

THE CULTURE OF ENTITLEMENT IN THE AGE OF ENLIGHTENMENT:
VOLTAIRE, A PERSONIFICATION OF NARCISSISM IN THE FRENCH MOVEMENT

BY

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A Thesis/Practicum submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies of The University
of Manitoba in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the degree

of

Master of Arts

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ABSTRACT

Psychohistory has remained suspect by historiographers and has made little inroads into mainstream historical research. The objective of the thesis is to demonstrate that by addressing cognitive, affective and motivational factors, psychology can lead to a greater understanding of the interrelationship between the individual and culture. Specifically, a model of narcissism has been used to locate historical sources of current mass-market culture of entitlement in the Age of Enlightenment.

The model used in the thesis concurs with theories viewing narcissism as an organizing self-system anchored in preverbal experiences primarily in the failure to develop a secure attachment. Contrary to popular notions, narcissism is not about self-indulgent self-love, rather it is a coping mechanism to ward off intolerable ubiquitous anxiety. Forever hypervigilant, narcissists do not learn about others or themselves. Lacking both empathy and psychological insight, they remain emotionally arrested as adults.

A comparison between England and France, the two significant sources of Enlightenment ideology and achievement, suggest that the former produced all the necessary ingredients to represent the period. But history has chosen the French *philosophes* to personify the spirit of the Enlightenment. Coalesced in the second half of the eighteenth century, the latter propagated a world view of *esprit simplicité* through the production of the *Encyclopédie* and anti-clerical satirical bantering. Lacking a sense of self-awareness and ability to auto-critique they were blind to their rigidity, self-centeredness and narrow social agenda.

Described, by admirers, as “the least self-analytical of man”, Voltaire emerges as the clearest personification of narcissistic features in the French movement. Physically frail, emotionally deprived and endowed with superior language intelligence, he evolved into a well defended narcissistic personality. A show piece, in his childhood, he continued to believe in his genius and successfully convinced others also of his entitlement to break all social boundaries. Baffled by the mediocre quality of his intellectual work, scholars have tended to accept his rationalizations. Reviewing his personal history and publications through the model of narcissism, reveal him as an individual who fought savagely against obstacles to personal fulfillment, disguised vengeance as affront against humanity and masked self-centered insecurity with protean adaptability. This personal-cultural narcissism is best illustrated in his philosophical story Candide.

In addition, Voltaire has been identified, by historians and in popular lore, as the great humanitarian of the eighteenth century. “The conscience of Europe” as master opportunist, capitalized on the misfortune of others, their hard work and his talent of manipulating the emerging forces of public opinion. Becoming a culture of spectacle, we have adopted his anxious and destructive negativity.

INTRODUCTION

Psychology has been conspicuously absent from history while literary criticism, linguistics, and anthropology have joined philosophy, political science and economics as viable view points for historical analysis. This omission is notably curious in a post-industrial world where psychology has emerged as a prime competitor battling science for epistemological supremacy. The “declaration of the birth of psychohistory” in 1957¹ was not followed with prolific scholarship. Instead of moving “from the periphery to a centre position in the field”, as some argue, it has often been relegated to footnotes.² The Journal of Psychohistory which started as the History of Childhood and has incorporated the Journal of Psychoanalytic Anthropology, has made little impact on current historiography. It has largely remained a child-psychology journal and otherwise has tended to publish articles one might classify as current themes in cultural anthropology or psychology.³ Beyond minor articles, psychohistorical literature has generated mostly psychoanalytically informed biographies or popular variants that pervade modern consciousness.⁴

¹ Jacques Szaluta, Psychohistory: Theory and Practice (New York: Peter Lang Publishing Inc., 1999) 59. Szaluta identifies the presidential address of William L. Langer, on December 29, 1957 at the annual conference of the American Historical Association, as the declaration of birth of psychohistory.

² Ibid., 13 believes psychohistory has moved to a more central position in historical research. The view that it has been largely relegated to footnotes is presented in “Psychohistory”, A Global Encyclopedia of Historical Writing, 1998 ed. Vol. II 747.

³ The Journal of Psychohistory (New York, 1988) started as History of Childhood in 1976.

⁴ Examples may be seen in: Ernest Jones, Essays in Applied Psychoanalysis, ed. Ernest Jones, vol 1 (London: The Hogarth Press, Ltd., 1951) “The Case of Louis Bonaparte, King of

Detractors, rejecting psychohistorical studies as reductionistic and unverifiable, view its clinically-based theories as non-generalizable to situations outside therapeutic contexts.⁵ According to advocates, personal narratives are congruent with the retrospective process of traditional historiography. Both rely on memory and interpretation-perceptions of events to construct a plausible reality. While objections to unsubstantiated autobiographical facts are valid, this shortcoming is not inherent to psychological interpretations of historical phenomena. By addressing cognitive, affective and motivational factors, psychological theories, of which psychoanalysis is only one idiom, can enrich existing historical formulations by articulating interactions between micro and macro social events thus leading to greater understanding of reciprocal influences between the individual and culture.

Viewing social evolution as a problematic non-linear progress, much like individual development, is not new to historical theorizing. Two eighteen-century social historians, Johann Gottfried Herder and Giambattista Vico, thought that humanity is marked by its expressive integration of its past into its present.⁶ The absence of cognitive schemas and emotional tones of cultural and social change perpetuates ideologies of human beings as abstract or institutional entities. While 'social prophets' have warned against *anomie*, bureaucratic nightmares and

Holland" 39-54; "The Island of Ireland" A Psycho-Analytic Contribution to Political Psychology". Ibid., 95-112; "The Inferiority Complex of the Welsh". Ibid., 128-132; "The Psychology of Quislingism". Ibid., 276-283; "The Psychology of the Jewish Question", *ibid.*, 284-300. Erik H. Erikson, The Young Luther: A Study in Psychoanalysis and History (New York : W.W. Norton & Company, 1958); Erik Erikson, Gandhi's Truth (New York : W.W. Norton & Company, 1969).

⁵ Szaluta 58 summarizes major criticism of psychohistorical literature.

⁶ Paul Hamilton, Historicism (London and New York: Routledge, 1996) 120.

neo-medieval nostalgia, since the turn of the century, it has not generated substantive inquiries into relationships between individual dispositions and socio-cultural trends.

The objective of this thesis is to demonstrate the validity of psycho-history as a viable perspective in current formulations of modernity and post-industrial society. Specifically, a model of narcissism is used to locate historical sources of mass-market excessive individualism in the culture of the Age of Enlightenment. Narcissism has been used to define the ubiquitous anxiety of current mass-market consciousness characterized by emotional impoverishment, lack of self-critical reflection and a marked obsessive preoccupation with entitlement to personal rights. The promotion of excessive individualism in the Enlightenment literature, echos the rhetorical trope reflecting the psychological make-up of individual and cultural modern narcissism. Representing a human condition devoid of empathic understanding, narcissism holds special relevance for historical analysis. Empathy or its absence produces different individuals, different social contexts and ultimately different historical accounts.

Historically, the Age of Enlightenment has come to be seen as the beginning of nontranscendental thought and the passion for individualism. Modernity was ushered in with an emerging science-based epistemology that competed with Church dogma for decoding the structure of the universe; astral cosmology replaced the supernatural Heavens. The tensions between these two world views surrendered temporarily to a consensus motivated by a scientific framework. But the twentieth century saw a growing disillusionment with promises of scientific progress. The fallout of the destructive powers of technology reintroduced an existential dread and a quest for transcendental meaning. While rejecting religion, the modern secular world seemed more receptive to science-based psychological models of awareness.

In its secular format, individualism sprang from an emerging “possessive market” society where property owners, the new ‘haves’, defined their right to protect unequal possession as the primary goal of social morality.⁷ In the Enlightenment climate of empowering the individual, intellectual freedom was the least restricted, whereas sanctioning rights to conscience, religion and especially to property were much more limited. If the Enlightenment boasted intellectual boldness it was not “emotionally or ethically self-assertive”.⁸ The hortatory tone of Enlightenment scholarship, particularly among the French, masked a sense of entitlement, self-centeredness and lack of critical self-awareness. Individualism, defined by appropriation in the eighteenth-century, has been reshaped as consumerism in twentieth century industrial society. Thus, liberal materialism, neophilia, profound anti-intellectualism and obsessional preoccupation with legitimizing indulgences, current traits of a “Culture of Narcissism”, echo remarkably well the “culture of entitlement” in the French Enlightenment. The latter, which both nurtured and was nurtured by a group of celebrated individuals, is particularly conducive for examining the interplay between individual temperament and social innovation.

From the French movement emerged Voltaire the most popular personage of the Enlightenment who personified most clearly its narcissistic features. Theodore Besterman, Voltaire’s most disarmingly honest admirer, described his hero as “the least self-analytical of

⁷ C. B. Macpherson, The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism: Hobbs to Locke (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962) 248-255.

⁸ Bertrand Russell, History of Modern Philosophy 7th ed. (London : Unwin Paperbacks, 1981) 578.

man”.⁹ No one felt more entitled than Voltaire or fought more savagely against obstacles to personal fulfillment. No one disguised personal vengeance and *incivisme* through righteous indignation better than Voltaire. No one discarded cognitive value for zeal more successfully. No one rivaled his protean adaptability which masked self-centered insecurity. Finally, nowhere did Voltaire profess this personal-cultural narcissism more vividly and accurately than in his philosophical story *Candide*.

The argument that the French movement both disseminated and was defined by a culture of narcissism which Voltaire personified most accurately is supported by the following sequence of discussion. Narcissism as a psycho-social construct defining individual and socio-cultural pathologies is developed in the first chapter. The working model of the thesis is a synthesis of prevalent psychological theories of narcissism and the writer’s clinical and personal observations. The second Chapter is designed to support the contention that it was among French Enlightenment figures that the culture of entitlement-narcissism was prominent. To demonstrate this point, a comparison is made between England and France, the two significant sources of Enlightenment ideology and achievement.

To justify the designation of Voltaire as the emblematic narcissist among his contemporaries, four other personages, three *philosophes* and a Catholic priest, are subjected to the scrutiny of the model. Evaluation of this supporting cast in the third chapter sets the stage for reviewing Voltaire’s personal history and achievements as reflecting the culture of entitlement in the Age of Enlightenment. In the following chapters biographical information from Voltaire’s

⁹ Theodore Besterman, *Voltaire* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., Ltd., 1969) 27.

early childhood is used to identify the conditions that fostered the development of a narcissistic personality. That Voltaire evolved into an archetypal narcissist is elucidated by the history of his relationships throughout his adult life. Once scrutinized by the model of narcissism, Voltaire's intellectual achievements also appear to reflect the psychological limitations of this personality type. The style, quality and quantity of his literary work and correspondence mirror the anxious-ridden insecure self of narcissism.

Candide as an embodiment of quintessentially Voltairean narcissism, is developed in the sixth chapter. The content as well as structural aspects of this philosophical tale are used to support the argument. The concluding chapter addresses the Calas affair which entitled Voltaire 'the conscience of Europe'. Reviewing his involvement, correspondence, and relevant social conditions point to the possibility that his efforts on behalf of the Huguenot family were motivated by his lifelong personal agenda of securing attention which he masked brilliantly with righteous indignation and the confusing manifestation of narcissistic self-serving servility.

Whereas evidence marshalled to support the notion of a culture of entitlement in the French Enlightenment has been derived largely from secondary sources, the analysis of Voltaire's narcissism is bolstered by study of his own publications. References to Voltaire's massive correspondence are based on Theodore Besterman's edition which is the most comprehensive compilation.¹⁰ The primary text for the study of *Candide* is the edition published in The Complete

¹⁰ Voltaire, *Correspondence*, ed. Theodore Besterman, The Complete Works of Voltaire, 131 vol (Oxford : The Voltaire Foundation at the Taylor Institution, 1976). In the text, letters will be identified by the following notation: Besterman D. (followed by a number designated in Besterman's listing) and identity of sender, receiver and date of the correspondence. For example: Frederick, Crown Prince of Prussia, to Voltaire, 16 January 1737, Besterman D. 1261.

Works of Voltaire¹¹ The title page of this version identifies it as published in 1759 under the pseudonym Mr. Le Docteur Ralph presumably from Minden. It is this version which is used by René Pomeau, a major contemporary authority on Voltaire. Translations into English are taken from Robert M. Adams Norton Edition.¹²

References to the philosophical tales *Zadig* and *Micromegas* rely on the English translation by H.T. Mason.¹³ Given the particular importance of the quote from the story *L'INGÉNU*, verbatim accuracy required that a French version be consulted. Here, the William R. Jones edition was used.¹⁴

References to Voltaire's poetry, plays, histories and other publications rely on secondary sources. The latter represent highly respectable authorities on Voltaire and his work.

¹¹ The Complete Works of Voltaire vol. 48, ed. René Pomeau (Oxford: The Voltaire Foundation at the Taylor Institution, 1980) 117-260.

¹² Voltaire, *Candide or Optimism; A New Translation Backgrounds, Criticism*, trans. Robert M. Adams (New York: W.W. Norton & Company. Inc., 1966) 1-77.

¹³ Voltaire, *Zadig and other Stories*, trans. and ed. H. T. Mason (London : Oxford University Press, 1974).

¹⁴ Voltaire, *L'INGÉNU; histoire véritable*, ed. William R. Jones (Geneva : Librairie Droz; Paris: Librairie Minard, 1957).

CHAPTER 1

PSYCHO-SOCIAL MODELS OF NARCISSISM

A brief digression discussing the myth of Narcissus is relevant for highlighting differences between the mytho-poetic mind and modern consciousness as they relate to the concept of narcissism. The psychological richness expressed in the classic version of the myth stands in stark contrast to the prosaic moralism of its modern rendition. Possible interplays between scientific and economic-based values and emotional devitalization could lead to interesting projections of future emotional profiles of individuals in Western societies.

The Myth of Narcissus

Like most mythological Greek figures, Narcissus received symbolic status in Western civilization and grew to represent such taboo traits as vanity, excessive self-love and pride. Of these attributes, pride is closest to the Greek notion of *hubris*, a spiteful arrogance punished severely by the gods and responsible for the majority of the calamities that befell the human race. Prometheus' attempt to usurp the power of the gods is emblematic of *hubris*. But, Narcissus did not sin against the gods, instead he appears to have lacked the capacity to interact with humans and was consequently transmuted into a flower and thus preserved in nature.

With the growing influence of Christianity, Narcissus came to represent a preoccupation with physical attributes, the antithesis of spirituality and piety preached by the Church. Associations between the mythological figure and shallow worldly pursuits continued into modern times. As religion was losing its prominence faith-based concepts gave way to secular models of human behaviour and Narcissus was transferred from sinful to mentally sick. It is with the advent of psychoanalysis that Narcissus came to signify the pathology of individuals

and society as a whole. Psychological narcissism which started as an infantile stage of development grew to signify a personality disorder of adults and a basic cultural trait of a mass-market civilization.

The mythic Narcissus referred to in this work was depicted by Ovid, Roman storyteller, “guide to Greek myth and Roman legends” and essential guide of the Classical world during the Middle Ages and Renaissance.¹⁵ In Ovid’s version, Narcissus was a sixteen year old youth who appealed to both sexes and all ages, but had “little feeling for either boys or girls”, young or old. Echo, a nymph whose power of speech was reduced to repeating last phrases of sentences, was spellbound by his charm. When she hurried to embrace him he shouted in horror “...May I die before I give you power o’er me”.¹⁶ To hide her shame, she dissolved her material self remaining only as a voice. Narcissus’ dread of the human touch was externalized as disdain.

Leaving trails of heartbroken admirers, Narcissus was eventually cursed by a “love sick” boy: “.. O may he love himself alone... And yet fail in that great love”. The lament was harkened by the “wakeful Nemesis”, personification of righteous anger of the Gods directed to curb human presumption.¹⁷ Feeling hot and tired, a vulnerable Narcissus tried to quench his thirst in a clear pool of water when he beheld a beautiful image that trapped him. Marveling at its beauty he became enchanted by the charms that were his own, but he could not consummate his burning

¹⁵ “Ovid”, The Oxford Companion to Classical Literature , ed. M.C. Howatson (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press 1989) 401-2. Ovid, Metamorphoses, Book I-VIII trans. Frank Justus Miller (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1916, 1994) Book III 149-161 Verses 339-510.

¹⁶ Ovid, Metamorphoses 391-392.

¹⁷ “Nemesis”, The Oxford Companion of Classical Literature, 381.

desire as the image vanished upon his touch. He understood his tragedy that “It may be fate for me to look at love and yet not touch it”. Like Echo, consumed with unanswered love, Narcissus faded away beating “his bare breast with pallid hands”. Echo, the betrayed lover, carried her lament for him through rivers and forests eliciting sympathetic responses from land and water nymphs. Traversing into the nether world, Narcissus saw nature mourning his departure. As his body vanished a “flower of gold with white-brimmed petals” emerged from the ground. The world was sad to see the passing of a life that failed to join in the human experience.¹⁸

Narcissus was a ‘misfit’ rather than a sinner. Unable to partake in human relationships, he had no place among humans. Off guard, he notices a reflection, a mirage , a “false image” which fell into nothing when he turned away, an image without permanency. Ovid did not reject physical beauty nor did he protest against self-love for Narcissus was not described as having loved himself whilst rejecting the advances of others. Ovid’s conclusion as an observer of Nature was of man as a social being whose survival depends on touching others and being touched in return.

A modern rendition of the myth, offered by Robert Graves, is a brief passionless and moralistic narrative warning against vanity.¹⁹ The emphasis shifts from lack of regard for others to “his pride in his own beauty”. In Ovid’s poem the enraptured lad felt despair whereas according to Graves he “rejoiced in his torments; knowing that the other self would remain true to him, whatever happened”. Modern Narcissus is granted ‘another self’ in order to avoid the

¹⁸ Ovid, *ibid.* 455-510.

¹⁹ Robert Graves, *The Greek Myths* , vol. 2 (Baltimore: Harmondsworth; Penguin Books, 1955) 286-8.

experience of loss. This is a clear departure from the Classic story of a youth aware that “what he had tried to hold resided nowhere...”, was an illusion. Graves rescued Narcissus from the abyss of emptiness to which Ovid sent him. Such differential treatment of the same subject is rather common historically. Thus, Christopher Marlowe, like Ovid, approved Dr. Faustus’ damnation for selling his soul to the devil. An enlightened Goethe, on the other hand, like Graves, granted Faust a last minute salvation. Unable to accept the tragic in the human condition, the modern Graves and the enlightened Goethe felt compelled to save their protagonists from their respective fates of emptiness and doom. Narcissus was granted a last minute epiphany of a faithful ‘other-self’ and Faust was swept away from the threshold of hell by singing angels. Less able to tolerate limits imposed by reality or cope with defeat, the modern enlightened mind unlike the mytho-poetic one, is more apt to pursue a false existence and conjure up phantom healing.

In addition to an illusory ally, Graves allows Narcissus to control his destiny by terminating his life. Accordingly, he “..plunged a dagger in his breast..” and ...”he expired”. Ovid was intimately familiar with suicide as an honourable choice for avoiding humiliation when he contemplated killing himself upon being sentenced to exile (he was persuaded otherwise by his wife). The Roman poet also knew how to describe violent scenes, but he did not need strong physical props, in this case, because the drama unfolded in a psychological reality. Afflictions dramatized in poetic presentation were blunted by succinct prose. The different literary genres projected distinct world views. To Graves this was a “fanciful moral tale” whereas Ovid who had little interest in religio-moral teachings presented an unfolding drama of Nature.²⁰ If there was

²⁰ Ibid., 288 is thus defining the tale while commenting on the medicinal value of the metamorphosed Narcissus.

eneration in this poem it was to Nature where laws, including human behaviour, reside in a realm above decorum.

Ascribing to myth psychological reality is anathema to Graves who believes that “..A true science of Myth should begin with a study of archeology, history and comparative religion, not in the psycho-therapist’s consulting room.”²¹ This repudiation of the psychological as a source of knowing is reminiscent of the Enlightenment’s rejection of religion and metaphysics. Graves’ criticism was directed at Jungians who view myths as representations of archetypal human traits stored as a collective unconscious that influences the evolution of cultures and psychological development of individuals.²² To Graves, a myth is a period artifact that lends itself to scientific inquiry as collateral to archeological and historical facts. Like their illusive metaphysical predecessors, psychological concepts such as the unconscious, are useless if they elude standard methods of scientific inquiry. Distracted by the poet’s use of anagogical expressions to disclose inner awareness, Graves discards the personal struggle and renders the story a redundant fable of dubious moral content.

The rejection of psychology as a legitimate method of inquiry parallels eighteenth century zeitgeist of newly discovered scientific modes of thinking and technology in the course of replacing religion and mythology. Researching ‘facts of the brain’, led often by positivist psychologists in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, became a useful aid in the assault on the mytho-magical world view. James Frazer’s celebrated *Golden Bough* published in 1890, spoke

²¹ Ibid., 288.

²² Carl Jung, “Approaching The Unconscious”, *Man and his Symbols* ed. C. Jung (New York: Dell Publishing Company Inc., 1968) 1-94.

the truth of an era which prophesied a steady progress of science and technology that would provide civilization its new means for controlling the environment.²³ Although popular, mythoclasm, did not go unchallenged by those who viewed myth as a psychological tool for constructing a meaningful reality. Max Muller wrote in 1873 that we do not perceive mythology because we ourselves live in the very shadow of it, and because we shrink from the full meridian light of truth.²⁴ His formulation widened the scope of mentation beyond observable facts and recognized the effects of existential dread. Gravity would have been dismissed as magic were it not for Newton's willingness to entertain the possibility of unseen physical forces. Myth, as an unseen guide of what is acceptable or not acceptable, instructs both private and public consciousness.

The position taken here is that myth is a mental schema that conjoins internal and external realities. It is that tacit knowledge which enables us to infuse sense into life and the universe. "The true symbol does not merely point to something else. It contains in itself a structure which awakens our consciousness to a new awareness of the inner meaning of life and of reality itself. A true symbol takes us to the center of the circle, not to another point on the circumference. It is by symbolism that man enters *affectively* and *consciously* (italics are mine) into contact with his own deepest self, with other man, and with God.."²⁵ Myth contributes to the development of a sense

²³ Joseph Campbell, Myths to Live By (Toronto, New York, London, Sydney : Bantam Books, 1982) 11-12.

²⁴ Max Muller, "The Philosophy of Mythology," The Science of Religion (London: Scholar Press, 1873) 353-355.

²⁵ Joseph Campbell 265 cites Thomas Merton, "Symbolism: Communication or Communion?" in New Directions, 20 (New York: New Directions, 1968) : 11-12 .

of identity, a sense of community, moral values and the mystery of creation.²⁶ This is a fundamental mode of prehension which impacts all levels of awareness and social contexts. Myth reflects a myriad of interconnected social bonds and individual awareness of which direct instruction is only one dimension.

In summary, Ovid's portrayal focused on the miraculous in Nature's perpetual transformations and cycles. The *Metamorphosis* which is a lush field for psychology has no religious vision or moral instruction. The apparent disorderly psychological realities, like material reality, are subject to rules of Nature and when in violation may be altered beyond recognition in order to be integrated into the natural order. Narcissus was an aloof loner, asocial and asexual, he did not seduce nor was he ever seduced. Cut off emotionally and socially from his environment he led an unnatural existence. An identity crisis precipitated at the age of sixteen revealed a fatal psychological deficit which resulted in his transmutation. The natural order of things prevailed and a life form that was not integrated into its surroundings was adaptively transformed.

Central to the story of Narcissus is the theme of awareness of self and others. Narcissus lived unaware until the fatal moment when he beheld his image in the pristine pool. A state of physical exhaustion permitted the broadening of consciousness and a flash of insight in an otherwise impervious self. The tragedy that ensued was not so much that his desire was denied as the realization that he was an optical illusion. Narcissus existed so long as he was unconscious of his phantom self and withered away as he came to know that. What was unbearable was the realization that he could not embrace himself because there was no self, only an alluring facade

²⁶ Rollo May, *The Cry for Myth* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company Inc., 1992) 30-31.

masking a void. Narcissus' survival depended on remaining ignorant of himself which was the meaning of the cryptic prophecy that the blind Teiresias delivered to his mother.²⁷

Psychological Models of Narcissism

Sigmund Freud introduced Narcissus, with other mythological figures, into the discipline of psychology and eventually into the twentieth century language and consciousness.

Psychoanalytic formulations of human behaviour and motivation metamorphosed Narcissus into Narcissism. The mytho-poetic figure that occupied a place in religio-ethico domains became a psychological symbol of personal and social pathology. Sinful preoccupations with worldly vanities of old traditions have been transformed into perversions associated with egoism nurtured by a flighty mass-consuming culture.

Freud first presented the concept in 1914 in an essay titled *On Narcissism* which described a perversion that absorbs the whole of a person's sexual life.²⁸ Accordingly, an individual withdraws from people and objects in the external world and replaces them with personal fantasies of omnipotence and grandiosity.²⁹ This phenomenon is normally manifested by

²⁷ "Teiresias", The Oxford Companion to Classic Literature 550. A blind Theban seer in Greek Mythology who was given special insight to compensate for his loss of eye sight. When Liriope, nymph and mother of Narcissus, came to ask what the future held for her son, the seer warned her that getting to know himself will be his demise. Taking it as a fanciful riddle, the mother paid no heed to the warning and forgot about it.

²⁸ Sigmund Freud, On Narcissisms : An Introduction , Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud , vol. 14 ed J. Strachey (London: The Hogarth Press, 1964) 73-102.

²⁹ Narcissistic withdrawal unlike schizophrenia does not result in breaking away from reality. In the latter case, an individual cannot communicate with his/her social environment whereas a narcissist can albeit through a distorted self, often veiling the empty self with a web of Bravado.

young children and “primitive people”, whose animistic beliefs underlie a conviction in the thaumaturgical power of words; both groups are expected to outgrow this immature stage.

Withdrawal to the self during early stages of development is, according to Freud, functional as it protects infants from effects of overwhelming anxiety inherent in early life experiences. Since psychic energy is finite, there needs to be a balance between the amount of energy channeled to protect a threatened self and that reserved for forming relationships with others. If flooded with intense and chronic anxiety, a strong ‘egoism’ (i.e., narcissistic withdrawal) may develop to prevent personal disintegration, but at the cost of hindering a capacity to form interpersonal relationships.

Freud posited a normal course of development whereby infantile preoccupation with the self is eventually transformed into ‘object love’, (i.e., love directed towards others) through parenting. This, he thought, was true particularly for women who would not develop proper object love were it not for their “rebirth” through their children. Their ‘moral deficit’ stemmed from the fact that they never experience an equivalent to men’s psychic struggle during the Oedipal years.³⁰ Early narcissistic fantasies do not disappear in mature adults, instead they are transformed into “ego ideals”. ‘Primitive’, ‘instinctual’ desires are sublimated or reshaped into socially acceptable values whilst the mature capacity to love another is accomplished through the role of parenting.

³⁰ Freud regarded women not only as the ‘weaker sex’, but as lacking morally. His attitude towards women was one of the reasons for the departure of Alfred Adler and Wilhelm Reich from the circle of disciples. Their sensitivity to women’s issues reflected greater social awareness and political interest which were absent from Freud’s individualistic disposition.

The proclamation of a “Narcissistic Personality” was made by Freud in his *Introductory Lectures On Psychoanalysis*, published in 1916/7.³¹ This designation described individuals who fail to reach the stage of “object love”, i.e., incapable of investing psychic energy in others hence unable to form meaningful relationships. Since psychoanalysis, the praxis of his theory, rests on the patient-doctor relationship, Freud concluded that people afflicted with this condition are not amenable to treatment because they could not form relationships with therapists. While questioned by non psycho-dynamically orientated therapists, alternate prognoses include a caveat that ‘re-parenting’ adults with narcissistic disturbances would likely become a protracted and complicated process.

In his work *Civilization And Its Discontents*, Freud formed an association between narcissism, destructive aggression and sadism.³² Accordingly, the wish for omnipotence underlies a “destructiveness accompanied by narcissistic enjoyment”. He considered this self-subsisting human disposition the greatest threat to civilization because he believed that chances for change in human relations lie in interpersonal connections rather than in ethical directives. The human race, according to Freud, has risen above the realm of ‘natural ethics’ by creating a humane morality based on interpersonal relationships rather than on personal survival. While portending dangers to the social order, Freud paid little attention to group psychology. Instead, he focused on

³¹ Sigmund Freud, *Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis*, S.E. vol 16, 412-427.

³² Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontent*, trans. James Strachey (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1961) 81. The reference was to the growing influence of Nazism in Germany and Stalinism in Russia.

individuals seeking consolation through problem solving mechanisms aimed to halt the natural inclination to self-destruction.³³

Freud's disciples accepted Primary Narcissism as a universal state of early human development.³⁴ Due to a state of helplessness, sensations during this stage of life are dominated by persecutive anxiety (what is seen as the paranoid position in adults).³⁵ From this primary state, infants enter a more "mature depressive position" or phase. In the earlier stage, psycho-emotional development relies on "projective mechanisms" while the second phase sees the evolution of "introjective mechanisms" (i.e., the infant is moving from expulsive to receptive mentation). In Klein's model, primary 'object relations', the integration of the mother's body, is principally defensive and bonding is only a secondary goal. The child first knows mother as an hostile object, comfort and safety are experienced later in the relationship. This position is contrary to developmental theories positing mother's body as an immediate source of contact comfort required for the development of the attachment on which integration into the human race is predicated.³⁶

³³ While Freud did not address the topic of group norms explicitly, it is clear that the Viennese bourgeoisie was the standard against which he defined pathology. He most definitely rated European 'refinement' the apex of civilization in contrast to the 'primitive' instinct-based cultures.

³⁴ Mélanie Klein, "Early Stages of the Oedipus Conflict," International Journal of Psychoanalysis 9 (1952) :167-180.

³⁵ Margaret Mahler, F. Pine & A. Bergman, The Psychological Birth of the Human Infant (New York: Basic Books, 1975).

³⁶ Attachment theory has produced volumes of research in the last three decades. The following are a few of the pioneer contributors to this fascinating areas of research: John Bowlby, Attachment and Loss : Vol.1 Attachment (New York: Basic Books, 1969). ---, Attachment and Loss: Vol. 2, Separation Anxiety and Anger (New York : Basic Books, 1973). ---, Attachment and Loss, Vol. 3, Loss: Sadness and Depression (London : Hogarth Press, 1980).

In the Kleinian developmental model, the tie to mother is always suffused with pain, anxiety, greed and destructiveness. The infant is assumed a 'moral' creature imbued mainly with negative attitudes towards the world. The dominant mental constellation is that of a sadistic and aggressive posture defending a chronic state of anxiety produced by any and all external stimuli.³⁷ A neonate is not a passive entity and, therefore, not infinitely malleable; there are infant fantasies which are not culturally bound. While attributing sadism to neonates is debatable, Klein's notion that they are not passive receptacles and enter the world equipped with complex mentation was a major contribution to the field of development psychology.

The theoretical formulations described thus far defined narcissism as a state of defensive withdrawal. The process of 'linking' between mother and child which was rather neglected by Freud and Klein, gained importance in later conceptualizations. Michael Balin who anticipated the ethological viewpoint, defined narcissism as difficulties with independence.³⁸ Accordingly, individuation problems for mature adults date back to the mother-child relationship which is based optimally on "mutual interdependence". Narcissistic adults defend against reliving aversive states of early dependency to which they were subjected and which were filled with envy and hostility. In Balin's formulation the negative feelings stem from 'poor parenting' and are not 'natural' or unavoidable.

M. D. Ainsworth, "Attachment Beyond Infancy," American Psychologist 44 (1989) 709-716.
D.W. Winnicott, The Family and Individual Development (London : Tavistock, 1965).

³⁷ This position is also taken by Margaret Mahler.

³⁸ Michael Balin's theory is cited by Otto E. Kernberg, Borderline Conditions and Pathological Narcissism (New York: Jason Aronson, 1975) 81.

Heintz Kohut, a critical contributor to the development of Self-Psychology, reconstructed narcissism as it unfolded in his clinical work with adult patients. In Kohut's theory, narcissism is not a stage in early human development, but an organizing principle of relationships throughout life. Narcissism, he posited, follows "its own epigenetic sequence" even if it represents a fixation on an early stage of development.³⁹ It is the parents' failure to provide accurate "mirroring" which puts the child on the developmental path of narcissism. Correct mirroring or validating feedback includes a modicum of frustration which is necessary for curbing the infantile sense of grandiosity and oneness fostered by parental adoring responses toward a neonate. Both absence or too much frustration lead to failure in the differentiation of a coherent self separate from an admiring-punishing parent-self unit.

