, now acknowledged as aunt and niece, make a tearful farewell. On the whole Voltaire seems kindly disposed to the female sex in La

Princesse de Babylone.

The minor fairytale characters, King Bélus and the three royal suitors, are not developed psychologically. But as Vivienne Mylne points out,³ one should not expect Voltaire to provide a more complex development of characters than do other writers of oriental fairy tales. In the Mille et une nuits tradition, the emphasis is on the adventures that befall fishermen, sultans, sailors, and vizirs, not on their personal psyches.

In La Princesse de Babylone fabulous beasts, a commonplace in the Mille et une nuits tradition, are purely mythical and are to be enjoyed as such. Following in the footsteps of Ariosto, Voltaire treats the fabulous or fantastic in a matter-of-fact practical way. Teams of unicorns spirit Formosante and Amazan around the world. The speedy unicorn is the standard means of transportation in the Land of the Gangarides but remains such a novelty in England that even the phlegmatic Milord Qu'importe is moved to comment: "Vous avez là six jolies licornes" (p.389). Two winged griffins with the body of a lion and the head of a bird, carry Formosante's sofa through the skies from Happy Arabia to the Land of the Gangarides. Recalling the incident in Zadig where it is a matter of religious importance as to whether one may or may not eat griffin,⁴ one might expect Voltaire to make a jest at the griffins'

expense, but he does not. Here the griffins are simply part of the mythological world.

Of special interest is Voltaire's choice of the Phoenix for a major role. This mythological bird associated with sun worship, is said to be as large as an eagle, to have brilliant scarlet and gold plumage, and to have a lifespan of at least five hundred years. It dies in flames only to be miraculously reborn from its own ashes. The existence of the myth of the phoenix is considered the most ancient proof of man's belief in the soul.⁵

Voltaire seized on the phoenix as a link between legendary antiquity and the present, between fantasy and reality. In the conte the Phoenix declares that he is twenty-seven thousand, nine hundred years old, a humorous exaggeration, and consequently speaks with authority about how things were in ancient times when animals spoke (p.363), and about recent history---he describes how Russia has been transformed since his visit there some three hundred years earlier (p.384). He serves as an historical observer of all times and places. The Phoenix also is a link between man and the animal kingdom; it is the Phoenix who calls the griffins to Formosante's aid. Because the rebirth of the Phoenix is incorporated into the story, it serves as a point of departure for a discussion of immortality and the soul (p.373).

Initially Voltaire does not identify the Phoenix, but refers to it as the "gros oiseau" (p.352) who waits on Amazan until bidden to attend Formosante, and whose exotic colouring dazzles all in attendance at the royal competition.

L'oiseau qui offrait ce présent les surprit encore davantage. Il était de la taille d'un aigle, mais ses yeux étaient aussi doux et aussi tendres que ceux de l'aigle sont fiers et menaçants. Son bec était couleur de rose, et semblait tenir quelque chose de la belle bouche de Formosante. Son cou rassemblait toutes les couleurs de l'iris, mais plus vives et plus brillantes. L'or en mille nuances éclatait sur son plumage. Ses pieds paraissaient un mélange d'argent et de pourpre; et la queue des beaux oiseaux qu'on attela depuis au char de Junon n'approchait pas de la sienne. (p.356)

The bird's coquettish, humanlike behaviour at King Bélus' banquet makes him the centre of attention. It is only when the dying bird instructs Formosante to burn it and to transport its ashes to Happy Arabia where they must be exposed to the sun on a spice-laden altar, that the reader realizes that Formosante is dealing with the phoenix of mythology. After his rebirth the Phoenix's role is to assist Formosante and through her, his beloved master in every way possible. He is portrayed as a wise, practical, authoritative figure capable of making whatever travel arrangements are necessary for Formosante and as one who, in anger at the harm caused by the blackbird spy's misleading report to Amazan, has power to banish all

blackbirds from the Land of the Gangarides. The reader might forget that the Phoenix is a bird, were it not for the fact that in Seville it is by flight that the Phoenix escapes capture by the forces of the Inquisition and, birdlike, carries word of Formosante's danger cross country to Amazan who is just reaching the Spanish border.

The Phoenix is the most important mythological element in the conte. Voltaire makes full use of its myth value and also gives it the dramatic functions of helper, donor. Voltaire's use of the Phoenix in La Princesse de Babylone is reminiscent of the part played by a silverheaded, golden-beaked bird who guides an adventurous prince on to a happy destiny with an enchanted princess in a story entitled "King Solomon's Ring" found in Les Mille et un jours.⁶

Other minor elements from mythology figure in the conte very briefly. The successful contender for Formosante's hand must succeed in bending Nimrod's bow:

Ce Nembrod, le fort chasseur devant le Seigneur, avait laissé un arc de sept pieds babyloniens de haut, d'un bois d'ébène plus dur que le fer du mont Caucase qu'on travaille dans les forges de Derbent; et nul mortel depuis Nembrod n'avait pu bander cet arc merveilleux. (p.350)

The reference is to a king of Babel, who was a great hunter and rebel against God, mentioned in Genesis X, 9.⁷ The King

of Egypt arrives in Babylon mounted on Apis the sacred Egyptian bull and carrying a saber belonging to Isis and Osiris, other Egyptian deities. To rescue Formosante (p.406), Amazan dons the armour of Magoq, son of Japhet, who symbolized for the Hebrews the barbaric northern enemies of Israel.⁸ A burlesque reminiscence of Epiphany may be detected in the fact that Formosante is courted by three kings from the East who come to pay her homage bearing strange gifts. Voltaire enjoys legends if they are understood to be fanciful and nothing more. He invents a legend of his own in explaining why there are no longer any blackbirds in the Ganges region:

Le Phénix, affligé du mal que l'indiscrétion du merle avait causé, fit ordonner à tous les merles de vider le pays; et c'est depuis ce temps qu'il ne s'en trouve plus sur les bords du Gange. (p.378)

If one interprets myth as that which has no historic foundation, that which is exaggerated, based on superstition, and therefore untrue, it is clear that an important intellectual current throughout La Princesse de Babylone is the serious parody of the more imaginative forms of history which include the Bible, histories written from the Catholic viewpoint, and the witness of Antiquity accepted at face value by so many of Voltaire's contemporaries. The author of the Essai sur les moeurs and

La Philosophie de l'histoire, expresses a critical attitude towards any dogmatic statement not based on solid, historical documentation and belying common sense.

