

UDEJANJANJE RAZUMA

PRIPOVED IN FILOZOFIJA V VOLTAIROVEM

»L' HOMME AUX QUARANTE ÉCUS«

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Članek raziskuje vlogo pripovednosti v Voltairovi misli, in to prek analize ene njegovih contes philosophiques, »L'Homme aux quarante écus«. Ugotavlja, da se zgodba odvija kot alegorija razsvetljenstva, v kateri protagonist postopoma pridobiva svojo identiteto. Dejstvo, da je ta identiteta utemeljena v tekstni heterogenosti, ne pa v koherentnosti, govori v prid tezi, da je za Voltairovo pojmovanje razsvetljenstva bistvena notranja različnost. Kajti Voltaire razume razsvetljenje kot projekt, ki je nenehno v nastajanju, njegov pomen pa kot nekaj, kar se upira fiksaciji. In narobe, Voltairova koncepcija razsvetljenstva pomaga razložiti, zakaj je izbral zgodbo kot medij za »udejanjanje« razuma v pripovednem aktu.

Ključne besede: narativnost, alegorija, identiteta, razsvetljenje, Voltaire

1. Uvod

Kakšno je razmerje med filozofijo in umetnostjo pripovedovanja zgodb? Ali je lahko nekdo znotraj istega teksta filozof in hkrati tudi pripovedovalec? Če je, kako v takem primeru medij vpliva na sporočilo? Walter Benjamin v svojem slovitim eseju označi pripovedovalca kot mojstra, ki ima v zadnjem času čedalje redkeje priložnost deliti izkušnje z drugimi (»The Storyteller« I, 142). Pripovedovalec kot rojeni komunikator je tisti, ki ponuja nasvet svojim poslušalcem. Ta nasvet skuša biti praktične ali moralne narave. Značilno zanj je, da privzame obliko predloga, kako bi se pravkar povedana zgodba lahko nadaljevala. Se pravi, da to, kar je tako posredovano občinstvu, ni niti informacija niti neka abstraktna resnica, marveč modrost, »epska plat resnice«, kjer je nasvet neločljivo prepleten z resnično življenjsko izkušnjo (»The Storyteller« IV, 145–46).

Ob Benjaminovem hvalospevu pripovedovalcu kot posredniku med življenjem in resnico bi kdo utegnil pozabiti, da zahodni filozofi niso od zme-

raj z naklonjenostjo gledali na umetnost »udejanjanja resnice« v pripovedi. Spomniti se kaže, da že Platon v deseti knjigi *Države* izžene fikcijo iz svoje idealne države, zato ker je zmožna kvariti javno moralno (1230–1241). Skupaj s pesnikom odpravi tudi sofista, in sicer kot obrekovalca, ki si za cilj namesto načela resnice raje postavlja prostaškost uspešnega prepričevanja.

Platonov poskus razločevanja med resničnim in lažnim govorom je Michel Foucault označil kot temeljni preobrat v človeški zgodovini, ko je opozicija med resničnim in lažnim začela funkcionirati kot edini najpomembnejši mehanizem za nadzorovanje diskurza nasploh (*Order of Discourse* 54).¹ Seveda lahko opazimo, da je to spoznanje oprto na tradicijo zahodne filozofije, kjer je bila laž večkrat izenačena s fikcijo. Razmerje med filozofijo in pripovedjo je že od Platona naprej vprašljivo, čeprav je ironija v tem, da so si nekateri sloviti filozofi prislužili ugled ravno zato, ker so bili prepričljivi pripovedovalci zgodb.²

Zdi se, da primer François-Marie Aroueta *alias* Voltaira (1694–1778) povečuje to težavo. Neutrudljiv zagovornik razsvetljenstva je bil tudi človek mnogih različnih talentov, ki je svojo literarno produkcijo povezoval s svojim zgodovinskim in filozofskim delom, pa tudi s svojimi znanstvenimi interesi. Voltaire, če je verjeti njegovim lastnim besedam, ni videl bistvenih razlik med žanri, ki jih je pisal. »*J'ecris pour agir*«,³ je dejal, to pa je rek, ki ustreza namenu njegovega *Dictionnaire philosophique* (1764), kot tudi namenu šestindvajsetih *contes philosophiques*. Te so njegova zapuščina svetu in na njih temelji njegov današnji literarni sloves.