Central to the Kohutian formulation of narcissism is the notion that it is the opposite of 'object love' and not the opposite of 'object relations'. This distinction is fundamental to cognitive and emotional schemata of the narcissistic personality.⁴⁰ Object love is the recognition of an 'other' (person, object or task) as an entity with its own intrinsic value which does not have an impact on one's own self-esteem. For narcissists all things, tasks and people are experienced as potentials of validation required for augmenting or maintaining an otherwise deflated self-esteem. Many object relations can serve narcissistic functions when they are experienced as extensions or enhancements of the grandiose self.

³⁹ Heintz Kohut, The Kohut Seminars: on Self Psychology and Psychotherapy with Adolescents and Young Adults, ed. Miriam Elson (New York & London: W.W. Norton & Co., 1985) 9.

⁴⁰ Kohut, The Kohut Seminars 18-30.

With the growing influence of self psychology, concepts of personality disorders gained legitimacy alongside earlier classifications of mental illness (e.g., neurotic-psychotic). Narcissism earned a *bona fide* psychiatric identification in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM) as a “Personality Disorder” rather than a “Mental Illness”.⁴¹ The latter assume conditions implicating organic underpinnings whereas the former represent environmentally induced disturbances. Psychiatrically, the narcissistic individual has a distorted view of her/himself, but is capable of communicating with others and acknowledging, if not following, societal expectations. According to the DSM definition, this person has “a sense of superiority and uniqueness and exaggerates talents; boasts; is pretentious, self-centered and arrogant; requires admiration and attention; is a high achiever and harbours grandiose fantasies.”⁴²

The DSM classification is a listing of traits unified by a proclivity to exhibitionistic grandiosity, but makes no reference to the fact that the manifest cluster of behaviours conceals a fragile ego structure which has been identified in clinical literature as the core of the disorder. What is of utmost importance, according to Kernberg, is the fact that the grandiosity and inflated ego veil emotional shallowness and ongoing bouts of insecurity.⁴³ Devaluation of others hides envy and lack of empathy which marks the exploitative nature of their relationships. Furthermore, it is fundamental to recognize that the exhibition of an ostentatious self is a desperate effort to mask a self-consciousness consisting of shame, embarrassment and hypochondriacal depression.

⁴¹ Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorder: SDM-IV-TR (Washington, DC: American Psychiatric Association, 2000).

⁴² Steven P. Gersten, M.D., “Narcissistic Personality Disorder Consists of Two Distinct Subtypes,” The Psychiatric Times . Medicine & Behaviour April (1991): 25-26.

²⁹ Kernberg , 1975.

Through his clinical practice, James Masterson encountered “closet narcissists” whose outward compliant and shy presentation disguised a plethora of grandiose fantasies à la Walter Mitty, albeit more embittered.⁴⁴

Insensitivity towards other and failure to anticipate the impact of their behaviour on others, are fundamental narcissistic features. Disregard of others coexists with hyper-sensitivity to the opinions of others. Narcissists are insensitive and overly sensitive at the same time.⁴⁵ What is crucial in this seeming incongruity is the fact that their insensitivity echoes lack of empathy while the hyper-sensitivity is indicative of a fragile self-esteem in constant need of affirmation. Narcissistic self-aggrandizement is a compensatory mechanism aimed to ward off insecurity rather than a declaration of accomplishments. The combination of a distorted sense of superiority, furtive and manipulative behaviour, and suspiciousness of others intermixed with constant need of validation, counteracts pervasive insecurity of an incoherent chaotic self. Very significant is the fact that ignorance of the depleted self is paramount for maintaining ego intactness. Lack of self-awareness neutralizes an otherwise overwhelming anxiety thus sustaining a sane, albeit distorted, sense of self. Narcissism is the self-centered unaware self, the soma and soul of the disturbance, in contrast to the popular misnomer of narcissism as a self-indulgent self-love.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ James Masterson, The Narcissistic and Borderline Disorders (New York : Brunner/Mazel, 1981). J. Masterson, M.D. & R. Klein, M.D., Psychotherapy of the Disorders of the Self; The Masterson Approach (New York : Brunner/Mazel, 1989).

⁴⁵ Glen Gabbard, “Two Types of Narcissistic Personality Disorder,” Bulletin of the Manninger Clinic. 53 (1989) : 527-532.

⁴⁶ Jeffrey Satinover, “Science and the Fragile Self: The Rise of Narcissism, The Decline of God,” Pathologies of the Modern Self; Postmodern Studies on Narcissism, Schizophrenia and Depression , ed. M.D. Levin (New York : New York University Press, 1987) 84-113.

Self-Psychology theories have stimulated an array of interdisciplinary approaches to the topic of narcissism as a pathological self. Efforts to articulate connections between inner experiences of the self and manifest socio-cultural trends have combined epidemiological research, “critical humanism” and “cultural nihilism”.⁴⁷ Central to these perspectives are notions that with the domination of ‘scientism’ the individual has been devalued as ‘merely subjective’ which resulted in the abrogation of personal interpretive powers and internalization of a sense of meaninglessness. Related are views suggesting that the abdication of religio-metaphysical interpretations of the world was instrumental in “reducing the self to “a phenomenon of the will” for whom affirmation is translated into self-glorification. The latter draw heavily from Nietzsche, historical critic and philosopher of ethics of the nineteenth century and Heidegger, philosopher of existentialism in the twentieth century.⁴⁸

According to Heidegger, psychology has played a major role in “silencing” ontological awareness, replacing it with obsessive preoccupation with the self. That psychological jargon has supplanted religio-mythical expressions in modern every-day life is evident, but shouldering the ‘upstart’ discipline with the responsibility of silencing older ways of knowing is misguided scapegoating propelled by despair. Spanning the realm from the medical/biological to philosophy and the humanities, psychology might have filled gaps created by the secularization and demystification of modern science-based civilization. Heidegger’s association of obsessional

⁴⁷ David Michael Levin, “A Modern Self in the Fury of Being,” Pathologies of the Modern Self, ed. Levin, 21-83.

⁴⁸ Friedrich Nietzsche, The Genealogy of Morals trans. Francis Golffing (New York : Doubleday Anchor Books, 1956) 254-256. Levin, Pathologies in the Modern Self , 50 cites from Heidegger’s “ Recollections in Metaphysics”.

self-absorption with Psychology as generator of this form of awareness, however, confuses the discipline's theories and praxis with popularized versions marketed for mass-consumption. Self-psychology models are consistent with the Heideggerian lament regarding the frantic preoccupation with personal needs and indulgences as substitutes for self knowledge. In the absence of a soothing existential philosophy, 'quick fix' messages resonate well in ears attuned to a culture that promotes 'politically correct expertise', brief training, pharmaceuticals and advice.⁴⁹ It is not too much, but too little psychology that is associated with excessive individualism and self-absorption.

A connection between the rise of narcissism and the decline of God has been extended in terms of alternative solutions to the dilemma of the self.⁵⁰ Freud's definition of religion as a benign delusion, a neurosis aimed at fulfilling dependency needs, supports the view that the theocentric world resolved needs for dependency through the communal. To Jungians, God is a projection to the metaphorical realm, a sophisticated euphemism for the self.⁵¹ Externalization is necessary to guard against both depression and inflation of the self and the price is a consciousness shrouded in a modicum of rationality. In demystifying the physical world, scientific reasoning solidified the cult of individualism. The emergence of the modern Faustian did not just signify a great individual, it also portended the appearance of the unreflected deified self.

⁴⁹ In December of 2001, I called up a billing department at a U.S. hospital and was told to wait for a "billing specialist" to give me the desired information. I was corrected every time I uttered the 'old' and obviously unacceptable title of 'billing clerk'.

⁵⁰ Satinover 84-113.

⁵¹ Freud, "The Future of an Illusion", SE, vol. 21, 5-56.

In a seminal social analysis, Theodor Adorno explained narcissism as emerging from the dialectic of bourgeois culture which negates the individual sense of connectedness with society by putting the self above group interests while simultaneously suppressing individuality by rendering the subjective inconsequential.⁵² Overwhelmed by a sense of powerlessness, one resorts to an inflated delusional self to ward off the unsettling sense of insecurity. Modernity is a 'natural' soil for cultivating narcissistic personalities, i.e., it nurtures anxiety ridden individuals who defend against a crippling insecurity with delusions of omnipotence. This destruction of inner life is, according to Horkheimer, the punishment for committing hubris by disrespecting any form of life other than our own order.⁵³ Accordingly, socio-cultural homocentricity mirrors narcissistic self-centeredness.

One cannot discuss narcissism without reflecting on the topic through the penetrating gaze of Christopher Lasch.⁵⁴ Addressing the 'common' reader, his presentation is lucid and accessible yet maintaining a scholarly level respectful of both writer and audience. Narcissism, says Lasch, is a psychological state "haunted by anxiety" in contrast to the old religious driven guilt. To compensate for inner panic, a narcissist aided by a supportive culture, denies his/her condition with pseudo-insightful cliches, therapeutic jargon and trivialization of serious dilemmas with clever arguments and petty remedies.

⁵² Theodor Adorno, Minima Moralia: Reflections from Damaged Life, trans. E.F.N. Jephcott (London : Verso, Redwood Books, 1996) 15 , 63.

⁵³ Levin, Pathologies of the Modern Self, 62.

⁵⁴ Christopher Lasch, The Culture of Narcissism : American Life in an Age of Diminishing Expectations (New York: Warner Books, 1979) 55-100.

Narcissism is not about giving selfishness a psychiatric label in lieu of the traditional moralistic one, argues Lasch. Its primary attributes are fear of dependence, inner emptiness, repressed boundless rage and unsatisfied cravings. It presents half as pseudo insight, calculated seductiveness and self-deprecatory humor aimed at disclaiming responsibility for actions and nervousness. Interpersonally, narcissists evidence an impoverished inner life and a lack of interest in others save for the purpose of self-aggrandizement. When endowed intellectually, they use their intelligence for “self-evasion” not for discovery or for learning. Anxious self-scrutiny, in the mode of Woody Allen, eagerly adopted by a society that identifies readily with a chronic sense of diffused dissatisfaction, does not signify critical self-examination. A self-deprecation which does not lead to understanding is used to disavow responsibility in the guise of admitting human frailty. Critical is the realization that “...a power of concentration without self-understanding is under suspicion of psychological inferiority”.⁵⁵

Among the paradoxes of narcissism, Lasch highlights a tense duality of an amoral personality that is highly susceptible to “moralistic inflation”; no one feels treated more unfairly than a ‘genuine’ narcissist.⁵⁶ While subscribing ostensibly to moral subjectivism to justify utilitarian behaviour, a narcissistic individual is guided by an archaic punishing ‘super ego’. Lacking correct mirroring and consistent adult models, future narcissists have only preverbal images to fall back on vacillating between an indulging permissive hedonism and a rageful anxiety produced by its withholding. Another contradiction is that of lacking empathic consideration for

⁵⁵ Esther M. Harding, Psychic Energy : Its Source and its Transformation (1948 ; New York: Bollington Series, Princeton University Press, 1973) 48.

⁵⁶ Lasch 74, 305.

others, while being wholly dependent on others to fulfill their cravings. Psychologically, this apparent contradiction is easily reconcilable. What narcissists miss sorely are self-soothing skills paramount for the development of a balanced, modulated ego. The mental steps required to overcome 'small' obstacles during childhood equip the child with a repertoire of skills for sustaining ego injuries while maintaining a sense of self-efficacy. Absence of self-sustaining skills results in continued need for external affirmation while the experience of loss is insupportable.

One of the more explicit narcissistic traits is an inordinate sense of entitlement. Henry Malcolm links this feeling to socio-cultural changes in family constellation, child rearing practices and a dependency on television as a source of information and entertainment.⁵⁷ Accordingly, feelings of entitlement mirror illusions created by permissive upbringing and a television remote control which portrays a world manipulable at will for one's enjoyment and use. While defining the sense of entitlement as "infantile wishfulfillment", Malcolm views it as a rebellious act challenging realism. The 'hippie' generation, he argues, was not prepared to carry out the burden of Sisyphus which is the adult view of reality. In the current climate of rapidly changing opinions, it is difficult to distinguish those who embrace fashionable slogans in order to be part of their social milieu from those who are validated by the lability of mass-market consumerism. Like individual narcissism, the signature property of a Culture of Narcissism is the "ubiquitous anxiety" of our times rather than challenges to realism or authority.⁵⁸

⁵⁷ Henry Malcolm, Generation of Narcissus (Boston: Little Brown & Company, 1971) 3, 145.

⁵⁸ Julia Kristeva, Tales of Love trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York : Colombia University Press, 1987) 21.

Narcissism - The Thesis Model

The model of Narcissism featured in this work is a synthesis of theories cited and a conceptualization derived from my clinical observations and personal experience. This presentation is not a complete theoretical formulation of the personality type/disorder, rather it highlights core mental schemata of narcissism. While many narcissistic attributes represent a continuum of traits shared in the general population, there is a personality variant that constitutes a particular character style identified as a Narcissistic Personality. The focus of this work is to describe how these individuals operate in their midst and delineate socio-cultural dynamics that nurture their development. Examining the interplay between person and society suggests a growing prevalence of this type which appears to be correlated with features of modernity rooted in the culture of the Age of Enlightenment.

While questions of etiology and development are not elaborated upon, a brief theoretical anchoring is required for understanding the proposed model and its applications. The premise is that narcissism is an organizing self-system anchored in preverbal experiences primarily in the failure to develop a secure attachment, the making and breaking of affectional bonds.⁵⁹ The primary function of an emotional bond is to provide a secure base from which one explores working models of self, others and the world around them. Lacking a secure base results in a low threshold for threat and rapid mental disorganization. The presence of non-soothing adults

⁵⁹ This is the premise of Bowlby's Attachment Theory.

evokes overwhelming anxiety for infants creating a “nameless menace” that blankets life. As adults they appear compulsively self-reliant, incapable of trusting and relying on others.⁶⁰

Underlying narcissism is a chronic free floating anxiety which is contained temporarily with frenetic levels of activity.⁶¹ Narcissists find quiet contemplation intolerable rejecting it as “a waste of time”. While denying discomfort they resist furiously suggestions to experiment with the idea. This ontological dread, unlike situational apprehensiveness, represents the “gaping hole” of an empty self, ‘a bottomless pit’ that cannot be satisfied.⁶² According to psychoanalytic perspectives this empty space is the missing mother who filled the other half of the symbiotic relationship. In Self-Psychology terms, narcissists fail to develop self-soothing skills for coping with fundamental existential *angst* (e.g., mortality, abandonment, etc.) due to incorrect mirroring. Attachment theorists identify the “gaping hole” as the terror of abandonment resulting from failure to form secure bonding. While positing different etiologies the three viewpoints regard narcissism a defense against a sense of dread induced by the parenting function in early childhood experiences. Narcissism is a screen for emptiness.⁶³

Onlookers fail to appreciate the pervasiveness and intensity of narcissistic insecurity and how compulsively and relentlessly one defends against it. It is a hyper-vigilant existence on an

⁶⁰ Ronald N. Stromberg, After Everything: Western Intellectual History Since 1945 (New York : St. Martin’s Press, 1975) 29 uses this phrase to define the ontological anxiety of Existentialism.

⁶¹ This state is not unique to Narcissistic Personality Disorder and is common to other Anxiety Disorders and Addictive Personality Disorders.

⁶² Kristeva 21. The phrase ‘bottomless pit’ is my own.

⁶³ Ibid 21.

edge of a precipice inches away from the abyss. Under such conditions mechanisms of self-defense remain largely unconscious and one responds reflexively to all stimuli as potential danger. When survival is at stake one cannot afford to attend to anything or anyone save for the immediate needs of rescuing the threatened self. Narcissists fail to develop psychological insight because they remain "puppets of the unconscious".⁶⁴ Their notable lack of empathy reflects a self-defense that leads to hostility and a consciousness that cannot transcend the ego. Since it is risky to stop and think, suspend judgement and attend to the environment, narcissists remain ignorant of others and fail to develop a coherent sense of themselves.

The obliterating power of intense anxiety prohibits clear prehension thus reducing experience to repetitive urgencies and preventing an accumulation of memory and a coherent sense of personal history.⁶⁵ Conscious memory is always relational and different from direct perception and in being self-referential its vital ingredient is self-awareness.⁶⁶ Narcissists do not like their past, especially their childhood which as a period of dependency represents weakness. When pressed they offer accounts that are negated by others, particularly adults. While they tend to recall themselves as obstreperous, older relatives remember them as pleasers with many somatic reactions (e.g., clumsiness, bed-wetting).

⁶⁴ Harding 98.

⁶⁵ Harry Stack Sullivan, The Interpersonal Theory of Psychiatry ed. Helen S. Perry & Mary L. Gawel (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1953) 158-171. Sullivan underscores the debilitating effects intense anxiety has on learning.

⁶⁶ Israel Rosenfield, The Strange, Familiar, and Forgotten: An Anatomy of Consciousness (New York : Alfred A. Knopf, 1992) 8.

Narcissists' present oriented existence produces a subjective morality which they use to justify their changing needs. They are the greatest advocates of relative morality. Their protean fickleness is rationalized as a right to reconsider and adapt to changing circumstances. Unwilling to pay child support, an individual argues that the sum should be defined by a former spouse's potential earning power rather than actual income. A short while later asking to reduce his payment he contends that supporting his new partner's education entitles him to change his mind about the principle of potential versus real income. The fact that payments were intended to support his son did not enter his equation of 'fairness' which reflected only his needs.

Functioning at a level of survival implies ongoing attention to tactics of preservation. To sustain a sense of security, narcissists try to manipulate their environment by becoming furtive and resorting to subjective morality to justify often amoral conduct. They exhibit behaviours commonly known as "wanting to have their cake and eat it too". Their manipulative skills are raised to levels of artful deception in interpersonal relationships. Not suspecting such elaborate furtive trickery, those involved with them find themselves often humiliated, confused and ultimately doubting of their own perceptions or judgment. An archetypal narcissist dating, wants to insure that until he has selected his next intended, his potential candidates remain loyal to him. While out on a date, he would fake 'fidelity' by taking his phone at home off the hook. Pretending to go to the washroom (in a restaurant or a movie theatre) he would call other dates apologizing for the busy signal, in case they had called, with important long distance work-related engagements. He showed no compunction when caught arguing he was entitled to "juggle things and buy time in order to make up his mind" and that "what they do not know won't hurt them".

Narcissists insatiable craving for affirmation leads to an apparent contradiction of restlessness and sloth.⁶⁷ Restlessness reflects continued hyper-alertness to ward off intolerable discomfort generated by waiting for others to provide the desired attention. To hasten reactions from others, narcissists tend not to invest in long term projects that do not yield short term recognition. Their deep anti-intellectualism does not reflect lack of intelligence as much as inability to delay gratification or sustain attention for long periods. This slothful behaviour is also a protective device against criticism. Brevity and haste are useful to justify flawed work all the while hinting greater potential. Since narcissists reject commitment to elaborate and thorough production, their potential is not tested and remains an illusive promise which sustains their distorted view of themselves and seduces others to suspect greater talent. Motivated by fear of rejection, their interpersonal relationships, similarly, lack commitment and are proclaimed as “great as long as it lasts”. Notions of relationships as accidental encounters aimed to confer reciprocal pleasure on its participants were supported by ‘experiential therapies’ during the sixties and seventies.

The restlessness-sloth dichotomy produces a renegade-type mentality. Narcissists exploit the industry of others and instead of “creating a work will fabricate an ersatz”.⁶⁸ Ultimately, narcissists feign participation in scholarly pursuit and by relying largely on abstracts, cliches or manufactured dissent, they secure the desired continuous attention. Instead of transmitting a personal message to his graduating class, a ‘renegade’ professor attends a convocation at a very

⁶⁷ Harding 37-58.

⁶⁸ Kristeva 126.

honored institution jotting down inspiring phrases delivered by eminent scholars of that establishment. The selected expressions had no meaning for him beyond the function of tantalizing his own audience and he had no intention of checking the veracity of the assertions or acknowledging the speakers as sources. "They too heard it from somebody else, it all comes down to transmitting information anyway and who says what is really not important" according to the said individual who fought furiously for his right to withhold from his audience the origins of his ideas.

Utility to a narcissist is correlative with survival. Every event has to produce an immediate useful outcome otherwise s/he feel cheated-victimized. The stance of "making everything work for me" masks their inability to tolerate loss (e.g., rejection, dissenting views, mistakes). When narcissists cannot discern a clear benefit for themselves, they feel cheated, become despondent and unsure that either reality changes or their perceptions change. Narcissistic individuals are avatars of rationalizations which are primary self-defense mechanisms. Because self-deception is a prerequisite for sustaining their fragile self-esteem, narcissists tend to be very persuasive. When they deceive you 'for your own good', they are often successfully convincing.

Since they live in an hostile world, everyone/thing is an enemy. Consequently, narcissists are not curious or interested in people or things except for their functional utility. They do not engage in dialogues and remain locked inside their own obsessive preoccupation with survival. Unable to engage reciprocally with their environment, they are not aware of others or themselves beyond the basic sense of flight or fight. Narcissists do not possess psychological insight, they cannot contemplate themselves. This fact is frequently misunderstood since they often exhibit a sharp tongue that expresses opinions and views which purport to carry psychological import.

Essentially, they parrot cliches they know are valued by their social environment or a larger cultural context. Keenly aware of their audience, they perform to earn attention, but have no personal attachment to positions they express. Narcissists are perennial 'devil's advocates' who keep their beliefs concealed. Ironically, these people who try to control their lives as well as others, ultimately, lead an arbitrary existence swayed by the urgency of the moment.

A scientist is worried about harmful effects a day care filled with children "from broken homes" might have on his child. This statement is made by him upon returning from a six months absence during which time he had no contact with his son. When pointed out that his own child had shared similar experiences, he irately denies that the label applied to him accusing the therapist of trying to induce guilt, unsuccessfully... This vignette illustrates lack of insight as well as lack of empathy. Empathic understanding rests on the ability to acknowledge others as individuals separate from us. It presupposes an ego capable of experiencing the gamut of positive and negative feelings and permitting others the same without feeling threatened by incongruities with others or inconsistencies within the self. An empathic father would have attended to the impact his absence had on his child rather than deny the latter's feelings and focus on defending himself. Unaware of his brittleness, the narcissistic scientist, ignores his child to wage war against his attackers.

The last episode highlights also narcissists' sense of singularity. Entitlement to uniqueness is quintessentially narcissistic. At times, the claims are discordant with reality, but often a modicum of success is invested with disproportionate import. Being the first to do anything, or the youngest to do something, assume functions of 'specialness'. The notion of anonymity is anathema to a narcissist whose survival rests on external attention and who would do anything to

attract it. Hence, notoriety and disrepute are preferred to lack of recognition which is experienced as obliteration.

The inordinate sense of entitlement, claims to specialness and obsessional preoccupation with oneself have resulted in a common misconception of narcissism as a manifestation of self-love. In reality, the ever present insecurity and fear of failure are closer to reflecting self-loathing than self-love. Busy warding off a pervasive anxiety they do not understand, but sense and dread, they do not embrace themselves or others. A related misattribution is that their self-preoccupation is a pleasurable self-indulgence. Living in a constant state of defensive alertness, narcissists experience little pleasure or joy. While professing a present oriented existence, they abhor spontaneity. Manifest effusive behaviour is always calculated rather than uninhibited, narcissists do not laugh heartily.

Epitomizing the contradictory sad existence of narcissistic individuals is the fact that despite valiant efforts to be special, they remain very ordinary and often boring individuals. Lacking natural curiosity and fearing the world around them leaves them peculiarly narrow. Their changing behaviour and ideas are often misconstrued as pseudo-radicalism and evidence of having many interests. Ultimately, they never follow their heart and are always servile to what others might accept or reject. Crusading for uniqueness, narcissists lack individuality. Locked in a vicious cycle of performing for those they fear-loath-need, defines the insular anxious ridden and self-serving servility of narcissistic existence.

While history is replete with self-serving, egotistical anxious personages, as a prevalent social phenomenon, narcissism is a product of modern Western civilization. The democratization of fashions and fads sustain an incessant outpouring of artifacts ready for immediate consumption

and whetting appetites for more and particularly for new. Unable to keep up with promises of endless novelty, advertising resorts to trickery by creating illusion of “new and improved” old products. Pseudo-scientific statements are used to legitimize claims to quality and novelty. Change and newness have become aims and symbols of achievement supplanting values of tradition and commitment. Mass-market morality fits well with the moral relativism and protean adaptability of narcissism.

Rapid change is a useful diversionary tactic offering an escape from the triteness of the quotidian.⁶⁹ Being diversionary, the new language is tantalizing rather than coherent and messages are designed to attract and entertain rather than inform and elucidate. Tradition and history are not only irrelevant, but a hindrance to contextualizing constant flux.⁷⁰ Spectacles have become primary tools for capturing attention, the *modus operandi* of mass-market culture. Paying attention, on the other hand, has become a waste of time retreating into short spans. Entertainment, the ubiquitous distracter of Western culture, created an incorporable homogenizer of experiences not just for the rich and the poor, but also for the old and the young in the form of ‘fun’. In modern civilization ‘cut-throat’ individualism is defending equal access to “technological distractions made possible by the electric plug”.⁷¹

⁶⁹ Neil Postman, Amusing Ourselves to Death; Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business (New York: Elisabeth Sifton Books. Penguin Books, 1987) 77.

⁷⁰ Unlike the Heraclitean concept of *panta rhei* suggesting that the observed unity is achieved by a balance of interdependent changes, the new world is literally a chaotic unruly flux.

⁷¹ Postman 156.

With the democratization of privileges and rights sprang a culture of complaint.⁷² An endless supply of goods coupled with messages of deservedness has produced insatiable individuals filled with resentment and a chronic sense of deprivation-victimization. As 'having' has become interchangeable with 'being', not having has become synonymous with victimization and personal invalidation. If modernity started with the liberation of individuals from group identity, post-industrial reification of humanism produced an agitated individualism devoid of individuality. In an obsessively anxious struggle to fulfill purported individual rights, success is measured by achieving what everyone else has. The oppressive illusions of mass-market promises of personal satisfaction via conformity mirrors the vicious cycle of the narcissist whose sense of self is predicated on performing for others. With remarkable insight and poetic sensibility W.H. Auden identified fundamental tyrannical facets of the *Age of Anxiety*:

“Brutal like all Olympic games,
Though fought with smiles and Christian names
And less dramatic
This dialectic strife between
The civil gods is just as mean,
and more fanatic.”⁷³

⁷² Robert Hughes, Culture of Complaint: The Praying of America (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993).

⁷³ Ibid. 57 cites W.H. Auden's poem "Under the Lyre", The Age of Anxiety.

CHAPTER 2

THE CULTURE OF ENTITLEMENT - WHY FRANCE?

Lexically, enlightenment is defined as an education in the use of reason.⁷⁴ Promotion of reason represented a new epistemology replacing Old World and Medieval notions of knowing through faith and revelation, but consistent with the Classical Greek quest for rational knowledge. According to Peter Gay, a zealous promoter of the Age of Enlightenment, scholars before the period embodied the “philosopher’s sense of order and limits, his love of virtue, his obedience to the rhythm imposed by the examined life.”⁷⁵ This description might reflect an image many Enlightenment intellectuals idealized, but has little in common with the emotional tone of the movement, especially in France. It is the defining characteristics of this latter group which are the focus of this thesis.

It is a conviction held by many that the eighteenth century was the *siècle des lumières* and Paris was the Mecca for enlightened minds. Those who did not pay homage to this cultural centre in person were influenced by it from afar.⁷⁶ What did Paris and its intellectuals, the *philosophes*, offer to the learned of the time and to contemporary society in general? How did they compare to their English counterparts whose achievements in science, literature and political thinking often exceeded the accomplishments of the continental brethren? Equally relevant is the question why

⁷⁴ Dorina Outram, The Enlightenment: New Approaches to European history (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995) 1. The definition is attributed to Moses Mendelsson, a Jewish/German philosopher of the eighteenth century.

⁷⁵ Peter Gay, The Enlightenment: An Interpretation, The Rise of Modern Paganism (New York : Vintage Books, A Division of Random House, 1968) 128.

⁷⁶ Mark Hulliung, The Autocritique of Enlightenment (Cambridge : Harvard University Press, 1994) 1-7. Among the pilgrims were Galiani (Italy), Hume and Adam Smith (England/Scotland), Grimm & Holbach (representing the German states), and Kant.

does the French movement still hold a unique position in the history of the Age of Enlightenment and how does this reputation reflect on present Western socio-cultural currents.

Traditional comparisons of political, economic, religious and social conditions in eighteenth-century Europe, tend to find English intellectuals to have enjoyed greater freedom and public support compared to their French counterparts. A closer examination of these circumstances suggests that social status and economic conditions of intellectuals in the two countries were often more similar than disparate.⁷⁷ The two groups seemed, however, to have varied greatly in their expectations of recognition and social entitlement. Claims to rights made by the French *philosophes* were often narrow in scope, reflecting an appetite for privileges rather than bids for equality. Furthermore, the most vocal among the French intellectuals (e.g., Voltaire), were oblivious to the dire economic conditions of the country and less sensitive to ensuing socio-political implications than were numerous contemporary clerics and administrators. Their image as a unified group propelled by a radical social agenda rests on their vehement anti-clericalism which they disseminated through popular publications directed to the ascending forces of public opinion, the two quintessential social facts of eighteenth century France.⁷⁸

⁷⁷ Roy Porter, The Enlightenment (New Jersey: Humanities Press International, Inc., 1990) 46.

⁷⁸ Robert Darnton, "George Washington's False Teeth: A Civic Sermon", Eighteenth-Century Research: Objects, methods and institution, 1945-1995, eds. Delon & Scholbach (Paris: Honore Champion E, 1998) 152. Daniel Roche, France in the Enlightenment, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (London: Harvard University Press, Cambridge Massachusetts, 1998) 420, 587. Roche places great emphasis on the "birth of public opinion situated apart from the real society and the royal government" and views publishing as the quintessential social act of the century.

The Enlightenment in England

Eighteenth century England was thriving with publications. In 1714 there were eleven newspapers in London, mostly weekly, and fifty years later the city boasted fifty three newspapers. Nevertheless, most authors were poor. They were not readily supported by patrons, publishers, government pensions and society at large. Samuel Johnson, who attained financial comfort after thirty years of poverty, described "Grub Street" as "the habitat of poetry and poverty".⁷⁹ In 1710 the British parliament passed a copyright act which did not offer much in the way of material gain because: (a) writers did not share in the profits of the sales; they received lump sums from the publisher or print shop owners and (b) it did not protect the writers against pirated publications outside the United Kingdom.

Copyrights earnings rose steadily in eighteenth century England and allowed renowned authors a respectable life style. While not as available in France, the trend was similar and the more reputable *philosophes* supported themselves through their literary work.⁸⁰ In both countries authors generated revenue by selling subscriptions to potential readers. While this practice was more profitable for the English writers, it was also widely used in France. The *Encyclopédie* was marketed partly through subscriptions and Voltaire raised a great sum of money by selling subscriptions of engravings depicting the misery of the Calas family.⁸¹ The two countries differed

⁷⁹ James Van Horn Melton, The Rise of the Public in Enlightenment Europe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001) 20-21. Durant and Ariel Durant, The Age of Voltaire: The Story of Civilization, Part IX (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1965) 45-245 offer a survey of England's economic conditions, political system, status of religion and philosophy, literature and the stage as well as of art and music.

⁸⁰ Melton 127-129.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 127.

markedly in the representation of women as published writers. In both countries women engaged in the popular art of epistolary writing, but whereas the English women evidenced a steady increase as published fiction writers their French counterparts contributed to the intellectual life and social climate of their society indirectly by organizing the *salons*.⁸²

English writers were excluded from 'polite society' in contrast to the *philosophes* who rubbed shoulders with the aristocracy.⁸³ If the English showed greater inclination to accept their lowly social standing, they equalled the French in internal strifes and vindictive literary feuds. British humility was restricted largely to the limits they placed on their intellectual ability to understand God. Consequently, their efforts were channelled to inquiry into the manifest cosmic order and the limits of epistemology. Hume, the great skeptic, exposed the futility of reason to establish the existence of goodness and of God.⁸⁴ The focus was on comprehending how learning occurs in the interplay between individuals and their environment. Observations concerning social stratification remained Lockean in nature, justifying the status quo as the outcome of a social contract devised and agreed to freely by reasonable men.

While the enlightened English seemed resigned to their social status, they did not accept their lot with Christian humility or Scientific reasonableness. Public scorn and vindictiveness

⁸² Ibid., 150-151.

⁸³ Durant & Durant 164. Alexander Pope insisted that he was both a poet and a gentleman. Autobiographical comments show him bitterly tormented with a physical deformity, chronic health problems as well as social rejection due to his Catholic parentage and beliefs. Most writers who were accepted in polite circles earned their position by birth right rather than through their literary achievements.