Voltaire may categorically refute a particular historical tradition as, for example, the circumstances of the founding of Carthage:

La flotte aborda le rivage où l'on dit que, tant de siècles après, la Phénicienne Didon, soeur d'un Pygmalion, épouse d'un Sichée, ayant quitté cette ville de Tyr, vint fonder la superbe ville de Carthage, en coupant un cuir de boeuf en lanières, selon le témoignage des plus graves auteurs de l'antiquité, lesquels n'ont jamais conté de fables, et selon les professeurs qui ont écrit pour les petits garçons; quoique après tout il n'y ait jamais eu personne à Tyr qui se soit appelé Pygmalion, ou Didon, ou Sichée, qui sont des noms entièrement grecs, et quoique enfin il n'y eût point de roi à Tyr en ces temps-là.

(p.411)

In the case of the origin of the place name Canopus, he declares that speculation as to whether the town was named after an Egyptian diety or the star Canopus is idle. All one can be sure of is that the place is very old, "et c'est tout ce qu'on peut savoir de l'origine des choses, de quelque nature qu'elles puissent être" (p.411). The Phoenix is knowledgeable about theories of the beginnings of civilization, but as these are not based on specific records, he considers such speculation to be useless. The King of Spain, awed by the military power and magnificence of oriental kingdoms, assumes that the East must predate

the West. "Mais d'où venons-nous?" he demands of the Phoenix. The latter replies: "Je n'en sais rien" and directs conversation to practical matters of immediate concern (p.410).

There are mocking allusions to traditions accepted by many as "historical". One of these is to court historians:

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.

(p.349)

Another is to poet laureates: "ces noces furent célébrées par cinq cents grands poètes de Babylone" (p.413). Popular conceptions of history are sometimes announced by such expressions as "On sait que" (p.413), "Chacun sait comment", "On se souvient que", "On n'ignore pas que" (p.412). The Chronicles of Egypt are described as being full of "prodiges" (p.412).

Sometimes the parody is very subtle. Hellegouarc'h points out that Voltaire's playful, multiple allusions to the Aldée dynasty poke fun at Biblical and other traditional geneologies, but this joke is meaningful only to those who have noted that Voltaire gives the meaning of Aldée as village (a humble label for a family tree) in his Précis du siècle de Louis XIV. Hellegouarc'h sees this recurring

presence of parody in the conte as an attempt to demystify "le monde fabuleux de l'Antiquité, celui qu'ont décrit les anciens et les modernes auxquels Voltaire reproche de se fier à leurs témoignages".⁹

As elsewhere, in the storyline itself of La Princesse de Babylone Voltaire attacks superstition. He treats Egyptian deities with complete irreverence. The fairy tale ends with a wedding feast at which Apis the sacred bull is served up as a roast. Oracles which Voltaire associates with superstition and with arbitrary, irrational church rulings, are ridiculed at every turn. It is King Bélus' practice to consult oracles "car un roi ne doit se conduire que par l'ordre exprès des dieux immortels" (p.359)---a statement heavy with irony. Obviously Voltaire deplores the church's hold on kings, as he makes clear in his mockery of the papacy in Chapter IX. Voltaire shows that oracles' prophecies are patently meaningless because contradictory---the death of the Phoenix will lead to "Mélange de tout; mort vivant, infidélité et constance, perte et gain, calamité et bonheur" (p.368)---, or may be misconstrued. The oracle's reply to King Bélus, "Ta fille ne sera mariée que quand elle aura couru le monde." (p.359), leads to humorous and ironic comment, Voltaire's way of showing that men with practical concerns cannot place any reliance on arbitrary interpretations of divine revelation:

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 lui obéir; que rien n'était plus indécent pour une fille, et surtout pour celle du grand roi de Babylone, que d'aller courir sans savoir où; que c'était le vrai moyen de n'être point mariée, ou de faire un mariage clandestin, honteux et ridicule; qu'en un mot cet oracle n'avait pas le sens commun. (pp. 359-360)

Another interpretation of the oracle's statement is found and acted upon. It is intended that the Princess make a religious pilgrimage to a shrine visited by girls seeking happy marriages. This results in her father dispatching her on her way towards Arabia. Her pilgrimage, however, becomes her love quest.¹⁰

The exaggeration found in many historical accounts is satirized subtly by the noticeable repetition of the number three hundred thousand with reference to the size of the armies of Scythia, Egypt, India, and Ethiopia. King Bélus has an army of six hundred thousand men. These figures are exposed as exaggerations of truth by the simple honesty of King Carlos of Spain who marvels at the "prodigieuses armées que l'Orient vomit de son sein" (p.409) because he personally has the greatest difficulty in

maintaining forces of twenty to thirty thousand men.¹¹

Although epic exaggeration is a common device and it would seem natural for a reader to accept descriptions of perfect splendour and of larger-than-life decor in an oriental fairy tale, Voltaire takes pains to alert us to the patent use of exaggeration even in a fairytale context. When we learn that the marble amphitheatre in Babylon holds five hundred thousand spectators (p.350) and that "vingt mille pages et vingt mille jeunes filles distribuèrent sans confusion des rafraîchissements aux spectateurs entre les rangs des sièges" (pp. 351-352), the key words "sans confusion" catch the eye and make us reflect that the scene described is improbable and an exaggeration of truth.