Izraz *conte philosophique*, ki ga ponavadi uporabljamo za označevanje Voltairovih zgodb nemara kaže na to, da ni pristajal na zgoraj nakazano opozicijo med resnico in fikcijo. Roger Pearson poudarja, da jo je Voltaire redko uporabljal, čeprav izdaja njegovih del v kvartnem formatu, objavljenih leta 1771, vsebuje dva zvezka, katerih vsebinske enote so razvrščene kot *romans*, *contes philosophiques* itn. Poleg tega je, zato da bi razkrinkal čudežna poglavja biblijske zgodovine, metafiziko svojih kolegov filozofov od Platona naprej in bajeslovno zgodovinopisje starih, na slepo srečo uporabljal izraze, kot so *conte*, *fable* in *roman* (*Fables of Reason* 5–6). Vse kaže, da Voltaire ni samodejno sprejel Aristotelove predstave o pesniku kot nekom, ki si – drugače kot zgodovinar, kronist zgolj dejstev – prizadeva izraziti višjo, bolj filozofsko resnico (Aristotel 61–63).

Takšno sklepanje potrjuje članek o zgodovini, ki ga je Voltaire napisal za *Encyclopédie*. Svoj prispevek začne z orisom utečenega razlikovanja med historiografijo kot »le récit des faits donnés pour vrais« in bajko [angl. *fable*, op. prev.], ta je »le récit des faits donnés pour faux«. Vsakogar, ki bi ga nemara zamikalo izraz *faux* interpretirati v nevtralnem smislu, to je kot *izmišljen*, bo tu hitro spoznal svojo zmoto. Avtor v četrtem poglavju ugotavlja, da ima zgodovina svoje korenine v zgodbah (*réécits*), ki se prenašajo iz roda v rod; proces, v katerem zgodba postopoma izgubi slehernost. To, kar ostane je *fable*, kjer se resnica izgubi (»la vérité se perd«); se pravi, da »toutes origines des peuples sont absurdes« (»Histoire«, *Oeuvres alphabétiques* I 164–165). Glede Herodotovih *Zgodb* pa opaža, da so nenavadna

mešanica resničnih stvari, o katerih je slišal, in *contes*, ki jih ima od govoric; mestoma se delo bere kot roman. Za tiste zgodovinarje, ki, podobno kot Voltairov starejši sodobnik Charles Rollin, nagibajo k temu, da občudujejo učenost (*science*) in resnicoljubnost (*véracité*) teh zgodb, bi bilo po njegovem bolje, če bi se zavedeli, da je čas preveč dragocen in zgodovina preveč brezmejna, da bi svoje bralce obremenjevali s takšnimi izmišljijami (70).

Ne samo da zgodbam manjka faktična resnica; Voltairova zadnja pripomba nakazuje, da bi tudi tam, kjer zgodba vsebuje »višjo« resnico, to morda lahko učinkoviteje posredovali prek drugih sredstev. Prav izraz *conte philosophique* je potemtakem potencialni problem v kontekstu Voltairovega opusa; okoliščina, ki je že sama po sebi razlog za podrobnejšo preučitev njegovega lastnega prakticiranja te zvrsti. Gotovo je kar nekaj resnice v Pearsonovi trditvi, da je Voltairovo splošno odklanjanje zgodb utemeljeno v njegovem prepričanju, da mnoge od teh zgodb ljudem preprečujejo videti stvari »takšne, kot v resnici so« (*Fables of Reason* 4). To, kar, po Pearsonu, počne Voltaire, je, da prodira na območje fikcije, kot da bi jo hotel uničiti od znotraj, tako da bajko kot izmišljeno zgodbo nadomesti s pristnejšo. Čeprav v svojem občinstvu nikakor noče zbuhati hrepenenja po iluzijah, se njegove zgodbe predstavljajo kot *alegorije*, ki jih mora bralec ali bralka uporabiti v skladu s svojim osebnim položajem. Mogoče je reči, da je ta didaktični načrt povsem v skladu z Voltairovim prepričanjem, da so najkoristnejše tiste knjige, ki jih avtor in bralec pišeta skupaj,⁴ in obenem potrjuje avtorjevo koncepcijo *conte philosophique* kot hibridne strukture, katere filozofski pomen se pojavlja samo posredno, na točno določenem mestu, kjer bajke, ki so si jih izmislili drugi – filozofi, a tudi znanstveniki, zakonodajalci in cerkev – obrne proti njim samim.

V nadaljevanju bom preko analize ene Voltairovih uspešnejših *contes*, »L'Homme aux quarante écus« (1768) preučila vlogo pripovedi v Voltairovi misli. Utemeljeno namreč domnevam, da je bil Voltairov pogled na razsvetljenstvo kot na izrazito *zgodovinski* razvoj tisto, kar ga je prisililo izbrati narativni pristop. Vselej nezaupljiv do filozofskih sistemov, je razsvetljenjski projekt videl kot neskončen proces, ki se lahko odvija samo v delovanju posameznikovega razuma. »Lisez, éclairez vous,« tako eden od pripovedovalcev v »L'Homme« prigovarja obema, protagonistu in zunanjemu bralcu (327) – pri tem pa, kako značilno, ne ponudi nobenih naslovov za takšno izobraževanje. Branje, opravilo, kjer gre nujno za zaporedje, je pomembna tema v tej *conte*, kjer se junakov nenehno naraščajoč apetit do knjig predstavlja kot alegorija njegovega poskusa »brati« življenje.⁵ Brati v tem širšem smislu pomeni razsvetljevati se, pomeni način *udejanjanja* [angl. *performing*. op. prev.] razuma skozi nenehni dialog z varljivim tekstom, ki je svet.

