

PERFORMING REASON

NARRATIVE AND PHILOSOPHY IN VOLTAIRE'S "L'HOMME AUX QUARANTE ÉCUS"

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UDK 1 Voltaire

UDK 821.133.1.09 Voltaire

This article explores the role of narrativity in Voltaire's thought through an analysis of one of his contes philosophiques, "L'Homme aux quarante écus." This story, it is argued, unfolds as an allegory of the Enlightenment in which the protagonist gradually acquires a narrative identity for himself. The fact that this identity is grounded in textual heterogeneity rather than coherence proclaims internal difference to be an essential condition for Voltaire's view of the Enlightenment as an ongoing project whose meaning resists being fixed. Conversely, Voltaire's conception of the Enlightenment helps explain his choice of the story as a medium for "performing" reason in narrative action.

Keywords: philosophy, narrativity, allegory, identity, Enlightenment, Voltaire

1. Introduction

What is the relationship between philosophy and the art of storytelling? Can one be a philosopher and a storyteller at one and the same time, or even in one and the same text? If so, then how does the medium affect the message? In a well-known essay, Walter Benjamin characterizes the storyteller as a craftsman with the increasingly rare ability to share experiences ("The Storyteller" I, 142). A born communicator, the storyteller is someone that offers counsel to his listeners. This counsel tends to be of a practical or moral nature, and it typically takes the form of a proposal as to how the story that is being told might continue. What is thus imparted to the audience is neither information nor some abstract truth, but *wisdom*, "the epic side of truth," in which counsel is inextricably interwoven with the matter of real-life experience ("The Storyteller" IV 145–146).

Benjamin's eulogy of the storyteller as a mediator between life and truth might well make one forget that the art of "performing truth" in narrative has

not always found similar favor among western philosophers. Yet it is important to remember that even Plato, in Book Ten of his *Republic*, banishes fiction from his ideal state because of its potential for corrupting public morals (74). Along with the poet, the sophist, too, is dismissed as a tale-monger that abandons the cause of truth for the vulgar objective of persuasion.

Plato's attempt to distinguish between true and false discourse has been identified by Michel Foucault as a fundamental turning-point in human history, where the opposition true/false itself came to function as the single most important mechanism for the control of discourse in general (*Order of Discourse* 54).¹ Indeed, we find this observation well supported by the tradition of western philosophy, in which the notion of "falsehood" has frequently been equated with "fiction." Ever since Plato, the relationship between philosophy and narrative has been an uneasy one, even if some celebrated philosophers – including, ironically, Plato himself – earned themselves a reputation as powerful storytellers.²

The case of François-Marie Arouet, *alias* Voltaire (1694–1778), appears to compound this difficulty. A tireless champion of the Enlightenment, he was likewise a man of many and diverse talents, who combined his literary output with his historical and philosophical work as well as his scientific interests. As Voltaire himself testifies, he did not conceive of his various kinds of writing as radically different from one another. "J'écris pour agir,"³ he declared, an adage that fits the purpose of his *Dictionnaire philosophique* (1764) as well as that of the twenty-six *contes philosophiques* that he left the world and that constitute the cornerstone of his literary reputation today.

The common application of the term *conte philosophique* to Voltaire's stories might suggest that he, for one, did not subscribe to the opposition between truth and fiction outlined above. However, Roger Pearson points out that the author himself rarely made use of it, even though the Quarto edition of his works published in 1771 contains two volumes whose contents are classified under the title *Romans, contes philosophiques, etc.* Moreover, he employed terms such as *conte*, *fable*, and *roman* indiscriminately to debunk miraculous chapters in biblical history, the metaphysics of fellow philosophers as far back as Plato, and the fabulous historiography of the ancients (*Fables of Reason* 5–6). It seems safe to conclude, then, that Voltaire did not automatically endorse Aristotle's view of the poet as one concerned with the expression of a higher, more philosophical kind of truth than the historian, the chronicler of mere facts (Aristotle 66–67).