⁸⁴ Carl Becker, The Heavenly City of the Eighteenth Century Philosophers (New Haven : Yale University Press, 1959) 68.

which underlined literary quarrels among the British brethren in pursuit of tolerance and good sense rivaled the sporadic hostility exhibited concurrently by the French apostles of reason. Pope, composer of An Essay on Man, a seminal poem filled with exhortation to God and warning against mortal hubris, was motivated as much by personal hatred as by feelings of benevolence and compassion.⁸⁵ The brilliance of the enlightened mind seemed to be lacking in empathy and psychological insight which led to a curious blend of ruminative melancholy and scientific faith on both shores of the Channel.

Theatre was clearly more popular in London than in Paris and at least as meritorious for its verse and execution. There were twice as many theatres in London than there were in Paris where women played female parts and began the ascent to fame and acclaim. Spectacles, bawdiness and 'immoral lines' which Voltaire found offensive and 'without decency' were common in London theatres.⁸⁶ In 1737 the British Parliament carried the Licencing Act instructing the Lord Chamberlain to become stricter in granting permission for dramatic presentations. This form of censorship was a reaction to the growing number of caustic political satires, (e.g., Fielding & Gay) using theatre as a venue for attacking the Prime Minister (Walpole) and the King (George II). The greater restriction placed on the English theater than on publishers might have reflected partly a legacy of puritan hostility towards the stage and succeeded in

⁸⁵ Alexander Pope, Selected Poetry and Prose (New York : Holt, Rinehart & Winston, Inc., 1951) 127-167. Alexander Pope's four Epistles known as "The Essay on Man", had a remarkable influence on the spirit of the Age of Enlightenment in particular over the French *philosophes*.

⁸⁶ Melton 172.

eliminating overt political criticism from the stage.⁸⁷ Patent theatres in London were not supported by the government while the three royal theaters in Paris received subsidies from the crown.⁸⁸

British laws permitted religious dissent. The Toleration Act was passed in 1689 freeing Catholics and dissenters from formal persecution at the same time that Locke had documented the Reasonableness of Christianity (1695). In the eighteenth century, Bishop Berkeley comfortably announced that knowledge is apprehended sensibly rather than revealed. Hume published the History of England in 1755 where he rejected the notion of miracles on the basis of lack of historical evidence and defined religion as man-made in his Natural History of Religion (1757). A more cynical Gibbon placed religion in the arsenal of government control devices.⁸⁹

Despite official policies religious freedom was restricted to followers of the Anglican Church. While dissenters were not pursued officially, they were rendered socially and politically disabled, barred from holding public office and not welcome to polite society. Alexander Pope did not qualify for a burial in Westminster Abbey because his parents were Catholic. Books were burned occasionally by the British government and authors were still pilloried for attacking the fundamentals of Christianity.⁹⁰ Instances of religiously motivated imprisonment were rare and had

⁸⁷ Ibid., 172-3.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 175 .

⁸⁹ J. B. Black, The Art of History ; A study of four great historians of the eighteenth century , (New York: Russell & Russell. Inc., 1965) 77-116, 143-188. Bertrand Russell, History of Western Philosophy (London : Unwin Paperbacks: Boston, Sydney, 1979) 623-33.

⁹⁰ Durant & Durant 495. Peter Annet was pilloried and sent to prison for one year with hard labour in 1762.

become linked with political dissent. Social restrictions associated with religious affiliation were enforced by the civil arms of government which were not pressured by the Church of England. Samuel Johnson, one of the few concerned with “false doctrines”, called on “the civil power” to “unite with the Church in punishing those who dare to attack the established religion.”⁹¹

Although largely unable to reach financial solvency or gain social status through writing, English scholars operated under less restrictions than French intellectuals. The latter were confronted with an ineffectual monarch Louis XV who felt more vulnerable after the attempt on his life in 1757 and a Church that was losing its political power. This notwithstanding, the French *philosophes* enjoyed relative freedom of expression and publication over stretches of time throughout the century and were often less subversive than some of their religious enemies.⁹²

Religion was clearly not the archenemy of the Enlightenment in England where most authors and scientists were believing Christians adhering to formal hierarchies and sacramental prerequisites. The list includes the conservative Burke and Johnson, the Catholic Pope as well as such proponents of bourgeois individualism as Defoe, Richardson, Fielding and “...above all the towering figure of the Very Reverend Jonathan Swift, Doctor of Sacred Theology”.⁹³ Overt antagonism to orthodox Christianity, among the renowned, was exhibited by Hume while other skeptics (e.g., Gray and Horace Walpole) maintained a low profile on the issue. Eighteenth

⁹¹ Preserved Smith, History of Modern Culture, 2 vol. (New York: Collier Books, 1930) Vol. II, 556.

⁹² Censorship in France and underground religious publications of the Jansenists are addressed further in the chapter.

⁹³ Donald Greene, “The Via Media in an Age of Revolution: Anglicanism in the 18th Century”, The Varied Pattern: Studies in the 18th Century, eds. Peter Hughes and David Williams, (Toronto: Hakkert, Ltd., 1971) 297-320.

century England inherited an attachment to the Anglican Church from its earlier great scientists, Newton and Boyle as well as from its philosophers Locke and Bishop Berkeley. England of the Age of Enlightenment produced the most famous religious hymns and erected great churches.

England was, by far, the most representative country of the emerging bourgeoisie, industrial capitalism and colonialism. No one was more emblematic of the growing global economy than Adam Smith or embodied the self-sufficient European more accurately than Defoe's Robinson Crusoe.⁹⁴ Samuel Richardson, Henry Fielding and Tobias Smollett captured the English middle classes through literary works more vividly than any historiography and had no equals among their French contemporaries. Inaugurators of the modern novel, both Fielding and Richardson had admittedly great influence on the French literati. Richardson not only launched a new literary style, but also ushered the era of sensibility into the Age of Enlightenment.⁹⁵ Messenger of prudence, frugality and reason, he roused an emotional swell which greatly influenced Rousseau, the *anti-philosophe philosophe*, who became linked with the ensuing rise of Romanticism, the revolt against reason.⁹⁶

⁹⁴ Daniel Defoe was born Foe in 1660 to a landed class of Presbyterian persuasion. A dissenter all his life he started his career as a novelist in his late fifties. He published Robinson Crusoe in 1719, A Journal of The Plague in 1722 and in the same year also Moll Flanders and several other books.

⁹⁵ Ronald Rosbottom, "Marivaux & the Crisis of Literary Forms in the Early Enlightenment", The varied Pattern: Studies in the 18th Century 97-111. Rosbottom notes that these two authors had produced similar new forms of writing almost concurrently.

⁹⁶ Samuel Richardson (1689-1761) the son of a carpenter who became an apprentice to a printer and managed through hard work and thrift to own a print shop, represented personally and through his novels bourgeois values of prudence, hard work and charity. Clarissa and Pamela earned him great notoriety in England and in France. Henry Fielding (1707-1754) is considered father of the realistic novel of manners. While he had some association with the upper classes, he lived modestly on his wife's pension. Although he

Scientific thinking, the 'new rational and empirical' mind which replaced the 'old mytho-poetic religious' understanding, was much more rooted in England than in France. Historically, the eighteenth century did not produce major scientific theories or spectacular findings and was rather an era of dissemination and popularization of earlier triumphs. Scholars' preoccupation with classifying and organizing existing knowledge was reminiscent of medieval styles of studying, but the new ordering of learning did represent a paradigm shift in replacing dogma and authority with experience and inquiry as sources of all knowledge. In England, Natural Philosophy was a body of knowledge pertaining to that which was created by God. Newton's universe was a creative act of God which required intervention to correct imperfection and infuse energy. Science seemed to be moving away from theology by avoiding 'first order' questions. Hume, the principal skeptic, posited that we cannot infer the Creator from creation, the latter falling under human comprehension is, therefore, probable rather than true. While eschewing first order questions, the English rationalized religion and in the spirit of scientific thinking argued that the Bible should not be interpreted literally.⁹⁷

Political thinking was also prominent in England while French scholars were preoccupied, some obsessively, with refuting Church doctrines and other metaphysical systems (e.g., Voltaire,

wrote some political satires he is mostly esteemed for his frank and elaborate portrayal of English society. He is most known for Tom Jones.

Tobias Smollett (1721-1771) had the disadvantage of being a Scot. He led a rather colourful life trying the navy medicine, and was often destitute. A man of temper and urge for adventure he offered the reader the rough imperial England of oceans and ports rather than that of the middle class.

⁹⁷ Roy Porter, The Creation of the Modern World; The Untold Story of the British Enlightenment (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2000) 114-15 refers to Thomas Woolston's Six Discourses (1727-30).

Diderot). Early political liberalism was essentially English and Dutch, it was Protestant and of the latitudinarian type. It favoured the rising commercial middle class, praised individual economic success and the protection of private property. The new morality was armed with economic scriptures providing legitimacy and a new rationale for civic rights and obligations of the bourgeoisie. Given these biases, political thinking did not sponsor unrest nor was there a great movement towards government reform. From Locke to the French Revolution, social stability went hand-in-hand with the championing of empirical inquiry and property rights in England and in France.⁹⁸ Eighteenth century liberalism in its various forms, anti-clericalism in France or ardent advocacy for economic right in England, were not democratic in nature. The desirable political system was a 'balanced monarchy' typified by the English and adopted by Montesquieu.⁹⁹

Newton and Locke of the seventeenth century together with Hume, Adam Smith, Swift and Richardson of the eighteenth century represent the gamut of the Age of Enlightenment from reason to skepticism and from religious tolerance to *laissez-faire* economy. These individuals alone define the complexity of the era through their personal histories and work. Yet none of them has become as emblematic of the Age of Enlightenment as the French movement in general and Voltaire in particular. Eighteenth century England produced all the necessary ingredients to represent the Age of Enlightenment: it housed the scholars, the scientist, the authors, the political system and the bourgeois economy that reflected the age. London was the practical embodiment

⁹⁸ Russell 618.

⁹⁹ Voltaire was more in favour of 'enlightened despotism' *à la mode de* Frederick the Great of Prussia or Catherine the Great of Russia or the venerated Louis XIV, although he professed to endorse the English system.

of urban renewal with its school, hospitals, new papers and consumer behaviour.¹⁰⁰ Yet, history has chosen the French *philosophes* and Voltaire, *primus primi*, to personify the spirit of the era.¹⁰¹

France of the Enlightenment

France entered the eighteenth century under the repressive rule of Louis XIV. Two days after his burial in 1715, the Regent, Phillip d'Orléans, ordered the release of all prisoners from the Bastille save for those accused of serious crimes. For the next decade, France was governed by a man who read Rabelais in Church and permitted the publications of Montesquieu, Voltaire and Fontanelle. He made the University of Paris and the *Bibliothèque Royal* accessible to all students who qualified free of charge and diverted public funds to the *Académie Royale des Sciences des Inscription et Belle-Lettres*, *Académie Royale de l'Architecture*. The *duc d'Orléans* also financed publications of learned works and founded, in the Louvre, an *Académie des Arts Mécaniques*.¹⁰² Copyrights were restricted by the *privilège du roi*, but in the lenient climate of the Regency, they seemed to serve more as protection against pirated publications than to inhibit freedom of expression. Paris was inundated with poetry, novels, diatribes and pornography and French had become the second language to any educated person in Europe.

¹⁰⁰ Porter, The Creation of the Modern World 14.

¹⁰¹ Darnton, George Washington's False Teeth 152. Darnton is asking this question with respect to intellectuals of the period in general, not just in reference to England : "...If one measures depth and originality of thought, it is difficult to find a Parisian who compares with Hume, Smith, Burke, Kant and Goethe. Why then concentrate on Paris?"

¹⁰² Durant & Durant 17-33.

The Regent, one might argue, ushered the Age of Enlightenment into the public domain in France and granted its tenets legitimacy. His loose religious practices, support of the Arts, literary endeavors and promotion of inventions in the industrial arts, mirrored the enlightened world view which advocated tolerance, pursuit of scientific knowledge and esthetics as well as 'epicurean' pleasures. The personal life of the Regent set the tone for the first half of the eighteenth century in France. His conduct exuded a skeptical, licentious morality in which promiscuity and libertinism stood for libertarianism and tolerance. Eros and Pan replaced religious themes in paintings while seduction, banditry and cunningness became principal folkloric and literary motifs.¹⁰³ Religion, during the Regency, was manifestly in recession when the Regent's mother was ready to wager a bet in 1722 that Paris could not boast one hundred people, including ecclesiastics, with true Christian beliefs.¹⁰⁴ When the *philosophes* attacked the Church in the middle of the century, they confronted an enemy for some time in decline.

Politically, the Regent restored the *Parlements'* "right to remonstrance" against royal edicts, revoked by Mazarin, thereby introducing conflict into the monarchical administration, but

¹⁰³ The leading visual artist during the Regency period was Antoine Watteau (1648-1721). François Boucher (1703-70) represented the Rococo style in the middle of the century. In the literary domain one would choose Alain René Lesage's (1668-1747) novel The Adventures of Gil Blas de Santillane as characteristic of this mentality. A complementary world view was reflected in the folk tales which elevated cunning and success to supreme virtues. For an elaborate treatment of French fairy tales, see R. Darnton, "Peasants Tell Tales: The Meaning of Mother Goose", The Great Cat Massacre; and Other Episodes in French Cultural History (New York: Vintage Books, 1985) 9-74.

¹⁰⁴ Durant & Durant 21-22 cites from Katherine Prescott Wormeley, Correspondence of Madame, Princess Palatine,... Marie Adelaide de Savoie,... and Madame de Maintenon (Boston, 1902) 30.

creating an opportunity for a more balanced and enlightened political system.¹⁰⁵ The Regent also showed leniency with political criticism and censorship was lip service paid to preserve a semblance of authority. In 1721, Montesquieu published a critical social commentary, *Lettres persanes*, and Voltaire suspected of spreading rumors of the Regent's incestuous relationship with his daughter, was sent to the Bastille to serve his sentence in physical luxury and with immunity he would not experience again.¹⁰⁶

The climate of irreverence notwithstanding, the Church in France was in possession of great resources and power throughout the eighteenth century. Next to the king, the Church was the richest institution in France while none of its possessions and earnings were taxable. Intermittently, bishops would give substantial donations to the king's coffers which were always voluntary and graciously accepted. In 1749, Voltaire issued a pamphlet, "*Voix du sage et du peuple*" pleading with Louis XV to implement the proposal of the comptroller general of finances to tax the Church and abolish the traditional *don gratuit*.¹⁰⁷ Whilst addressing financial changes, Voltaire also recommended a social restructuring whereby the clergy would be replaced by secular intellectuals. The king preferred the bishops' generous donations and suppressed the

¹⁰⁵ Cardinal Jules Mazarin, born Giulio Mazarini (1602-1661) was chief minister to the regent Queen Mother (Anne of Austria) when five year old Louis XIV came to the throne in 1643. Lenient with opposition and liberal with the arts, he fought to set up an absolute monarchy and quelled attempts to follow the English parliamentary system.

¹⁰⁶ Montesquieu published his book *Lettres persanes* in 1721 without giving it his name. The book is presented in the form of letters written by two Persian travelers in France and exposing the foibles of the Orient as well as those of the French.

¹⁰⁷ Jean-Baptiste Machault d'Arnouville (1701-1794) became controller general of finance in December 1745. In 1749, he attempted a reform in the levying of direct taxes. Voltaire To d' Arnouville, May 16, 1749, Besterman D. 3927 .

pamphlet.¹⁰⁸ However, in the alliance between King and Church, it was not the clergy that dominated a hesitant monarch. On the contrary, by 1766 the Church was more under the king's protection than an independent political force.¹⁰⁹

Religious precepts may not have been paramount in people's lives, but the majority followed tradition and bowed to the power of ceremony. Secularization was prevalent among the outspoken intellectual minority, disaffected aristocrats and perhaps the upper echelons of the rich bourgeoisie. The peasantry and rural poor which comprised the greater part of the population as well as the majority of the urban Third Estate (trades and urban poor) were not anticlerical. Most people relied on religious holidays as days of rest and on local churches to assist with food shortages while proponents of the Enlightenment heralded new economic realities in which time became linked to money and fairs were defined as lazy celebration.¹¹⁰ Notions of free enterprise, voiced by the physiocrats, surfaced only in the second half of the century following the historic appearance of the doctrine of "*laissez faire*", Vincent de Gournay's economic system based on commerce free of government. Small enterprises involving only a few hands were subject to strict government regulations handed down from Colbert's economic

¹⁰⁸ The efforts of the comptroller general of France, Machault d'Arnouville, to eliminate the *don gratuit* extended to the Church are described in Voltaire, Works, 44 v. (New York, 1927) XVI 261. The king's response to Voltaire's efforts is cited in Durant & Durant 255.

¹⁰⁹ Daniel Roche, France in the Enlightenment, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Cambridge, London: Harvard University Press, 1998) 358.

¹¹⁰ Daniel Roche 83. Fernand Braudel, The Wheels of Commerce: Civilization & Capitalism 15th-18th Century, vol. 2. Trans. Sian Reynolds (New York: Harper & Row, 1979) 90-95 addresses the development and decline of fairs.

administration. "The articles of faith in the new religion of humanity" had little to say about injustice in this social imbalance.¹¹¹

Whereas its enormous economic assets rendered the Church almost invincible as a social power, theological disputes offered ample opportunity for the *philosophes* to attack its viability as interpreter of the word of God and more importantly for the King to weaken its political power. Sectarian and doctrinal wars among Jesuits and Jansenists coupled with questions pertaining to papal jurisdiction enfeebled Church authority and allowed Louis XV to proceed with a utilitarian secularization (e.g., denying the clergy powers to refuse sacraments and the expulsion of the Jesuits in 1761). As the King was restricting the political power of the Church, the 'apostles' of the Enlightenment focused their attention on lurid behaviour exhibited by teachers of the Gospel often resorting to sensationalistic exaggerations of immorality. Direct attacks on the Church and religion were more prominent in the second half of the century following the expulsion of the Jesuits. It was then that Voltaire made his name as fighter for religious tolerance while campaigning to *écrasez l'Infâme*.

Despite blatant antagonism between *philosophes* and clerics, many Church officials joined learned societies where they were honoured and respected for their erudition. Voltaire himself is reported to have enjoyed the sermons of Jean Baptiste Massillon, the bishop of Clermont.¹¹²

¹¹¹ Becker 39. Jean Baptiste Colbert (1619-1683) was the economic advisor to Louis XIV.

¹¹² Durant & Durant 258.

Many Bishops who belonged to the nobility cultivated a cultural hospitality that rivaled the 'goût' espoused by the best among the enlightened.¹¹³ High clerics often outdid the *philosophes* also in championing social causes and promoting reforms. In the *pays d'États* bishops were the most active supporters of tax reform and public works, two domains which eluded most French intellectuals.¹¹⁴

French scholars resented ecclesiastics' control over education as much as their fiscal power. Access to the young, they argued, enabled the Church to mold them with liturgical interpretations and disarm them with sacramental mystique. Interestingly, many *philosophes* were schooled by Jesuits whose curriculum exposed the students to classical rather than theological reflections. In essence, the high culture of France was carried largely by minds who were formed by the Jesuit classical course of studies. D'Alembert and Diderot, among the more active scholars of the era, protested the expulsion of the Jesuits, in 1762, and proclaimed it a defeat for the forces of Enlightenment.¹¹⁵ Jesuits, like the enlightened secular scholars, expressed keen interest in Chinese religion and philosophy commending greatly Confucian practical ethics.¹¹⁶ While almost all *philosophes* experienced the tutelage of the Jesuits many did not attend a university (e.g.,

¹¹³ Voltaire and Montesquieu extolled the advantages of taste to civilization. Montesquieu contributed an essay to the entry 'taste' in the *Encyclopédie*. Voltaire's sense of taste will be elaborated upon in the following chapters.

¹¹⁴ Roche 362.

¹¹⁵ Peter Hughes, "Language, History & Vision", The Varied Patterns: Studies in the 18th Century 87.

¹¹⁶ Arthur Lovejoy, Essays in the History of Ideas (New York: Capricorn Books, 1960) 103 refers to Jesuits' publications of their encounters in China.

Voltaire). At the universities and in particular the University of Paris, education was dominated by conservative Jansenist priests.

Whereas the *philosophes* deplored ecclesiastic authority, many among the business classes, legal profession and artisans were closely affiliated with the Jansenists known as the ‘Calvinist Catholics’ who ascended to power in the Paris *Parlement* during the second half of the century.¹¹⁷ This group, typically identified as the austere clerical contingent, also preached a democratic ecclesiology and introduced notions of conscientious opposition and fierce individualism. Moreover, their teaching advocated that the search for the truth in God be conducted through reason and nature.¹¹⁸ There seemed to be more potential for disorder in adhering to their religious tenets than in following the orderly individualism and civic obedience preached by *philosophes*. Indeed, Jansenists’ publications, during the first three decades of the eighteenth century, were banned and *lettres de cachet* used frequently against their members helped sustain a spirit of martyrdom. It seems that enlightened intellectuals had much to learn from the clerics, both in methods of enlisting public opinion as well as successfully circulating underground clandestine ideas. The Jansenist publication *Nouvelle ecclésiastique* was banned from 1728 to 1789 and was never seized.¹¹⁹ Fighting the papal Bull denouncing Pasquier

¹¹⁷ Jansenism is a religious doctrine based on the writings of the Dutch theologian Cornelis Jansen (1585-1638) who emphasized the Augustinian tenets of predestination. Jansenism was condemned by papal bulls (1643, 1653, 1656, 1713), but was defended by many including Pascal and seems to have gained its greatest following in France. They were persecuted by Louis XIV, but continued to have influence in the French Catholic church until the revolution in 1789.

¹¹⁸ Roche 663-673.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 377. Melton 49-52 suggests that the Jansenist movement stimulated the emergence of an oppositional public sphere in France.

Quesnel's commentary on the Bible, the latter portrayed the public as a tribunal defending the persecuted victims.¹²⁰

To be sure the Church in France held enormous wealth, kept many peasants in virtual serfdom and often deprived of income the secular arm in such roles as making wills and bequests. Criminal offenses and moral transgressions were not uncommon, but allusions to reigning debauchery and Machiavellianism reflected often a self-serving propaganda aimed to justify competing claims of entitlement to power, social status and wealth rather than argue against social injustice. Among the *philosophes* only a few expressed moral outrage against the callous and unsympathetic extravagances of the aristocracy which lived on revenues of the poor peasantry. In 1725, Saint Simon decried this gross injustice declaring that "...The first king of Europe is great simply by being a king of beggars and by turning the kingdom into a vast hospital of dying people, from whom all is taken without a murmur."¹²¹ The French Enlightenment resisted such empirical facts showing negligible political or social interest compared to its ferocious attack on the Church.

Whereas the Church was the designated enemy, the Enlightenment in France was inseparable from the gilded aristocratic refinement of elegant conversation and brilliant wit with which philosophy was debated in cafés and *salons*. The latter, unique to France, were discussion groups organized and run by women of title and wealth. While the hostesses were often intelligent and learned, the tenor of the gatherings was one of superficial repartee. For attendants, mostly *philosophes* and guests from abroad, these groupings were safe arenas for abusing religion

¹²⁰ Melton 52. The papal Bull *Unigenitus* was decreed in 1713 denouncing the New Testament commentary published by Pasquier Quesnel.

¹²¹ Durant & Durant 260. The quote is taken from Hyppolite Taine, The Ancient Regime (New York, 1891) 330.

or each other as well as exchanging new ideas. According to Daniel Roche, *salons* had no practical utility outside the value they held for the participants.¹²² For its members it was often an arena of self-congratulatory activities, but it also offered a venue for exchanging ideas and a potential site for securing patronage and assistance for circulation of publications. *Salon* matrons expressed ambivalence about their guests and proteges, at times condescending, but also supportive of their work. They advised aspiring writers to attach themselves to women rather than men to improve their chances for success and often dismissed ideas expressed by *philosophes* with other utopian myths.¹²³

Salons were an esoteric world where men of different social standings rubbed shoulders yet maintained distinct identities, the baron and the son of a tradesman were never confused. *Salons* were a stage for polished dialogues; a private theatre room with interactive yet well rehearsed scripts. There was an aspect of the French Enlightenment which resembled a theatrical production where men of letter entertained opinions and inflated their brittle egos. Around the *salon* tables of Paris, philosophy was replaced with platitudinous bantering in the same way that art was superseded by *objets d'art*. Opinions, speculative and accessible, replaced cautious scholarship with the ascent of a new class of socialites. Idolatry of the spectacular, of notoriety

¹²² Roche 439.

¹²³ Mme. de Tencin (Claudine Alexandra de Tencin), biological mother of the *philosophe* d'Alembert, considered second to Pompadour, was a brilliant woman who worked her way from poverty to riches and power and ran a very distinguished salon. She referred to her guests, which included Montesquieu, Fontenelle, Helvétius, Duclos, Marmontel, Condorcet as “*bêtes*” or “*ménageries*”. On the other hand, she bought most of the first edition of Montesquieu’s *Esprits des Lois* in 1748 and distributed it among her friends.

and illusion - signature facets of current mass-media culture - were cultivated in *salons*, poured out into cafés and into the streets of Paris.

Contemporary documents disclose interests and opinions on current events that were shared by *salon* participants. While the Parlement of Paris protested against taxes in 1725, 1748, 1756 and 1759 through countless pamphlets and treatises, most dialogues in the salons were rife with anti-religious barbs and discourse on the ideal Natural man. What transpired in *salons* produced little discomfort for the dictatorial rulers of Prussia or Russia. Instead, it offered them intellectual stimulation and occasionally ideas for educational reform. France was exporting the art of cultured living for those who could afford it. To its own bourgeoisie, the sparkling dialogues of the *salon* offered access to social etiquettes previously reserved for the aristocracy and to the multitudes a new source of entertainment in the form of illusory familiarity with the *Grands*.

There was clearly greater depth to the *philosophes*, than that which was expressed around *salon* tables, yet this medium defined both the method and task of the movement. Exaggerated language was intended to sway emotions and win over opinions rather than clarify positions. “Primitive energy”, a traditional religious means of appeal to the public, was reframed with secular labels as “energetics of communications”.¹²⁴ Popularizers rather than creators, *salon* participants honed the art of persuasion rather than the discipline required for systematic acquisition of knowledge. It was primarily to the educated and the rich that the *philosophes* addressed their claims to a true faith and social status. What appears presently as a glaring discrepancy between a rhetoric of universal rights and its restricted application to the bourgeoisie

¹²⁴ Roche 599.

went unmarked by most of these scholars. To historicize and excuse it as representing the spirit of the times is to ignore those who were mindful of social injustices and global implications of advocating human rights. Arguments for relativism ignore the fact that an intellect devoid of empathy and self-reflection produces reasoning oblivious to social implications. Church fathers did not right the wrong of their destitute flocks, but they felt compelled to include them in the cosmic design. They might have seduced the poor into submission, but they did not ignore them or justify their misery as confirming a law of natural justice.¹²⁵

Both England and France were inundated with publications throughout the eighteenth century, but it was in France that the printed word was central to the growing phenomenon of public opinion and was intimately related to the dramatic presentation of the Age of Enlightenment. According to the dossiers of the Police Inspector of the Book Trade, between 1750-1769, there were hardly any 'full time' authors living *aux gages des libraires* (Diderot was one of the few) among his 'clients'.¹²⁶ It was a secondary activity for aristocrats, clergymen and budding abbés. Writers could not rely on sales to strike it rich because publishers had a monopoly on book privileges and a pirating industry nabbed the little profit a good sale might have generated. Lacking social status and financial backing, non-privileged writers were treated condescendingly by Joseph d'Hemery, the Police Inspector who viewed them as *gens sans état* in contrast to the *gallant homme*, man of means. A thirty-seven year old Diderot, married man and

¹²⁵ Voltaire did not hesitate to proclaim the masses undeserving of equality due to natural incapacity to appreciate its meaning.

¹²⁶ This section relies on Robert Darnton, "A Police Inspector Sorts His Files: The Anatomy of the Republic of letters" in The Great Cat Massacre 145-190. The information is restricted largely to the period between 1750-1769 and is based on the dossiers of an inspector by the name of Joseph d'Hémery.

father, was addressed by the Police Inspector as *garçon*. Interestingly, writers were never identified in the dossiers as a group or a movement. The police inspector, who knew many authors and appreciated the work of some (e.g., Montesquieu, Diderot, Voltaire, etc.), never addressed them as *philosophes* or *lumières*.

When censorship tightened, after the attempt on the life of Louis XV, the Police Inspector was not alarmed by the activities of those we identify as *philosophes*. Danger, according to him, originated with two sources: (a) atheists and those mocking the sacraments, and (b) *libelles* directed against the king and his family. Diderot was identified with the first group because he ridiculed the sacraments and was arrested on suspicion of writing the tract "*Thérèse philosophe*" which contained "conversations about natural religion which are extremely forceful and dangerous".¹²⁷ The Abbé Guillaume, editor of the *Journal encyclopédique*, was sent to the Bastille in 1752 for publishing an "atrocious libelle against religion" entitled "*Zoroaster*". Two year prison terms were given for writing libels "of the greatest violence against the king and the entire royal family".

Political libels were not new to the French in the eighteenth century. "*La custode du lit de la reine*" printed in 1649, alluded to an illicit relationship between Mazarin and the queen mother and was as crude as any material published during the Age of Enlightenment. Murlot, the printer of this slanderous publication, was saved from the hangman by fellow printers.¹²⁸ With time

¹²⁷ Darnton, *The Forbidden Best Sellers of Pre-Revolutionary France* (New York, London: Norton & Company, 1995) 89-90 cites from J.F. Barbier, *Journal historique et anecdotique du règne de Louis XV* (Paris, 1851).

¹²⁸ Darnton, *Forbidden Best Sellers* 170. The libel which alludes to the relationship between Mazarin and the queen mother reads as follows: "Townsmen, don't doubt it any more; it's true that he fucks her".

libelles assumed a more destructive force as gossip and slander were legitimized by a literature reliant on libelous style and content. The desacralizing propaganda used by *philosophes*, notably Voltaire, exceeded the often vulgar rumors of political libels. Embedded in both was oral gossip which got stylized, amplified and disseminated in written materials. In the streets of Paris where attacks on God went unpunished, little remained sacrosanct and the man-made dynasty, even if inspired by the Heavens, was left open to public scorn and abuse. Most French scholars were royalists and supporters of the monarchy, but rejecting the collective wisdom of the past, symbolized in the assault on the Church, preached a new confidence not bound by previous beliefs or practices. While the fresh enthusiasm was intended for the ruling elite of the educated and the rich, once unleashed it was appropriated by mass movements to change forever regimes and social structures. The journal of the Inspector of the Book Trade testifies to the vastness of the corpus of forbidden books between 1750-1769 and the failure of the police to bring it under control.¹²⁹

Noteworthy is the fact that libel law in England played a major role in curbing the press. These laws did not only apply to slanderous material, but were also extended to any publications deemed injurious to the public peace.¹³⁰ Expressions of political opposition in England after the 1760s, could have been easily identified as sedition. Being persecuted for hostile journalism in England was both costly and dangerous.

Did the street influence publications or did the printed word reflect a growing cynical population? The shaping of public opinion happened as much in the market place as in the *société*

¹²⁹ Darnton, Forbidden Best Sellers 392.

¹³⁰ Melton 32.

de pensée.¹³¹ The general mood in Paris clearly changed over the century. Early street chatter, not lacking in audacity was directed against religion, while in cafés the birth of the crown prince was celebrated with heartfelt devotion in 1729.¹³² The second half of the century displayed a different mood when nothing seemed as rotten as the court. What is clear is that increased disaffection with the monarch as well as the erosion of sacred values were driven by a literature designed to polarize views and resulted in the isolation of the monarchy. The enlightened French who were essentially loyal to the crown hoping to find suitable positions in the *Ancien Régime* added to its demise with their unbridled mass produced criticism.

The French and the English differed clearly in their attitude towards religion and the Church. The formers' anti-clerical zeal led Hegel to believe that the *philosophes* continued the Reformation, but mistakenly assumed that faith can be assessed by reason.¹³³ While in England mercantilism, aristocracy and the Church had been bedfellows for some time France lagged even behind Prussia where Frederick the Great built Catholic cathedrals and allowed Jews to regulate their own schools and cemeteries.¹³⁴ But, the English and the French shared a utilitarian ethic antagonistic to church doctrines preaching humility, poverty and personal sacrifice. The voices of Enlightenment were unanimous in searching for a faith compatible with the developing market economy and its emerging social structure. Detractors of the French Enlightenment argue that the

¹³¹ Darnton, Forbidden Best Sellers 180.

¹³² Roche 461.

¹³³ Outram 6, 32.

¹³⁴ The Act of Toleration in England was passed in 1689 whereas in France a decree in 1787 granted only limited toleration to Protestants.

debate between the *philosophes* and the Church was not grounded on moral issues as much as on 'just' prices for social status; the morality of the original sin was replaced with a profit-based ethic. In England, the ideology of law of Nature was used to rubber stamp an existing socio-political reality whereas in France, still embedded in a feudal-class structure, the Church was strong enough a rival for the middle-class market morality, hence the apparent ferocious fight which has come to be known as the French Enlightenment.