Moja analiza se osredinja na vprašanje, kako, se pravi, s kakšnimi formalnimi sredstvi skuša Voltairova *conte* udejanjati razum v pripovedi; in na vprašanje, kakšne posledice ima ta narativni pristop za tako posredovano filozofsko resnico. Posebna pozornost bo posvečena nekoherentnosti zgodbe na ravneh prezentacije in naracije, saj je ta vidik bistven za mojo interpretacijo njenega alegoričnega pomena.

2. Gospod Povprečje⁶ se nauči brati

»L'Homme aux quarante écus« je zgodba o človekovem iskanju vednosti. V tem smislu sovpadе z njegovo individualno rastjo v smeri narativne identitete.⁷ Preden preidem na vprašanje oblike, bi rada orisala to tipično voltairovsko zgradbo.

»L'Homme« se začne s tožbo, narejeno po *ubi sunt* motivu, kjer neki starrec primerja sočasno stanje francoskega gospodarstva z njegovo slavnejšo preteklostjo. Glavni razlog, ki ga navaja za ta upad, je trenutno pomanjkanje poljedelske delovne sile, kar je med drugim posledica dejstva, da se je že toliko ljudi usmerilo v druge poklice.

Poglavje, ki sledi prologu, nas seznanja z nesrečo, ki je zadela protagonista, malega posestnika, čigar posest bi mu omogočila letni dohodek štiridesetih ekujev, če ne bi bilo davčne reforme. To so uvedle »quelques personnes qui, se trouvant de loisir, gouvernement l'État au coin de leur feu« (286).⁸ Pokaže se, da so novi ministri uvedli davek na zemljo, pri tem pa izvzeli vse tiste, ki prejemale dohodke iz drugačnih virov. Tako se naš junak kot *seigneur terrien* mora odpovedati polovici svojega letnega dohodka v prid državi.⁹ Potem, ko prestane zaporno kazen, ker ni zmožen plačati svojih obveznosti, sreča napihnjene kapitalista, kateremu se *skoraj* posreči, da protagonista prepriča o pravičnosti novega sistema: »Payez mon ami, vous qui jouissez en paix d'un revenu clair et net de quarante écus; servez biens la patrie, et venez quelque fois diner avec ma livrée.« (287)

Kapitalistova hvalnica povzroči, da začne *l'homme* misliti – redka dejavnost v njegovem koncu dežele (285). Vendar ugotovi, da samo s premišljevanjem ne bo našel odgovorov, nujno potrebnih za zavrnitev argumenta, kateremu ne verjame. Zato dvakrat zaporedoma pokliče na pomoč svoja *géomètres*.¹⁰ Njegov prvi konzultant, ki prakticira metafizično različico te znanosti, ga samo zmede, ko ga skuša prepričati, naj ne verjame svojim lastnim očem. Na srečo pa mu njegov drugi mentor, *citoyen philosophe* zagotovi, da »la véritable géométrie est l'art de mesurer les choses existantes« (292). Prek niza statističnih izračunov se pokaže izračun tega »pravega« merilca: če bi vsoto vseh francoskih obdelovalnih površin delila s približnim številom njenega prebivalstva, bi se zgodilo, da bi na vsakega prebivalca odpadel letni dohodek štiridesetih ekujev. Na tem mestu torej *l'homme* ugotovi, da je prav on francoski gospod Povprečje. Toda to je položaj, ki mu niti malo ne ugaja, zlasti potem ko izve, da je povprečna življenjska doba Parižana triindvajset let in da si lahko obeta samo še tri leta znosnega življenja: »Quarante écus et trois ans à vivre! Quelle ressource imaginerez-vous contre ces deux malédictions?« (291)

Njegov svetovalec, zelo praktičen mož, nemudoma začne pojasnjevati program za izboljšanje ljudskega zdravja in higiene, kar zveni nenavadno moderno: poskrbi naj se za čistejši zrak, ljudje naj jedo manj in se gibljejo več, spodbuja naj se dojenje in cepljenje proti kozam. Glede bogastva pa lahko gospodu Povprečju svetuje samo poroko in štiri otroke, »kajti iz petih ali šestih nesrečnežev skupaj lahko nastane kar spodobno gospodinjstvo« (292). Čeprav živimo v železni dobi, ko vlada neenakost, je položaj