This conclusion is confirmed by the article on history that Voltaire wrote for the *Encyclopédie*. He begins his contribution by drawing a conventional distinction between historiography as "le récit des faits donnés pour vrais" and the fable, "qui est le récit des faits donnés pour faux." Whoever might be inclined to interpret the term *faux* in the neutral sense of 'fictitious' here is quickly disabused. In the fourth paragraph, the author observes that historiography has its roots in stories (*récits*) passed on from one generation to another; a process in which the story gradually loses all probability. What remains is a *fable* in which the truth has been lost (*la vérité se perd*); hence, "toutes les origines des peuples sont absurdes" ("Histoire," *Oeuvres*

alphabétiques I 164–165). Herodotus’ *Histories*, he notes, represent a curious hybrid of the true things he has heard and the *contes* he has from hearsay; at times the work reads like a novel (*roman*). Those historians that, like Voltaire’s older contemporary Charles Rollin, are inclined to admire the wisdom (*science*) and truthfulness (*véracité*) of these stories had better consider that time is too precious, and history too immense, to saddle their readers with such fictions (170).

Not only do stories lack factual truth; Voltaire’s last remark suggests that even where a story does contain a “higher” truth, this might have been more efficiently conveyed through other means. The very term *conte philosophique* thus presents itself as a potential problem in the context of his oeuvre; a circumstance that alone warrants a closer investigation into his actual practice of the genre. There may well be truth in Pearson’s claim that Voltaire’s general dislike of stories was grounded in his conviction that many of these stories prevent people from seeing things “as they really are” (*Fables of Reason* 4). What Voltaire does, according to Pearson, is to penetrate the realm of fiction so as to destroy it from within by replacing the fable with a more authentic story. Far from pandering to his audience’s craving for illusions, his stories present themselves as *allegories* that the reader needs to apply to his or her personal situation. This didactic design, it may be noted, conforms entirely to Voltaire’s belief that the most useful books are those that are written jointly by the author and the reader.⁴ At the same time it confirms the author’s conception of the *conte philosophique* as a hybrid structure whose philosophical meaning emerges only indirectly, at the precise point where it turns the fables concocted by others – philosophers, but also scientists, legislators, and the Church – against themselves.

In what follows I will examine the role of narrative for Voltaire’s thought through an analysis of one of his more successful *contes*, “L’Homme aux quarante écus” (1768). My enabling assumption is that what compelled Voltaire to a narrative approach was his view of the Enlightenment as a radically *historical* development. Ever suspicious of philosophical systems, he saw the Enlightenment project in terms of an open-ended process that can only unfold itself in the workings of the individual mind. “Lisez, éclairez-vous,” one of the narrators in “L’Homme” exhorts both the protagonist and the external reader (327) – without, characteristically, providing any titles for the curriculum. Reading, an occupation that necessarily proceeds sequentially, is an important theme in this *conte*, in which the hero’s steadily increasing appetite for books presents itself as an allegory for his attempt to “read” life.⁵ To read in this broader sense is to enlighten oneself, a way of *performing* reason through constant dialogue with the baffling text that is the world.

My analysis focuses on the question how – that is, by what formal means – Voltaire’s *conte* seeks to perform reason in narrative, as well as on the consequences of this narrative approach for the philosophical truth thus conveyed. Special attention will be paid to the story’s incoherence at the levels of presentation and narration because this aspect is crucial to my interpretation of its allegorical sense.

2. Mr. Average⁶ Learns to Read

“L’Homme aux quarante écus” is the story of a man’s quest for knowledge. As such, it coincides with his individual growth towards a narrative identity.⁷ Before proceeding to the question of form I would like to give an outline of this typically Voltairean plot.

“L’Homme” opens with a lament modeled on the *ubi sunt* motif, in which an old man compares the present state of France’s economy to its more glorious past. The main reason given for this decline is the current scarcity of agricultural labor owing, among other things, to the fact that so many have turned to different occupations.