Les Philosophes

Those who seat the Age of Enlightenment in Paris identify its ideology and achievements with the *philosophes*. As a self-conscious movement driving a concerted campaign the *philosophes* coalesced in the second half of the eighteenth century.¹³⁵ According to Berthier, the Jesuit editor of the *Journal de Trévoux*, the label was usurped by "those who attack revealed religion, and 'prosecute' those who battle for its defense."¹³⁶ In addition, the designation implied the use of 'reason' rather than elaborate philosophical systems to defend convictions and arrive at truth. A pedagogy of vulgarization was adopted to popularize scientific information and religious questions which heretofore were reserved for academics, important clerics and men of power. To achieve this goal the *philosophes* expressed their ideas in short essays, pamphlets, satirical plays and spicy epigrams occasionally bordering on pornography. While purporting to herald a new social force, most of these scholars, either fought to be admitted into or belonged to established

¹³⁵ Darnton, George Washington's False Teeth 152.

¹³⁶ John Pappas, Berthier's Journal de Trévoux and the Philosophes (Geneva, 1957) 122. The quote is from the issue published in July, 1759.

institutions of government and academia. The Church was the only formal organization they shunned.

With the exceptions of Montesquieu (1689-1755) and the octogenarian, Voltaire (1694-1778), the *philosophes* published in the later part of the eighteenth century. Several among them boasted respectable individual achievements, but it was their group effort of producing the *Encyclopédie*, the most extensive publishing enterprise of the century, which earned them their position and title of *philosophes*. A compendium of information written from a rationalist point of view, the work was a major intellectual undertaking which required outstanding physical and emotional stamina. The goal was to bring all branches of knowledge under the umbrella of natural laws which were assumed to govern cosmic as well as human behaviour, including religion. Life in all its facets, including morality, was to be contained within a measurable and calculable interrelated unified science. Eschewing comprehensive theoretical systems, the production resembled “a factory of ideas and illustrations”.¹³⁷

The two major contributors, organizers and sustainers of the project, Diderot and D’Alembert took great risks in trying to consolidate existing knowledge along the new secular lines of reason and science while undoing the old sacred world of learning. True to the Baconian tradition, they advocated the study of the immediate world through induction and reflection, but went further in their attempts to submit theology to reason. History, they argued, has been determined by secular leaders: kings and intellectuals with the latter exerting the greatest influence on advancements of civilization through progression of knowledge. This new

¹³⁷ Roche 575-577.

organization of knowledge revealed a new cosmic order and with it a new social hierarchy that qualified its messengers to assume leadership roles in their society.¹³⁸

Another belief shared by the *philosophes* was the importance of disseminating the new knowledge to replace false Church doctrines. To achieve these goals they had to “vulgarize” esoteric scientific and philosophical theories thus developing a culture of transmission rather than one of creation.¹³⁹ Entwined with the *gens des lettres*’ concerns for educating their contemporaries, young and old, was the urgency of promoting themselves as mentors and leaders. With the exception of Rousseau and Diderot, all *philosophes* claimed public offices to mark their achievements and legitimize a rising social status and all but Rousseau vied for positions in the *Académie*.¹⁴⁰

This widespread propaganda transcended national boundaries and helped develop the notion of a “truly cosmopolitan” Republic of Letters without “borders or police, open to ideas from everywhere”.¹⁴¹ Scholarly and other types of publications from different countries were circulating in Europe in unprecedented numbers. This was undoubtedly the beginnings of mass communication with printed matter as the new medium propelling diverse secular publications to new arenas and making the exchange of ideas ‘truly cosmopolitan’. In France, more than any

¹³⁸ This paragraph relies on Darnton, “Philosophers Trim the Tree of Knowledge: The Epistemological Strategy of the *Encyclopédie*”, The Great Cat Massacre 191-214.

¹³⁹ Peter Gay, The Party of Humanity: Essays in the French Enlightenment (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1971).

¹⁴⁰ The *Académie* chose nine *philosophes* to its membership in the fourteen elections between 1760 and 1770. In 1772 d’Alembert became its permanent secretary.

¹⁴¹ Darnton, George Washington’s False Teeth 162.

other country, printed matter was circulated freely on billboards and in cafes to generate, enlist and sway public opinion.

Indefatigable in disseminating their own work, the *philosophes* were less generous in sharing rights to freedom of expression with others. While arguing vociferously against the shackles of the Church, they did not shy away from exerting effort to censor antagonistic views. D'Alembert failed to convince Malesherbes, censor and *philosophes* sympathizer, to suppress the *L'Année littéraire*, an *anti-philosophe* periodical.¹⁴² Voltaire, the more connected and most vocal member of the group, tried to quell a performance ridiculing his play *Semiramis* by pleading his case with the Queen who refused him and subsequently with Mme. Pompadour who obliged.¹⁴³ Gaping discrepancies between professing an ideology of tolerance and denying others the right to criticize discloses a social agenda of entitlement rather than a struggle for freedom of expression.¹⁴⁴

The power of public ridicule was also used to discourage dissension amongst themselves. Much of Diderot's outstanding work was published posthumously probably to avoid peer censorship. This lack of personal and interpersonal awareness implies a disarray in "the psychic house". Individual responsibility is taken over by impersonal ideologies, typical of narcissists in which perceived threats to self-preservation are projected as righteous indignation against

¹⁴² Arthur Wilson, M., *Diderot: The Testing Years 1713-1759* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1969) 121-122.

¹⁴³ This blatant contradiction between his rationalized vicious attack on others and equally violent objections to be subjected to like or more benign criticism, supports the argument that he personified the entitlement in the French Enlightenment.

¹⁴⁴ Roche 420.

universal crimes.¹⁴⁵ The *philosophes* outcry against censorship had no tolerance for others and little awareness of the contradiction between the liberties they demanded for themselves and their readiness to inflict restrictions on others.

Generally, the *philosophes*' struggle for recognition did not call for global socio-political reforms. Often stressing the need to protect their 'enterprise' with 'privileges', they seemed content to be absorbed into existing ranks caring little about the regime they served as long as they gained social esteem.¹⁴⁶ While this censure was offered by a biased ardent Rousseauist, it underscores the *philosophes*' political insensibility and apparent indifference to the wretched economic conditions in France. Curiously, the few who advocated social reforms boasted both pedigree and wealth (e.g., Helvétius and d'Holbach) whilst those of humble origins indulged in radical anti-religious rhetoric, but were content to merge with the existing ruling classes.¹⁴⁷ Nowhere was the "bourgeois betrayal" in France elucidated more clearly than in the non-interventionist liberalism of its enlightened thinkers whose assimilation into the establishment was no different than the process of ennoblement through sale of office.¹⁴⁸

The *philosophes* were united in their anti-religious sentiments albeit not shared to the same degree. As noted earlier, Berthier, the Jesuit scholar who edited *Journal de Trévoux*,

¹⁴⁵ Harding 337.

¹⁴⁶ Hulliung 86.

¹⁴⁷ Darnton, "The High Enlightenment and the Low-Life of Literature in Pre-Revolutionary France", *Past & Present* 51 (1971): 81-115 notes the discrepancy between radical rhetoric and assimilation into the establishment. The comment associating high birth and radical political thinking is by this writer and refers to the works of the Baron d'Holbach and Helvétius.

¹⁴⁸ Roche 111 provides the concept "bourgeois betrayal".

lamented that "...The custom has been established to call '*philosophes*' those who attack revealed religion and 'persecutors' those who battle for its defense."¹⁴⁹ Unlike their English cohorts, they were not content to restrict human reason to the study of observed phenomena and were often but a step away from atheism. In their determination to banish the mysteries, some (Voltaire in particular) developed a propaganda campaign that rested on lurid stories of clerics steeped in lasciviousness and avarice. The war with the Church was carried largely by short pamphlets in cafes and in the theatre, traditionally an excellent pulpit for preaching.¹⁵⁰ Theatre as a forum for social and political criticism is as old as western civilization. Greek tragedies and satires were as biting as any eighteen-century production in France or England. In contrast to their British counterparts, the French satirists directed their barbs assiduously towards the Church and were less critical of social inequalities or the limitations of the new scientific truth. The *philosophes* had no rival to the social compassion, ironic flare and great imagination of Jonathan Swift.

Emphasis on style was a signature trait of the *philosophes* and the climate of the French Enlightenment. While Rococo presented itself in detailed attention to artifacts, the men of letters packaged their impractical messages with drama and pathos. Their mode of expression was particularly useful for attracting attention and convincing listeners to discard the enemy, the peddlers of religion. Trivializing the Church rather than suggesting means for ameliorating social inequities was their primary tactic. Sarcasm, more conducive for evoking fear and suspicions than promoting reflection, was the common weapon used by the *philosophes* in their battle with the

¹⁴⁹ See footnote 44.

¹⁵⁰ P.J.S. Whitmore, The Enlightenment in France: An Introduction (London: Norton Bailey, 1969) 112 emphasizes the use of the stage as a replacement of the pulpit.

clergy. Unlike French dramatists of the seventeenth century who preferred comedy, tragedy and verse, Enlightenment intellectuals were less inclined to cater to the 'gentler' sensibilities. Defining themselves as men of reason, the *philosophes* appealed more often to their audience 'base' passions while revealing their own chaotic emotionalism.

The *philosophes* produced principled treatises as well as comprehensive works, but in rejecting metaphysics and viewing traditional philosophy a pretentious vanity, they refrained from developing inclusive models. Short essays, satirical plays and street pamphlets were primary vehicles used to wound their opponents. Philosophy and religion were turned repeatedly into diverting dialogues delivered in theatres, cafés and exclusive salons. The atmosphere was one of intoxication with a new revelation rather than a deliberate search for knowledge based on principles of reason. Paris seemed not so much the centre for learning as the capital of passions where very little was sacrosanct and the merits of reason were extolled with great emotional fervor. It was an arena where popularized Newton and Locke fortified mechanistic-atheistic views with wit while omitting the intellectual and religious dilemmas faced by the English who subscribed to the Baconian legacy of leaving God outside the realm of human reason.

In 1765, Horace Walpole who rubbed shoulders with many respectable *philosophes* summarized his experiences as follows: "...There is God and the king to be pulled down... men and women are devoutly employed in the demolition. They think me quite profane for having any belief left," in another letter, he wrote: "...The *philosophes* are unsupportable, overbearing, and fanatic; they preach incessantly, and their avowed doctrine is atheism; you would not believe

how openly. Don't wonder, therefore, If I should return a Jesuit."¹⁵¹ What Walpole viewed as moral recklessness reflected intellectual and psychological chaos, a pervasive nihilism. This anarchic outpouring of contradictions went unnoticed by the participants who did not see the irony in devout atheism or evangelical doctrines of reason. The Englishman known for his 'pre-romantic' Gothic affinities was ready to find refuge in the more tolerant company of Jesuits leaving his intellectual counterparts to carry out the apostolic work of their new faith.

An identity espoused by the *philosophes* and perpetuated by devotees, was that of a cohesive group, a fellowship of brethren united by a shared mission. In reality this group was often plagued with bitter rivalries that occasionally suggested fratricidal attitudes. A Police Inspector describing a confrontation between two contributors to the *Encyclopédie* (Marmontel and Fréron) found it a "comic" event that writers made a spectacle of themselves defending their honour. In his estimation writers possessed neither honour nor social status unlike the tax farmer whom he titled "*un gallant homme*". Writers were *gens sans état* whom he could patronizingly refer to as *garçons* irrespective of their age or marital status.¹⁵²

Notably missing from the *philosophes*' writings are a sense of self-awareness and the ability to auto-critique. These deficits are not indicative of lack of intelligence, a quality these scholars possessed in great abundance, but are suggestive of egos incapable of incorporating emotional tension and moral dilemmas. Most of these intellectuals were equipped with a lashing

¹⁵¹ Durant & Durant 781. Horace Walpole, the fourth earl of Oxford was an English man of letters famous for his Gothic novel and 3000 letters. The quotes are taken from *Letters*, ed. Peter Cunningham, 9 v, (London, 1880). The first quote is taken from a letter dated October 19, 1765 and the second one from a letter written in November 19, 1765.

¹⁵² Darnton, "Police Inspector", *The Great Cat Massacre* 168-175.

tongue that rebuked and satirized others freely and skillfully, but showed little tolerance for receiving criticism or welcome opinions other than their own. Dissenters were chastised (e.g., Rousseau) and self-doubt was published only posthumously (e.g., Diderot), likely to avoid scorn. The manifest culture of the *philosophes* had no room for questioning the self or the professed tenets of the movement. Their tenuous identities and need to repress the gap between their ‘empirically real’ experiences and ‘abstract ideal’ doctrines paralyzed their brilliant intellect rendering them incapable of discerning glaring incongruities.¹⁵³ This was a clear instance where self-preservation superceded higher order human qualities of logic and ethics.

The intellectual versatility evidenced by the *philosophes* paired with their notable mental rigidity, is consistent with theories positing different developmental paths for acquiring psychological insight and intelligence. Accordingly, the capacity to conceptualize abstractly is distinct from the ability to integrate complex life events outside of “theoretical moments”.¹⁵⁴ It is possible to possess a penetratingly acute and clever mind, be very witty yet lack in wisdom and empathy (i.e., awareness of others as separate individuals). The *philosophes* paid little heed to social contexts outside their immediate concerns and often misjudged grossly social exchanges with which they were involved. Their English counterparts, less enthusiastic and more empirical, acknowledged a utilitarian agenda and spoke of ‘interest’ as the binding blocks of social contracts. What started in England as a rationalization of contemporary socio-political structures was

¹⁵³ Isaiah Berlin, The Proper Study of Mankind: An Anthology of Essays eds. Hardy & Hausheer (London: Pimlico, 1997) 148 refers to these Kantian concepts.

¹⁵⁴ Isaiah Berlin, “Historical Inevitability”, The Proper Study of Mankind: An Anthology of Essays 145. This term is used by Berlin, in the context of the debate concerning history as a scientific discipline.

consecrated in France into a faith of reason. Entitlement to happiness in this world was restricted to select groups in both sides of the Channel, but it was on the Continental shores that this conclusion was declared the truth of the new scientific morality.

The *philosophes'* war against religious practices deemed idolatrous or superstitious (e.g., miracles) was not reinforced with instruction to rely on one's own critical faculties. The onslaught on the Church was designed to unseat the preachers of a fraudulent faith and replace them with secular evangelists. 'The people' were expected to accept the new leaders because of their claim to a truth which "...the masses of the human race is not worthy of", according to Voltaire.¹⁵⁵ For enlightened French scholars, Voltaire in particular, the "human masses", the *obiter dicta* of the new truth, were excluded from the definition of a universal man.

Wholly certain of their calling, the *philosophes* did not invoke the sanction of God nor seek the approval of the ignorant masses. A *cogito* not predicated on *dubito* underlies a rigid mental structure which finds challenges and insight a threat to its survival as individuals or groups. Hence, the tedious seriousness of the *philosophes*, the lack of humor and inability to tolerate criticism or discord. While espousing enlightened ideas, their personal values and conduct disclosed suspect ethical grounding and a narrow range of emotions, traits consistent with the anxious immaturity of a narcissistic self rather than a flexibly modulated reasoning ego.

Charles Pinot Duclos, one of the less self-assured contemporary doctrinaires, showed incredible insight into the character of his fellow scholars and social climate of the era. Concerning the latter, he noted that many among the "grandees" did not have a great affinity for

¹⁵⁵ Voltaire to Étienne Noël Damilaville 12 October, 1764, Besterman D. 12138. "Le gros du genre humain en est indigne."

the intellectual, but pretended to do so "...because it is the fashion".¹⁵⁶ Public opinion and fashion, the new secular idols, were replacing Church symbols and rituals as cultural homogenizers. *Vox populi*, it would seem, was as oppressive as *vox Dei*. Judging the character of his generation, Duclos concluded that "...The great defect of the Frenchman, is to have always a youthful character; thereby he is often amiable, rarely stable; he has almost no age of maturity, but passes from youth to decrepitude...The Frenchman is the child of Europe." This observation is consistent with psychological formulations of narcissistic exhibition of shallow ebullience concealing a developmentally arrested egocentricity.

"...We claim a great deal in these days against prejudice; perhaps we have too much destroyed them. Prejudice is a kind of common law among men... In this matter I cannot avoid blaming those writers, who wishing to attack a superstition (a motive that could be praiseworthy and useful if the discussion were kept on a philosophical plane), sap the foundation of morality and weaken the bonds of society...".¹⁵⁷ Even if motivated by personal disappointments, Duclos' aspersions reflect an understanding of the complexities of the human condition and the dialectic of change. But, his dissenting tone and honest self-criticism lacked charisma and entertainment value fundamental to the growing influence of popular appeal. Exhibitions of outraged indignation and public feuding, on the other hand, were more effective attention getters. Burlesque type sarcasm was common in the streets of Paris and therefore easily understood. There was a growing

¹⁵⁶ P. Johnson, *Intellectuals* (London: Phoenix Press, 1988) 11 cites from C.P. Duclos', *Considération sur les moeurs de ce siècle* (London,1784) .

¹⁵⁷ Durant & Durant 338 quote from Duclos' *Considération*.

reciprocity between the public and its secular intellectuals whereby the former needed rituals to replace traditional Church functions and the latter eager to perform were in search of an audience.

Among the *philosophes*, no one had as clear a vision of the immanent need for economic reform and social redress to avoid a calamity as did René Louis de Voyer, Marquis d'Argenson, an aristocrat and minister of foreign affairs in the court of Louis XV between 1744-47. As early as 1739 he wrote that those who till the land should be exempt from feudal dues and obligations, that the state should lend small farms money for future crops, and that the nobility which produced poor administrators was a drain on the economy and the most expendable group in the state.¹⁵⁸ He saw the people's salvation resting with an enlightened king and anticipated the catastrophic eventuality of "...a great revolution, in both religion and government".¹⁵⁹ Like Saint Simon, d'Argenson's observations had little clout with members of the 'cult of reason' who were blinded by their mission of dismantling the mysteries of the Church and disseminating their new episteme.

This unintended course towards social anarchy informed partly by the shortsightedness of obsessional preoccupation with self-interest highlights the interplay between individual attributes and changing social currents. The individual discovered by Renaissance forces solidified its position with the Reformation whose inherent work ethic resonated naturally with the growing capitalism and free enterprise which was integrated into the Lockean notion of personal property

¹⁵⁸ Martin Kingsley, The Rise of French Liberal Thought (New York: Harper & Torchbooks, 1956) 238 addresses D'Argenson's *Mémoires*.

¹⁵⁹ Durant & Durant 279. The quote is taken from William A. Lecky, History of England in the Eighteenth Century, 8v (London, 1888) v5 327. Roche 351 identifies him as most "attentive to the social seismography of the period."

before public good. The drive in France, similarly to that in England, was not to subvert the social system, but to secure individual satisfaction, for a privileged minority, and collective stability.¹⁶⁰ In eighteenth century France, where public interest was largely associated with two morally bankrupt institutions, Monarchy and Church, the clamour of personal egos found a responsive ear in the growing arena of public opinion thus embarking on the path of servility to self-interests which destroyed, unintentionally, the existing socio-political structure of the land.

¹⁶⁰ Porter, The Creation of the Modern World 22 refers to the British while this writer views this statement to be correct also for the French.

CHAPTER 3

WHY VOLTAIRE AMONG THE *PHILOSOPHES*?

While exhibiting many narcissistic features, the *philosophes* varied in the degree to which they typified the personality type (i.e., a pervasive insecurity linked with a sense of entitlement, ego-centricity and lack of insight). Among the French intellectuals of the Enlightenment, Voltaire's personal conduct and work are the most authentic personification of the narcissistic overtones of the movement. To his contemporaries he was probably the best known *philosophe* although not necessarily most regarded. His unprecedented notoriety was achieved by a remarkable awareness of the machinations of the growing power of public opinion and the printed word. His legacy as the 'century's humanist', rests largely with his genius for marketing an image of righteous indignation and sacrifice for the common good. Aided by a brilliant and agile mind, Voltaire supported indefatigably an insatiable craving for attention which caused him occasional embarrassment and even compromised his safety. The thesis advanced is that his apparent struggles were driven more by an unappealable ego rather than by a genuine concern for human rights. He was perhaps the first great modern rationalizer who replaced successfully the traditional consciousness of the collective with individual egoism. To support this thesis four contemporary French figures who propagated core ideas espoused by the *philosophes* are subjected to the scrutiny of the model of narcissism to assess the validity of the contention that Voltaire epitomized the culture of entitlement in the Age of Enlightenment (i.e., Meslier, Montesquieu, Rousseau and Diderot).

Traditionally, it is Rousseau who is juxtaposed to Voltaire as the rival intellectual even by those who view the Genevan thinker an *anti-philosophe* and forerunner of the Romantic era.

While rejecting fundamental assumptions of the movement, (e.g., the victory of reason and science over tradition and religion) temperamentally, Rousseau was the 'other' egotist of the movement and quite successful in making a name for himself then and now. Much of the debate around his work is carried on by exegetes apologizing for outrageous behaviour and mythologizing a dictatorial ideology. Voltaire and Rousseau shared many personality attributes which led to their ferocious rivalry. Both vied for centre stage, but the former's sanity was more functional in supporting and preserving an image of the enlightened man.

If Voltaire and Rousseau competed for entitlement and fame, Diderot, the anti-hero of the French Enlightenment, personified more accurately the spirit of the *philosophes* and that of the movement in general. It is against his life-time commitment to the movement, intellectual achievements and personal conduct, in contrast to Voltaire, that one gains an understanding of narcissistic self-centeredness, superficiality, entitlement to privileges and the art of self-deception. The relationship between Diderot and Voltaire also offers insight into the complex interactions between individual temperament and cultural trends propelling the latter to stardom while granting the former relative anonymity, but growing respect.

Jean Meslier (1678-1733) was a parish priest in Etrigny in the province of Champagne. He was a beloved poor cleric who cared for his impoverished flock spiritually and as best he could materially. He gave away annually all that he saved from his meager salary. Upon his death, after thirty years of service, he bequeathed his possessions to his parishioners and willed them three copies of a treatise entitled 'My Testament'.¹⁶¹ Attached to one of the copies was a letter

¹⁶¹ George Huppert, The Style of Paris: Renaissance Origins of the French Enlightenment (Indiana University Press: Bloomington & Indianapolis, 1999) 108-112.

addressed to his congregation in which he apologized for serving them without conviction. He confessed to having lost his faith before ordination, but being an obedient son he continued with his "profession". Meslier tried to assure his followers they were not led astray by a spiteful man and that his errors were confined to hypocrisy motivated by meekness.¹⁶² Voltaire published excerpts of the text in 1762 and d'Holbach together with Diderot issued a summary under the title *Le Bon Sens du curé Meslier* in 1772.

Meslier's 'Testament' is considered by many the strongest attack on religion and the Church produced by a Frenchman throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. His doubts were generated by inconsistencies he found in the Holy Writs which he thought defied reason and experience, laws he was not prepared to renounce. Disclosing a materialist world view, he deplored the abject poverty he witnessed and saw no reason to believe in an alternate justice in another lifetime. His uncompromising questioning of God's existence preceded the *philosophes'* proclaimed atheism and seemed too stark a prospect for Voltaire who reshaped it to fit a deistic formulation. Atheism, argued Meslier, is a natural state which is supported by the fact that children do not have a concept of God. Fear of God together with the belief in werewolves is instilled in children by caring nurses, the true theologians of Christianity.

Religion, according to the village priest, was conceived by theologians and statesmen to frighten the masses into obedience. The primary culprits in this conspiratorial plot were Doctors of the Church who managed to brainwash secular rulers into submission and incite wars. "...The votaries of a religion which preaches... charity, harmony and peace have shown themselves more

¹⁶² Durant & Durant 611-617, n 829. The primary source quoted is Jean Meslier, Superstition in All Ages or Last Will and Testament.

ferocious than cannibals or savages every time that their instructors have excited them to the destruction of their brethren. There is no crime which men have not committed in the idea of pleasing the deity or appeasing his wrath".¹⁶³ Religion, he went further, has little to do with morality which is based on reason and social restraint; both are best transmitted by the State rather than the Church which has proven its lack of compassion throughout history. He attributed the surrender of the poor to ignorance and the conformity of the educated to fear for their lives. He could not conceive of enlightened minds, following rules of reason and natural law, not perceiving the injustice and reaching the conclusion that all men were created equal.¹⁶⁴

Meslier condemned secular intellectuals for replacing Church dogma with their own beguiling hieratic codes. Descartes, Malebranche and Leibnitz were identified as intellectuals who compromised their ideas to fit principles of theology. What the *éclairé* should do, according to Meslier, is encourage the poor to throw off the yoke of the tyrannical *Grands* and follow laws of natural equity and justice. Revolution is morally justified if not driven by hatred or revenge, but by love of justice and truth.¹⁶⁵ Of the tasks Meslier assigned to the "philosophers", the *philosophes* seized only upon the struggle for freedom of expression and secularization of education ignoring the call to address social injustices. The former missions restricted notably to the privileged promised the 'freedom fighters' handsome gains. As well, allusions to a revolution were alien to the men of reason who were content with the *status quo* as long as they could replace the clerics.

¹⁶³ Ibid., 615.

¹⁶⁴ Huppert 110.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., 111.

Meslier's 'Testament' encapsulated what the French Enlightenment articulated. The 'gentle' priest predated Voltaire's outcry against the infamy of the Church and the *philosophes*' crusade for secularization of education. He extolled the virtues of reason, experience and natural morality and dared to justify atheism half a century before d'Holbach published his thesis on the subject.¹⁶⁶ Meslier's materialism and social conscience proved too extreme for most *philosophes*. Identifying property as the root of evil was clearly anathema to intellectuals who were devout Lockeans in their conception of the 'social order'. His demand for major social and economic reforms struck a chord with some (e.g., Helvetius) and was consistent with d'Argenson's compelling plea, in 1765, to introduce legislation aimed at effecting the most feasible economic equality to avert a civil war. But his egalitarian materialism was too extreme for most French intellectuals and resonates more with the socio-political proclamations of Marxism a hundred years later (e.g., separation of State and Church and equal sharing of economic resources). Accepting violence as a means for attaining social justice foreshadowed the revolution in his own country and the onset of political uprising in general.

As an individual Meslier is a figure of complex contradictions. He was an independent critical thinker who defied God yet led a life motivated by filial obedience, a man of extreme and violent ideas who led a restrained and disciplined existence never betraying his 'true' convictions. A priest who worked for the people using his clerical authority and Christian principles all the while negating the viability of his word and deed. A man who dared put to paper the most outrageous heretical and sacrilegious ideas and declared himself to be a "nothing". If he thought

¹⁶⁶ Paul Henri Dietrich Baron D'Holbach (1723-1789) *philosophe* of German descent published his chef-d'oeuvre "*Système de la nature, ou des lois des monde physique et du monde moral*", in 1770.

his 'Testament' would not make an impact why leave such a disturbing legacy and shake up his poor congregation? There are inconsistencies about this ascetic anti-hero which evoke uneasy suspicions of righteous saintliness and duplicity.

Reasons for his relative obscurity during the eighteenth century are quite obvious. His ideas were subversive and threatened everybody: Church, King and the *philosophes*. Somewhat self-righteous, he pointed fingers at everyone boldly after his death. Throughout his life he modeled humility and a faithful execution of priestly duties in accordance with true Christian tenets. Meslier was not a hero; he saw himself an insignificant person during his lifetime and did not anticipate earning notoriety posthumously. This humble, disciplined man had little in common with the socially climbing *philosophes*. His idealism was entwined with violence (frequent bedfellows) and demanded an outrageous level of commitment. Both were foreign to his contemporaries and to those of a more temperate outlook since.

It is not sufficient to argue that fear of the authorities prevented intellectuals from addressing issues outlined in the 'Testament'. While censorship was executed harshly at times, most *philosophes* found his social agenda both threatening and alien. Meslier's anonymity and self-imposed poverty were antithetical to the group's struggle for recognition and status. His doctrines were too extreme, he was too serious, too Christian in his outlook and conduct and too egalitarian. Meslier's attack on the Catholic Church, unlike those of the *philosophes*, was grounded wholly on experience. He exposed the Church's sordid history of errors of omission and commission up to and including the deplorable conditions he had witnessed. A rather disturbing parochial figure among the seekers of universal truth.

But what of later generations, why has Meslier not been resurrected by current students schooled to seek truth in history of *mentalité*? Meslier offers a remarkable 'period text', a life story that is both emblematic of and deviating from the mainstream of French Enlightenment. Furthermore, to the political 'Left' and militant idealists, he could have become an icon, a forerunner of Communism; he did not shy away from violence in the name of justice and equality. But, Meslier was the anti-hero and led an anonymous life. Eschewing fame he has little to offer to a culture thriving on excessive individualism, personality cults and spectacles. A social climate that promotes displays of opulence and expresses itself with extravagant emotions is not interested in a life modeling frugality, self-restraint and private atonement. Neither the man nor his 'Testament' could make a brilliant conversation piece in salons of the Enlightenment or the silver screen today. There is a disquieting halo over a seeming simplicity underlaid with a ferocity of independent thinking and private reflection. Meslier was a furious private psychodrama, away from the limelight and not for public consumption.

Charles Louis de Secondent Baron de la Brède et de Montesquieu (1689-1755) was born at La Brède near Bordeaux. A member of the nobility, he boasted a lineage as far back as the Goths who conquered Rome. He received his early education in Paris and earned a law degree at nineteen from the University of Bordeaux. Generally rated as one of the most influential minds of his age, his writings are considered pace setters for eighteenth century France. Montesquieu is said to have shown profundity in judging with restraint and to possess great eloquence and humor.¹⁶⁷ Being prudent and serene he is placed in the tradition of

¹⁶⁷ Whitmore 84.

“non-doctrinaire thinking”, and in interpreting modernity as the triumph of commercial capitalism secured a leading position among the scholars of the Age of Enlightenment.¹⁶⁸

Montesquieu was clearly the most serious political thinker among his French contemporaries and the one who introduced new theoretical concepts to this discipline. He replaced the hitherto accepted Aristotelian classification of governmental systems (i.e., that of monarchy, aristocracy and democracy) with republic (aristocratic and democratic), despotism and monarchy. His preference for a monarchy reflected his notion of what this type of government should have been rather than what it was in his own country.¹⁶⁹ He envisioned the English as possessing a social model of desirable liberties and balances where the monarch’s power is limited by fundamental laws and the population is free to trade and ascend to heaven any which way they want.

Lettres persanes, his first great work, was published anonymously in 1721. It reflected both the upcoming fashion of Orientalism and the lenient mood of the Regency which allowed him to expose, albeit gently, prejudices of Parisians and Mohammedans alike. Typical of the French Enlightenment, the text dealt more with religious topics than with political issues. In the role of political philosopher, Montesquieu sought to identify fundamental factors which produce great movements such as the demise of Rome or the contemporary outpouring of secular intellectual activity. He saw himself an instrument in a global movement, but the ‘*zeitgeist*’ he addressed was not metaphysical in nature. To the contrary, it was attributed to events and institutions which could be chronicled and analysed logically. The novelty of Montesquieu’s thought was in

¹⁶⁸ Roche 252 relegates him to the camp of non-doctrinaire thinking.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., 252.

elevating history to a universal event and viewing it from the perspective of civilizations. This opus set the tone and scope for contemporary historians (e.g., Voltaire, Gibbon) and delineated principles for generating a future philosophy of history independent of metaphysics or religion.

In 1748 Montesquieu published the essay *L'Esprit des lois* considered by his contemporaries the greatest intellectual production of its time. The thesis advanced politics as a product of a history and geography that is steeped in law. Accordingly, habitat forms customs which determine national character and the interplay among these variables accounts for the formation of different types of government. While acknowledging the existence of a 'spirit' that animates the laws and institutions of societies, he assumed that its overt manifestations underlie timeless common ends which are structured into different types of institutions.¹⁷⁰ Although *L'Esprit* was consistent with Enlightenment materialism and empirical approaches to history, he was criticized by his contemporaries for spending too much time on finding reasons for that which is instead of that which ought to be.¹⁷¹ His comparative approach led to the development of sociological theories of history. Typical to period thinking, he supported his view with references from the Classics (e.g., Cicero, Tacitus and the Stoics) as well as more recent political thinkers (e.g., Hobbes, Malebranche).

An authentic witness of his time, Montesquieu accepted *prima facie* the fundamental proposition of the Age of Enlightenment that "reason is the most perfect, the most noble and the

¹⁷⁰ Berlin 393.