Francozov boljši od mnogih drugih narodov. Gospod Povprečje bi bil srečen človek, če bi le lahko sam sebe imel za srečnega! Toda filozofov učenec se noče zadovoljiti s takšnimi izmuzljivimi tolažbami. To, kar sledi, je lekcija iz »pravega« vladanja, po kateri je celotno prebivalstvo, vključno z novimi industrijalci, ustvarjeno za to, da prispeva svoj delež k razbremenitvi nacionalne zakladnice. Geometer, potem ko konča svoj govor, ironično priporoči gospoda Povprečja božji milosti. Toda njegov odgovor pokaže, da je že začel žeti sadove izobraževanja: »On passe sa vie à espérer, et on meurt en espérant.« (301)

Resničnost tega poslednjega uvida je – spet ironično – preverjena, ko se gospoda Povprečja, zdaj obubožanega zaradi nove davčne zakonodaje, spretno otrese bosonogi karmeličan, ki ga je gospod poprosil za hrano. Ko se udeleži javne seje, ki jo vodi *contrôleur général* – gospod Povprečje upa, da bo pred njim lahko predstavil svoj primer –, dobi še nadaljnje dokaze za to, da deželi vlada nepravilnost. Posvetna in cerkvena oblast druga drugi odrekata pravico do izžemanja ljudi, *contrôleur* pa, zatekajoč se k biblijskemu jeziku, poje hvalnico izžemalcem. Redek trenutek resnice nastopi, ko »zares genialen človek« predlaga, da bi odmerili davek na duhovitost; *contrôleur* se na to odzove tako, da govorca nemudoma oprostí davka za vse življenje (404). Ko gospod Povprečje končno dobi priložnost, da zaprosi za svojo pravico, mu povejo, da je bil žrtev potegavščine. Kot odškodnino prejme precejšnjo vsoto in oprostitev davkov za vse življenje. Sejo zapusti, blagoslavljajoč *contrôleurja*.

Anonimni dopisovalec, ki je prebral poročilo o spremenljivi sreči gospoda Povprečja in spoznal, da je gospod strastni bralec, mu pošlje izvod nekega gospodarskega časnika. Pisca samega je namreč uničil nasvet, natisnjen v takem časniku. Zato opozarja gospoda Povprečja, naj ne zaupa tam predstavljenim novim ekonomskim teorijam in poljedelskim sistemom: »Gardez-vous des charlatans.« (307)

Tej vstavljeni zgodbi o človeku, ki se je naučil brati, sledi druga, in sicer odlomek iz rokopisa starega samotarja, v katerem ni težko prepoznati Voltairovega *alter ega*. Samotar ne obravnava več stvariteljev novih sistemov vladanja svetu, marveč se osredini na tiste, ki bi radi odstavili Boga, medtem ko si prizadevajo s pisanjem poustvariti njegov univerzum. V tem smislu poroča o dialogu, kjer ga je eden od teh mislecev, Talesov potomec, skušal prepričati, da je svet sprva pokrivala voda in da je zemeljska krogla narejena iz stekla. On pa pravi, »plus il m'indoctrinait, plus je devenais incrédule« (308). Tudi ustvarjalci metafizičnih sistemov – Leibniz, Descartes – in raziskovalec Maupertius, ki je predlagal zgraditi mesto v središču zemlje, ne zvožijo nič bolje s tem zagrizenim skeptikom.

Medtem je gospod Povprečje precej napredoval na poti do izobrazbe. Kot imetnik manjšega premoženja se poroči s prijetno žensko, ki kmalu zanosi. Njegovo bližajoče se očetovstvo sproži nova vprašanja. Zato se, da bi ugotovil, kako se zaplodijo otroci, obrne na svojega geometra. Ta zanika sleherni neposredno vednost o zadevi, a se ponudi, da mu bo posredoval, kaj nekateri »filozofi« mislijo o tej temi, »se pravi, kako se otroci *ne* delajo« (311). Prikazane so različne teorije, od Hipokratovih pojmovanj o mešanju

moškega in ženskega semena do Harveyjeve hipoteze, da ženske, podobno kot vsi sesalci, rodijo iz jajc, ki zorijo v jajčnikih. Ravno ko bodoči oče prizna, da so mu jajca njegove soproge zelo pri srcu, inštruktor pokvari vzdušje, ko pove, da se je znanost naveličala tega sistema in da se dandanes otroci delajo drugače (313). Sledi krog novih spekulacij, do katerih postaja učenec čedalje bolj kritičen. Ko *géomètre* izjavi, da se bodo na koncu znanstveniki morda »vrnili k jajcem«, gospod Povprečje vpraša, kaj je potemtakem korist vseh teh razprav. Odgovor je – dvom. Znanstveniki, pravi *géomètre*, imajo pomembno prednost pred teologi, saj utegnejo imeti različne poglede, pa se zato ne pobijajo med seboj. Četudi izrecno ne govori o prednosti dvoma za znanost, pa gospodu Povprečju vseeno svetuje, naj dvomi o vsem v življenju – razen, seveda, o osnovnih načelih geometrije (315).