From the very beginning of the conte Voltaire prompts the reader to be critically aware of the distinction between exaggeration and truth, between myth and reality. Once the reader's learning process has begun, the constant interplay of myth and reality provides him with ample opportunity to put his critical faculties to the test. Into what is in part a mock-historical narrative, Voltaire has incorporated an intellectual game of spotting the deliberate use of anachronisms. Formosante's fantasy sofa has drawers outfitted with such contemporary delicacies as "petits pains à la reine" (p.374). When trapped by the King of Egypt, Formosante behaves and speaks so like an eighteenth-century

society lady that Voltaire uses the modern term "lorgner" (p.370) to describe her flirtatious manner.

In his article "An Underlying Theme in La Princesse de Babylone"¹², P. C. Mitchell explores the critique of more imaginative forms of history and of works such as the Bible, officially recognized as history, in La Princesse de Babylone. He concludes that Voltaire would contend that if in La Princesse de Babylone he succeeds in making the reader sceptical of any book claiming to impart authoritative information, he will have created a work which is useful according to this definition found in the preface to the Dictionnaire philosophique:

Les livres les plus utiles sont ceux dont les lecteurs font eux-mêmes la moitié; ils étendent les pensées dont on leur présente le germe; ils corrigent ce qui leur semble défectueux, et fortifient par leurs réflexions ce qui leur paraît faible.¹³

La Princesse de Babylone is very clearly presented as a fairy tale that begins and ends in "myth time": Voltaire situates the opening events at the Babylonian court in a legendary pre-Christian past. In speaking of the palace gardens, Voltaire states:

Les jardins de Sémiramis, qui étonnèrent l'Asie plusieurs siècles après, n'étaient qu'une faible imitation de ces antiques merveilles; car, du temps de Sémiramis, tout commençait à dégénérer chez les hommes et chez les femmes.
(p.350)

Sémiramis was a legendary queen of Babylon and the subject of Voltaire's tragedy of that name written in 1748. We are led to believe that the fairytale "myth time" predates the historical points of reference cited: the Trojan war about 1200 B.C. (p.369), the founding of Carthage 800 B.C. (p.411), and the work of Praxiteles, the Greek sculptor from the fourth century B.C. (p.350). A special legendary time frame applies to the Land of the Gangarides for while it corresponds in some ways with the modern region of the Ganges, it is also set in the fairy tale's "myth time", since it is the only place described where men still commune with the animal world as in the legendary "temps que les bêtes parlaient" (p.364), thanks to the enlightened attitudes of its inhabitants who recognize that animals have God-given souls and are therefore their fellow creatures.

We have already seen in Chapter VIII how fairytale fantasy and reality are fused in the two-fold function of the imaginary journey as a fairytale love quest and as a philosophic overview of eighteenth-century Europe. Here "myth time" and historical time are fused. In following the adventures of mythical or fairytale protagonists who have frequent adventures in the real, eighteenth-century scene, the reader has the impression that time disappears as they move from the realm of legend to the most recent

present. By presenting his story as legend or myth, the author is less likely to be held responsible for his personal comments. Beginning and ending his fairy tale in "myth time" serves as a protective camouflage for the pointed satirical attacks on contemporary institutions and practices that are incorporated into the body of the tale.

In the course of the imaginary journey the fairytale protagonists mix with representatives of the real eighteenth-century world. Formosante dines with Young-Tchin, the Chinese emperor who expelled the Jesuits in 1724.¹⁴ The Phoenix has a conversation with one of Catherine the Great's senior officers, possibly Shouvalof who corresponded with Voltaire.¹⁵ Amazan mixes socially with the Qu'importes in England, is guided through Rome by a member of the Congregation of Saint Anthony,¹⁶ is invited to dine in Paris by Madame Geoffrin¹⁷, is charmed by a Parisian opera girl, and receives assistance from King Carlos III of Spain. And in the "O Muses" coda, the reader encounters the real author feuding with very real personal enemies, yet in his accusations against them Voltaire is primarily concerned with the fortunes of the philosophic tale he has just written and with the honour of his fairytale princess.

In prior discussion of the imaginary journey,¹⁸ we noted Voltaire's knowledge of geography and the plausible, precise itinerary followed by the lovers. In this realistic

use of authentic places Voltaire follows in the tradition of Thomas Simon Gueulette who in his Contes tartares (1715), chinois (1723), mogols (1723), and peruviens (1733), rooted his fanciful tales in clearly defined and well-documented geographical locations.¹⁹ Voltaire underplays this realistic aspect of the conte by referring to some modern countries and nationalities by their Roman or Greek names more in keeping with the mythical world of the fairy tale. Accordingly England is called Albion, Holland Batavia, Spain Baetica, the Poles Sarmatians, the Russians Cimmerians. It is also to be noted that the limits of the real eighteenth-century world seem to expand into a fantastical or visionary view of the universe as Formosante takes to the skies and speaks of pursuing her lover "dans tous les globes que l'Eternel a formés" (p.378).

Voltaire treats the fantasy elements realistically to create an effective illusion of enchantment. Although no mention is made of realistic language problems or of difficulties in dealing with foreign currencies, very mundane, practical arrangements are made to procure fantastic means of transport. The Phoenix orders a custom-made sofa for Formosante and summons the griffins by pigeon post (p.374). On at least two occasions a protagonist is delayed by such natural causes as wind conditions (pp.387-388) or the need of a carriage repair (pp.403-404).