¹⁷¹ Becker 101 cites Condorcet, *Oeuvres*, VIII, 188.

most exquisite of all the senses.”¹⁷² Like most his cohorts, he rejected notions of equality of property or power, but promoted a distribution of land, in the Gracchi style. Unlike most contemporary intellectuals he was titled and wealthy referring openly to “my domain” and “my vassals”, a terminology arrogated by the upstart *seigneur*, Voltaire.¹⁷³ Comfortable with his elevated social status Montesquieu projected an image of a benevolent patrician. Belonging to the ruling class, he was more conscious of group identity and less taken to individual’s rights, genius or achievements.

His moderation, restraint and unwillingness to embark on an anti-clerical crusade marred his popularity with the *philosophes*. Montesquieu’s conceptions of universality and tolerance which included the religious scene in France rendered him a conservative and the *L’Esprit* a manual for maintaining the status quo. Voltaire’s objections to this work were reflected in a dismissive tone rather than open criticism. He found the *L’Esprit* lacking in method, plan or order, but abounding in wit and thought the title “*l’esprit sur le lois*” (i.e., wit about laws) a more fitting designation. Voltaire’s overall judgment of the Baron and his opus was that “Montesquieu was almost always in error with the learned, because he was not learned...Europe owes him eternal gratitude.”¹⁷⁴ An excellent feuilletonist, Voltaire added Montesquieu to his list of victims,

¹⁷² Durant & Durant 356. This quote is taken from Emile Faguet, *Dix-huitième siècle: Études littéraires* (Paris, 1907) 195 : “...La raison est le plus parfait, le plus noble, et le plus exquis de tous les sens”.

¹⁷³ Chapter 6 p. 214.

¹⁷⁴ Voltaire, *Works*, vol. 6 (New York, 1927) 104-108.

the middle aged bourgeois not forgetting how resolute the Baron was in barring his acceptance to the Academy.¹⁷⁵

A man of reason in his theoretical and non theoretical moments, Montesquieu represented the growing awareness of politics as historical development. True to the movement and influenced by the prominence of the natural sciences, he espoused an ultimate universal truth for humanity. As an aristocrat, he belonged to the old feudal system and was not an ardent individualist. Temperamentally correct and prudent, he shied away from factional disputes and was rightfully perceived as aloof. His 'gentle' criticism of the Church alienated him further from the *philosophes* who viewed him a conservative fearful of change.¹⁷⁶ He died in the middle of the century when things were brewing in France and a younger generation motivated by acute hostility toward the Church was defining the Age of Enlightenment. To posterity and contemporaries alike, he was an educated, cultured, sophisticated man of reason who *malgré lui* is seen more as a prominent intellectual rather than a symbol of the spirit of his time. Wise and perhaps benevolent, but an aristocrat nevertheless, he generated little excitement in a culture that glorified self-made men. His temperamental restraint had little appeal for his excitable comrades.

Jean Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778) is one of the most complex figures of the Age of Enlightenment. He was a Genevan Calvinist who entered the scene of the Republic of Letters by winning first prize for an essay maintaining that the arts and sciences did not confer great benefits

¹⁷⁵ Durant & Durant 357 cites Albert Sorel, in *Montesquieu* (Chicago, 1888) 165 who relates Montesquieu's opposition to accepting Voltaire into the *Académie* using the following statement: "... It would be a disgrace to the Academy if Voltaire were a member, and it will one day be his disgrace that he was not one."

¹⁷⁶ Kingsley 168 quotes a letter from Helvetius to Montesquieu in which the former chides the Baron on this point.

on mankind. Considered both *philosophe* and *anti-philosophe*, he poses problems for classifiers and ardent proponents of the French movement.¹⁷⁷ Peter Gay, narrating events of the period through a Voltairean gaze, ignores Rousseau's critique on the limitations of reason and the ultimate benefits of material progress, two basic tenets of the Enlightenment. Gay introduces Rousseau only in his second volume to deal with the topic of civic education; one could hardly imagine a debate on the topic without *Émile*.¹⁷⁸ Ernest Cassirer, another respected authority on the Age of Enlightenment, views Rousseau virtually as a German thinker and forerunner to Kant's categorical imperative.¹⁷⁹ To others, then and now, he was the 'trojan horse' in the movement whose anti-Enlightenment sentiments made him 'father' of the Romantic era. Ongoing debates of his merits as thinker and author leave frequent trails of contradictory interpretation which may reflect a degree of unintelligibility rather than profundity. However odious or even censurable some find his personal ethics and conduct, "we must recognize his immense importance as a social force", is the general consensus.¹⁸⁰

Following this discussion one might question the wisdom of attributing to Rousseau a leading role in the French Enlightenment. Atypical as he might appear, he did subscribe to the fundamental *weltanschauung* of individualism motivated by a goal oriented reason leading towards an ultimate condition of happiness. Where he differed from other *philosophes* was in

¹⁷⁷ J.H. Brumfitt, The French Enlightenment (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Schenman, 1972) 7-8 identifies the problem and ignores Rousseau for the rest of the book.

¹⁷⁸ Hulliung 3.

¹⁷⁹ Ernest Cassirer, Rousseau, Kant and Goethe (New York: Harper, 1963).

¹⁸⁰ Russell 660.

locating reason in individual conscience rather than intellect, unseating knowledge (and science) from its celebrated position and rejecting the notion of a neutral political economy. Rousseau's individual conscience was informed by a religion directed by reason and not by a priori doctrines. In his natural religion, represented most accurately in the *Profession de foi du vicaire Savoyard*, rules of conduct are found in the depth of one's heart where Nature inscribed them in ineffaceable characters.¹⁸¹ Champion of 'sentimental theology', Rousseau tried to construct a secular theodicy whereby God is revealed to each individual directly. In rejecting orthodox notions of revealed truth he became an enemy to all established churches despite emphatic affirmation of religiosity. No other contemporary French intellectual professed their faith so openly and passionately.

Unlike most scholars of the day, French and otherwise, Rousseau did not equate knowledge with virtue or affluence with happiness. Furthermore, he argued that civilization and material production resulted in depravity rather than progress. One of the first to speak of material alienation, he agitated the scholarly community whose moral foundations rested on pointing to newly acquired material abundance as proof of scientific truth. Whereas the physiocrats and Voltaire preferred the utilitarian and efficient ethics of *homo economicus*, Rousseau reintroduced morality into the economic and political orders arguing that economic rules and decisions are never neutral and always political.

One of Rousseau's most studied doctrines is the political theory he formulated in the *Contract Social* published in 1762. Conceptually opaque, one finds it difficult to decide whether

¹⁸¹ The theology of the Savoyard Vicar is the interlude to the fourth book of "*Émile*" published in 1762. The vicar is described as a Christian who happened to be a Catholic entrusted with the difficult task of directing Émile to the right religion, that to which reason would lead him to.

he had advocated or rejected an array of contradictory ideas (e.g., intellectual reasoning versus *conscience*, *sentiment*, and *sensibilité*).¹⁸² Echoing prevalent opinions condoning social inequality he asserted that "...It would not be good in society / If there were less class inequality", but objected to privileges authorized by convention or to a meritocracy based on talent.¹⁸³ Democracy, to Rousseau, meant direct participation of citizens, an inherited privileged status in Geneva he possessed proudly and was reluctant to share with the vulgar 'mob'. Once in office, the magistrates elected by the citizens were invested with undisputed authority. Similarly to Montesquieu, Rousseau felt that an aristocratic administration was necessary to temper democratic sentiments. If the elected Genevan magistrates could not boast ancestral authority, they were bestowed with tyrannical powers granted to them by the citizens of their own free will. The most disturbing political concept posited by Rousseau, was the idea of a sovereign 'general will'. First introduced in his article Political Economy, written for the *Encyclopédie* in 1754-55, it was defined as power aimed to restrain the violent reasoner. Upon reading the essay, Diderot, who commissioned it, approached Nicolas Boulanger, a friend of d'Holbach, to write another article on the topic.¹⁸⁴ Six years later, Rousseau published *Du contract social* where his political

¹⁸² Russell 669 believes he valued equality at the expense of liberty even when he proclaims that "man is born free, and everywhere is in chains." Hulliung 134 argues Rousseau was not advocating civil equality, rather he pointed out the arbitrariness of all determinants of inequality when he puts talent on the same footing with noble titles, both are accidents of birth. Reference to statement are to Rousseau, *Pref. Narcisse*, OC, 966.

¹⁸³ Maurice Cranston, *The Solitary Self: Jean-Jacques Rousseau in exile and adversity* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1997) 199. Translated from "Il ne serait pas bon dans la société qu'il fut entre les rangs moins d'inégalité" cited from Rousseau, OC 11, p. 1140. These ideas are elaborated upon in Rousseau's "Discourse on Inequality" published in 1754.

¹⁸⁴ Hulliung 27.

theory and concept of 'general will' were further developed and for which he had to flee Paris. There are many interpretations of this gloomy esoteric idea, but common to all is the understanding that it requires the individual to submit to the collective will. The 'general will' is not the sum total of the wills of the citizens, rather it is the power invested in the body politic itself, the 'Sovereign' which embodies the communal in its collective legislative capacity rather than its administrative representations (i.e., monarchy or other form of government). Since this reified entity was formed freely by individuals to represent their collective self-interest, it is always right. Therefore, if the 'general will' is inherently right, private wills in discord are forced to accept the decisions of the collective which are ultimately the truth of each individual of the collective that escaped him temporarily.¹⁸⁵

This vague idea provoked violent reactions throughout the last two centuries. His conservative contemporaries were threatened by the implied rejection of the divine rights of king. Frequent use of the term democracy generated enough anxiety for the authorities not to realize that he limited it to certain climates and thought that where riches have already infested the land, government is best confined to the monarch and his court.¹⁸⁶ Following the aftermath of the French Revolution and Napoleonic wars, Heine, the German romantic poet, labeled the works of Rousseau "the blood stained weapons" of terror used by Robespierre.¹⁸⁷ One hundred years later,

¹⁸⁵ Rogers D. Masters and Christopher Kelly, ed., The Collected Writings of Rousseau, vol. 4 (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1994) 84-85 cite from the first version of On the Social Contract, Chapter III: On the Fundamental Compact.

¹⁸⁶ Russell 769. The notion that free people are suited to moderate climate is from "Social Contract" Book III, ch VIII, Masters & Kelly, *Ibid.*, 182.

¹⁸⁷ Berlin 192 does not identify his source.

Bertrand Russell portrayed him as the “...inventor of the political philosophy of pseudo-democratic dictatorship as opposed to traditional absolute monarchies” and concluded that “...At the present time, Hitler is an outcome of Rousseau; Roosevelt and Churchill, of Locke.”¹⁸⁸

Against such vehement disapprobations stand those who argue the merits of Rousseau’s work ‘from a neutral ground’ which he himself did not think possible. According to such impartial observers, he was a natural historian who revolutionized the study of anthropology and linguistics.¹⁸⁹ One can credit him with modern ideas of education identifying tensions between social pressures and the immediate interests of the concrete child. As a social critic, he is seen as the first to speak of material alienation and to note that tragic life conditions such as illness, death and anxiety are not ameliorated by technological advances. He popularized the ‘cult of nature’, preferred spontaneity to urbanity and even to civility and invented the public secular confessional as a new literary phenomenon later entering the realms of entertainment and politics.

Rousseau’s theoretical condemnation of luxury led frequently to mistakenly attributing ‘conspicuous destitution’ to his personal condition. A closer examination reveals him to have enjoyed regularly ‘epicurean’ delights which wealthy hosts bestowed upon him. Endowed with an inordinate sense of entitlement, he managed to manipulate people of intelligence and wealth into supporting him financially and offering him asylum while convincing them that it is they who were graced by his presence. Gratitude was absent from his repertoire of feelings as was civility.

¹⁸⁸ Russell 660.

¹⁸⁹ Among the many references are : M. Cranston 191; Mark Hulliung 172 ; R. Woker, “The Ape Debate in Enlightenment Anthropology”, CXII Studies in Voltaire and the Eighteen Century, ed. H. Mason (Geneva: Oxford University Press, 1980) 164-75.

Natural behaviour to Rousseau was equated with brutish rudeness later to be incorporated into the prototypical romantic rebel and more recently into images of the 'angry young man'.

Unabashed self-pity was another way Rousseau asserted his exceptionality and entitlement; no body suffered as much, loved as much, was as sensitive, etc. Edmund Burke, a British contemporary, thought that "Vanity was the vice he possessed to a degree little short of madness".¹⁹⁰ His extravagant egotism did not reflect an anti-social sentiment, on the contrary, it disclosed an unquenchable thirst for external affirmation. His emotional instability, however, could not restrain his outrageous megalomaniacal and paranoid fantasies rendering him pathetic in contrast to the self-made, wealthy, urbane and crafty Voltaire.¹⁹¹

One of Rousseau's greatest legacies was inventing the dishonest autobiographical confession. In disclosing eccentricities and shameful behaviour he projected an aura of straightforwardness which lent credibility to his accusations against others. This pretense was noted by an insightful and generally benevolent Diderot who complained that "he describes himself in odious colours to give his unjust and cruel imputations the semblance of truth".¹⁹² There was a manipulative and calculating side to the man who was also truly paranoid. Inconsistencies between Rousseau's portrayal of his life, known facts and accounts of others

¹⁹⁰ Paul Johnson, "Jean-Jacques Rousseau: 'An Interesting Madman'", Intellectuals (London: Phoenix Press, 2000) 10.

¹⁹¹ J. H. Huizinga, The Making of a Saint: The Tragi-Comedy of Jean Jacques Rousseau (London: H. Hamilton, 1976) juxtaposes the man and his theories highlighting his unscrupulous and amoral conduct.

¹⁹² Johnson 17.

involved in those situations, reveal purposeful distortions designed to solicit sympathy for his 'unparalleled victimization' and to rationalize his exploitative behaviour.

Most telling of narcissistic people are their interpersonal relationships which disguise a uni-directionality of 'I deserve, you owe' concealing an abysmal void of an unappeasable self. Such was the nature of relationships Rousseau had with sponsors, benefactors and friends. The lack of reciprocity in his relationships also highlights another prominent narcissistic feature of childlike dependency. Depicting himself frequently as an abandoned child, he enacted the role also in intimate relationships with women referring to his mistress, Madame de Warens, as "Maman".

Rousseau's most censured behaviour and one that he felt compelled to rationalize, was his misconduct towards his own children. He 'begot' five children all of whom were placed in the *Hôpital des Enfants-trouvés*, without so much as acknowledging their date of birth or their sex. In 1764, an incensed Voltaire (for other reasons) published an 'anonymous' pamphlet entitled "*Le Sentiment des Citoyens*", accusing Rousseau of abandoning his children and of being a syphilitic murderer. While denying these accusations, the latter felt compelled to externalize the blame for this alleged behaviour throughout his *Confessions*. His exculpatory list included atheist friends who planted the idea in his unsuspecting mind, bad finances and the prerequisites of tranquility for the creative process of writing. An unequivocal assertion that he would have been the best father, but for the need to protect the children from his partner's horrible mother, added a typical Rousseauesque sense of perverted self-sacrifice.

Most informative was his theoretical justification for abandoning his children. Agreeing with Plato who advocated that children be the responsibility of the State, Rousseau concluded

that due to his behaviour his children would “be all the better for not being delicately reared since it would make them more robust”... and they would be “happier than their father” who “... still do wish that I had been brought up and nurtured as they have been, If only I could have had their good fortune”.¹⁹³ The utter incredulity evoked by such distorted rationalizations suggestive of moral lacunae and arrogant cynicism can also mask the morbid fragility of an arrested ego devoid of empathy and desperate for affirmation. His was a misanthropy not motivated by cold hatred as much as by mental illness and an egotistical entitlement compensating for a pervasive sense of inadequacy, the existential dread of malignant narcissism.

Prostrate and defenseless in his infantile parasitic indecency, Rousseau is likely to evoke competing responses of pity and revulsion rather than emulation. In essence, demands he placed on others in his social relationships mirrored the tyrannical powers he granted his theoretical sovereign ‘general will’. Rousseau did not even feign cooperation or brotherhood and preached the benefits of dictatorial powers over individual rights. He was a writer who understood the emotional energy of religion and spoke its truth through his novels. The growing influence of publications and publicity made him a trend setter with a readership extending beyond the traditional circles of clergy and intellectuals. Rousseau became a prototype anti-hero of the Romantic era and could probably inspire multi-media productions of ‘Rousseau Agonist’ in the overly therapized voyeurism of today. But his debilitating emotional pathology, the abandonment of his children, and preference for a dictatorial polity, are not conducive to the making of a

¹⁹³ Ibid. 23 cites from the *Confessions*.

modern social icon. Still, he has had a distinguished following of intellectuals over the centuries who profess to have been deeply influenced by his writing and 'sensitive and sublime' soul.¹⁹⁴

Denis Diderot (1713-1784), the last among the supporting cast of *philosophes*, is by far its exemplary member. He was a profound individual who personified the movement's successes and failures, its flighty sides and its heartfelt intensity. Virtually unknown to the non-scholarly community to date as well as during his life time, he was essentially the effective director of the French movement and its most reliable, diligent and brave supporter. A principal character in the intellectual life in eighteenth-century France, his posthumous literary works earned him even greater esteem with prominent nineteenth century intellectuals and a steadily growing recognition today.

Like many of his contemporaries, Diderot was a Renaissance man. Interested in the natural sciences, his creative strengths resided with the humanities. Unlike many members in his circle, his writings reveal a rich inner life of an emotionally complex individual guided by empathy and an accurate awareness of self and others. As such, Diderot was more of an exception in his group whose members tended to be richly endowed with intelligence and largely deprived of psychological insight. The least narcissistic among his cohorts, he was able to contribute to his scholarly community, champion a cause, persist under duress and concomitantly attend to family responsibilities and friendships. Despite his enormous efforts and the impact he had on the direction of social thought in Europe well into the nineteenth century, Diderot the individual and his work have not inspired popular imagination or entered the public pantheon of celebrated humanists.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid., 27. The list is rather long and impressive and includes such minds as: Kant, Shelley, George Eliot, Hugo, Tolstoy, Sand and Claude Levi-Strauss.

Diderot was born in Langres, an ancient fortified provincial town of Roman origin. He was the eldest surviving son to an established master cutler whose family had been known in the trade for two centuries. Economically comfortable, his early education followed the typical exposure to a Jesuit classical curriculum. Somewhat high strung and prone to unruliness, he found it difficult to abide by authority and asked to apprentice with his father instead of attending school. Realizing he did not possess the manual dexterity or patience required for the task, he resumed his academic studies. Though struggling continuously with 'behaviour problems', he managed to complete his schooling with honours. Following an aborted plan to turn him into 'abbé Diderot', he was sent to Paris to continue his education and found himself studying at the Jansenist *Collège d'Harcourt*. In 1732 he graduated with a masters degree in arts from the University of Paris and planned to earn a doctorate in Theology. During that time he also received training in law, but his instructor, M. Clément, admitted to Diderot senior that the student showed no progress. When asked by his father what profession he would choose, Denis replied "none" and embarked on the long journey of the life of a penniless intellectual in pursuit of truth.¹⁹⁵

A self proclaimed atheist, Diderot did not pursue the clerics as aggressively as other French intellectuals. His avowed hostility was directed mostly towards monasticism and political religion rather than the idea of faith per se. A brief personal experience of imprisonment in a monastery, in his twenties, left terrifying memories on the impressionable Diderot whose life long aversion to monastic life was expressed clearly, though with mature restraint, in his work The

¹⁹⁵ Biographical details of this paragraph are taken from P.N. Furbank, Diderot: A Critical Biography (London: Secker & Warburg, 1992) 10-22.

Nun.¹⁹⁶ He was fundamentally a skeptic rather than a cynic which he did not treat with levity, but rather with careful probing.¹⁹⁷ Diderot's skepticism reflected a quest for 'infinite knowledge' regarding basic existential questions for which there are no definitive answers. His doubting did not lead to a rhetoric of cynicism or despair, but to that process which generated post Kantian epistemology. It seemed fitting that he should become editor of the *Encyclopédie*, a position requiring one to react critically to different ideas. Yet paradoxically, Diderot, who would become known for his skepticism, championed the production of the most hortatory publication of the Enlightenment.¹⁹⁸

As editor of the *Encyclopédie*, Diderot was not only a synthesizer of currents and views, but also a tireless peace maker largely responsible for the image of a circle of friends united by a mission. A very intense and sociable man he advocated, cultivated and maintained genuine friendships. His allowance for diversity of ideas and personal idiosyncrasies were tested in his relationship with Rousseau. Despite fundamental ideological differences and the interpersonal antics of the latter, Diderot was not dismissive and never vengeful. This generosity reflected a secure sense of self that was also not intimidated by Voltaire's intellect, fame or vindictiveness. Following d'Alembert's withdrawal in response to criticism by a renegade *philosophe*, Charles Pallisot, Diderot functioned as sole editor of the *Encyclopédie* and while he was the prime target

¹⁹⁶ "La Religieuse" first appeared in print in 1796, twelve years after his death, published by F. Buisson, Paris.

¹⁹⁷ Furbank 32. This matter was discussed as early as 1746 in the publication *Pensées Philosophiques*.

¹⁹⁸ James Creech, *Diderot: Thresholds of Representation* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1986) 53, 104-4, 141. Also in Lucien Goldman, *The Philosophy of the Enlightenment*, trans. Henry Maas (London: Routledge, 1973) 45-6.

of the assault he rejected Voltaire's suggestion to move the project to Geneva. While deeply hurt by the criticism, typical of the *philosophes*, Diderot remained resolute in performing his task and asked Voltaire to refrain from undermining his efforts of continuing the project. A dejected Voltaire lamented he was more respected by Frederick the Great and thought his younger colleague "blind to the obvious", but he did not retaliate. The avatar of artful vindictiveness was rendered powerless by an independent and tenacious Diderot whom he tried to tame but learned to respect.

Though sociable and lover of flattery, Diderot kept his best and deepest thoughts to himself to be shared with posterity. A sanguine overflowing man to his contemporaries, he would reveal to future generations more of the methodical art critic, deliberate and often detached thinker, and original skeptic. Most, but not all, his posthumous publications fictionalized contemporary personages or recent historical dignitaries which could account for the delay in publication. Equally plausible is the possibility that they stood in stark contradiction to the declared principles of the *philosophes* and his own entries in the *Encyclopédie*. In the writings of the mature Diderot, there appeared to be little science, much conjecture and a rational agility reminiscent of the late Medieval scholastics. An independent and retracting Diderot might have had great difficulty facing the wrath and ridicule of his reason-motivated comrades.

Considered a masterpiece, the posthumously published Rameau's Nephew uses a 'divided self', *Moi*, the self-respected Diderot and *Lui*, his alter ego, to explore the limits of his psychological, intellectual and ethical self. *Moi & Lui*, an admixture of sagacity and baseness inhabiting the same person foreshadowed the alienated self articulated in psychological and philosophical theories of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. *Lui*, the protean other, can will

himself on demand to depict socially desirable images. Appearances as underlying social reality and the search for a unified self in a compartmentalizing world are central motifs in current social thinking as is the frantic quest of the genius signifying the neurotic fear of the mundane.¹⁹⁹

Diderot showed remarkable awareness of the individual's struggle to maintain a coherent autonomous self. In this he was strikingly different from his cohorts who were not introspective nor psychologically minded and evidenced little interest in individual consciousness.

Addressing methods of inquiry, Diderot concluded that cynicism cannot sustain us intellectually or emotionally for it offers only an illusory sense of security. Its brilliant sophistry is a shifty facade of parasitic and ultimately nihilistic destructiveness, the essence of narcissistic defence. Psychologically, the professed self-abasement of the cynic, is but *amour propre* disguising a brittle ego in need of external sustenance to survive. It is no wonder he was quoted by Hegel who was writing The Phenomenology of Spirit when Rameau's Nephew appeared in Goethe's translation. Defined by the latter as a "self-estranged soul", *Moi* and *Lui* were turned by the metaphilosopher into archetypal specimen of "The World of Self-Alienated Spirit".²⁰⁰ Posthumous Diderot was as integral to nineteenth and twentieth centuries' social thinking as the living man was to the French Enlightenment.

Diderot was consistent with his fellow *philosophes* in rejecting Cartesian duality, but unique in doing so not by rendering the metaphysicality of the 'spirit' unacceptable, but in

¹⁹⁹ Hulliung 94-105 discusses this work. Sociological references are to Erving Goffman, The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life, (New York :Doubleday, 1959).

²⁰⁰ Le Neveu de Rameau (Rameau's Nephew) first appeared in French 1821 as a translation from Goethe's mangled translation of the novel into German in 1805. The original script was published by his daughter in 1823. Hegel, The Phenomenology of Spirit, trans .A.V. Miller, J.N. Findley, ed. (1977) 125-6.

proposing a physical transition from the insentient to the sentient. Through eating, the digestive process converts the vegetative world into living muscles as the brain potentiates movement and thought. The transformed masticated essences are regenerated as sensibilities which inform conscious human experience. This conjecture is central to his philosophical fiction *Le Rêve De d'Alembert* where he also introduced the notion of consciousness outside deliberate awareness, presaging the study of dreams as informing agents. In his last summa, Diderot suggested that “memories form oneself” through a natural process whereby consciousness connects the mature person with a historical self that underwent major physical changes.²⁰¹ These intuitive conjectures on the formation of a coherent ontological integrated self are germane to most current non-behavioural theories of personality development, although Diderot is wholly unknown in the discipline of psychology. This fictional work is also viewed as a parable instructing philosophers whose declared goal is dispelling prejudices of others, to examine their own intolerances.²⁰² If published, this message would have immersed Diderot in the boiling ink of a raging Voltaire.

Forever interacting and debating, Diderot's stories were not narratives, but polemical dialogues anchored in real life contexts. The idea of experience as inherently relational was also fundamental to his esthetics formulated in his art critiques. Accordingly, it is perceptions of “*rappports*” which begin with sense data that comprise the beautiful. These connected and disconnected relational patterns and orders mirror configurations in the physical world and should

²⁰¹ Lester G. Crocker, *Diderot's Chaotic Order* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1974) 34-36.

²⁰² Diderot was working on *Le Rêve De d'Alembert* (D'Alembert's Dream) already in 1769. It first appeared in Grimm's manuscript journal *La Correspondence Littéraire* in 1782 and was later published in *Mémoires, correspondance et ouvrages inédits de Diderot* (Paris: Paulin, 1830).

be studied as empirical questions.²⁰³ Such overarching interest in linking all philosophical issues to sense data was fundamental to Enlightenment thinking and integral to Diderot's world view.

Curiously, this sociable individual for whom society and morality were inseparable, paid little heed to political issues. Like Voltaire and Rousseau, Diderot's moral explorations are novelized, but unlike the latter he did not connect the individual with the political structures of society.²⁰⁴ Contrary to Voltaire's sensitivity to and manipulation of the growing power of public opinion, Diderot lacked a good *rapprochement* with the French people. This sociable man who desired acclaim thrived on intimate relationships and wrote his best work for himself, to be judged by future generations. An assiduous nourisher of talent, he was unique in the support he offered many of his colleagues. Like them, he too was an intellectual elitist, but unlike them he did not cater to popular approval although he wanted it. *Vox populi* was not a substitute for his Godless morality and his private character kept him oblivious to socio-cultural changes bred by the new information technology he supported. Positioned securely in the small circle of the society of *philosophes*, he remained unknown to the general public. While France and Europe read Rousseau's novels and Voltaire's diatribes, the "Homer of modern thought" waited to be discovered, as he hoped, by posterity.²⁰⁵

The prolific versatility and intellectual depth that characterize Diderot's later works mirror his emotional richness and psychological complexity. As a family member, he demonstrated

²⁰³ Creech, 46-7.

²⁰⁴ R. Niklaus, A Literary History of France: The Eighteenth Century, 1715-1789 (London: Ernest Benn Ltd., 1970) 232.

²⁰⁵ Furbank 5. This appellation is said to have been used by the Goncourts in their *Journal* for April 1858.

loyalty, concern and empathy towards his family of origin as well as his daughter. To insure a dowry and a respectable marriage for her, Diderot, who resisted recognition through office, became a courtier selling his book collection to Catherine the Great in 1765. He was allowed to keep his library to the end of his life. His commitment to his marriage, while far from representing the Christian ideal, was nevertheless relatively stable and respectful. Likewise was his relationship with Sophie Volland an intellectual who was thirty nine years old at the onset of their affair which over time became a deep friendship.²⁰⁶

In the hot-blooded circle of *philosophes*, the spirited Diderot was nonetheless the voice of temperance, conciliation and perseverance. The man who professed an addiction to admiration worked tirelessly as manager behind the scenes, giving renown and acclaim to his fellow contributors to the *Encyclopédie*. His collaborative nature was also the glue that kept the circle working together despite occasional fierce rivalries and defamatory outbursts. A truly tolerant and psychologically secure man, Diderot was not threatened by Rousseau's anti-enlightenment provocations and he maintained a friendship with him when the latter was becoming increasingly isolated from the rest of the *philosophes*. In his *Confessions*, Rousseau attributed the dissolution of their friendship to the fact that Diderot had encouraged him to become a philosopher which resulted in an irreconcilable rivalry. Diderot, who was an astute observer of human behaviour noted early in their relationship that Rousseau, the better chess player of the two, refused to grant

²⁰⁶ Sophie Volland born Louise-Henriette came from a financially elite background. 'Sophie' ('Wisdom') might have been a courtesy name given to her by Diderot to acknowledge her intelligence and erudition. It was also a cult name at the time. It is from his letters written to Sophie that we learn about the personal and intellectual vision of the mature Diderot. There are no extant letters from her and our information about her is inferred from his writings.

him a 'handicap' in order to prolong the game. Diderot was interested in playing while Rousseau required the predictability of victory.

Diderot's unique blend of sociability and individuality was reflected most clearly in his relationship with Voltaire. Letters exchanged between the two as well as their correspondence with others, make it abundantly clear that Diderot was not intimidated by his senior and that with time had lost respect for him. Faced with the possibility of d'Alembert's resignation, Voltaire was ready to terminate the enterprise and relocate the *philosophes* to Geneva, closer to his estate and in a milieu he deemed friendlier to the enlightened. Standing alone, Diderot responded to his elder's suggestion with a determined resolve to continue the 'program' asking Voltaire to refrain from tempting d'Alembert. Feeling outdone by his junior's tenacity and courage, Voltaire expressed distress over the young man's lack of appreciation of the situation and lamented his rudeness at a tardy reply.²⁰⁷ Critical of Diderot's literary skills, Voltaire recognized his "genius" while decrying Diderot's preoccupation with the "troop of guinea-fowl" (i.e., the *anti-philosophes*). He conferred upon him flattery reserved for special personages (e.g., referred to him as "Plato" or "Socrates").²⁰⁸

The respect, however, was not mutual and by the late 1750s, Diderot did not have much regard for Voltaire whom he viewed as a self-serving disloyal meddler. In letters to Sophie Volland, he addressed the septuagenarian scornfully as "de Voltaire", "the parrot of the man of

²⁰⁷ Furbank 172-173. Letter from Diderot to Voltaire written in February 19, 1758 is cited in its entirety.

²⁰⁸ Ibid. n. 500 quotes excerpts of Voltaire's letter to N. C. Thierot, November 19, 1760.

thirty” who at any time came “...only second in all the genres”.²⁰⁹ To compensate for his apparent lack of support for the “cause” and perhaps to tame the autonomous Diderot, Voltaire embarked on a mission to secure the latter an academic position. His plan consisted of sending Diderot to visit a few key religious dignitaries and convince them of his piety. An angry Diderot never acknowledged Voltaire’s efforts directly, but rejected this uninvited interference in a letter to Sophie where he criticized the dishonesty and self-serving duplicity of the plan. This exchange highlights personal differences between an opportunistic Voltaire and a sincerely forthright Diderot. Replying to Voltaire who recommended that he complete the *Encyclopédie* on Russian soil to strike mortal blow on the Church, Diderot argued that the Enlightenment is impoverished if driven to settling scores with the Church rather than by the unity of *philosophes* in pursuit of their “... kind of Trinity” “...benevolence and a love of true, the good and the beautiful.”²¹⁰

A long and prolific career of writing offers us a view of Diderot as a human being and scholar. His personal beliefs as well as intellectual formulations disclose developmental changes guided by a growing maturity rather than opportunistically driven fluctuations. The younger Diderot, excitable and enthusiastic, believed in a brain controlled by appetites and desires that lead to happiness. Evolving into an art critic, he learned to observe and study passion with detachment and to appreciate inner vision rather than seek permanent truths. Raised on a mechanistic cosmology he grew to believe in a fluid universe that excluded absolute predictability and solutions to natural disasters.

²⁰⁹ Diderot to Sophie Volland, 25 November 1760, *Correspondence*, ed. George Roth, vols.16 (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1955-79) vol. 3, 265. Ibid., 12 August 1762, vol. 4 100.

²¹⁰ Diderot to Voltaire, 29 September 1762, *Correspondence* Vol. 4 175-8.