In the chapter following this prologue, we are acquainted with the disaster that has befallen the protagonist, a smallholder whose land would afford him an annual income of forty *écus* were it not for a tax reform recently introduced by “quelques personnes qui, se trouvant de loisir, gouvernement l’État au coin de leur feu” (286).⁸ The newly-appointed ministers, it turns out, have imposed a single tax on land while exempting all those that gain their income from different sources, and as a *seigneur terrien* our hero is bound to renounce half of his annual income to the state.⁹ Having served a term in prison for being unable to pay his due, he meets a puffed-up capitalist who *almost* succeeds in convincing him of the justice of the new system: “Payez mon ami, vous qui jouissez en paix d’un revenu clair et net de quarante écus; servez bien la patrie, et venez quelquefois diner avec ma livrée” (287).

The capitalist’s apologia sets *l’homme* thinking – a rare activity in his part of the country (285). Yet he finds that thought alone does not provide him with the answers necessary to refute an argument he cannot believe in, so he calls in the help of two *géomètres* in succession.¹⁰ His first consultant, who practices a metaphysical variant of this science, merely confuses him by trying to make him disbelieve the evidence of his own eyes. Fortunately, his second mentor, a *citoyen philosophe*, assures him that “la véritable géométrie est l’art de mesurer les choses existantes” (292). Through a number of statistical calculations, this “true” measurer of things figures out that if the total amount of France’s arable land were to be divided by the estimated number of its population, everyone would have an income of forty *écus* a year. At this point, then, *l’homme* discovers himself to be France’s exact Mr. Average, a position that does not please him at all once he learns that the average Parisian has a life expectancy of twenty-three years and only three years of a tolerable existence to look forward to: “Quarante écus, et trois ans à vivre! Quelle ressource imagineriez-vous contre ces deux malédictions?” (291).

Straightaway his counselor, an eminently practical man, launches into a remarkably modern-sounding program for the improvement of public health and hygiene: provide cleaner air, make the people eat less and do more exercise, encourage breastfeeding and inoculation against smallpox. As to the matter of fortune, he can only advise Mr. Average to get married and have four children because “five or six miseries put together make a

very tolerable household” (292). Although we live in an Iron Age in which men are no longer equal, the French are better off than many other nations. Mr. Average would be a happy man if only he could think of himself as such! However, his pupil refuses to settle for such glib consolations, and what follows is a lesson in “true” government in which the entire population, including the new industrials, are made to do their stint to relieve the national treasury. Having reached the end of his discourse, the *géomètre* ironically commends Mr. Average to the grace of God. Mr. Average’s answer shows that he is already beginning to reap the benefits of education: “On passe sa vie à espérer, et on meurt en espérant” (301).

The truth of this last insight is – again, ironically – driven home when Mr. Average, rendered destitute by the new tax legislation, finds himself brushed off by a discalced Carmelite whom he had asked for food. A visit to a public session of the *controleur général*, before whom he hopes to present his case, provides him with further proof of how the country is ruled by injustice. Worldly and ecclesiastical authorities dispute with each other for the right to extort the people while the *controleur*, resorting to biblical language, applauds the humanity of the extortionists. A rare moment of truth presents itself when a “man of profound genius” proposes to levy a tax on wit, and the *controleur* responds by immediately declaring the speaker exempt from this tax (404). When Mr. Average finally seizes his chance to beg for justice he is told that he has been the victim of a hoax. In recompense, he receives a substantial sum and is exempted from tax for the rest of his life. He leaves the session invoking God’s blessing on the *controleur*.

An anonymous correspondent, having read an account of Mr. Average’s vicissitudes and knowing him for an avid reader, sends him an issue of an economics journal. Because the writer himself has been ruined by the counsel contained in such journals, however, he warns Mr. Average to put no trust in the new economic theories and agricultural systems he will find expounded there: “Gardez-vous des charlatans” (307).