Barchilon states that in the eighteenth-century, realistic detail was considered essential in fairy tales:

This concern for giving a real feeling to supernatural adventures fulfills a deep need of the human psyche. For it is well known that the fantastic, like the fairy tale and the dream, becomes believable, if only for a moment (all that is needed), when somehow it has aspects which seem actual. Thus the supernatural acquires a borrowed plausibility from a few realistic details. In the eighteenth century it seems the realistic is a necessary ingredient of the fantastic.²⁰

One consequence of the fusion of fantasy and realism in the imaginary journey is that the narrator can vary the rhythm of the episodic conte readily. Rapid transit is necessary for pursuit and flight, and to enable the lovers to ultimately be united. Pauses for philosophic comment, as in Russia, England, and France, provide welcome intervals of static time for reflection and observation, and create the illusion of time passing in the love quest story. Such brief interruptions or slowing down of the pace of the lovers' adventures are plausible and justified by the normal, interrupted patterns of eighteenth-century travel. On the other hand, travel by fantastic means allows the narrator to link incidents very rapidly.

The pace of action resulting from this fusion of myth and reality is highly unpredictable. The narrator's lengthy comments on eighteenth-century France are followed by a surprising resurgence of fairytale adventures: Formosante's

discovery of Amazan, her subsequent flight to Spain only to fall into the hands of the Inquisition, her rescue by Amazan, their reconciliation, and their triumphant journey home. This final acceleration in pace leads in frenzied manner directly into the "O Muses" coda, at which point the fairytale illusion is shattered brutally. We are hurled into Voltaire's real world of personal polemic but one very directly related to the fairytale world just left.

It is my contention that in his delicate, finely-tuned stylistic play with fantasy and reality, Voltaire has created an exciting, binary literary dynamic that accounts for the unique charm of La Princesse de Babylone. Allusions to mythology and to magic dot the text as signs of myth. Allusions to contemporary events, to eighteenth-century monarchs, to Voltaire's foes, are signs of the real world. At all times there is a creative tension between myth and reality: the heroic and the ordinary; myth enjoyed as such and myth debunked by reason; "myth time" and historical time; fairytale protagonists and representatives of the eighteenth-century world; the fantastic treated prosaically; a fanciful journey superimposed upon a real geographic itinerary; a fairytale ending and a coda of realistic invective. The charm of each component is heightened by contrast with its counterpart. The reader is caught up in the passage from the opening Arabian Nights extravaganza

to Voltaire's real world glimpsed in his malicious attack on his enemies; the reader's mind is fully occupied, and his interest does not flag.

As the narrator flits in and out of the worlds of fantasy and of reality, the reader is invited to play the game of actively discerning the fine line between the real and the unreal. The fusion of fantasy and of reality is a dimension of adult experience. We live with the duality of our fancies and the realities to be faced. On a daily basis we must distinguish between exaggeration and truth. In the case of La Princesse de Babylone it is our awareness of the fusing of myth and reality, frequently prompted by the narrator's comments, that stimulates our interest in and enhances our enjoyment of the conte.

NOTES TO CHAPTER X

¹André Delattre, Voltaire l'impétueux (Paris: Mercure de France, 1957), p.97.

²This incident calls to mind the Tristan legend in which Yseut is prevented from reaching Tristan before he dies because her ship is becalmed off the coast of Brittany.

³Mylne, pp.1078-1079.

⁴See Zadig, chapter IV.

⁵Dictionnaire des symboles, Coll. Bouquins (Paris: Publ. Robert Laffont/Jupiter, 1982), p.698.

⁶Pétis de la Croix, The Thousand and one Days, Willi Richard Fehse ed. and trans. (London: Abelard-Schuman, 1971), pp.79-97.

⁷Pléiade, p.1030.

⁸Ibid., p.1052.

⁹Hellegouarc'h, "Quelques mots clin d'oeil chez Voltaire", p.543.

¹⁰See Chapter V, Propp analysis.

¹¹In her article "Quelques mots clin d'oeil chez Voltaire", pp.539-541, Hellegouarc'h suggests two other reasons for Voltaire's insistence on and repetition of these figures in La Princesse de Babylone. The first is that Voltaire had used the figure, three hundred thousand, playfully in 1743 in connection with his admiration for Princess Ulrique, sister of Frederick II. In Best. D2900 he wrote: "C'est grand dommage que je n'aie pas à mon service ces trois cent mille hommes que je voulais pour vous enlever, mais j'aurai plus de trois cent mille rivaux si je

montre votre lettre." In 1767 Ulrique, now queen of Sweden, is again noticed by Voltaire when she takes Marmontel's part in the quarrel about Bélisaire. The second is that the number three hundred thousand, as well as the number six hundred thousand, were also specific figures at issue in one point of Voltaire's dispute with Larcher.

¹²P.C.Mitchell, "An Underlying Theme in La Princesse de Babylone", SVEC, No. 137 (1975), 31-45.

¹³Dictionnaire philosophique, M XVI, 7 quoted by Mitchell, p.45.

¹⁴Pléiade, p.1042.

¹⁵Ibid., p.1044.

¹⁶Ibid., p.1048.

¹⁷Ibid., p.1050.

¹⁸See Chapter VIII.

¹⁹Jacques Barchilon, "Uses of the fairy tale in the eighteenth century", SVEC, No. 24 (1963), 114.

²⁰Barchilon, p.115.