As a young materialist and atheist, he joined fervently with the *philosophes*' crusade to banish the mysteries and was often the most ebullient *salon* scholar making self-assured hortatory statements echoing the certainty of *Encyclopédie* entries. With time, he focused his energies more on actualizing the group project paying less attention to attacks on the Church. Growing more tolerant with maturity he maintained his "abhorrence" towards political religion, but abandoned the Voltairean vulgarity in his commentaries on religion and the ancient Jews.²¹¹ While as scornful as his cohorts of the beliefs and practices of the Jews who represented the irrational to enlightened sensibilities, Diderot, the art critic, was able to reject his youthful denigration of ancient Hebrew poetry and discover powerful expressions and emotions in this 'primitive' tongue. Unlike most *philosophes*, he became more open to feedback that contradicted earlier impressions. Though ultimately a child of the French Enlightenment, he was true to his principle of writing about real people rather than abstract stereotypes, and upon visiting a Jewish synagogue in Holland he revised Rameau's Nephew by adding two Jewish characters to the story.

Diderot, the man of letters, art critic, aesthetician, humanist and lover of people, was acknowledged *philosophe par excellence* by his contemporaries. A moralist, yet tolerant and probably the least dogmatic among his cohorts, he was a sociable yet a very private individual. A man of superior intelligence and an insatiable curiosity nurtured by an agile mind and expansive imagination, he was also endowed with a rich emotional life as an individual, family man and friend. Somewhat of an intellectual elitist, he expressed less disdain towards the non-educated masses than did the popular Voltaire. Unlike the latter, however, Diderot did not cater to popular

²¹¹ Leon Schwartz, Diderot and the Jews (London & Toronto: Fairleigh Dickinson, 1981) 167 n. 35 cites an excerpt from Diderot's commentary on Voltaire's Lettres d'Amabed.

sentiments restricting his desire for approval to the intellectual elite, wishful expectation and the verdict of posterity.

Indubitably the embodiment of the French Enlightenment, Diderot lacked popular appeal.²¹² 'The life of the party' among his friends, he viewed philosophy a serious task and deplored the Voltairean burlesquing methods in dealing with important issues. He left to posterity a most thought provoking legacy of struggling with the dilemma of free will in a deterministic universe. Somewhat obsessive in his concern with his contributions to posterity, he remained true to his conviction leaving a legacy of sincere learning and integrity. Conscious of the growing power of the printed word, he was indefatigable in using publications to disseminate the new secular teachings. Aware of the growing power of public opinion outside the established political and religious structures, he did not use the proliferating printing machine to make himself known. Intellectual elitism might account for this oversight, but equally plausible is the notion that his ambivalence reflected a genuinely private individual who thrived on intimate attachments and did not understand the emerging power of public opinion.

Notoriety emerged as a new social status with entertaining as a corollary skill. This trend reflected a democratization of a culture relying increasingly on popular appeal for recognition and power. With mass publication came publicity and the literate public was turned into an audience for individuals seeking celebrity and willing to entertain in order to maintain that position. Unaware of the significance of the evolving trend or refusing deliberately to adopt it, Diderot failed to gain recognition as spokesman of the French Enlightenment. It was left for Voltaire,

²¹²Carl Becker, "The Dilemma of Diderot," Philosophical Review, 1958 ed. Becker perceives Diderot as the incarnate of the eighteenth century: "...in him all currents of that age, deep or shallow, crossed and went their separate ways."

master propagandist and performer, to seduce posterity into crowning him the leading spirit of the Enlightenment.

CHAPTER 4

YOUNG VOLTAIRE : THE DEVELOPMENT OF A NARCISSISTIC PERSONALITY

Following a review of the narcissistic features of the French Enlightenment, the stage is set for demonstrating the thesis that Voltaire is the exemplary representation of this psycho-social phenomenon. It will be shown that: (a) his personal relationships and intellectual pursuits never graduated from adolescent hankering into mature passions and were driven by insatiable needs for attention and affirmation, (b) his histrionic demonstrations of anguish over personal losses or the sufferings of humanity were short lived and limited to a rhetoric oblivious to the cry in the street and (c) his incessant writing conspicuous for its facile contempt for others, dead and alive, was marked by an obsessive quality rather than originality or depth. It will also be argued that his success at fooling himself and others, then and now, rests with a reciprocity between his character and socio-cultural trends steered by the new forces of public opinion, conviction by spectacle and the growing appeal of heroic victimhood.

At the zenith of the Franco-centric eighteenth century refinement stood Voltaire, master of the French language and taste, spreading the word of Enlightenment, fighting the clerics and promoting the rise of the celebrated secular intellectual, i.e., himself. A true offspring of the *Grand Siècle* he tried to use its literary reputation to bolster his belief in his own greatness to which he dedicated his long life. No one rivaled his convictions of entitlement and masked a self-indulgent expressiveness as successfully. The apparent universalism flaunted in his literary outpouring, is a gloss concealing excessive individualism, little depth or wisdom and a limited imagination defined by emotional immaturity and a festering narcissism.

Such charges against the icon of 'humanism', spokesman of modern secular intellectualism and herald of free speech are very grave indeed. Criticism of Voltaire's quality of work and occasional insincerity (i.e., contradictions between proclamations of tolerance and instances of blatant bigotry) have been raised before. He was called "... the greatest entertainer of the age" and was said to be driven by a lust for fame. But to deny him his historical identity as humanist and "uomo universale" would seem to rival the impertinence attributed to the accused.²¹³ Careful marshalling of supporting evidence tempered by humility is, therefore, required. Still, there is ample testimony to justify this thesis as a plausible alternative to traditional views of Voltaire and his time. Biographical data are used to highlight familial and developmental circumstances pointing to the cultivation of a narcissistic personality. The glaring inconsistencies of character and behaviour often attributed to longevity or complexity of nature are interpreted to reflect lack of a coherent self in constant need for reinvention. Protean versatility is paramount to a narcissist in need of endless rationalizations to support opportunistically driven choices for which consistency is an obstacle. A detailed analysis of *Candide*, considered Voltaire's *summa*, is used to show that these character traits are mirrored in his work and define its quality.

It is probably as ancient a stratagem as the existence of disputation to use others' own words to refute their arguments, and Voltaire's long life and exhibitionistic personality offer many convenient opportunities. He talked too much and wrote too much making the private public and general knowledge a tale of gossip. Hence, Voltaire's conclusion that it is futile to search for a

²¹³ Nancy Mitford, *Voltaire In Love* (London : Hamish Hamilton, 1975) 14 refers to him as the entertainer of the century. The title of "uomo universale" was conferred by Frederick the Great while still Crown Prince of Prussia and is cited in Ira O. Wade, *The Intellectual Development of Voltaire* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1969) 328.

personal identity is testimony against those who invest him with psychological insight.²¹⁴ One might be tempted to project a deeper meaning to this 'maxim' as if alluding to the futility of ever knowing the Heidegerian 'authentic' *Dasein*.²¹⁵ This is not only an anachronism, but it also contradicts the well documented fact that Voltaire and many French contemporaries did not practice introspection finding the notion of retreating to an inner world dangerously close to religious meditation and Cartesian mentalism. Eighteenth century French had no linguistic parallel to the Lockean coinage of 'self-consciousness'. In their zeal to form a geometrically patterned natural society, Enlightened French spoke of the physical senses and a natural morality, but tossed out the psychological in their anti-clericalism.²¹⁶

Theodore Besterman, a great Voltairean enthusiast whose familiarity with the topic is unrivaled, assessed his protagonist as "...the least self-analytical of men, so little given to autobiography or to public introspection..".²¹⁷ It is rather curious for one so versed in Voltaire's life and work to have concluded that the Frenchman shied away from publicity. The absence of self-reflection discloses a psychological deficit while withholding personal information attests to the narcissist's need for secrecy as a tactical advantage. Apart from calculated concealment, Voltaire felt compelled to discharge all thoughts that crossed his mind including hearsay, juicy

²¹⁴ Catherine Glyn Davis, Conscience as Consciousness: The idea of self-awareness in French philosophical writing from Descartes to Diderot, vol. 272 (Oxford: The Voltaire Foundation, at the Taylor Institution, 1990) 65 quotes from J.L. Carr ed. (London, 1965) 51.

²¹⁵ George Steiner, Martin Heidegger (London: The Harvester Press, 1978).

²¹⁶ Scholars of the French Enlightenment tended to equate 'natural' with 'mathematical', therefore, concluding erroneously that sense data correspond to mathematical relationships.

²¹⁷ Theodore Besterman, Voltaire (London & Harlow: Longmans, Green and Co. Ltd., 1969) 24.

gossip and ideas others shared with him, at times passing them off as his own. Besterman's observation that Voltaire was "the least self-analytical of men" is accurate, but he fails to understand the psychological implications of this observation when he associates it with a shortage of evidence of Arouet's early life. There is more information on Voltaire's youth than on most other contemporaries. More important is the fact that Voltaire's lack of interest in revealing his past reflected a genuine distaste for his childhood, partly to forget the terrors of his early precarious existence and emotional deprivation, and partly to deny his mundane ancestry. Personal history is anathema to narcissistic individuals who are in constant need of reinvention. Forgetting the past is a convenient compensatory skill allowing narcissists the freedom to modify reality to fit with a desired self-image.

Following the intellectual development of Voltaire, Ira Wade supports the contention that Voltaire had no grasp of the notion of self-conscious introspection. Furthermore, in evaluating Voltaire's poetry, Wade identifies a core narcissistic feature at the root of his poetic shortcomings, lack of empathy for the tragic in human existence. While far from offering a clinical diagnosis, Wade's depiction of the poet and his art provides a remarkable insight into this character configuration which warrants a *verbatim* citation:

"... Nowhere is there the slightest indication that he was concerned with what constituted a tragedy or even what role tragedy can play in the society which has created it. He was not the least bit concerned with what constitutes a tragic hero or what tragic irony is. He had a faint glimmer that there may be a tragic effect; he divined that it may be pity. But tragic purgation and the play as ritual were totally devoid of meaning for him. He would not have been willing to consider that Oedipus is the story of a man who goes in search of himself relentlessly and unconditionally, that, as Sophocles's play unfurls, Oedipus, the greatest of man, becomes as nothing, and that only then he is fit to become a God. Voltaire was not

conscious of the symbolism of sight, of the tension of the soul of a man who wants to know the truth and dreads to know it because he realizes that the truth destroys, of the paradox in human existence which drives a man to will his every act and at the same time to do everything to avoid the outcome, of the irony of a human situation in which one has the freedom to act but no freedom to choose, a freedom which carries with it utterly degrading responsibilities and which may lead one to become the vilest of men or a god without knowing why, or how, or even when. Voltaire understood nothing of these things and yet he intended to write twenty-seven tragedies, which would he sincerely thought, be distinguished, like Sophocles's Oedipus, by the harmony of the verse and the "pathétique qui règne dans son style."²¹⁸

Wade's depiction is of a young Voltaire (in his late twenties) criticizing Aristotle's and Horace's conceptions of the art of poetry as well as seventeenth century French literary figures. Reading Voltaire's commentary led Wade to conclude that the former was more concerned with name-dropping than with a careful reading of the works he criticized. Impertinence of youth is a frequent excuse offered to explain this 'early' behaviour. After all Sophocles did not attempt to tackle his great masterpiece until his late sixties. Thus are forgiven ignorance and patronizing references to Sophocles' weakness as developer of plots and other shortcomings attesting to the 'early stages' in the history of drama. *Oedipus Tyrannus* represented to Aristotle Greek tragedy at its best where the unity of the plot is complete. The ancient sage "saw life steadily and saw it whole" for Matthew Arnold. Shelley had a volume of Sophocles when he drowned.²¹⁹ But Voltaire never outgrew his puerile irreverence discussing matters he was not able to handle. At the age of eighty-two, he would decry the undeserved popularity of the "monster" Shakespeare

²¹⁸ Wade, Intellectual Development 113.

²¹⁹ "Sophocles" Oxford Companion to Classical Literature, ed. M.C. Howatson (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 1989) 533.

whom he had discovered for the French and who disappointingly produced mostly a “pile of manure”.²²⁰ This lifelong impertinence which lacked erudition and depth was motivated by adolescent need to shock and dazzle at any cost and by an irresistible urgency to be the focus of attention in the developing arena of publicity.

In addition to juvenile impudence, Wade alludes to a cognitive concreteness, inability to grasp the psychological significance of symbolism and a lack of insight into the tragic of the human condition. These were not symptoms of immaturity nor were they merely typical attributes of most eighteenth-century scholars. Voltaire could not understand Sophocles, because the fundamental conflict in the Greek drama is internal; “the dramatic dialogue is in the final analysis between the self and the self”, a process which was incomprehensible to Voltaire.²²¹ At the age of forty one, he defined “I” and “me” as designations of material objects rejecting any notion of “immateriality” or introspection as metaphysical speculation.²²² Giambattista Vico, an Italian contemporary (1668-1744) conceptualized myth and fables as vital nuclei of social and psychological history and understood myth as the medium articulating universal antimonies.²²³ Many minds of the Age of Enlightenment were neither too young nor too overwhelmed by science to handle the deeper meanings of the arts or the human condition. But it was Voltaire’s

²²⁰ Wayne Andrews, Voltaire (New York: New Directions Book, 1981) 19. The writer does not give references for most of his citations.

²²¹ George Steiner, Language and Silence: Essays on Language, Literature, and the Inhuman (New York: Atheneum, 1967) 132.

²²² Voltaire to René-Joseph Tournemine, August 1735, The Selected Letters of Voltaire, ed. Richard A. Brooks (New York: New York University Press, 1973) 50. Besterman D. 901.

²²³ Giambattista Vico, New Science: Principles of the New Science Concerning the Common Nature of Nations Trans. Davis March (London: Penguin Books, 1999).

impetuousness linked with arrogant entitlement that charmed his contemporaries and even more our current spectacle-driven and youth-oriented modern culture.

Voltaire was born, in November or February of 1694, in Paris and was christened Francois-Marie Arouet on November 22 of that year. There is evidence suggesting he was born one day before the christening date making his formal birth November 21, but Voltaire did not believe his mother's husband was his biological father and identified his birth date nine months earlier. On several occasions, Voltaire, implied that Rocheburne, one of his putative father's clients, was his biological father.²²⁴ Data supporting the November date consist of a baptismal certificate which includes the statement "born the day previous" as well as a letter from a visiting cousin who wrote to his family about the birth; the letter was dated November 24 and stated that the child was born three days earlier.²²⁵ René Pomeau, a most respected authority on Voltaire, suggests that the aforementioned letter was a forgery designed to cover-up the scandal of an illegitimate child. He relies on Condorcet's account of 1789 that Voltaire was born in Chatenay (where the family owned a house) in February and the delay of the baptism was due to the fragility of the sickly infant; nine months later it was clear baby Arouet was going to live.²²⁶

²²⁴ Besterman, *Voltaire* 21 cites Voltaire's letter to the duc de Richelieu (June 1744) where he refers to himself as the "bastard of Rochebrune" and nine years later, when he suspected he suffered from dropsy, he wrote to his niece, Mme. Denis, that Rochebrune had the same illness before he died. Besterman does not doubt Voltaire's convictions, but is not sure he was correct. Overall, he finds this issue inconsequential.

²²⁵ James Parton, *Life of Voltaire*, vol.1 (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Co., 1900) 19. Parton uses the cousin's letter as proof of the November date.

²²⁶ René Pomeau, *Voltaire en son temps*, vol. 1 (Paris: Fayard, Voltaire Foundation, 1995) 11-13.

Voltaire did not appear overly disturbed by the paternity issue nor did he seem attached to any one father. He was not uniquely encumbered with the burden of illegitimacy; two close associates - famous figures - d'Alembert, a fellow *philosophe* and the duc de Richelieu, shared this status. The history of Voltaire's future lover, the Marquise du Châtelet, suggests that among the aristocracy to be born out of wedlock was not that uncommon nor did it hamper chances for a political career. If Pomeau is correct in suggesting that the Arouet family tried to conceal Voltaire's illegitimacy for fear of a scandal, it speaks to differences between the bourgeoisie rules of respectability and the aristocratic disregard for social conventions. Irrespective of religious affiliation, the bourgeoisie accepted the 'Protestant' work ethic and a set of rigid social conventions. The Anglican "Clarissa" and the Calvinist "Heloise" espoused the same prudery attributed to Voltaire's Jansenist father. The latter's conflictual relationship with his youngest son did not seem to be related to a paternity issue as much as to a 'generational gap' between upwardly mobile middle class parents and their enlightened radical offspring. There was little difference between aspirations Arouet senior had for his son and those declared by Diderot senior for his Denis. Both fathers wanted their sons to enter the legal profession and both sons chose a literary career. Diderot received less financial support than Voltaire yet showed a greater attachment to his father. Voltaire's uncharacteristically taciturn approach to his family of origin is more revealing of his character than his father's attitude towards him. There was nothing remarkable about Arouet senior's behaviour towards his children, but it was this commonness that an entitled little boy destined to greatness found unacceptable.

Rocheburne, the alleged biological father, boasted a preferred 'blood line' and a character more appealing for Voltaire's self-image. While labeling old Arouet a "very common man" he

referred to Rochebrune as “un homme d’esprit”, a “mousquetaire, officier, auteur” whose poems expressed great “fureur”.²²⁷ The ‘idealized’ father was one with passion, valour and talent who could claim an ancient noble pedigree from the Auvergne.²²⁸ If Voltaire eschewed the topic of lineage it was not due to an egalitarian ideology or a sense of privacy. On the contrary, Voltaire accepted the hierarchical social order and could not reconcile his non-privileged status and ‘pedestrian’ ancestry with his inordinate sense of entitlement. Throughout his life he condoned social ranking and made every effort to be near people with title and power. His proclamations of equality were uniquely tailored to his qualifications: Voltaire the brilliant man whose talents transcend social norms and standards by which others abide, is equal to or greater than titled individuals, including kings and queens. To interpret his lack of interest in his ancestry otherwise is to ignore an unparalleled demonstration of sycophantic maneuvers to break into aristocratic circles at home and abroad and to deny his flagrantly dismissive attitude towards the stupid, unfit majority of the population.

The Arouets’ social status and pedigree equalled the background of many eighteenth century French intellectuals. His father came from a respectable bourgeois family of drapers, weavers, tanners or apothecaries and notaries. His mother’s family included official administrators who bought their offices, hence allusions to a lineage of ‘minor nobility’ from Poitou. Mostly, this was a respectable family headed by a man with great aspirations for social climbing and respectability. “Voltaire’s father was a prosperous notary with a middle class

²²⁷ Ibid. 13-14.

²²⁸ Ibid. 14 quotes Théophile Imarigeon Duvernet, *La Vie de Voltaire*(Geneve 1786) 9.

outlook and an aristocratic clientele.”²²⁹ Such statements are used commonly and matter-of-factly to describe Voltaire’s background and upbringing. At first glance it seems innocuous and reminiscent of family characteristics shared by other *philosophes*. Diderot’s father, one recalls, was a respectable bourgeois, established in his home town who exposed his son to Jesuit schooling hoping he would become a lawyer if not an Abbé. Whereas Diderot senior was content in his comfortable life as a “low bourgeoisie”, Voltaire’s father was determined to climb up the social ladder and if unable to attain noble status at least to serve the aristocracy and socialize with the *Grands*.²³⁰

James Parton, writing in 1881, found it significant that Voltaire’s father was a notary. This was a lucrative ‘business’ which issued licence that legally certified and validated all social agreements from marriage to wills.²³¹ Under Louis XIV, Paris had 113 notaries who were commissioned by the king and allowed the display of the royal arms over their doors. These positions which could be bought and bequeathed required six years of study with one additional year of apprenticeship as a clerk. Fees for notarial services were specified in the notarial manual, but there were transactions allowing the charging of a percentage of sums involved. The latter offered great returns and justified the high cost involved in procuring the post. Ongoing contact with financial transactions helped a shrewd notary cultivate good business acumen while gaining a great deal of information about the affairs of families with title and wealth. But access to money

²²⁹ Mitford 22.

²³⁰ Among his clients he could boast familiarity with the Dukes of : Saint Simon, Sully, Praslin, Richelieu and the aging Corneille.

²³¹ Parton, vol. 1 12-15.

and information did not change the fact that the notary remained outside the ranks of the legal profession or their titled clientele; richer than some clients they remained servants nevertheless. With all the flattery in the address of *maître*, a notary was only entitled to a dowry between twelve and twenty thousand francs according to the authorized marriage contracts of the time. Father Arouet wanted more for his youngest son who proceeded to break many social boundaries.

It is clear that Arouet senior was an ambitious man with designs for amassing wealth and gaining social status. Unable to penetrate the ranks of the *Grands*, he enjoyed proximity by entertaining and serving them. Name-dropping and mingling with powerful personages was as useful to the father as it would later be to his son who was fortunate to reap the benefits of his father's social networking. Like his father, Voltaire would remain an outsider throughout his life despite unprecedented success and fame. Despising the lackluster 'talents' of heads of state, he would seek their approval for his work and please them with a degree of sycophancy bordering on a servility seemingly antithetical to his willful character. The son who rejected his father for his banality, would identify in later years with his father's estimation of Corneille as old and boring. Voltaire internalized more than his father's self-serving servility, he rivaled (or inherited) his shrewdness in business and strove for even greater riches. Learning father's lessons of thrift he would top them with a ruthlessness that included risky illegal dealings and unethical conduct.

Allusions to the 'ordinariness' of the father reflect the son's need to be special and the growing compulsion of 'escaping the banal' typical of the French Enlightenment. There was little that was 'average' about a man who succeeded in purchasing the lucrative business of a notary, amassing property and wealth and associating with many in powerful positions. Surely, the father's aspirations paled by comparison to the son's success at dining and corresponding with an

Emperor and a Tsarina, but to view him a common man is to accept the unappeasable ego of the son and the precepts of a culture of celebrity. Moreover, father's lack of suavity, interest in music and the arts in general, were faithfully transmitted to his son via nature or nurture. Voltaire's interests were restricted to activities he excelled in: rhetoric, writing and acting. Everything else including his living environment was disregarded. The stark interiors of his mansions did not reflect the austerity of an ascetic, but rather the hoarding mentality of a bourgeois and an impoverished sense of esthetics. Ostensibly knowledgeable about taste, Voltaire who would write a great deal on the topic, remained his father's son.

It would seem there was nothing in the background portending the unique development of the child Arouet until the birth itself. His doubtful entry into the world was the first contribution to the emergence of a compensatory psychological structure defending against overwhelming fragility, physical weakness being overcome by a sense of omnipotence. Voltaire was not only a vulnerable infant, he was also a weakly child unable to partake in activities that promote age appropriate physical mastery. But he was endowed with great verbal intelligence which rescued him from his physical infirmities and offered him an escape from a restrictive reality. The physically feeble child charmed the adults around him with feats of intellectual precocity and a pseudo-maturity suggested by his verbal dexterity and interest in adult topics. Voltaire's early relationships were not based on emotional attachments, but rather on pleasing and amusing the adults around him, transforming their initial pity into admiration. Voltaire was not a loved child, he was a show piece.

It is common knowledge that Voltaire was largely ignored by his family in his early years. His mother is described as sickly, attractive, witty, somewhat superficial and 'overly' social while

his father was engrossed in his business affairs.²³² His siblings were older and unavailable to their young brother. His sister, whom he was fond of, was busy finding a husband. Between Voltaire and Armand, his older brother, there was a strong reciprocal antipathy typical of contradictory temperaments. The fact that Voltaire did not form close attachments to family members has led to the erroneous conclusion that his family had little impact on his development and identity formation. Families influence as much or more by withholding as by giving, especially with respect to emotional availability. Francois learned many secrets of thrift from his father and seems to have inherited the gift of wit and sociability from his mother. But not being handsome he escaped the charge of being, like her, superficial. The family legacy, however, was more powerful in its emotional rejection. Chronically absent parents coupled with physical illness produced overwhelming anxiety which could only be contained by a powerful instinct for self-preservation. When bodily pain screams for relief and emotional succor is not available, an infant never outgrows the domination of the somatic and develops an unquenchable need for pleasure to satisfy bodily desires.²³³ These are future narcissists for whom the pleasure-pain principle becomes the criterion for right and wrong. Lacking a secure attachment to his care-givers and enfeebled by a weak body, baby Voltaire failed to develop empathy and a sense of attachment and became centered on satisfying his burning urges to ward off insufferable anxiety. Right and wrong, for Voltaire, would always be suffused with pleasure and pain.

Luckily he was surrounded with family friends who reveled in his intellectual precocity and affirmed his strength. A less traumatic inception, more responsive parents and less attentive

²³² Biographical details are from Besterman, Durant & Durant, and Pomeau.

²³³ Harding 9-17.

'liberal' family friends would have likely produced a less extravagant, self-centered cynic. Of the three abbés who frequented the Arouet home, Nicolas Géroyn was the first to detect the boy's writing talent.²³⁴ This man espoused liberal religious opinions, was steeped in the writings of antiquity and advocated a natural morality separate from religion. In later years Voltaire would bolster his criticism of Milton's Paradise Lost with references from unpublished works by the abbé.²³⁵ Géroyn introduced young Arouet to a famous socialite Ninon de L'Enclos who was also a client of Arouet senior. The child visited this octogenarian also with his godfather and mentor the abbe de Châteauneuf. The latter assured the boy that it was him rather than Géroyn who enjoyed the said lady's last favours. Châteauneuf exposed young Voltaire to the French classics predicting that history would favour Racine over Corneille. Voltaire remembered the lesson well. He also exposed the child to the teachings of "*La Moïsade*" which unmasked Moses' "magnificent fooleries" with which he infected the whole world.²³⁶ With unconstrained hostility, Voltaire would carry this message throughout his life.

There is little doubt Voltaire was imprinted on these early teachings which replaced more normal human attachments. His intellectual precocity, notwithstanding, Voltaire was a little boy governed by animistic fantasies when exposed to adult praise and cynicism. His superior verbal ability and imitative skills dazzled his mentors, thus, conferring upon him special status and a great

²³⁴ Besterman, Voltaire 27.

²³⁵ Besterman, Voltaire 28. According to Voltaire Géroyn had regarded the poem "barbarous and disgustingly fanatic".

²³⁶ Parton 26 cites the conclusion of the "*Moïsade*". He does not reference the source of his quote.

deal of attention. The child was, indeed, the father of the adult who mistook proximity to the *Grands* with equality and never modified his childish unmeditated response to others. The blurring of boundaries, manifested by the mature Voltaire, is often mistaken for radicalism lending him an aura of nonconformity where in fact it underlies the opposite, identification with those holding power.

Almost every biographer tells the story of the ten year old Arouet meeting the famous socialite Ninon de L'Enclos shortly before she died at the age of ninety. Following this visit during which she got to see his verses, she had left him in her will a thousand francs to buy books. In his autobiography published posthumously in 1777, Voltaire refers to the incident very briefly identifying himself as a twelve year old who composed verses that "appear to be superior" to what would be expected at his age and while recalling his benefactor as "that extraordinary woman".²³⁷ In an earlier letter in 1751, Voltaire offers a more elaborate and rather negative reflection on this episode. He recalled his verses as meaningless, but promising for his age and portrayed the old Ninon as a decrepit, bony, wrinkled mummy with a jaundiced complexion.²³⁸ Besterman rejects the negative recollection as an inaccurate account, without offering a motive for such a dismissal, whereas others find it puzzling that Voltaire would be thankless and cruel to a woman who remembered him in her will. The extant will of the said L'Enclos which states that she had left "Arouet of the Jesuits" one thousand francs to buy books, may shed some light on Voltaire's

²³⁷ Besterman, *Voltaire* 543 -5 offers the "*Mémoires*" as an appendix. Although written in the third person he believes it was written or dictated by Voltaire.

²³⁸ *Ibid.* *Voltaire* 28 n. 23 believes this account to be inaccurate. Pomeau 24 accepts this version.

apparent ambivalence.²³⁹ It is possible that the different recollections reflect mixed feelings towards a woman who while impressed saw him as a talented ‘Jesuit boy’ rather than as a *vir sui generis*. Voltaire was never closed-mouthed when it came to flattery. It thus stands to reason that what transpired in the encounter mirrored the designation of the will. For the mature Voltaire calling upon the mob to “eat the Jesuits” being identified as a “Jesuit boy” must have evoked a major shudder especially since he was the most authentic product of their teachings.²⁴⁰

At the age of ten, young Francois was sent to the Jesuit college of Louis le Grand unlike his older brother who attended the Oratorian seminary of Saint-Magloire. The institution which was designed to prepare its pupils for the clergy or insure their integration into the upper social ranks produced many free thinkers. Regardless of the reasons for Arouet senior’s choices, it was a fortunate decision for Voltaire who was already prepared for the curriculum which suited his innate talents perfectly. Given his upbringing, young Arouet was awkward with his peers, but quite adept at interacting with his teachers. He immediately stood out with his knowledge and outrageous criticism which he executed with the linguistic skill not expected of a child his age. His teachers were charmed by his childish conceit and encouraged his growing arrogance and sense of uniqueness.²⁴¹ The Jesuits’ preference for literary knowledge over religious doctrine suited Voltaire’s intellectual inclinations and enhanced his budding egomania. At the age of thirty- nine, he would publish the *Lettres Philosophiques*, where he would summarize two

²³⁹ Ibid. 24 quotes from E. Magne, *Ninon de L’Enclos*, (Paris, 1948) 300-1.

²⁴⁰ The directive to “eat the Jesuits” is taken from “*Candide*” and was used by the Parisians to jeer at the Jesuits upon their expulsion from France.

²⁴¹ Pomeau 32 quotes a statement made by a charmed and bemused teacher declaring that young Arouet loved to “...manipulate the delicate balance of the grand interests of Europe.”

centuries with one witty sentence and a man's biography and achievements in one phrase. Many would be awestruck by this "literary machine gun", for the next two centuries, yet a closer examination of these feats reveal a life long urgency to devalue as a means for sustaining a brittle ego.²⁴² The mature Voltaire secured a wider audience than the school boy, but the style and intent of his performance remained the same, using a highly emotive language to capture the public's attention and guarantee a spot in the limelight.

In recounting Voltaire's school years, most biographers omit the events preceding his graduation which would appear, at first glance, uncharacteristic of his character and scholastic record. Voltaire had failed his last assignment which was to defend a thesis in his philosophy class, his arguments being unacceptable. Pomeau who reports these events attributes the poor performance to lack of interest.²⁴³ Voltaire had no interest in such archaic thinkers as Aristotle and Aquinas thus channeling his energy to his rhetoric class. To avoid additional work required for passing the subject, young Arouet enlisted his father's support to vouch for his ill-health claiming migraines. Father further accommodated his son allowing him to finish with a "demi acte". Both father's and son's seeming atypical behaviour actually reflected rather accurately their characters. But it is Voltaire's conduct and future interpretation of these events that are most revealing and relevant.

Attributing failure to lack of interest is as old an excuse as it is prevalent. But Voltaire was a brilliant youth who excelled until this assignment. What prevented him from using his great

²⁴² Cleveland Chase, The Young Voltaire (New York : Longmans, Green & CO., 1926) 12.

²⁴³ Pomeau 35.

reservoir of intelligence to ‘whip up’ an acceptable argument for a task managed by many of his peers? It is tempting to view this behaviour as the sign of a nonconformist character. But Voltaire was an outsider not a rebel and sensitive and alert to his audience more than any of his contemporaries. His school performance and behaviour did indeed mirror his unfolding career and personal conduct. Hypochondriasis, a common excuse in narcissism, would assist Voltaire throughout his life. His physical fragility would become a life long asset for excusing real or anticipatory blunders and warding off the wrath of others.

Harping on a physical weakness is also a functional mechanism for preserving a brittle ego. As the insecure self locates its restrictions and pain in a physical condition it removes the threat of facing intellectual and psychological limitations while reinforcing an image of specialness by combating successfully chronic physical adversity. This episode also foreshadowed an overwhelming need to dazzle and shine which would steer Voltaire’s intellectual development. Depth analysis would never be his strong suit and his productions would rely on anecdotal narratives and resemble moralizing tales. He would reduce every subject to fit his skill, to some kind of a literary expression and devalue that which he found out of reach.