This embedded story of a man that learned to read too late is followed by another, to wit, an excerpt from a manuscript by an old recluse in whom it is hard not to recognize an *alter ego* of Voltaire. The recluse shifts the topic from the creators of new systems of worldly government to those that aim to displace God by recreating His universe in writing. Thus he recounts a dialogue in which one of these thinkers, a descendant of Thales, tried to convince him that the world was originally covered with water, and that the globe itself is made of glass. However, “plus il m’indoctrinait, plus je devenais incrédule” (308). Metaphysical system-builders – Leibniz, Descartes – and the explorer Maupertuis, who proposed building a city at the centre of the earth, fare no better with this confirmed skeptic.

Meanwhile Mr. Average has come a long way on the road to education. Possessed of a small fortune, he marries a nice wife who soon gets pregnant. His approaching fatherhood triggers new questions, and so he returns to his *géomètre* to find out how children are engendered. The latter denies any direct knowledge of the matter, but offers to give him the thoughts of

some “philosophers” on the subject: “that is, how children are *not* made” (311). Various theories are reviewed, ranging from Hippocrates’ ideas concerning a mixture of male and female semen to Harvey’s hypothesis that women, like all mammals, breed from eggs that ripen in the ovaries. Just when the prospective father has avowed that his wife’s eggs are very dear to him, his instructor dampens the atmosphere by announcing that science has grown weary of this system, and that children are made differently nowadays (313). There follows a round of new speculations that meet with growing criticism on part of the student. When the *géomètre* declares that in the end scientists may have to “return to the eggs,” Mr. Average asks what the use of all these debates has been. The answer is: doubt. Scientists, says the *géomètre*, have an important advantage over theologians in that they can hold different views without knocking each other’s brains out. Although he does not make the advantages of doubt for science itself explicit, he counsels Mr. Average to doubt everything in life – except, of course, the basic principles of geometry (315).

As he proceeds to put this advice into practice, Mr. Average encounters ever new evils and idiosyncrasies in the world: the exorbitant wealth of the monastic orders and the wasted talents of those that enter them; the inhumanity of the dowry system, which compels poor noblemen to send their daughters to convents; the injustice of tithes and ecclesiastical taxes paid by French citizens directly to the Holy See; the disproportionately high punishments imposed by the courts of law (“un pendu n’est bon à rien,” 323); the practice of obtaining confessions by means of torture; and finally the scourge of syphilis, which, according to the surgeon of the army that brings the disease to Mr. Average’s part of the country, could only be defeated by another crusade (332).

By keeping an open mind and taking nothing for granted, Mr. Average gradually succeeds in perfecting his own education. His progress is accompanied by material success, too: no less than three inheritances from relatives permit him to start a library of his own. But perhaps his most important feat in the story is that he at last acquires a name for himself. Henceforth, *notre nouveau philosophe* will be known as Monsieur André (332).

In his new capacity as a man of wisdom, Monsieur André soon gains a reputation as a mediator in conflicts. When a seemingly insoluble dispute arises among theologians about the question of whether the soul of the virtuous pagan emperor Marcus Aurelius resides in heaven or in hell, he invites both parties to supper and tactfully persuades them to leave the emperor’s soul *in statu quo*, “pending a definitive judgment” (334). Interestingly, he manages to break the ice by telling his guests a *conte* (334). The last episode finds him and his wife presiding over a banquet where the guests, all of whom represent different religious denominations and walks in life, nevertheless manage to spend a very pleasant evening together. For his part, the narrator of this final scene is convinced that the occasion yields in nothing even to Plato’s feast: “J’avoue que le banquet de Platon ne m’aurait pas fait plus de plaisir que celui de monsieur et de madame André” (342).