CHAPTER XI

CONCLUSION

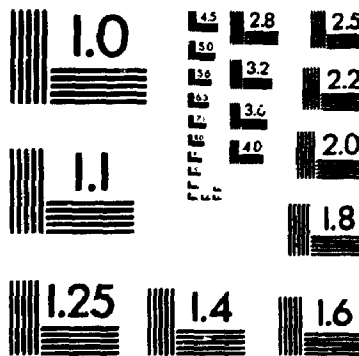
This appraisal of La Princesse de Babylone leads me to disagree with the critics' charges that La Princesse de Babylone is a derivative, contrived, and disjointed tale written by a dogmatic, pessimistic, aging Voltaire. On the contrary, given the literary conventions of the day, this conte is a soundly constructed oriental fairy tale into which the author has skilfully integrated satirical and philosophic material by fusing fantasy and reality. The result is a unified tale characterized by a carefree, whimsical exuberance and pleasant humanity peculiar to La Princesse de Babylone. When read in conjunction with Voltaire's correspondence for the period November 1766 to April 1768, it is clear that the high-spirited, joyous tone of the conte reflects a moment in Voltaire's life of personal fulfilment, domestic happiness, and of optimism.

La Princesse de Babylone has much to offer the student of Voltaire. The content of the tale reflects Voltaire's preoccupations in 1767: his happy discovery of Holwell's writings that supported his stand against the commonly accepted view of the dominance of Jewish religion in the history of civilization, by affirming the practice

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of natural religion by the brahmins in a far more remote past; his enthusiasm for a natural order of things; his battle against superstition and against the oppressive and reactionary influence of the church in Europe; his hope in the continuing political and social progress in Europe fostered by the enlightened rulers of the north; and his own quarrels and disputes. La Princesse de Babylone is a work which is closely connected to La Philosophie de l'histoire, to L'Essai sur les moeurs, and to Les Scythes. It represents the Mille et une nuits tradition of oriental fairy tales, an important part of our eighteenth-century cultural heritage. When one compares La Princesse de Babylone with Voltaire's other oriental contes, it is evident that it stands with Zadig as a major oriental conte written in the Mille et une nuits tradition, but unlike Zadig it is a magic-oriental tale rather than a purely philosophical one. In 1767, at a more mature stage of his development, Voltaire is untroubled and serene, ready to indulge in merriment and fancy, and to experiment with fusing myth and eighteenth-century reality.

At the very outset of this study, I said that I would try to determine whether or not Voltaire could have written this conte for the purpose of conveying a particular message to his readers. I do not find any possible overall ideological interpretation of this conte, no single message

embodied in the text as a whole. Certainly Voltaire had "vérités" (p.413) to convey to the reader through philosophic comment, but his primary purpose was to enjoy himself and entertain the reader by creating a fanciful oriental conte of great richness and complexity.

By 1760 the oriental tale genre had become very diversified indeed but, although Voltaire did not worry about being original, his contes can be particularly difficult to classify because of his ability to combine many traditions and materials. Bertrand-Guy refers to Voltaire's art in the conte as an "exercice de virtuosité":

Il est cependant difficile de faire entrer ces contes dans des catégories bien définies, Voltaire, qui se défiait des systèmes, multiplie et mélange toutes les ressources que la technique du conte met à sa portée.¹

In La Princesse de Babylone we find elements of the Mille et une nuits tradition, of traditional fairy tales, of epic romance, of legend, of travel literature, of primitivism, pastoralism, and republicanism, as well as sociological satire, philosophic propaganda, the utopian theme, and personal invective, all skilfully blended into an entertaining, lighthearted tale unified by the narrator's witty guiding presence. Pierre Martino identified Voltaire's intention in writing La Princesse de Babylone:

Qu'est-ce qui plaît le plus dans La Princesse de Babylone

de Voltaire (1768)? le fantastique joliment bête du récit, l'éloge de l'Angleterre, les aventures de la princesse Formosante et du bel Amazan, ou bien la satire de Rome? [...] N'a-t-il pas eu plutôt le dessein d'amuser par l'indécision même de l'oeuvre, par sa donnée tantôt extravagante et tantôt réaliste, toujours surprenante, presque toujours spirituelle?²

La Princesse de Babylone was first presented to the French public as a simple fairy tale. The first publication of the conte in France was the shortened version that appeared in the Mercure de France, July 1768. In this version La Princesse de Babylone is reduced to the fairytale love story of Amazan and Formosante, their misunderstandings and mutual pursuit ending with their reconciliation in Spain and their happy return to Babylon. The omission of all religious satire, of all critical comment on France, and of the "O Muses" coda might well be explained by the wish to avoid censure. However the initial lavish descriptions of the events in Babylon and the secondary romance of Princess Aldée and the King of Scythia were also omitted. Clearly it was assumed that a basic oriental fairytale romance would appeal to the public.

In earlier times La Princesse de Babylone was valued for its fantasy and mythological elements. In a 1778 volume of illustrations for Voltaire's Romans et contes, there are six drawings for La Princesse de Babylone.³ The female characters are dressed in the garb of Classical Antiquity,

but with breasts exposed. In the first drawing a noble youth, observed by King Bélus, Formosante, and Aldée, bends Nemrod's bow. The Phoenix hovers overhead. The second shows Formosante and her maid Irla flying through the air on the griffin-drawn sofa, the Phoenix as escort, and the towns passed over lying far below. The third depicts Formosante's encounter with the amorous King of Egypt at the inn. The blackbird spy is seen flying out of the window. The King of Egypt is attempting to kiss Formosante but she has already succeeded in drugging the King's bearded priest. The fourth drawing depicts Milord Qu'importe's carriage accident. The horses roll on the ground. Amazan rights Milord's carriage while his servant holds the reins of Amazan's unicorns. Meanwhile Milord Qu'importe smokes a long pipe, seemingly indifferent to the scene around him. The fifth drawing is of Formosante's discovery of Amazan and the opera girl in bed. The Phoenix is also a witness. The sixth shows the King of Ethiopia trying to rape Formosante and Amazan coming to the rescue with a great sword. The eighteenth-century publisher was clearly interested in making the most of the fairytale content of La Princesse de Babylone.