Voltaire would argue in later years that seven years of schooling amounted to some Latin and nonsense.²⁴⁴ Echoing this sentiment, Besterman concurs that “all he really learned at school was Latin, habits of work, and ambition” and perhaps “love of the stage” which are, it would seem, far less determining to a person’s character or opportunities than higher knowledge of the sciences. Since he was not taught mathematics, science or history, so goes the argument, he like

²⁴⁴ Besterman, Voltaire 37 cites from the entry ‘Education’ in the Dictionnaire philosophique.

most great men was an autodidact. Pomeau, on the other hand, appreciates the unique compatibility between the college agenda and atmosphere and Voltaire's personality and talents. The very limited curriculum and scholastic competitiveness suited young Arouet remarkably well allowing his brilliant facility with words to shine while honing his vanity and pugnacity.²⁴⁵ According to his confessor, Voltaire had a "devouring thirst" for being a celebrity and the college, says Pomeau, did much to ignite this desire.²⁴⁶ Overall, the Jesuits had a marked effect on young Voltaire in exposing him to their urbaneness and instilling in him an ardent passion for writing in his famous direct and facile style. In Voltaire the Jesuits found a superb student who would go on to become the truest personification of their education. Not only was he not an autodidact, but he seems to have been very fortunate to receive an educational program tailored to his talents. The mature Voltaire would find tutors to instruct him in the increasingly popular areas of mathematics and physics, but would not evidence the talent or the patience required to excel in these disciplines. Contrary to Besterman's assessment, Voltaire was very fortunate not to have been subjected to the sciences in his early years.

It is difficult to separate Voltaire's attitude towards school from his aversion towards his childhood. There is nothing more insipid, according to Voltaire, than details of childhood and school years.²⁴⁷ Embedded in this flippant cynical observation is a loathing of self and of others masking core narcissistic feelings and defense. There is a difference between recalling one's

²⁴⁵ Pomeau 29.

²⁴⁶ Ibid. 43 cites the confessor's testimony, Duvernet 14.

²⁴⁷ Ibid. 26.

childhood and school years as unhappy, torturous, boring, lonely, etc. and defining them as vapid and pointless. The latter disclose a brittle ego ashamed of its impotence and anxious to deny the realities of those years. Young Arouet worked very hard at pleasing his teachers, memorizing the scriptures and the classics as well as the lessons given by his pre-school mentors. He was a most zealous competitor, according to his teachers, and worked hard at obtaining centre stage. But, such personal history is anathema to the narcissist who cannot withstand the weakness inherent in childhood and must reinvent himself to fit his idealized image. The psychological product of self anathemazation is loathing of the self and others. This is the misunderstood essence of the self-serving servility of malignant narcissism. While professing disdain, Voltaire would always solicit the proximity of others and need the acceptance of the titled and powerful.

In a recent edition of the History Workshop, David Wootton raised the possibility that Young Arouet was likely abused sexually at the Jesuit college and that this had a lasting impact on him.²⁴⁸ Wootton finds several references over the years which establish the existence of such practices and associates these events with allusions to homosexuality, on the one hand, and immature sexual relationships with men or women on the other. Of particular value are his observations of Voltaire's excessive hostility towards the Jesuits and his inability to comprehend the notion of an internal dialogue.²⁴⁹ Wootton notices that the inflammatory declaration "lets eat the Jesuits" which appears in Candide in 1759 "exceeds the energy of other Enlightened intellectuals" in its anticlericalism. Voltaire was notorious for using emotive language for

²⁴⁸ David Wootton, "Unhappy Voltaire or "I Shall Never Get Over it as Long as I Live," History Workshop Journal 50 (2000) : 137-55.

²⁴⁹ Ibid. 146.

propaganda purposes and as means for capturing his audience attention. He had to shout louder than his peers to insure he left a mark. Polarizing, a Voltairean signature tactic, relies on unconstrained hostility against a caricatured object and does not reflect necessarily genuine feelings.

Wootton's suggestion that Voltaire's tendency of "escaping from the self" represented a flight from the dreadful experiences of sexual abuse is questionable. He is correct in noting that Voltaire's translation of Hamlet's soliloquy fails to convey that the process is occurring within the mind, that this was an internal debate. Further, states Wootton, the need to escape the awful past also explains Voltaire's ambivalence towards Pascal and his failure to comprehend him. These observations depicting Voltaire as a literal-minded, non-reflective and emotionally immature individual lend support to the thesis that he was a narcissistic personality rather than a man exhibiting symptoms of post traumatic stress. This is not disputing the possibility that Voltaire was sexually abused. In fact, given his ingratiating behaviour towards his teachers and isolation from his peers, he was a prime target for such abuse. But any impact such events might have had on his future emotional state was probably subsumed by an existing psychological make up rather than defined by it. Voltaire entered the college equipped with a sense of entitlement and wry sarcasm. Like the academic curriculum which fostered his innate talents, the social climate, as painful as it might have been, enhanced an existing mental structure.

Making social connections was an invaluable service the *collège* offered its student. This was a place where sons of wealthy or aspiring bourgeois met children of the aristocracy. Voltaire did not partake in boyish antics, but he earned esteem for his intellectual feats and was able to develop several strategically advantageous friendships. Among his life long friends were: Clause

Phillipe Foyte de La Marche who became the *premier président* of the Dijon *parlement*, Charles Augustin Feriol comte d'Argental who became the minister plenipotentiary of Parma at the French court; René Louis de Voyer de Paulmy, Marquis d'Aregenson, later the minister of foreign affairs and Louis François Armand du Plesiss, duc de Fronsac better known as the marechal-duc de Richelieu. Educating the wealthy and titled boys empowered the school personnel to make contacts as high as the royal family. It thus befell upon the school star, Arouet, to plead with the dauphin on behalf of an old soldier. The petition was a success and secured its producer a name and fame in Versailles and Paris. By the time Voltaire graduated, the precocious youth was known to members of the three important classes in the French society: the *noblesse d'épée*, the *noblesse de robe* and men of letters. Thus he began his public career.²⁵⁰

The "insipid" details of his childhood and school years mirrored Voltaire's life long personal conduct, social trajectory and career achievements. At the age of seventeen, he personified the Jesuit universal man steeped in manners and literature rather than in religious morality. His techniques and passion for writing and oratory exemplified his tutor's pedagogy at its best. Success would be restricted to the areas of satiric verse. The ability to write tragedy would elude him. The mature Voltaire would compensate for lack of psychological depth and poetic talent with cynicism and sarcasm, his prime intellectual weapons. Voltaire would forever cherish his friendships and use his connections to further his causes and destroy his enemies. He would use his physical fragility and hypochondriasis to solicit sympathy and excuse failure. Impatient with others and intolerant of criticism, he would judge his work always superior and feign humility. The child Arouet as father of the mature Voltaire is stunning in its likeness

²⁵⁰ Chase 19.

suggesting a rigidly entrenched personality not amenable to growth and change, an archetypal narcissist.

Following his graduation, young Arouet submerged himself readily into the daily pleasures of Paris while enjoying the general leniency and indifference to dogma which distinguished the Regency. The Temple, which derived its name from its historical function as the centre of the Knights Templar, was the meeting place of free-thinkers in Paris and Voltaire's literary home until 1723. Voltaire was initiated to the Temple with a growing notoriety as a wit by his godfather the abbé de Châteauneuf. According to Theodore Besterman, it was there that Voltaire's young mind was "impregnated with passions for freedom of thought and speech."²⁵¹ Wade, on the other hand, notes that Voltaire was more inclined towards light 'society verse' and controversial topics than toward the socio-political issues of the day.²⁵²

Among the free-thinkers, young Arouet preferred the informal verses of Guillaume Amfrye, abbe de Chaulieu to the more discrete Charles de Marguet de Saint-Denis de Saint-Evremond. The latter who wrote in exile differentiated reason from faith and is said to have declared that "he who wished to know everything, does not know himself".²⁵³ The *double entendre* of "does not know himself" must have created 'double-trouble' for Voltaire. Firstly, it invalidated his aspirations of becoming the 'universal encyclopedic man'. Secondly, the notion of 'knowing the self' as an introspective consciously willed activity would elude him. It would

²⁵¹ Besterman, Voltaire 50.

²⁵² Wade, The Intellectual Development of Voltaire 136.

²⁵³ Besterman, Voltaire 50 ; Wade, Intellectual Development 125. The abbé Guillaume Amfrye Chaulieu(1639-1720). Charles de Marguet de Saint-Denis de Saint-Evremond (1615-1703).

evoke sufficient anxiety that Voltaire would express hostility or disregard toward anyone in search of an identity (e.g., Sophocles, Pascal, Shakespeare). During the Regency and Temple years, young Arouet seemed more inclined to soak-up pleasures of the day rather than concern himself with free-thinking literature.

The egalitarian treatment Voltaire enjoyed at the Temple only added to his sense of entitlement to fame and status. It is said that at a party given by the Prince de Conti, the seventeen year old Arouet exclaimed: “..Here we are all princes or poets”.²⁵⁴ No one snubbed him and it is rather likely that he envisioned himself both a prince and a poet. Being outrageously carefree, Voltaire frightened his father into using his connections to send the youth to Holland with the Abbé de Châteauneuf’s brother, the ambassador designate to this country. In no time young Arouet became involved with a young woman and the comedy which ensued is documented fully in his letters as well as in memoirs published by the ‘maiden’s’ mother.²⁵⁵ Thus began a lifelong history of distinctive relationships with women who would address him as “child” and whom he would call “maman”. This started with young Pimpette at the age of 19 and continued into old age with his niece, Mme. Denis. Not surprisingly, Rousseau, Voltaire’s arch enemy and rival for status of sublime egoist, had similar relationships with women. In both cases jejune antics and childish behaviour portended a lasting developmental arrest which reflected their immature sexuality and child-like intimate relationships throughout their lives.

²⁵⁴ John Hearsey, Voltaire (London : Constable, 1976) 17.

²⁵⁵ The Complete Works of Voltaire 85, ed. Theodore Besterman, Correspondence and related documents , I, December 1704- December 1729, letters D7-D23 (Geneva: Institute et Musée Voltaire, 1968) 9-29.

After aborted attempts to pacify his father and study law, Voltaire anxiously sought to prove his unique literary talents by entering a poetry contest and losing. This 'blunder' cost the winner public humiliation by the lashing tongue of an outraged youth. Society was excoriated by an ode, "*La Chambre de justice*", in which he likened himself to a prophet piercing the walls of injustice. In Besterman's opinion, this work indicated Voltaire's growing social awareness.²⁵⁶ Voltaire would not include this ode in his published Works. The "revolutionary" tone of these lines reflected a rageful youth unable to tolerate the injury of losing in competition rather than an outcry against a corrupt system. Social injustice to young Arouet meant failure to recognize his great talent or agree with his entitlement to privileged status. His emotive language would serve him well in disguising personal interests as important moral issues and maintaining an image of a victim of oppression.

Unlike a rather partial Besterman, Pomeau offers a more balanced review of young Arouet's creative accomplishments and motives. Relevant is the observation that Voltaire's reputation as a scathing satirist was well established before he produced a major work. His terrific gift for publicity propelled him to centre stage as a 'genius of potential' without evidence to back up the claim.²⁵⁷ His notoriety gained by expressing unbridled hostility, however, made him also an easy target for vengeful individuals as well as exasperated authorities. Thus, the circulation of the 'anonymous' "*Regnante puero*" and "*J'ai vu*" landed him in the Bastille. A

²⁵⁶ Besterman, Voltaire 47.

²⁵⁷ Pomeau 72, 78.

confrontation with an aristocrat, the Chevalier de Rohan-Cabot, would result in a three year 'voluntary' exile in England.²⁵⁸

Those who are seduced by the presentation of heroic victimhood fail to understand the blinding power of entitlement. To interpret Voltaire's mishaps as outcries against social inequality is to ignore his blatant elitism and to deny the fact that differential power is integral to most social interactions. Parents and children do not possess equal power, nor should they, and statesmen evoke greater deference than private citizens. In both cases those invested with greater power are also shouldered with greater responsibility. No one among Voltaire's aristocratic friends baited the Regent and all of them agreed that Voltaire was not a member of the inner circle. He, on the other hand, continued to be seduced by the pseudo-intimacy of propinquity. The banter allowed to court scribes and royal tutors he misinterpreted as signs of equality and acceptance. Voltaire would always be utterly surprised and outraged to find himself outside the aristocratic circles of Europe and like a frustrated child would oscillate between bouts of sycophancy and outburst of temper in efforts to get his way.

During this period, Voltaire would assume his *nom de plume* following an eleven month prison sentence in the Bastille. That he was treated well is accepted by all. It should also be noted that the use of the Bastille or other institutions (e.g. monasteries) as 'correction' facilities for youths was common among the bourgeoisie and the aristocracy. For young Arouet, the purported significance of this event is that he left the Bastille a 'changed man' wearing a new

²⁵⁸ 43 Hearsey 30-1. Both poems were circulated in the spring of 1717. Voltaire denied he had written them. *J'ai vu* which dealt with injustices during the reign of Louis XIV was later identified as the work of one Antoine Le Brun. The "*Regnante Puero*" was a personal attack against the Regent alluding to incestual relationships with his daughter.

name. There was nothing unusual about assuming a pen name or stage name. What is telling, in this case, is that Voltaire appropriated the title “de” to designate his genius. And what is even more revealing is his uncanny ability to persuade biographers that the altered name actually reflected a lasting personality change. Into the Bastille went a cocky dissolute young Arouet and out came a focused and socially-minded de Voltaire. The sense of entitlement to a signature of genius shows that rather than being humbled by the experience our hero grew more presumptuous especially in light of the fact that he had no evidence to support his claim to a great talent. His alleged developing social awareness seemed to rest with his growing conviction of deserving honorific titles rather than with concerns for social issues. The supposed “transformation of character” which was solidified after the period of exile in England, shows Voltaire ‘maturing’ into a shrewd social climber with friends placed strategically to enable the circulation of clandestine publications and avoid altercations with the law.²⁵⁹ Rather than a lesson in humility, Voltaire had recognized the value of concealment, the primary *modus operandi* of narcissistic individuals, which would distinguish him throughout his long life.

Being tucked away in prison, however, had profound effects on Voltaire who abhorred anonymity and found “nothing more disagreeable than being hanged in some obscure place”.²⁶⁰ When Voltaire pleaded with acquaintances in his correspondence to be reminded to others, he was not using conventional euphemisms, he meant it literally. For one addicted to attention, to be forgotten is to lose one’s sense of being. It is the panic of oblivion which might account for the acute hatred Voltaire carried for decades towards the Regent who defined the boundaries between

²⁵⁹ Pomeau 85 suggests that the new name signified a changed personality.

²⁶⁰ Wayne Andrews 5.

them by sending him to prison. Pomeau is sensitive to the issue and legitimately questions the nature of Voltaire's animosity towards the Regent whose personal conduct and public stance allowed the libertines and free-thinkers to flourish and publish. What indeed motivated Voltaire in 1733 to condemn the Regent for introducing fear and chaos to the public by spoiling the country with fine arts and sensual pleasures?²⁶¹ Voltaire's criticism was always *ad hominem*, masking personal revenge with the rhetoric of social causes.

According to Pomeau Voltaire reconsidered and rejected the life of "luxe et plaisir" while in prison.²⁶² It is difficult to reconcile this conclusion with Voltaire's future theoretical commendation of quotidian personal indulgences with exotic food, wine and sexual relationships. The fear of chaos he attributed to society was likely a projection of his own rageful anxiety and failure to understand the boundaries of his relationship with the Regent. Their shared socio-religious attitudes and clever repartees did not signal equality of status and a confused Voltaire had to be reminded of the differential of power. Voltaire was publicly confined and unable to change the circumstances which humiliated and frightened him. There is no account of the eleven months he spent in prison. If one accepts as autobiographical his description of imprisonment in the philosophical story *L'Ingénue*, published some fifty years later, prison is a place wholly separate from the rest of the universe and its silence is like death in a cemetery.²⁶³

²⁶¹ Pomeau 80.

²⁶² Pomeau 80-81.

²⁶³ Voltaire *L'Ingénu; Histoire véritable* ed. William R. Jones (Genève : Libraire Droz, Paris: Libraire Minard, 1957) 120-121, Ch.9, "... en silence dans la chambre où il devait être enfermé, comme un mort qu'on porte dans un cimetière....Les deux captifs restèrent séparés de l'Univers entier."

Accordingly, denying Voltaire an audience was like cutting his lifeline and source of energy. The horror of silence and powerlessness explain young Voltaire's anxious hatred toward the Regent. He was surprised and shocked yet again a few years later (1726) when his aristocratic friends did not treat him as an equal and refused to intervene on his behalf against one of their own rank. A despondent Voltaire unable to face his friends retreated into a 'voluntary' exile to recompose himself in England.

Assumptions regarding Voltaire's writing while in the Bastille highlight common biases reflected in the acceptance of his projected self-image. Not backed by factual information, it is said that young Arouet found ingenious ways to write in prison when writing materials were withheld from him. This must have been the case, so goes the argument, seeing that Diderot was inventive enough to write between lines when he was denied paper, and .. "what Diderot did an Arouet could do".²⁶⁴ Voltaire's craftiness is undisputed, but his writing was contingent on having an audience to rouse. The absence of cheering or jeering onlookers in the Bastille was not conducive to a writer who thrived on volatile public reactions. Voltaire, who would rely on the immediate gratification of applause or scandal, must have found eleven months of isolation frightening and uninspiring. Regarding the comparison with Diderot, one could easily accept a verdict of a craftier Voltaire, but as easily reject the notion that he was the more creative one of the two. Judging from Diderot's posthumous publications, he would appear to have the upper hand as an insightful dramatist with artistic integrity and psychological depth. Equally relevant is the fact that Diderot managed to remain in Paris writing and editing the *Encyclopédie* at great peril to himself. Not subscribing to 'heroic victimhood' and lacking Voltaire's unrivaled

²⁶⁴ Parton 109.

propaganda tactics, Diderot remains the relatively unappreciated hard working *philosophe*. In essence, there were many things Diderot did that an Arouet could not do.

Soon after his release from the Bastille, Voltaire produced his first play *Oedipe* thus embarking on a road of impeccably timed ventures. Master at sensing people's desires and partialities, he became quickly aware that the theatre was suffering a "shortage of good pieces" and that influential contemporaries were deploring "the fatal desertion of the French theatre".²⁶⁵ Voltaire obliged and received the desired *succès du scandale* that polarization guarantees - praised or vilified - but talked about by all. Flippancy towards the Church was fashionable and Voltaire was always eager to be in style.²⁶⁶ The play earned him annuities and prizes from the Regent and through the growing exchange in an intellectual market, was also recommended to King George I by English scholars. With this opus Voltaire became "and was to remain for sixty years: the chief ornament of French letters".²⁶⁷ As for the quality of the play, even admirers concede it lacked originality or spontaneity resembling a set of stylized attitudes towards life rather than a creative drama. It seems that those deliberate and calculating traits useful in mastering an audience also stripped him of poetic imagination making his plays technically constructed mechanical forms. Instead of producing inspiring plays, Voltaire would embark on a path of criticizing, especially those whose topics he fancied (e.g., Sophocles and Corneille). By the time he produced his *Temple du goût* (1735), honouring criticism over artistic expression

²⁶⁵ Pomeau 91 attributes the statement to the prince de Conti.

²⁶⁶ Chase 58.

²⁶⁷ Besterman, *Voltaire* 80.

would become a career choice more fitting his temperament.²⁶⁸ This 'youthful' first attempt of *Oedipe* would characterize Voltaire's dramatic career producing, for the court, mediocre plays written in seventeenth century French neo-classical style.

The *Henriade*, which followed, was another production where creativity and execution took second place to popularity of subject.²⁶⁹ Aspiring to the role of a modern Greece or Rome, France did not have an epic extolling its glorious past or present. Voltaire was ready to become the modern Virgil and right this wrong with an "absurd imitation" of the *Aeneid*.²⁷⁰ This amendment was particularly necessary for he believed the French to be a poetic nation in contrast to the philosophical English. This anti-Spanish propaganda piece, written in the style of *gazette rimée*, was first published in Rouen after failing to secure a royal permission for printing. An edition of four thousand copies was clandestinely circulated into the domiciles of women of fashion where they were displayed openly. The book was never banned formally, thus, allowing the clever entrepreneur to use its notoriety and order another edition to be printed immediately.²⁷¹ In the later English edition, Voltaire omitted all references to the exploits of the duc de Sully's ancestors in retaliation for the latter's refusal to support him in his fight with the aristocrat Cabot. The author's retaliation tactics are as revealing as the ingratiating efforts of the original version.

²⁶⁸ Wade *Intellectual Development of Voltaire* 116, 207 .

²⁶⁹ Pomeau's 131 verdict on the quality of this epos was that it was "... an amplified version of his high school exercises".

²⁷⁰ Ibid. Pomeau thinks the *Henriade* was patterned after the *Aeneide* even in having 12 parts. S.G. Tallentyre, *The Life of Voltaire* (New York : Loring & Mussey, 1930) 40 views the *Henriade* as "an absurd imitation of the *Aeneid*."

²⁷¹ Mitford 32-3.

Voltaire wrote for attention from the King and the aristocracy sacrificing accuracy for personal goals and some would argue also for artistic merit.

The *Henriade* like *OEdipe* depicts Voltaire as a moralizing teacher and preacher who used didactic poetry as format and the theatre as venue for lecturing. He would continue to write moralizing poetry and become a court historian where he would develop his talent of story telling.²⁷² As poet and dramatist, his desire and determination would generally exceed his sensibilities, a deficit he managed to conceal with an agile intellect and a remarkable mastery of the language. Never sure that his plays would be appreciated, Voltaire added explanatory essays, which also provided an opportunity to criticize predecessors who wrote on the subject. This irresistible need to control his audience underlay his literary work throughout his life. Already in his mid-forties he would write: "... In the matter of a tragedy or a poem, I do with my characters as I please, I create and destroy at my pleasure". Ira Wade likens this attitude to a puppeteer controlling marionettes mechanically.²⁷³ In defence of Voltaire, one might argue that he simply described the process of creating fiction whereby the poet-dramatist invents and manipulates messages and messengers. But when an author approaching middle age still needs to remind the public of his power as creator, he discloses adolescent insecurity rather than elucidating the creative process. The existence of underlying anxiety is detected by Pomeau in whose judgment

²⁷² Wade, *Intellectual Development of Voltaire* 234. This accusation is levied against Voltaire's *Lettres sur les Anglais*.

²⁷³ Ibid. 394. The quote addressed to the President de Meynieres taken from Fichier Chararaway, Vol. 76, No. 39697. "...Quand il s'agit d'une tragédie ou d'un poème épique, je fais de mes personnages ce qu'il me plait, je suis créateur et destructeur à mon plaisir...".

the *Henriade* “..pâtit d’une évidente timidité”.²⁷⁴ While often questioning Voltaire’s talents and motives Pomeau fails to discern a consistent pattern suggesting a characterological basis for the said deficits. Eschewing psychological explanations is a limiting factor in many so-called objective historical analyses.

Voltaire’s timidity, noted by Pomeau, was not confined to controlling his imaginary characters. He was so enmeshed with the performance that he entered the stage during presentation.²⁷⁵ For Voltaire there was little distinction between fiction and reality. He was always on centre stage acting and controlling. In 1734 he would describe to his friend Cideville how he orchestrated the union between the Duc de Richelieu and Mme. Guide “...like a comedy plot”.²⁷⁶ Whether said in jest or expressing illusions of omnipotence, these statements reveal a world view where reality contracts into a stage and relationships become stylized manipulable actions.

Before proceeding to the next stage of ‘life in exile’, it is important to address Voltaire’s superior business acumen and conduct which like other talents and attributes were consistent throughout his life. Voltaire who epitomized bourgeois desire for social recognition and money was undoubtedly the shrewdest and richest self-made intellectual of the Enlightenment.²⁷⁷ Never

²⁷⁴ Pomeau 132.

²⁷⁵ Parton 122 reports that Voltaire entered the stage during the performance of “*OEdipe*”.

²⁷⁶ Harsey 100.

²⁷⁷ Chase 37.

really impecunious, it was his own wizardry and cunning which made him wealthy.²⁷⁸ Innately suspicious, he showed remarkable restraint in staying out of the “South Sea Bubble” of the early 1720’s, thus avoiding a loss of great sums of money.²⁷⁹ Realizing the potential of commerce, he invested in the *Compagnie des Indes* quite unhindered by notions of the immorality of slave trade and other related iniquities. Such conduct, argue his defenders, was common practice at the time and even the Fathers of the American Declaration of Independence owned slaves. To this is added a defence of his tender age. In 1722 Voltaire was twenty eight years old, not very young even by current standards let alone when contemporary life expectancy would have labeled him middle aged. There was another financial practice which tends to be ignored by biographers, his involvement in the munition trade.²⁸⁰ This behaviour did not reflect lack of knowledge or immaturity, rather it would be typical of Voltaire to profit greatly from wars and to leave most financiers unscathed in his hortatory social diatribes.

Anti-Jewish sentiments were prevalent among the *philosophes* who fought against religious dogma and professed atheism. But Voltaire would evidence a peculiarly unrestrained antagonism akin to racial antisemitism. This display of extreme emotions was reminiscent of the unbridled hostility he manifested towards the Church and the Regent, those who threatened him the most. The Regent curbed his personal power, the Church competed with his claim to teach morality and the Jews tested his ability to tolerate liminal spaces and ‘others’ who paid little heed

²⁷⁸ 65 Miriam Beard, A History of the Business Man (New York: Macmillan Company, 1938) 85; Harsey 88.

²⁷⁹ Beard 418.

²⁸⁰ Ibid. 463-4; Chase 63.

to him. For the present it suffices to note that the man who condemned Jewish usury and disloyalty would become a money lender to most of his friends and sell his services to different monarchs. In a letter written to the Abbé Moussinot, his Jansenist money handler, Voltaire shows great mastery and ease with instructions to collect his dues from the Villars, Richelieus, Guises, D'Estaings and others. Most revealing are his direction to the abbé to avoid associating him (Voltaire) with the dealings in order to maintain the 'appearance' of justice and refrain from damaging his friendships.²⁸¹ The son of the notary was not only a usurer, but one who thrived on the frailties of his closest friends. His love of money, like his thirst for fame, determined his taste in *belle lettre* and the quality of his human relationships.²⁸² An avatar of narcissism and outstanding myth maker, he charmed posterity into accepting unadulterated avarice as reflecting youthful impulsivity and benign love of money of an otherwise great humanist.

The 'exile' years in England (1726-29) constituted another episode that produced more crucial changes in Voltaire's creative and personal development. In to England came a young thirty year old impecunious "deft and superficial poet" and out went a richer cosmopolitan philosopher.²⁸³ Upon closer examination it would appear that Voltaire entered England equipped with several letters of introduction to scholars and statesmen and hardly lacked means.²⁸⁴ He avoided public appearances for three months during which time he learned the language and

²⁸¹ Parton 315 cites a letter addressed to the Abbe Moussinot dated March 21, 1736. Besterman D1042.

²⁸² Pomeau 107, 111 notes that Voltaire used his father's house, but made no efforts towards reconciliation and reflects on the effects love of money had on his taste in *belle lettres*.

²⁸³ Chase 232.

²⁸⁴ Parton 193; Tallentyre 49.

dazzled his hosts with his level of fluency once he emerged from his hideout. Otherwise, he left no mark on the host country and is not mentioned in contemporary English correspondence.²⁸⁵ In later years (1732), an article in the Journal of London intimated that several homes which hosted him closed their doors to him. There were also 'rumors' that he had forged notes and left unpaid debts.²⁸⁶

England and its people, like all other places and occasions, became an opportunity which presented itself for marketing. He would use his impressions and correspondence with his friend, Thieriot, to rouse the French by extolling the "nation of philosophers and clever merchants" under the title *Lettres Philosophiques*. His private notes on this period, however, are filled with deprecatory remarks on the "foolish people who believe in God and trust in ministers." Voltaire did not appreciate people or works of art, he used them. His advocates argue that exploiting any opportunity which presented itself was instinctive to Voltaire, an intuitive genius making instant use of chances rather than crass calculating behaviour.²⁸⁷ To argue he could not help himself is rather insulting to a master calculator who helped himself to a great deal. The notion of intuitive opportunism supports the thesis of a narcissistic instinct for self-preservation of an insecure and unappeasable ego whose relationship to the world was defined by exploitation and domination.

While nothing original seems to have been created in exile, Voltaire was busy honing his publishing and advertising skills. Both in England and in France, he ran an ad campaign "...that

²⁸⁵ Besterman, Voltaire 110.

²⁸⁶ Pomeau 201 does not find this rumor incredible.

²⁸⁷ Chase 138, 195.

would do justice to a highly trained specialist of our own time.”²⁸⁸ Seemingly for no particular reason, he published in 1727 an essay on the civil wars of France. The professed reason was that he was “ordered” to provide a “faithful account of all the useful things and of the extraordinary persons, whom to know and to imitate..”.²⁸⁹ But the essay was soon followed by the epic presenting Henri IV, a king to be emulated. Voltaire could not create without publicity or a good scandal. While in England he was like a man without breath of life unable to infuse theatricality into the English countryside and probably feeling more forlorn than his writings suggest.

²⁸⁸ Chase 124. The campaign is in reference to the essay on civil wars in France he published in 1727 which was designed to advertise *La Henriade*.

²⁸⁹ Besterman, Voltaire 119.

CHAPTER 5

CIREY (1735-1751) : THE MIDDLE AGES OF THRIVING NOTORIETY AND SCANTY MATURATION

The 'critical years' in England where the young poet was exposed to philosophy and science, were followed by years of furtive and clandestine activities that marked Voltaire's life long affair with notoriety. Upon returning to France, Voltaire set out to relearn the prevailing social terrain which included the literary fads, the raging debates and the leading personages. This information was necessary for planning a re-entry that would earn him his rightful place in French society. In the next few years, Voltaire evidenced an uncanny genius at manipulating his lofty and less elevated 'friends' into supporting his causes. Armed with the art of secrecy and outstanding business acumen, he cajoled, bullied and bribed his 'friends' to serve him unsuspectingly. As well as exposing young Voltaire to science and philosophy, mercantile England roused the notarial habits he inherited from his father. To this knowledge he added his own indefatigable energy and obsessive drive which transformed him into an unstoppable money-making machine. Of import though largely unrecognized, is the fact that the exile years in England provided Voltaire respite from an overwhelming personal crisis and enabled him to reconstitute emotionally and plan his future more effectively.

Being fundamentally '*homo economicus*' and realizing he could not count on his friends to help him attain the social status he desired, Voltaire concluded correctly that great financial wealth would afford him a freedom superior to that enjoyed by his aristocratic friends. Investing much of his energy and attention to making money he met with unprecedented success. Intelligent and cunning, he broke the code of a governmental lottery scheme which made him a

very rich man despite the grumbling of authorities.²⁹⁰ This solvency allowed him to procure ongoing financial information, finance clandestine publications and subsidize the aristocratic taste of his friend who would be beholden to him.²⁹¹

The most celebrated publication during the 'quiet' period of 1728-35 and one of his better known works was *Lettres philosophiques*. Published in 1734 the manuscript was ready in 1731, but the author awaited a more propitious moment to release it.²⁹² A long correspondence between Voltaire and his friend Cideville reveals a trail of double dealings and deceit. Jore, the publisher whose father had a history of illicit publications under Louis XIV, was himself no stranger to government harassment and visits to the Bastille. While the latter was under attack and Paris was reading the *Lettres*, Voltaire performed what would become his standard role as heroic victim. The French edition of the *Lettres* included a critique on Pascal's *Pensées* which created an uproar and resulted in orders to arrest the author and burn his book.²⁹³ Voltaire was granted permission to return to Paris in 1735 by the Chief of Police and former school mate. His planning was starting to pay dividends. Voltaireans who justify his clandestine publication tactics and feigned indignation as life saving, overlook the fact that he was protected by powerful friends and suffered less than other contemporary authors and publishers involved in the book-selling trade. For almost all of his publications, furtiveness was less a protective device than a powerful

²⁹⁰ Besterman, *Voltaire* 161.

²⁹¹ Mitford 69.

²⁹² Wade, *The Intellectual Development of Voltaire* 220.

²⁹³ Besterman, *Voltaire* 171-2. The added chapter was titled: "*Remarques sur les pensées de M. Pascal*".

tool of surprise, mystery and control of marketing and image building. Perfecting the art of concealment, was indeed a form of self-preservation whereby satisfying the narcissistic urge to attract attention superseded threats of a *lettre de cachet*.

The opus itself, like the process of its publication, is representative of the author's future style, goals and skills. Here were all the ideas he would reiterate over the years.²⁹⁴ Despite its title there was little philosophical about the *Lettres* other than the writer's evaluations of 'right and wrong' philosophers or scientists. Sensing the potential of the topic to ignite debate, he polarized the subject in order to elicit violent reactions from his readers. There was little new in the content or his views of the English. Voltaire drew heavily from both French (Montesquieu, Bayle, Destouches, Mural) and English sources (Addison, Steele) acknowledging none.²⁹⁵ The novelty of the *Lettres* which portended future works did not reside in his ideas, but in his contentious techniques of presentation and publication. Unlike the more lengthy and serious discourses of previous publications on the topic, his was a short, selective and perfect blend of propaganda and flattery.²⁹⁶ In reducing the spirit of a nation to a simple formula which encompassed all aspects of civilization, Voltaire made the genius of a people accessible to his readers. His goal was to reach as many readers as possible in order to become a celebrity. A proposal inviting the proud French to merge with a foreign way of life, was a guaranteed formula

²⁹⁴ Whitmore 97.