3. Voltaire's Allegory of Enlightenment

Paul Ricoeur, in his monumental study *Time and Narrative*, defines human identity as being constituted essentially through narrative. As human agents, we live in a continuous present of historical time in which we determine our actions on the basis of past experience and expectation of the future. In order to give expression to this complex historical present, we need stories. Only by refiguring historical time through narrative can we situate our individual experience in the interpersonal context of the world we inhabit. This is so because, unlike the historical present, a story is not a sequence of unconnected events. In telling a story, we impose a unifying plot structure onto a succession of discrete events and incidents, thereby creating an illusion of logical and causal coherence. "Time becomes human," says Ricoeur, "to the extent that it is articulated through a narrative mode, and narrative attains its full meaning when it becomes a condition of temporal existence" (*Time and Narrative* I 52). Stories enable us to synthesize the heterogeneity of experience into an intelligible whole (I 65). At the same time they help us to come to terms with the finitude of our lives in that they permit us to construct a prehistory and imagine a possible sequel to our existence. In short: we need stories to make *sense* of our lives.¹¹

Judging from the outline of "L'Homme" given above, we might conclude that the story provides a perfect illustration of Ricoeur's theory. Like *Candide*, Voltaire's most famous *conte*, "L'Homme," also unfolds as a *Bildungsroman* in which a man, struck by an initial disaster, outgrows his role as a passive figure – in the case of the future Monsieur André, a *literal* figure – and gradually learns to take his fate into his own hands, thereby acquiring a personal identity.¹² Yet this identity could reveal itself as such only in a *story*, in which the hero's past experiences are strung together and connected with his present situation. Similarly, the illusion that the protagonist has fulfilled his destiny and thereby imposed a unifying seal on his biography is an effect of the story in that it rests on the fact that the story *ends* at a given point.

A comparison between "L'Homme" and *Candide* yields further interesting correspondences. Both *contes* are anti-fables in that they employ the narrative mode to ridicule existing systems of thought. In this respect they differ from more conventional philosophical tales in which the story merely serves to *illustrate* a truth, a genre for which Aesop's fables provided the western prototype.

The chief butt of Voltaire's satire in *Candide* is the monadology of Leibniz, particularly the Leibniz's optimistic belief that because God created the universe we can only assume to be living in the best of possible worlds.¹³ The character that is made the mouthpiece of Leibniz is Candide's tutor, the learned Doctor Pangloss, who has been appointed to instruct his pupil in *métaphysico-théologo-cosmolo-nigologie* (28). In the course of the story the venerable doctor finds himself afflicted by all conceivable evils, yet he remains steadfast in his conviction that Leibniz cannot possibly be wrong (146). Not so Candide, whose own ordeals lead him to the

proverbial but cryptic conclusion that *il faut cultiver notre jardin* (153). Bitter experience has taught him that the only truth resides in useful *action*. Reasoning is supplanted by the *performance* of reason, a performance that holds no guarantees for the future and whose allegorical meaning must be supplied anew by each reader.¹⁴

We have seen that “L’Homme”, too, offers Mr. Average and its external reader a course in exposing the unfounded certainties of others. Just as in *Candide*, “true reading” is never a matter of simply exchanging one system for another. Rather, the quest structure of the narrative serves to displace truth from one textual chain to the next, finally to disappear beyond the horizon of the story. What lends the banquet *chez André* its convivial atmosphere is precisely his guests’ ability to engage in animated conversation while refraining from trying to convert each other, so that the evening yields no weightier conclusion than a jolly song that one of the companies has composed for the ladies.

Still, there are also important differences to be observed between both *contes*, and as far as I am concerned the most conspicuous of these concerns the levels of narration and focalization.¹⁵ In *Candide* as in “L’Homme,” an initial stroke of fate lands the protagonist in a maelstrom of disjointed experiences in which nothing seems to make sense anymore, and which leaves him out of control for the time being. Yet where narrative unity in *Candide* is throughout ensured by the presence of an external narrator that integrates the embedded stories into a single perspective, such unity is totally absent in “L’Homme.”