I shall mention here how two librettists attempted to transpose the imaginative power of the conte into opera. In their operas entitled La Princesse de Babylone (See

Appendix II), Martin and Vigée omit all satirical and philosophic content. Instead they capitalize on the atmosphere of pre-Christian legendary time when the fortunes of men were decreed by oracles and dreams. This type of melodrama was considered appropriate for the opera genre.

In the introduction to the text of his libretto for a four-act opera La Princesse de Babylone, written in 1788, Joseph Martin made the following remarks:

J'avais oui dire à des amis de Voltaire qu'il leur avait souvent indiqué sa Princesse de Babylone, l'un de ses plus ingénieux romans, comme très propre à servir de base à un grand opéra. En 1787, me trouvant à la campagne, y jouissant d'agréables loisirs, et dans cette heureuse disposition d'esprit si favorable aux ouvrages d'imagination, je me ressouvins du conseil de Voltaire. Un peu surpris que personne n'eût encore accompli le vœu de ce grand homme, à qui il a manqué, pour son bonheur et le notre, d'être très sensible aux charmes de la musique, je pris la plume et ne la quittai qu'après avoir fini l'ouvrage que j'imprime aujourd'hui.⁴

It may indeed be true that because of Voltaire's longstanding predilection for the tragic genre⁵, he would not have been adverse to Martin's transposition of a merry tale into a tragicomedy. In a footnote Martin explains his need to transform the tone and the mood of the original.

En adoptant [sic] les personnages que Voltaire fait agir et parler dans son Roman philosophique, qui sert de base à cet Opéra, il a fallu changer les circonstances qui, très gaies dans un conte, dont le but est d'amuser le lecteur, doivent au contraire dans une Tragédie porter l'empreinte de la terreur, et présenter aux spectateurs des scènes pathétiques et intéressantes.⁶

Martin's drama has nothing of the traditional fairytale motif in which a king seeks a husband for his daughter nor of the ensuing love quest. The opening scenes are ominous. A terrible monster threatens to destroy Babylon but the high priest at Serapis' oracle prophesies that King Bélus and his people will be saved by a young hero who will bend Nembrod's bow and slay the monster provided that he be rewarded by wedding Princess Formosante. The Princess, secretly betrothed to Amazan, worries about her fate. Three potential heroes appear--the Kings of Egypt, India and Scythia--followed by Amazan with the Phoenix. Needless to say, Amazan triumphs and the lovers are united in the presence of the god of love. Martin has intensified the mythological element.

Vigée's libretto for a three-act opera La Princesse de Babylone 1815, revolves around the competition for Formosante's hand. The three royal suitors are again outdone by the young Gangaride. Much is made of the unworthy, cowardly behaviour of the Kings of Egypt and India who, out of spite, attack Babylon, imprison Amazan, and when Formosante declares her love for him, vow to burn him at the stake. The King of Scythia who is grateful to Amazan for having rescued him from the lion's jaws, saves the day by taking Amazan's place in prison, thus allowing Amazan,

disguised as a Scythian, to overthrow his enemies. An oracle confirms Amazan's royal blood. He is accepted as Bélus' heir and wins Formosante. This libretto contains Amazan's eight-line madrigal to Formosante of which Voltaire was proud.⁷ Like Martin, Vigée recognized spectacle, drama, and the appeal of myth as the components of Voltaire's conte that would suit opera.

I alluded in Chapter V to the perennial appeal of fantasy based on the very human need to escape periodically from the limitations and trials of day-to-day existence to a dream world. A recent page-long newspaper article by Henry Mietkiewicz entitled "Fairy tales in the fast lane"⁸ describes the immense current popularity of fairy tales in all forms of entertainment and attributes this indisputable phenomenon to the public's recognition of the emotional therapeutic value of fantasy, so necessary in an age dissatisfied with materialism and dismayed by a spiritual void. The best fairy tales help people to resolve deep-rooted conflicts of mind using mythic images both cherished and feared such as giants, witches, talking animals, and castles in the clouds. A few examples of current entertainment hits in the fantasy mode listed by Mietkiewicz include the TV series Beauty and the Beast and The Storyteller; Sondheim's Broadway musical Into the woods; the movie The Princess Bride; as well as The Little Mermaid, a

Walt Disney film and Little Red Riding Hood, Year 2000, a Canadian film, both to be released in 1989; a new Canadian opera entitled A Midwinter Night's Dream, and a new definitive collection of Grimms' fairy tales. Clearly fantasy is very much in vogue with the general public in 1988.

Although scientific proof of the value of fairy tales by such psychologists as Bruno Bettelheim⁹ is recent, for centuries people have turned naturally to fantasy for entertainment and solace. Delattre supports Pomeau's assertion that Voltaire delighted in periodically escaping to a fantasy world. "Voltaire se réfugie de temps à autre dans le monde féerique, revient à l'heureux temps des fables déraisonnables et des aventures aussi héroïques qu'absurdes."¹⁰ It is important not to underestimate the role of fantasy in the life of a man known as the epitome of reason.