Ko skuša gospod Povprečje ta nasvet uporabiti v praksi, naleti na zmeraj nove nesreče in čudaštva tega sveta: brezmejno bogastvo meniških redov in izgubljene talente tistih, ki vanje vstopajo; nehumanost sistema dot, ki revne plemiče sili pošiljati hčere v samostane; nepravilnost desetih in cerkvenih davkov, ki jih francoski državljani plačujejo neposredno Svetemu sedežu; nesorazmerno visoke kazni, ki jih izrekajo sodišča (»un pendu n'est bon à rien«, 323); priznanja, izsiljena z mučenjem; in končno nadloga, ki se ji pravi sifilis. Tega bi bilo mogoče – po mnenju vojaškega zdravnika armade, ki prinaša bolezen v tisti konec dežele, kjer domuje gospod Povprečje – premagati samo s še eno križarsko vojno (332).

Ker si gospod Povprečje prizadeva, da bi bil njegov duh nenehno odprt, in pazi, da ne bi ničesar jemal za čisto zlato, mu postopoma uspe izpopolniti svojo izobrazbo. Njegov napredek spremlja tudi materialni uspeh. Nič manj kot tri dediščine od sorodnikov mu omogočijo, da si začne ustvarjati lastno knjižnico. Njegovo najpomembnejše junaštvo v zgodbi pa je nemara to, da si končno dobi ime. Od tod naprej »notre nouveau philosophe« nastopa pod imenom Monsieur André (332).

M. André v svoji novi pristojnosti modreca hitro pridobi ugled kot posrednik v sporih. Ko med teologi izbruhne na videz nerešljiv prepir, ali duša poštenega poganskega cesarja Marka Avrelija biva v nebesih ali v peklu, povabi obe strani na večerjo in ju taktno prepriča, naj pustijo cesarjevo dušo *in statu quo*, »z opustitvijo poslednje sodbe« (334). Zanimivo je, da uspe prebiti led s tem, ko svojim gostom pove neko *conte* (334). V zadnji epizodi ga vidimo, kako s svojo ženo načeluje gostiji, kjer povablencem različnih veroizpovedi in življenjskih poti uspe skupaj preživeti zelo prijeten večer. Tisti, ki pripoveduje o tem sklepnem prizoru, je prepričan, da priložnost v ničemer ne zaostaja niti za Platonovo gostijo: »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. Voltairova alegorija razsvetljenstva

Paul Ricoeur v svoji monumentalni razpravi *Čas in pripoved* opredeli človekovo identiteto kot nekaj, kar se konstituira predvsem prek pripovedi. Kot človeški agensi živimo v kontinuirani sedanosti zgodovinskega časa,

kjer določamo svoja dejanja na osnovi preteklih izkušenj in pričakovanja prihodnosti. Za to, da bi tej kompleksni zgodovinski sedanjosti dali izraz, potrebujemo zgodbe. Samo prek preoblikovanja zgodovinskega časa lahko našo individualno izkušnjo umestimo v medoseben kontekst sveta, ki ga naseljujemo. To je zato ker – drugače kot zgodovinska sedanjost – zgodovina ni zaporedje nepovezanih dogodkov. Ko pripovedujemo zgodbo, projiciramo poenotujočo strukturo zapleta na zaporedje nepovezanih dogodkov in pripetljajev; s tem ustvarimo iluzijo kavzalne koherence. »Čas postane človeški,« pravi Ricoeur, »kolikor se artikulira prek pripovednega načina«, pripoved pa doseže svoj polni pomen, ko postane pogoj časovnega obstoja.« (*Time and Narrative I*, 65). Zgodbe nam omogočijo, da heterogenost sintetiziramo v razumljivo celoto (I, 65). Obenem nam pomagajo sprijazniti se s končnostjo naših življenj, tako da nam dovolijo skonstruirati predzgodovino in predstavo o možnem nadaljevanju našega obstoja. Skratka, zgodbe potrebujemo za *osmislitev* naših življenj.¹¹

Če sodimo po gornjem orisu Voltairove povesti, lahko sklenemo, da je »L'Homme« odlična ponazoritev Ricoeurjeve teorije. Podobno kot *Kandid*, Voltairova najslovitejša *conte*, se tudi »L'Homme« odvija kot *Bildungsroman*, kjer človek, ki ga najprej zadene nesreča, preraste svojo vlogo pasivnega lika – v primeru prihodnjega M. Andréja, *dobesedno* lika – in se postopoma nauči jemati usodo v svoje roke, s čimer pridobi osebno identiteto.¹² Ta identiteta pa se lahko zares razkrije samo v zgodbi, kjer so junakove pretekle izkušnje zbrane na enem mestu in povezane z njegovim sedanjim položajem. Podobno tudi iluzija, da je protagonist izpolnil svojo usodo in s tem na svoj življenjepis pritisnil poenotujoč pečat, v celoti temelji na dejstvu, da se zgodba na določeni točki *konča*.