In the prologue we meet a personal narrator that questions the old man. Only in the next episode does this narrator identify himself as the protagonist, who proceeds to tell his own adventures up to and including the scene in which the *controleur* relieves him of his pecuniary trouble. So far, Mr. Average seems to be running the show of his own story, if not of his destiny. At this point, however, his account is interrupted, first by his anonymous correspondent – who claims to have *read* the story of Mr. Average’s disaster and subsequent good fortune! – and then by the excerpt from the manuscript of the *vieux solitaire* (307), Voltaire’s fictional counterpart, who does not lose the opportunity to refer his readers to some of his other writings.

The following episode, in which Mr. Average receives his crash course in biology, marks another shift in that the beginning is related by an external narrator. In this account, Mr. Average functions for the first time as the focalized object of another narrator/focalizer. However, before long the partners in dialogue take over, and the text quickly switches to the dramatic mode. In the next section, another personal narrator (“Voltaire”? The *géomètre*?) returns and, while the dialogic element is retained, the protagonist is increasingly focalized by others. Once more the story is broken off, this time to accommodate a series of excerpts from a (historical) document on criminal justice written by a contemporary of Voltaire. In the final sections, the unidentified personal narrator is again in firm command. By that time, the tense begins to shift from past to present now and then, thereby suggesting the convergence of narrated time with the time of narration.

Summing up these developments, we might say that Mr. Average's transformation to Monsieur André is counterbalanced by his gradual change from a narrative subject and focalizer into a narrated character and object of focalization. This latter change helps to account for our impression that the protagonist has been "formed;" that is, that he has reached his enlightened destiny at the point where the story reaches its conclusion.

Still, this would be putting things rather too neatly, especially when one considers the text's lack of narrative unity caused by the alternation between different, often unidentified narrators. The resulting sense of incoherence is yet reinforced by the hotchpotch of different texts, discourses, and genres that present themselves to the reader in quick succession. At the level of fabula, finally, the discrepancy between the practical nature of our hero's interests and the overtly fabulous nature of his changes of fortune threatens to destroy any suggestion of *vraisemblance*.

Should we ascribe these *faux-pas* to the ramblings of the author's old age? After all, Voltaire was seventy-four when he wrote "L'Homme." In my opinion there is a more interesting possibility. The very lack of formal coherence as well as the truly Bakhtinian cacophony of voices in the story could also be read as part of its allegorical meaning. Thus interpreted, "L'Homme" might be taken to convey the truth – philosophical or otherwise – that reality itself is irreparably fragmented, and that any suggestion of internal unity can only be the result of emplotment.

On the other hand, Voltaire's *conte* also demonstrates that internal difference may be productive. After all, Monsieur André, an enlightened counselor *par excellence*, is himself the successful product of this heterogeneous text. Nor need difference always be synonymous with discord, as is shown by the convivial example set in the closing scene. The mutual differences between the guests do not prevent them from enjoying each other's company; on the contrary, they help to fuel the conversation. Here, we might remember the *géomètre's* lesson that scientists, too, can learn to live with their disagreements.

Internal difference is an indispensable condition for Voltaire's own view of the Enlightenment as an open-ended process that resists any attempt to fix its meaning. By the same logic, however, it will be clear that he needs stories to press this philosophical point. The result, in "L'Homme," is a hybrid that continues to fascinate for its daring performance of reason.

NOTES

¹ However, Foucault makes it clear that this opposition will reveal its aspect of arbitrary violence only when it is viewed from a position *outside* the discourse that it aims to regulate. *Within* a given discursive community, the need to distinguish between truth and falsehood can only appear self-evident (*Order of Discourse* 54).

² "...there is an old quarrel between poetry and philosophy. I could quote a lot of passages for that: 'the yapping bitch that barks at her master,' 'a great man amid the vanities of fools,' 'the rabble of know-all heads,' 'thin thinkers starve,' and so on. However, let us make it clear that if poetry for pleasure and imitation have any argu-

ments to advance in favor of their presence in a well-governed city, we should be glad to welcome them back. We are conscious of their charms for us. But it would be wrong to betray what we believe to be the truth” (Plato, *Republic* X, 74).