Perhaps La Princesse de Babylone has attracted less attention than it merits because eighteenth-century scholars tend to associate Voltaire with the great evolution in the world of ideas during the Enlightenment, with serious works, with the fight against l'infâme. La Princesse de Babylone is neither a confessional conte as Van den Heuvel termed those tales in which Voltaire struggled with metaphysical issues troubling him, nor one in which completely new ideas

are expressed; consequently it risks being dismissed as frivolous. And yet, Barchilon assures us that frivolity as expressed in fantasy is an important part of our heritage from the Enlightenment:

Finally we cannot stress too much that it would be distorting the Enlightenment to consider it as only "philosophical". Philosophy and sensibility were neatly balanced by the "puerile" fairy tale. Frivolity and seriousness walked hand in hand.¹¹

Gérard de Nerval expressed his nostalgia for the scintillating wit and imagination expressed in eighteenth-century fairy tales:

Jamais les fictions et les fables n'eurent plus de succès qu'alors. Les plus graves écrivains, Montesquieu, Voltaire, Diderot berçaient et endormaient par des contes charmants cette société que leurs principes allaient détruire de fond en comble. L'auteur de l'Esprit des lois écrivait Le Temple de Gnide, le fondateur de L'Encyclopédie charmait les ruelles avec L'Oiseau Blanc et les Bijoux indiscrets; l'auteur du Dictionnaire philosophique brodait La Princesse de Babylone et Zadig, ces merveilleuses fantaisies de l'Orient. Tout cela c'était de l'invention, de l'esprit et rien de plus, sinon du plus fin et du plus charmant.¹²

La Princesse de Babylone should be valued for the wit, charm, and imaginative power to which Nerval refers. At the same time we recognize that by integrating satirical and philosophic material in the fairy tale and by giving vitality to the whole by a unique fusion of myth and reality, Voltaire has created a complex conte that is both entertaining and intellectually stimulating. If a word of

personal testimony may be included at the very end of this study, I can truthfully say that the appeal of the high-spirited Princesse de Babylone is so great that my pleasure in it is undiminished after countless readings. Truly it is a tale to satisfy all tastes.

NOTES TO CHAPTER XI

¹Bertrand-Guy, pp. 68-9.

²Martino, p.279.

³Dessins de Charles Monnet, Clément-Pierre Marillier, Jean-Michel Moreau et Pietro Antonio Martini pour les "Romans et Contes" de M. de Voltaire, 1778. B.N., Collection Rothschild no. 228.

⁴Joseph Martin, La Princesse de Babylone, music by A. Salieri (Paris: Denné, 1791), p.iii.

⁵In his article "Voltaire's Bel Canto: Operatic Adaptions of Voltaire's Tragedies", R. S. Ridgway tells us that Voltaire wrote seven librettos and that "with the exception of Shakespeare, Voltaire is the writer whose works are the single most important literary source of opera librettos". SVEC, No. 241 (1986), 125.

⁶Ibid., p.41.

⁷This madrigal appeared in several collections of odd poems under the title "Madrigal à une princesse aimée de trois rois". See Etrennes aux belles données par Voltaire, quinze jours avant sa mort (Paris: chez la veuve Guillaume, 1783), 56 p.; Calendrier de Paphos, dédié aux jolies femmes, recueil des pièces de vers les plus ingénieuses et les plus galantes, faites par les dames, ou en leur honneur, avec le nom des auteurs (Paris: chez Desnos, 1778), 83p.; and Elite de poésies fugitives, vol. IV of Poésies compiled by Luneau de Boisjermain (London & Paris, 1770).

⁸See The Toronto Star, Feb. 20, 1988, "Fairy tales in the fast lane" by Henry Mietkiewicz.

⁹Bruno Bettelheim, The Uses of Enchantment (New York: Knopf, 1976).

¹⁰Delattre, p.97.

¹¹Barchilon, p.138.

¹²Gérard de Nerval, Oeuvres, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade
(Paris: Gallimard, 1956), p.1127.



APPENDIX
VOLTAIRE'S ORIENTAL

Title	Length *	Type	Geographic setting
<u>Le Crocheteur borgne</u> 1715 *	5p.	magic-oriental tale dream ↔ reality	Bagdad
<u>Le Monde comme il va</u> between 1739-1747	15p.	satirical, moral tale	"Haute Asie" & Persepolis used for France & Paris
<u>Zadig ou la Destinée</u> 1745-47	68p. including appendices	philosophic, oriental tale	Babylon, Egypt Arabia & Bassora
<u>Lettre d'un Turc</u> 1750	3p.	philosophic, satirical tale	India
<u>Histoire des voyages</u> <u>de Scaramentado</u> 1753-54	7p.	expression of personal bitterness	Europe, India, Asia, Africa
<u>Les Lettres d'Amabed</u> 1753 reworked 1768-69	48p.	polemical	India and Rome

* Dates of composition and page length as found

APPENDIX I

ORIENTAL CONTES

	Historical setting	Oriental vogue	Fabulous animals	Love element	Tone
	None	<u>Mille et une nuits</u> tradition	No	Yes	humorous licentious
& ed Paris	Myth	slight oriental flavour	No	No	suave
pt	Reign of King Moabdar	<u>Mille et une nuits</u> tradition	No	Yes	reflective
	None	exotic local colour	No	No	light mild
	early 1600s	The Orient, a part of an unjust world	No	No	bitter, unrelieved irony
ne	1512-13	superiority of Orient	No	Yes	virulent

as found in Pléiade edition of Romans et contes

VOLTAIRE'S ORIENT

Title	Length	Type	Geographic setting
<u>Candide ou l'Optimisme</u> 1758	87p.	philosophic tale in picaresque tradition	Europe South America Turkey
<u>Histoire d'un bon bramin</u> 1759	2p.	philosophic, moral tale	India
<u>Le Blanc et le noir</u> 1763-64	12p.	philosophic tale dream reality	Province of Candahar in Persia; Kaboul in Afghanistan; Cachemire, N.W.India
<u>Aventure indienne</u> 1766	2p.	philosophic tale	India
<u>La Princesse de Babylone</u> 1767	65p.	magic-oriental tale fused with satire & philosophic comment	the composite Orient, Europe, N. Africa
<u>Le Taureau blanc</u> 1772-73	33p.	magic-oriental tale philosophic spoof	Egypt