Primerjava med »L'Homme« in *Kandidom* prinaša nadaljnje zanimive podobnosti. Obe *contes* sta anti-bajki, saj uporabljata pripovedni način za smešenje obstoječih miselnih sistemov. V tem pogledu se razlikujeta od konvencionalnejših filozofskih pripovedi, kjer zgodba zgolj služi ponazranju resnice; Ezopove basni so zahodni prototip tega žanra.

Poglavitna tarča Voltairove satire v *Kandidu* je Leibnizova monadologija, zlasti njeno optimistično prepričanje, da živimo v najboljšem vseh možnih svetov. To je utemeljena domneva, če verjamemo, da gre za stvaritev Boga.¹³ Lik, skozi katerega govori Leibniz, je Kandidov vzgojitelj, učeni doktor Panglos, ki je bil zadolžen, da svojega učenca poučuje v *métaphysico-théologo-cosmolo-nigologie* (28). Zgodba se odvija tako, da častitljivega doktorja zadenejo vse možne nesreče, toda njegovo prepričanje, da se Leibniz ni mogel motiti, se nikakor ne omaje (146). Povsem drugače je s *Kandidom*, ki so ga njegove lastne preizkušnje pripeljale do pregovornega, toda skrivnostnega sklepa, da »il faut cultiver notre jardin« (153). Grenka izkušnja ga je naučila, da se edina resnica nahaja v koristnem *dejanju*. Umovanje je nadomestilo udejanjanje razuma, udejanjanje, ki ne vsebuje nobenega jamstva za prihodnost, pač pa samo nalogo, katere alegorični pomen mora sleherni novi bralec vsakič na novo dojeti.¹⁴

Videli smo, da tudi »L'Homme« ponuja gospodu Povprečju in njegove-
mu zunanjemu bralcu pouk v razkrivanju neutemeljenih prepričanj drugih.

Tako kot v *Kandidu*, tudi tu »pravo branje« ni nikoli stvar preproste zamenjave enega sistema z drugim. Struktura pripovedi, utemeljena na iskanju, služi prenašanju resnice z ene tekstne ravni na naslednjo, dokler končno ne izgine onkraj obzorja zgodbe. Gostoljubno vzdusje, ki vlada *chez André*, je posledica dejstva, da so gostje zmožni sodelovati v živahnem pogovoru in pri tem ne skušajo drug drugega spreobračati. Zato se večer sklene povsem neobremenjeno, tako kot prijetna pesem, ki jo je nekdo iz družbe zložil za gospe.

In vendar so med obema *contes* opazne tudi pomembne razlike. Najočitnejša med njimi, vsaj po moje, zadeva raven naracije in fokalizacije.¹⁵ Tako v *Kandidu* kot v »L'Homme«, začetni udarec usode spravi protagonista v vrtinec nepovezanih izkušenj, glede katerih se zdi, da so povsem brez smisla in ga puščajo v tem času povsem nenadzorovanega. Toda v *Kandidu* prisotnost zunanjšega pripovedovalca, ki integrira vstavljene zgodbe v eno samo perspektivo, vseskozi zagotavlja pripovedno enotnost, v »L'Homme« pa bi takšno enotnost zaman iskali.

V prologu naletimo na personalnega pripovedovalca, ki sprašuje starega moža. Šele v naslednji epizodi se pokaže, da je ta pripovedovalec protagonist, ki nadaljuje s pripovedovanjem svoje lastne zgodbe do prizora, in vključno z njim, kjer *contrôleur* reši njegove gmotne težave. Do tu se zdi, da gospod Povprečje usmerja svojo lastno zgodbo, če ne celo svojo usodo. Na tem mestu pa se njegova pripoved prekine, najprej z anonimnim dopisovalcem, ki zatrjuje, da je prebral zgodbo o nesreči gospoda Povprečja in poznejši naklonjeni usodi, in potem z odlomkom iz rokopisa starega samotarja (308), Voltairovega fikcijskega dvojnika, ki ne izpusti priložnosti, da ne bi bralce usmeril k nekaterim drugim svojim tekstom.