³ The quotation (from a letter by Voltaire to Jacob Vernes dated 15 April 1767) is taken from Pearson (*Fables of Reason* 7).

⁴ « Les livres les plus utiles sont ceux dont les lecteurs font eux-mêmes la moitié; ils étendent les pensées dont on leur présente la germe; ils corrigent ce qui leur semble défectueux, et fortifient par leurs réflexions ce qui leur paraît faible » (Preface to the *Dictionnaire philosophique* I 284). Voltaire’s view of the connection between fable and allegory is borne out by the first sentence of the article on fables that he wrote for this work: « Les plus anciennes fables ne sont-elles pas visiblement allégoriques? » (*Dictionnaire philosophique* II 99). Elsewhere in the same article he wonders whether « l’ancienne fable de Vénus, telle qu’elle est rapportée dans Hésiode, n’est ... pas une allégorie de la nature entière » (101).

⁵ Compare the following quotation from “L’Homme,” which appears near the end: « Comme le bon sens de monsieur André s’est fortifiée depuis qu’il a une bibliothèque! Il vit avec les livres comme avec les hommes ... » (336).

⁶ I borrow this name from Pearson (*Fables of Reason* 22).

⁷ Compare Ricoeur: “The narrative constructs the identity of the character, what can be called his or her narrative identity, in constructing that of the story told. It is the identity of the story that makes the identity of the character” (*Oneself as Another* 147–48).

⁸ Unless stated otherwise, all quotations are from the edition by Henri Bénac.

⁹ The tax system as described here did indeed exist in Voltaire’s day, but only as a theory launched by a group of economists that styled themselves the “Physiocrats.” Their idea, based on the belief that cultivation of the soil is the best way to ensure economic wealth, was that France needed to develop its agriculture. The proposal for a single tax to be levied on land came from Le Mercier de la Rivière, but was never actually put into practice in France (Pearson, *Fables of Reason* 21). Voltaire may thus be seen to have grounded his own story in an economic fable created by others.

¹⁰ The word means both ‘geometrician’ and ‘surveyor’. The narrative, which I identified earlier as a process of learning to read, may be seen to effect a shift from the first to the second sense.

¹¹ “First, the configurational arrangement transforms the succession of events into one meaningful whole which is the correlate of the act of assembling the events together and makes the story followable. Thanks to this reflective act, the entire plot can be translated into one ‘thought,’ which is nothing other than its ‘point’ or ‘theme’” (*Time and Narrative* I 67).

¹² From the point of view of identity, the story of Mr. Average’s transformation to Monsieur André seems the more spectacular, because his change of name indicates that he exchanges his allegorical status for the identity of a man of flesh and blood.

¹³ For an excellent yet accessible account of Leibniz’ metaphysical thought, see G. MacDonald Ross, chapters five and six.

¹⁴ Deloffre, in the preface to his edition of *Candide*, suggests a possible link between *Candide*’s garden and Voltaire’s private “vineyard of the Lord” (Mt. 21:28); i.e., his repeated proposal to Diderot, D’Alembert, and others to join him at his rural estate so as to join forces and ensure the completion of the *Encyclopédie* (22). Compare Pearson, *Voltaire Almighty* 269–71.

¹⁵ Cf. Bal, who draws a narratological distinction between three different types of agency in a text: telling, seeing, and acting. She relates these different functions

to three corresponding narrative levels; that is, the text, the story, and the fabula respectively. By *fabula*, she understands the material or deep structure of a narrative, “a series of logically and chronologically related events that are caused by *actors*.” The presentation of this fabula takes place at the level of the *story* and involves the agency of *focalization*; that is, of presenting the story from someone’s perspective. Finally, the story reaches the external reader in the form of a *text* that is related by a *narratorial agent* (*Narratology* 5–7).

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