S ORIENTAL CONTES

	Historical setting	Oriental vogue	Fabulous animals	Love element	Tone
rica	1700s	incidental	No	Yes	pessimistic ironic
	None	slight oriental flavour; local colour not developed	No	No	simple
andahar about stan; W India	None	oriental atmosphere	Yes	Yes	lively
	6th century B.C.	None	animals speak	No	somber
site rope, a	fusion of myth & 18th century reality	<u>Mille et une nuits</u> tradition	Yes	Yes	sparkling merry
	6th century B.C. as myth	<u>Mille et une nuits</u> tradition; customs of ancient Egypt	Yes	Yes	highly humorous

APPENDIX II

TWO OPERAS ENTITLED LA PRINCESSE DE BABYLONE

"La Princesse de Babylone" by Joseph Martin

The title page of the libretto for Martin's four-act opera La Princesse de Babylone gives the following information: "Lu au comité de l'Académie Royale de Musique, les 16 Août 1788, 24 Février 1791, et non encore représenté le Vendredi premier Avril 1791".¹

Martin identifies himself as a "député du commerce près l'Assemblée Nationale, Membre du Club des Amis de la Constitution et Chef de la Société Académique des Enfants d'Apollon, pour 1791". Salieri who wrote the musical score, is described as "Premier maître de chapelle de la Cour de Vienne" (p.ii).

Martin first submitted his "poème" to the Comité de l'Académie Royale de Musique in May 1788 (p.iii). Although he was turned down, partly on the grounds that the work would be costly to stage, he expected that the opera would eventually be accepted if only because of the reputation of his associate Antonio Salieri. When La Princesse de Babylone was rejected again in March 1791, Martin felt that he had been dealt with unfairly and had been victimized by the all-powerful committee secretary, M. Lasalle, who seemed determined to block Martin's success. Consequently, to

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than fifty years, counted Beethoven, Schubert, Czerny, and Liszt among his pupils. In addition to forty-five operas he wrote sacred works, instrumental music, and secular vocal music. Salieri is known to viewers of the film Amadeus as Mozart's rival. However, in The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians Rudolph Angermüller states that there is no real evidence for Salieri's supposed enmity with his famous contemporary.⁵

In the 1780s Salieri had had great success in Paris with his operas Les Danaïdes 1784, Les Horaces 1786, and Tarare (words by Beaumarchais) 1787. It is therefore not surprising that Martin should assume that Salieri's enthusiasm for La Princesse de Babylone would confirm its merit and that the opera committee would be impressed by the fact that so eminent a musician was devoting himself to the project.

Martin states that Salieri had completed three quarters of the musical score in April 1791 (p.80). Salieri's letter from Vienna dated Jan. 24, 1791 (pp. 80-81), expresses his reluctance to request a leave of absence from his post in Vienna to come to Paris to work on the production of La Princesse de Babylone, given the extreme uncertainty of the opera ever being performed at the Théâtre lyrique. I have no knowledge of the Martin/Salieri opera ever being performed.

"La Princesse de Babylone" by L.J.B.E.Vigée

Vigée's three-act opera La Princesse de Babylone was performed for the first time by the Académie Impériale de Musique, May 30, 1815. The libretto printed in Paris 1815, lists a cast of eleven as well as "peuples" and "soldats".⁶ I have been unable to find any information about Vigée. Pierre Gardel, 1758-1840, a prominent dancer and choreographer, was responsible for the "ballets".

The music was by Rodolphe Kreutzer, 1766-1831, a virtuoso violinist, teacher, and composer. This is the Kreutzer to whom Beethoven dedicated a piano-violin sonata. From 1790 on Kreutzer brought out a series of operatic works. One of the productions that enhanced his reputation for stage work was Paul et Virginie, a ballet-pantomime performed in 1806.⁷ In 1817 he was the chief conductor of the Paris opera.

NOTES TO APPENDIX II

¹Joseph Martin, La Princesse de Babylone, Music by Antonio Salieri (Paris: Denné, 1791), p.i. All references are to this publication.

²See Adolphe Jullien, La Cour et l'opéra sous Louis XVI (Paris:Didier & Cie, 1878): "Les noms de Lainez, Laïs, Rousseau, Chéron, Chardini, Adrien, Dufresne, Moreau, Martin, Lefèvre, Renaud, de M^{lle} Maillard, Girardin, Joséphine, de M^{me} Ponteuil, de M^{lle} Audinot et des soeurs Gavaudan, montrent que l'auteur [Joseph Martin] ne s'était pas choisi de mauvais interprètes et qu'il avait pris tout simplement pour cette exécution imaginaire le dessus du panier du personnel alors si remarquable de l'Opéra français" (p. 294).

³Ibid., p.277.

⁴Ibid., p.306.

⁵The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians, ed. Stanley Sadie (London: Macmillan Publishers Ltd., 1980), XVI, 416 & 418: "It remains to mention the supposed enmity with Mozart, which has traditionally damaged Salieri's posthumous reputation. Even if Salieri did not go out of his way to help Mozart, there is little evidence for the intrigues that are frequently attributed to him, nor is any derogatory remark against the younger composer recorded. Mozart himself (letter of 14 October 1791) reported Salieri's warm reception of Die Zauberflöte. And the rumour that Salieri poisoned Mozart is without foundation."

⁶L.B.J.E. Vigée, La Princesse de Babylone, Music by Kreutzer (Paris: Vente, 1815), 40p.

⁷Grove, X, 261.

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