Naslednja epizoda, v kateri gospod Povprečje prejme nagel pouk iz biologije, zaznamuje še en premik, ko začetek pripoveduje zunanji pripovedovalec. V tem poročilu torej gospod Povprečje prvič funkcioniра kot predmet fokalizacije drugega pripovedovalca. Vendar sogovornika kmalu prevzame besedo in tekst hitro privzame dramski način. Toda vrine se še neki drugi personalni pripovedovalec (Voltaire?, geometer?), dialoška prvina se torej ohranja, protagonist pa postaja čedalje bolj predmet fokalizacije drugih. Zgodba se še enkrat prekine, tokrat zato, da poskrbi za niz izvlečkov iz (zgodovinskega) dokumenta o kazenskem pravu, ki ga je napisal Voltairov sodobnik. V sklepnih odlomkih ima neidentificirani pripovedovalec še enkrat vse trdno pod nadzorom. V tem času se začne tudi pripovedni čas premikati iz preteklosti v sedanost, iz časa v čas, in tako nakazovati sovpadanje časa pripovedi s časom pripovedovanja.

Če vse to povzamemo, lahko rečemo, da protiutež preobrazbi gospoda Povprečja v Monsieurja Andréja predstavlja njegova postopna sprememba iz pripovednega subjekta in fokalizatorja v pripovedovano osebo in objekt fokalizacije, in da je ta poslednja sprememba razlog za naš vtis, da je protagonist dosegel svojo razsvetljeno usodo na točki, kjer se zgodba sklene.

In vendar bi to bila preveč preprosta razlaga, še zlasti, če pomislimo, da tekstu manjka pripovedna enotnost, kar je posledica izmenjave različnih, večkrat neidentificiranih pripovedovalcev. Občutek nekoherentnosti, ki iz

tega sledi, poudarja tudi mešanica različnih tekstov, diskurzov in žanrov; ti se namreč v naglem zaporedju predstavljajo bralcu. In končno tudi na ravni fabule obstaja razkorak med praktično naravo interesov našega junaka in očitno pravičljivo naravo spreminjanja njegovega bogastva, kar grozi uničiti sleherni namig na *vraisemblance*.

Ali naj ta *faux-pas* pripišemo avtorjevim starostnim blodnjam? Konec koncev je imel Voltaire štiriinšedeset let, ko je napisal »L'Homme«. Po moje obstaja zanimivejša možnost. Prav pomanjkanje formalne koherence, tako kot pravo bahtinovsko kakofonijo glasov v zgodbi, je mogoče brati tudi kot del njenega alegoričnega pomena. Takšna interpretacija omogoči, da »L'Homme« razumemo kot posredovanje resnice – filozofske ali kakšne druge –, da je realnost sama nepopravljivo razdrobljena in da je sleherna sugestija notranje enotnosti lahko samo rezultat zapleta.

Po drugi strani pa Voltairova *conte* tudi dokazuje, da je notranja različnost lahko produktivna. Konec koncev je Monsieur André, razsvetljeni svetovalec *par excellence*, sam uspešni produkt tega raznorodnega teksta. Prav tako ni nujno, da bi bila različnost vselej sinonim za nestrinjanje, kot kaže zgled gostoljubja v sklepnem prizoru. Vzajemne različnosti gostom ne preprečujejo, da ne bi uživali v družbi drug drugega. Nasprotno, celo poživljajo pogovor. Tu se lahko spomnimo geometrove lekcije, da se znanstveniki tudi lahko naučijo živeti s svojimi nestrinjanji.

Notranje razlike so neogibna okoliščina Voltairovega lastnega pogleda na razsvetljenstvo kot na odprt proces, ki se upira slehernemu poskusu zakoličenja svojega pomena. V skladu z isto logiko utegne biti jasno, da za poudarek te filozofske poante potrebuje zgodbe. Rezultat v »L'Homme« je hibrid, ki zmeraj znova očara s svojim smelim udejanjanjem razuma.

Prevedla Jelka Kernev Štrajn

OPOMBE

¹ Vendar Foucault jasno pove, da bo ta opozicija razkrila svoj vidik naključnega nasilja samo s položaja zunaj govora, ki naj bi ga usmerjala. Znotraj dane govorne skupnosti je lahko potreba po razločevanju med resnico in lažjo videti kot samoumevna (*Order of Discourse* 54).

² »[...] med filozofijo in pesništvom obstaja že neki starodavni spor. Takšni izrazi, kot so 'hrupna psica, ki laja na gospodarja', 'velik v praznem govoričenju nerazumnih', 'drhal premodrih glav', 'ti, ki pretanjeno razmišljajo', da so 'pač ubogi', in nepreštevni drugi, so namreč znamenja starodavnega nasprotovanja te dvojice. Kljub temu pa naj bo povedano: če lahko posnemanje in pesniška večšina, ki imata za svoj smoter užitek, navedeta kakšen razlog (logos) za to, da morata obstajati v polisu, ki ima dobre zakone, bi ju vsaj mi z veseljem sprejeli, ker se zavedamo, kako smo od njiju očarani.« (Platon, »Država X« 1241).

³ Navedba (iz Voltairovega pisma Jacobu Vernesu, z datumom 15. april 1767) je vzeta iz Pearsona (*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 » (Uvod v *Dictionnaire philosophique* I 284). Voltairov pogled na zvezo med priliko in alegorijo obelodanja prvi stavek članka o *fables*, ki ga je napisal za to delo: « Les plus anciennes fables ne sont-elles pas visiblement allégoriques? » (*Dictionnaire philosophique* II 99). Drugje v istem članku se sprašuje, ali « l'ancienne fable de Vénus, telle qu'elle est rapportée dans Hésiode, n'est [...] pas une allégorie de la nature entière » (101).

⁵ Primerjaj naslednjo navedbo iz »L'Homme«, ki se pojavi pri koncu: « 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 To ime si sposojam pri Pearsonu (*Fables of Reason* 22).

⁷ Prim. Ricoeur: »Pripoved med ustvarjanjem identitete pripovedovane zgodbe ustvari identiteto značaja, kar je mogoče imenovati njegova ali njena pripovedna identiteta. Identiteta zgodbe je tista, ki ustvarja identiteto značaja.« (*Oneself as Another* 147–148).

⁸ Kolikor ni drugače označeno, so vse navedbe iz izdaje Henrija Bénaca.

⁹ Davčni sistem, kot je opisan tukaj, je v Voltairovem času zares obstajal, a samo v obliki teorije, ki jo je predlagala skupina ekonomistov, imenovana fiziokrati. Njihova zamisel, osnovana na prepričanju, da je obdelovanje zemlje najboljši način za zagotovitev ekonomskega bogastva, je bila v tem, da Francija potrebuje razvoj svojega poljedelstva. Avtor predloga, da je treba zemljo obdavčiti z enim samim davkom, je Le Mercier de la Rivière. Toda v Franciji ga nikoli niso zares prakticirali (Pearson, *Fables of Reason* 21). Mogoče je torej reči, da je Voltaire svojo lastno zgodbo utemeljil v ekonomski bajki, ki so si jo izmislili drugi.

¹⁰ Beseda pomeni oboje, geometer in nadzornik. Pripoved, ki sem jo prej opredelila kot proces učenja branja, je mogoče videti kot udejanjenje premestitve od prvega k drugemu pomenu.

¹¹ »Prvič, konfiguracijska razporeditev transformira zaporedje dogodkov v eno pomensko celoto, ki je korelat akta zbiranja dogodkov, in kar omogoči, da zgodbi lahko sledimo. Zahvaljujoč temu refleksivnemu aktu, je mogoče celoten zaplet prevesti v eno samo 'misel', ki ni nič drugega kot njena 'poanta' ali 'tema'« (*Time and Narrative* I 67).

¹² Z vidika identitete se zgodba o preobrazbi gospoda Povprečja v Monsieurja Andréja zdi še toliko presenetljivejša, saj sprememba njegovega imena kaže, da je svoj alegorični status zamenjal za identiteto človeka iz mesa in krvi.

¹³ Za odlično vendar dostopno razlago o Leibnizevi metafizični misli glej G. MacDonald Ross, peto in šesto poglavje.

¹⁴ Deloffre v uvodu k svoji izdaji *Kandida* nakaže možno povezavo med Kandidovim vrtom in Voltairovim zasebnim »Gospodovim vinogradom« (Mt 21:28). Gre za Voltairov večkratni predlog Diderotu, d'Alambertu in drugim, da se mu pridružijo na njegovem postestvu, kjer bi združili sile in skupaj dokončali delo na *Encyclopédie* (22). (Prim. Pearson, *Voltaire Almighty* 269–271).

¹⁵ Gl. Bal, ki opiše naratološko razlikovanje med tremi različnimi tipi tekstne dejavnosti: pripovedovanje, gledanje in delovanje. Te tri različne narativne funkcije poveže s tremi odgovarjajočimi pripovednimi ravnmi, s tekstom, z zgodbo in s fabulo. Pod *fabulo* razume pripovedno snov ali globinsko strukturo pripovedi, »niz logično in kronološko povezanih dogodkov, ki so delo akterjev«. Predstavitev te fabule se dogaja na ravni *zgodbe* in vsebuje dejavnost fokalizacije, to pomeni predstavljanje zgodbe z določene perspektive. Končno, zgodba doseže zunanjega bralca v obliki *teksta*, ki ga posreduje *pripovedovalni* agens (*Narratology* 5–7).

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PERFORMING REASON

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

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UDK 1 Voltaire

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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, gouvernent 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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