²⁹⁵ Roy Porter, *The Enlightenment* 46.

²⁹⁶ Whitmore 89.

for getting a spirited reaction. Feigning innocence and feeling relatively safe with the Chief of Police on his side, Voltaire became the most talked about man in Paris.

The shortcomings noted for the *Lettres* typify criticisms directed against most of his works. In pursuit of his ideological or aesthetic aims, Voltaire was “impressively unfaithful to history” in generalizing personal impressions and private conversations to reflect national traits.²⁹⁷ Philosophers seem to be paraded for the sake of name-dropping with little reflection and consideration given to their thoughts. Locke, for instance, was represented by incidental asides rather than the content of his philosophical works. Glaring in their absence are core English ideas concerning economics, scientific achievements, deism controversies as well as existing practices of religious discrimination. He was well aware of the stately burial rites bestowed on the Anglican Newton versus the modest Catholic ceremonial given to Pope. But this was a detail, an irritant marring the aesthetic simplicity of an inclusive definition of the English genius. For the purpose of enraging the French, Voltaire chose to ignore English policies on slavery, colonization and wars. Such positions were, arguably, held by other Enlightenment scholars, but there were also those who denounced slavery and espoused greater racial and gender equality (e.g., D’Holbach and Helvétius). Embodying bourgeoisie economy and values, Voltaire concluded that: “...commerce which has made the citizens of England wealthy, has also helped to make them free, and that freedom has in turn expanded commerce. This has made the nation great. Little by little, commerce established the navy that has made England master of the waves. At present the

²⁹⁷ Wade, The Intellectual Development of Voltaire 232 quotes Lanson’s verdict on the *Lettres*.

English have 200 warships.”²⁹⁸ Voltaire seemed to have little difficulty dissociating armies in the service of augmenting commercial opportunities from wars he professedly abhorred. His vision of freedom was limited to enhancing the wealth of the European bourgeoisie.

Conceptually the *Lettres* constituted a catalogue of experiences that fail to produce an organic sense of a way of life.²⁹⁹ Voltaire and his apologists, would often excuse this superficial quality by the urgency to publish and the need to be the first to bring important ideas to the public. Thus, for example, is justified his impoverished version of Newtonian science. Haste is put before depth and accuracy for the sake of informing public opinion. These excuses stand in stark contradiction to a life long history showing Voltaire obsessively reworking his productions. The latter activity warrants further inquiry both with respect to a suspected lack of confidence or commitment to ideas as well as the frequent mediocrity of outcomes. Against the presumed ‘flippant’ nature of the published *Lettres*, stand six years of reviews and revisions. Thus, the publication of 1734 was a deliberate outcome of an author whose appeal to the simplistic via the controversial reflected not only an accurate reading of his public, but also his own ability and goals.

Voltaire seemed to have understood life in simplistic and literal categories which he could manipulate into sets of caustic criticism against ideas or people he did not understand or like. Lacking the capacity for self-reflection, the *sine qua non* for high order conceptualization, he could not rise above mere classification. The glaring absence of synthetic power in his work points to a latent mental rigidity which inhibited the development of a mature psychological

²⁹⁸ Roche 140.

²⁹⁹ Wade, The Intellectual Development of Voltaire 293.

capacity for integrative conceptual thinking. Voltaire created long entertaining lists of anecdotes, but failed to identify theoretical underpinnings to render them into a coherent world view. His was not a conscious effort to eschew the development of comprehensive systems of thought, the presumed anathema of the period. Rather, it was a personal limitation defined by an arrested psychological development. This was a clear case where native intellectual potential was compromised by psychological deficits.

According to Wade, a naive concept of humanity lay at the root of all Voltaire's writings. Such oversimplification is central to a narcissist whose non-integrated ego is incapable of synthesizing complex human experiences. Voltaire's admirers tend to view his simplism mistakenly as a vehicle he used to educate the public. While he read his audience with remarkable accuracy, his unprecedented success was boosted by the coincidence between his mentality and a cultural trend forming a 'perfect fit'. Both Voltaire and the publishing industry thrived on the new power of mass marketing which used and catered to a society that became increasingly dependent on amusement to soothe its anxieties. Voltaire did not evidence a growing maturity as a philosopher or writer over the years and continued to present his ideas often in a disorganized manner bordering on the "niggling and picayune".³⁰⁰ Tireless in his efforts to actualize his talents, he would eventually stumble on a genre suitable for his temperament and skills, the *conte philosophique*, not too long and not too deep, but witty and anecdotal. Precursor of the information age he would use this genre to promote philosophy as a life style and cater to an audience with a short attention span. Voltaire often deplored the extended productions of

³⁰⁰ Ibid., 580.

prominent writers (e.g., Fielding and Swift).³⁰¹ For one reading with the purpose of finding flaws and with little genuine curiosity or empathic appreciation, extensive discourse can be very tiresome.

The prescriptive message of the *Lettres* asking the French to assume English characteristics, might have had sufficient bite to create the desired effect. But Voltaire needed a grand re-entry desperately and was not prepared to risk less than a true uproar. He produced a whale of a splash with an addendum to the *Lettres* he titled “*Remarques sur les pensées de M. Pascal*”. His unrestrained attack reveals an unformed mind which led apologists to argue that these notes were not meant for publication and only reflect a youthful enthusiasm.³⁰² Upon publication of the *Lettres*, young Voltaire was forty years old and approaching middle age even by current standards. As for the possibility of a publication *malgré lui*, Voltaire’s correspondence with his publisher discloses a deliberate and justified plan for publishing the *Remarques* with the purpose of assailing the public with a sensation.³⁰³

Besterman, in typical unrestrained support, accepts Voltaire’s opinions on Pascal finding his “argumentum ad hominem” “..unavoidable”.³⁰⁴ Others are more of the opinion that Voltaire’s tantrum suggests he did not grasp the Pascalian notion of “*le coeur a ses raisons que la raison ne connaît pas*” or the notion that God can be sensed through the heart, but cannot be proven

³⁰¹ Ibid., 249.

³⁰² Durant & Durant 370.

³⁰³ Besterman, *Correspondence* 596 cites Voltaire declaring..” *Il y a déjà longtemps que j’ai envie de combatte ce géant*”.

³⁰⁴ Besterman, *Voltaire* 174.

logically.³⁰⁵ Interestingly, Voltaire also failed to understand that Locke, too, was arguing the inability of human reason to scrutinize God's will.³⁰⁶ Pascal was the enemy because to Voltaire "...our condition is precisely to think about outside things with which we have a necessary connection.... To think about oneself, apart from natural things, is to think about nothing at all."³⁰⁷ Fleeing from self-knowledge he was trapped in rationalized material existence. Voltaire could not grasp the tragic in life presented in poetry, drama or philosophy except in its concrete form of material want and physical pain. This is why he did not understand Shakespeare, Pascal, or Socrates. While he was clueless about the affairs of the heart and soul, he was well versed with mechanisms for capturing an audience's full attention. He was a great diverter who worked tirelessly to keep his audience entertained and attentive rather than demand that they ponder the human condition.

During this 'interim period' between England and Cirey, Voltaire also developed his career as a historian. The production of *Charles XII* was not different from previous efforts whereby the author reduces history to a moralizing tale or drama. The emphasis was on elegance, style and Voltairean morality where the winner is the 'right man'. The manner in which he composed *Charles XII* exemplifies his method of inquiry, sources of information and use of friendships. Conversations with the Baron Frédéric Ernest Fabrice, ambassador for Holstein, were the basis for this historico-political analysis much like house parties in England had informed

³⁰⁵ Wade, The Intellectual Development of Voltaire 585.

³⁰⁶ Whitmore 122.

³⁰⁷ Hulliung 13.

the *Lettres*.³⁰⁸ And preparing for his future *magnus opus* on the life and times of Louis XIV, Voltaire, already in 1734, enlisted his employee/friend, Thierot, to secure him anecdotal information for which he foresaw a greater return than that which was produced by their correspondence which had been the foundation for the *Lettres*.³⁰⁹

There is little political analysis in *Charles XII* and what emerges is a personal philosophy which favours the grand sovereigns as creators of great civilizations.³¹⁰ First prints of this work were circulated privately in Paris by a helpful Duc de Richelieu, a school friend. Officially, it was printed in Rouen where Cideville, another school friend, was the President of the *Parlement*.³¹¹ Voltaire's plan of establishing a viable social network was yielding the desired results. It is during this period that his intellectual and psychological styles crystallized to reveal an unappeasable thirst for acclaim, a predatory alertness to others' frailties (friends and audience) and superb marketing skills. His artistic and conceptual powers will always be inferior to his scheming and indisputable genius at image building.

These years (1728-34) also saw Voltaire's personal likes and dislikes put forward as a universal standard of taste entitled *Le Temple du Goût*.³¹² In a style that seems to disarm many

³⁰⁸ Mitford 136.

³⁰⁹ The letter was addressed to Nicolas-Claude Thieriot. Lunéville, June 12, 1735. "...I may ask you from time to time for anecdotes concerning the age of Louis XIV. Remember this may be useful to you one day, and that work would earn you as much as twenty volumes of *Philosophical Letters*." Brooks ed. 45-6. Besterman D. 857.

³¹⁰ Pomeau 215.

³¹¹ Hearsey 90.

³¹² *Ibid.*, 94.

intelligent readers, then as now, he once again expressed damning opinions “gaily, charmingly and innocently”.³¹³ In assuming the role of arbiter of taste, Voltaire could expand his criticism to include all activities of a civilization and become master critic, a role befitting both his temperament and his aspiration of becoming the universal man. The final version of this work was a restrained product modified to accommodate the recommendations made by his friend Cideville. The latter argued against a prevailing one sided negativity levied against many writers and demanded more suitable recognition for accomplished French literary masters such as Molière, La Fontaine, Racine and Corneille.³¹⁴ Many of Voltaire’s final versions were the product of efforts at moderation by friends or as the result of public feedback. What was often held in check was unbridled hostility and lack of appreciation of others rather than expressions of a free spirit. Giving free reign to his thoughts and feelings would have likely revealed more accurately the character of an irascible and despondent individual with an inordinate sense of entitlement unable to value and enjoy the human *esprit* he purported to exalt.

While evolving into a philosopher/historian/critic, Voltaire the poet/dramatist released two plays: *Zaïre* (1732) and *La Mort de César* (1731). The latter written ‘*dans le goût anglais*’ shows him affected by the visual displays in Shakespeare’s *Julius Caesar*, but totally oblivious to the tragedy conveyed in Brutus’ failure to stop tyranny personified in Anthony. This was typical Voltaire, compensating for lack of poetic power and dramatic sense with technically crafted

³¹³ Tallentyre 69.

³¹⁴ Wade, *The Intellectual Development of Voltaire* 208-215 cites Cideville’s letter to Voltaire on March 28, 1733. This letter appeared only in Besterman’s edition of Voltaire’s *Correspondence* which accounts for earlier erroneous attributions of restraint to the growing maturity of the author.

verses delivered in an overstated fashion.³¹⁵ *Zaïre*, which he wrote purportedly in three weeks, aimed to address two issues. First, by his own admission, it was a response to popular demand that he add an element of love to his plays. Second, Orientalism and Muslim topics which were in vogue provided as much a stage for spectacular costumes as an opportunity to render an opinion. Most revealing, however, are the plot and its resolution. The protagonist dies reclaiming her Christian roots and the Sultan pledges himself to monogamy. Voltaire used Islam to fight Christian clericalism, but reduced the religion of the Prophet to a fraud.³¹⁶

Voltaire's frequent references to various cultures and religions has deceptively led to a perception of tolerance and open-mindedness. Ultimately, in almost all his works, the moral and right way of life is his own special version of Christianity. Concluding his exaltation of China as the best regulated kingdom on earth, he could not imagine a higher endorsement for Confucius than canonization.³¹⁷ The commendation of the saintly order was not a figure of speech for Voltaire was rather addicted to religious imagery. He referred to the *philosophes* as apostles (most likely seeing himself at the head of the table) and denounced Rousseau as Judas³¹⁸. It is also noteworthy that the above recommendation for canonization paralleled a vehement anticlericalism Voltaire voiced in *Candide* (1759). Voltaireans would see no contradiction between these events

³¹⁵ Andrews 12 cites Daniel Mornet, *La Pensée Française à la Dix-huitième siècle* (Paris, 1926), assessing Voltaire's plays as no more entertaining than school boy exercises.

³¹⁶ Pomeau 230.

³¹⁷ The reference is to Voltaire's work *Essai sur les mœurs*, published in 1758. Durant & Durant 505.

³¹⁸ Hulliung 155 cites Voltaire's letters in Besterman, *Correspondence*, Vol. LXIII, p. 42.

arguing he was a Deist who fought abuses of organized religion. Canonization could, however, be regarded an ideology that bordered on if not exemplified clerical abuses of power and promotion of superstition. This inconsistency was steered by a narcissistic philosophy of practical opportunism whereby one's views are defined by the immediate context. Coherence and commitment are a disadvantage when constant reinventing of the self is paramount to keeping ahead of fads.

This period, witnessed also Voltaire's first version of his infamous *La Pucelle*. This 'burlesque epic' was yet another controversial production that required coining a new literary definition to explain such a vulgar attack, this time on superstitious aspects of the Church. Some of the cantos were extremely obscene and indecent forcing apologists to conjure up the convoluted notion that the salaciousness was designed to protect him from pirated versions that might compromise his safety.³¹⁹ Another explanation offered is that the gratuitous sexual violence depicted in the piece might have reflected his rage against a growing sexual impotence. The latter would be consistent with Voltaire's tendency to project his deficits, desires and beliefs as universal truths. A genuine narcissist, he externalized his own reactions reflexively as "*vrai*" and with an unwavering power of self-deception he managed to persuade the public of their validity.³²⁰ Motivated by the need to sustain a brittle sense of self, this remarkable avatar of rationalization

³¹⁹ Vigil W. Topazio, "Voltaire's Pucelle: a study in burlesque", Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century, ed. Theodore Besterman (Geneva: Institute et Musée Voltaire, 1956) 207-223, 208.

³²⁰ Wade, The Intellectual Development of Voltaire 678 argues that Voltaire could not separate "*vrai*" from "*vraisemblable*".

managed to convince the world that humanity was defined by his psychological and sexual angst, shallow intellectual conceptualizations and an idiosyncratic and slippery religio-moral code.

Against the notion that *La Pucelle* represents a moment of jocosity in Voltaire's otherwise serious efforts stand the writer's own memoirs disclosing four years of deliberations concerning this product. The Duc de Richelieu encouraged Voltaire to respond to Chapelain's heroic poem about the Maiden of Orleans which had already been satirized by Boileau. Voltaire was concerned that a maiden with a taste for men's clothing and a pathetic life story would not generate enough public interest. He did believe, however, he could give the topic a "jocular" treatment for which he was applauded by his friend.³²¹ Not only did he ponder over it for four years before publishing the first cantos, but he literally worked on it for over twenty years making it his longest poetical work published officially in 1759. And after investing so much time and effort the verdict delivered is that he managed to create a "curieux gauchissement, en vérité!"³²² Time and again, Voltaire portrayed his work as hurried stammering to ward off much deserved criticism and time and again he succeeded in marketing this idea despite evidence to the contrary. Voltaire worked long and hard to create, more often than not, mediocre work. His brilliance emanated not from his creative powers, but from his unflinching belief in his genius and indisputable talent to propagate and sustain a myth of 'an unrealized potential'.

La Pucelle, like *Zaïre*, *Lettres*, *La mort de César* or the *Henriade*, was an imitation of an earlier famous production. Like all his preceding works *Pucelle* was inferior to the original, *Orlando furioso*, by Ariosto. Voltaire was unable to accomplish Ariosto's "lucidity and

³²¹ Parton 251.

³²² André Delattre, *Voltaire L'impétueux* (Paris: Mercure de France, 1957) 96.

clearness” and “lacking the fertile imagination of Ariosto, was unable to copy successfully the pattern he had set for himself. He succeeded in capturing only the outward form.... Voltaire lacked Ariosto’s varied style and ability to adapt himself to the various scenes of battle, love, gallantry and humour.... {His} characters were more like puppets that Voltaire manipulated as he spun his tale”.³²³ Similar verdicts are often pronounced for his dramatic, poetic, historical or philosophical works. His imitation of Virgil (*Henriade*) Shakespeare (*Zaire*, *Mort de César*, *Brutus*), Bayle, Montesquieu, and others, were found equally lacking. Voltaire who seldom created original material managed to impart an impression of a non-conformist with novel ideas. Those who laud his imaginative powers tend to confuse his unorthodox and controversial presentations with originality. Lacking empathic insight, Voltaire could only copy patterns, but failed to capture the psychological nuances as well as the delicacy and charm of his models.

One of the highlights of this ‘barren period’ was the circulation of an anonymous publication, known as the “*Portrait*” during 1734-5.³²⁴ The piece was a sketch of Voltaire’s character and work. Ignored by many historians and biographers, the “*Portrait*” is often dismissed as a vengeful act of jealous and vindictive contemporaries. Those who give it more credence tend to focus on the damage it caused Voltaire. Leigh suggests that the negative impact

³²³ Topazio 210.

³²⁴ The analysis of the portrait is based on texts cited in : Pomeau 267-8 and in R.A. Leigh “An anonymous eighteen-century character-sketch of Voltaire”, *Studies on Voltaire*, ed. Besterman (241-272) 242-4. The portrait has been attributed to several personages (e.g., the marquis de Charost, the abbé de la Mar, chevalier Ramsay and Frederick the great. Young marquis (or comte) de Charost seems to be an acceptable option. Voltaire disagreed with this on the grounds that the young aristocrat had never met him and was rather inclined to attribute it to Ramsay. The latter was subject to the Voltairean special vindictive wrath reserved for special enemies. Leigh 251.

of the character sketch was partly related to its accuracy.³²⁵ The physical description and mien of a scheming malicious satyr is also echoed in dossiers of a contemporary Police Inspector of the Book Trade, Joseph d'Hémery, who deemed Voltaire less dangerous than Diderot.³²⁶ One could argue that the later portrayal (1748) of the Inspector was influenced by the "*Portrait*", but his benign treatment of Voltaire suggests these observations were independently informed.

The potential damage of the "*Portrait*" emanated from its disputing Voltaire's genius and integrity. The latter was particularly harmful to Voltaire who was in great need to appear mature and respectable in his tireless efforts to secure a place in the *Académie*. One of the few inaccurate attributions made by the anonymous author was that Voltaire was motivated by money more than by fame. Voltaire was very wealthy by 1734 and did not rely on his publications to increase his fortune. He was too astute a businessman not to realize the limited monetary rewards of the publishing industry at the time. Frequent allusions to the marketability of his publications reflected more likely concern regarding public approval rather than finances. Voltaire was correct in assuming that financial solvency would allow him to express his opinions freely and he was, more than any contemporary, remarkably successful in realizing this goal. The sketcher of the "*Portrait*" understood that for Voltaire work was a question of survival, as elemental as breathing air. What he failed to realize was that the needed oxygen were fame and attention rather than money. Voltaire who was keenly aware of his need, presented it characteristically as universal truth:

“...How much toil and trouble for this smoke of vainglory !

³²⁵ Ibid., 246.

³²⁶ Darnton, The Police Inspector 181.

Nevertheless, what should we do without that chimera?
It is as necessary to the soul as food is to the body. I have
made 'Eriphile' and 'Caesar' all over again; and all for that
smoke." (September 1732)³²⁷

Pomeau's complaint with the "*Portrait*" is that it distorted Voltaire's future image by generalizing from a limited sample of achievements and conduct up to the age of forty.³²⁸ A follow-up of Voltaire's next forty years, however, suggests that the image depicted by the anonymous writer stood the test of time. Deficits in originality, depth, erudition, poetic sensibility, etc., noted by the portraitist, have been reiterated in scholarly assessments that accessed all Voltaire's known publications. That he sought grandeur, but despised the grand cannot be missed by anyone making their way through the massive written material he left behind. That his ever changing interests were motivated by a thirst for fame rather than by genuine curiosity is a verdict passed by many today. Pomeau's case for the notion that one could be simultaneously a poet, an historian and a philosopher is a valid one. The portraitist, however, did not fault Voltaire for his versatility, but rather condemned him for adapting his calling to fads in order to insure notoriety and uphold an image of leader in popular opinion polls. Two centuries later, this assessment is adopted by many including Pomeau.³²⁹

The "*Portrait*" deserves greater attention than hitherto granted. This pamphlet affirmed Voltaire's apparent success of marketing himself as "l'homme extraordinaire".³³⁰ While predicting

³²⁷ Letter to Fromont cited in Parton 279.

³²⁸ Pomeau 272.

³²⁹ Wade and Pomeau often identify fame rather than genuine interest as the prime motivator behind Voltaire's publications.

³³⁰ Pomeau 269.

correctly that scandals attract attention, Voltaire failed to realize that exposure makes one also a vulnerable target especially when the road to stardom is paved with the antipathetic opinions of others. The fact that by 1762 anti-Voltaire sentiments ran high can hardly be credited to the 1735 'character assassination'. In producing this "morceau brillant",³³¹ the anonymous portraitist was aided generously by his subject whose measure of success was that " [It] is detested and read by all the world".³³² In using Virgil, Voltaire's poetic ego-ideal, to deliver the summary verdict: *non vultus non color unus*, the anonymous sketcher evidenced a sardonic wit that matched his subject's notorious mocking power. But the portraitist might not have possessed a rage equal to that which his subject reserved for those who crossed him and was wise to remain anonymous.

Overall, the 'interim' period was not unlike other presumably more productive times. Once establishing financial independence, Voltaire wrote with typical frenetic and obsessional urgency. He wrote for the public and established himself as the dramatist of the people. Creating scandals he made enemies and admirers while becoming the most talked about person in Paris. Rather than barren, this period saw the formation of conditions that would be indispensable for Voltaire's future success: financial conditions were set, a devoted and beholden social network was established and an image of an *homme extraordinaire* was widely disseminated. Thus was set the stage for the next forty years whereby enactment of performances transmitted in a private and

³³¹ Ibid., 268.

³³² Voltaire's delight with the sensational impact of the *Temple du Goût* was expressed in 1733 in these words. Cited in Parton 293.

an obscure language would be used to convey universal truths.³³³ By all accounts an unprecedented feat and one which is yet to be repeated.

The 'barren period' which followed the 'exile period' ended successfully in scandals and notoriety that required a change in Voltaire's living arrangements. Not competing successfully with the new 'darlings of Paris', the scientists, Voltaire settled into a relationship with Émilie de Breteuil, Marquise du Châtelet on her husband's estate at Cirey. He announced to friends, and anyone else he thought needed to know, that he was ready to retire from society's frivolities in order to complete his education. Essentially, he planned to hone his deficient knowledge of science for the purpose of popularizing Newtonian cosmology and with it surpass the more established scientists.

Voltaire, who upon returning from England and as late as April 1735, lamented the retreat of poetry in the face of a more scientific world, Janus faced wrote two months later that poetry should never be more than an ornament to reason.³³⁴ For the next few years, Voltaire studied Descartes, Pascal, Malebranche, Locke and Newton to champion the fads he seemingly had deplored. Ira Wade offers two unflattering reasons for this learning spree. One was Voltaire's need to upgrade himself in the areas of science and philosophy in order to keep up with his lover. The second was his unappeasable need to outshine his contemporaries as the "*uomo universale*" and leader of the intellectual *avant garde*. Contrary to popular conception, Voltaire was not

³³³ The idea of an obscure language used by Voltaire and its effect on assessment of his work is developed in the next chapter.

³³⁴ Voltaire to Cideville, April 16, 1735, Besterman D. 863 is cited in Richard A. Brooks ed. 44. The later letter addressed to the abbé d'Olivet is cited in Wade, The Intellectual Development of Voltaire 350.

naturally curious. Maintaining vigilant attention to fads, popular currents and fashionable milieu is a *sine qua non* for upholding the status of forerunner. Thus, he was a poet at the Temple, a dramaturge in Paris, a budding philosopher in England and an upcoming scientist in Cirey. Ironically, for all his efforts to be the first, Voltaire was trendy rather than original, mostly echoing society, but doing it with unrivaled *éclat*.

In her correspondence with Richelieu, her former lover and Voltaire's good friend, Émily declared that the purpose of her relationship with Voltaire was to save him (Voltaire) from himself.³³⁵ She believed he was dissipating his intellectual energies with his provocative behaviour and ensuing theatrics seeking refuge from real or imaginary persecutors. Émily did not understand that his provocations were planned and that theatricality nurtured and sustained him. For Voltaire life was an ongoing play he wanted to write and direct. Some argue that Émily's emotional demands had a draining effect on Voltaire's intellectual productivity, a conclusion which adopts Voltaire's lamentations, but ignores documented facts to the contrary. Cirey was a safe playground for Voltaire and Émily, it would appear, was more of a facilitator and catalyst for his intellectual growth rather than a drain.³³⁶ She stimulated him with her own knowledge and intelligence and provided the best tutors for him through her connections.

Upon arriving at Cirey, Émily was clearly proficient in science, philosophy and critical deism, the domains Voltaire planned to upgrade himself in. Her correspondence with

³³⁵ Mitford 71.

³³⁶ Besterman, Voltaire 176-186 notes that she stood in the way of Voltaire's effort to write the history of Louis XIV. He is also less inclined to acknowledge contemporaries' assessment of her intelligence and superior comprehension of scientific issues and methods. Rather defensively, he tries to demonstrate that Voltaire would have done well without her. Voltaire knew better.

contemporary scholars (e.g., Bernouilli, Maupertuis and Clairaut) shows them treating her with professional respect.³³⁷ Her extant works include the *Institutions de Physique* (1740), the *Dissertation sur la nature et la propagation du feu* (1744), the commentary on Newton published posthumously as the *Principes mathématiques de la philosophie naturelle* (1759) and 740 pages of critical deism examining the Old and New Testaments. Mme du Châtelet's analyses, whether scientific or metaphysical, reflect an ability to respect the human mind in search of truth and to accept genius with its foibles. Not influenced by fads, her critical thinking was not restricted to the English and included also German, Italian and French sources. Unlike Voltaire who could not regard for long merit in others, Émilie was more interested in discovering positive contributions from various points of view rather than rejecting ideas for their flaws.³³⁸ She was also more honest and straightforward in presenting her opinions. When she wrote the *Réflexion sur le bonheur* she identified her audience clearly as *les gens du monde* and did not pretend to address humanity in general.³³⁹

Noteworthy is the fact that Émilie, who was reputed to reject the validity of history thought it necessary to trace the evolution of concepts in the scientific/philosophical thinking of the time. Moreover, it was Émilie who forced Voltaire to probe into metaphysical problems of science thus helping him become the "grand historian of science".³⁴⁰ Voltaire himself acknowledged, albeit indirectly, Emily's contribution to his intellectual development and work.

³³⁷ Ibid., 183 identifies himself as publisher of such letters, but gives no reference.

³³⁸ Wade, *The Intellectual Development of Voltaire* 281.

³³⁹ Mitford 188.

³⁴⁰ Wade, *The Intellectual Development of Voltaire* 277.

Disguised by a jocosity that borders on parody, he remarked in a letter to Frederick, Crown Prince of Prussia, that “..Minerve dictait et j’écriverais”.³⁴¹ He dedicated his *Éléments* to Émily and praised her intelligence in his correspondence during these years. Voltaire’s Biblical criticisms published in 1762 as *Sermon des cinquantes*, drew heavily upon Émily’s works, from analysis down to examples.³⁴²

While passions and jealousy punctuated their relationship, his were displayed more at the beginning and hers became more frequent with time, Émily and Voltaire spent much of their time together studying and performing his plays for privileged guests. Being psychologically a rescuer, Émily assumed a maternal posture in an arrangement that enabled and perpetuated Voltaire’s impulsive adolescent-like behaviour. Overtly intense but very brief grieving cycles were typical of Voltaire throughout his life. He recuperated with remarkable speed from professed great personal losses (e.g., his sister’s death) and Émily’s death was no exception. His eulogy was not very flattering and the distress expressed to his niece was replaced quickly with juvenile sex-talk.³⁴³

Voltaire’s short-lived heightened emotional reactions are interpreted often to signify a high-strung, impetuous man whose feelings though deep were not “realized” nor extended over a long period of time.³⁴⁴ This emotional style is often apparent in individuals with personality disturbances for whom histrionic demonstrations of emotions do not signify depth of feeling. To

³⁴¹ Ibid., 273.

³⁴² Ibid., 549 alludes to the *Examination de la Genèse and Religion chrétienne analysée*.

³⁴³ Mitford 270 alludes to letter Voltaire had written to Mme. Denis.

³⁴⁴ Delattre, *Voltaire l’impétueux* and Torrey, N. L., *The Spirit of Voltaire* (New York, 1938).

the contrary, such emotional exhibitionism often marks an absence of empathic sensitivity and deep feeling. In the ego structure of disordered personalities, amplified emoting is correlative with other overstated reactions such as idealization, pathological rage and obsessional preoccupation with retribution. Voltaire fits this style remarkably well. "...She never knew the horrors of death; that she left to us" lamented Voltaire who knew that Émily's condition had deteriorated to a point she suffered visibly severe physical discomfort and pain.³⁴⁵ Apologists would like us to believe this was an expression of great grief. This example of tasteless theatricality, however, is consistent with a life-long exhibition of emotional shallowness. It reveals a non-empathic man enveloped by impregnable self-centeredness. In her death, bloated and suffering, Émily did not perform well enough to assume the role of heroine in his play.

Voltaire's support of Émily rested largely with financing her appetites for luxury. His indulgences were limited to the typical philanthropic treatment he saved for close friends. He allowed her to spend great sums of money to make her quarters sumptuous and according to some "*d'une saloperie à dégouter*" and later presented the expenses to her husband as a loan.³⁴⁶ He did forgo some of the debts after Émily's death, rendering himself a benevolent benefactor in his own mind and that of others. Duplicity was for ever a necessity with Voltaire, less for safety reasons, than for the survival of his brittle and consuming ego. Publically, he placed Émily high above monarchs following their reunion in 1741, while in letters to Frederick the Great he

³⁴⁵ Quoted in Mitford 270.

³⁴⁶ The description of Emily's living quarters as overly cluttered was made by Mme de Graffigny, a widow who stayed at Cirey upon the request of the Marquise de Richelieu. In her correspondence she tended to be less gracious towards her hostess than her host, i.e., Voltaire. Wade 262.

complained that she had made him “lose his king”.³⁴⁷ This was a game he had to play, say ardent proponents, in order to maintain his position with the King which enabled him to influence European politics and the spirit of humanity, etc. This naive outlook concerning Voltaire’s power and the Prussian King’s malleability, accepts Voltaire’s puerile school year fantasies to mold European politics with his little hands. This is another example where Voltaire’s uncanny image building skills disarm intelligent people into accepting his puerile projections despite evidence to the contrary.³⁴⁸

Correspondence between Voltaire and Frederick, Crown Prince of Prussia, started in August 1736. Forever hungry for validation, the former sent copies of the letter he received from the prince to people he deemed important while enjoining them to keep it a secret.³⁴⁹ Taking care of the Prince’s image and protecting his own future, Voltaire corrected the letters of his ‘young protege’ before disseminating them among his ‘friends’ in Paris. Thus began an exchange of flattery between two ambitious men who vied for the position of the most influential person in Europe. The Crown Prince was playing the part of an enlightened monarch while Voltaire was enacting his school fantasies of ‘juggling Europe’s fate in his hands’. Both appropriated the role of shaping the new ‘European spirit’ and were equally duplicitous in heaping praise on each other while devaluing each other in correspondence with others. In this exchange Voltaire revealed himself most flexible with his principles and morals.

³⁴⁷ Mitford 163.

³⁴⁸ The game-like correspondence between Voltaire, Frederick, Richelieu and others during The Seven years War is addressed in the next chapter reviewing *Candide*.

³⁴⁹ Mitford 90.

In September 1740, delighted by the reception he received from Frederick, Voltaire helped the Enlightened Despot compose a manifesto justifying the Prussian attack on the Bishop/Prince of Liege. Upon learning that his composition would be delivered to the Bishop by 2000 soldiers, Voltaire burst into a cheer. Pacifism and moral concerns were secondary to and always in the service of self-aggrandizement. When the eighty-seven year old Cardinal Fleury admonishingly asked him to 'grow up' and show loyalty to France, Voltaire responded with a letter to Frederick where he praised him for being the peacemaker of Europe and applauded him for "being too quick for the old man".³⁵⁰ After this letter was circulated in Paris, most likely with the helping hand of the Prussian monarch, an embarrassed Voltaire asked a gleeful Frederick to deny its authenticity. The middle aged scholar appears, once again, to have miscalculated naively his exaggerated influence on 'his student' and on European politics.

To his 'naivety' would soon be added an abjectness which epitomizes the shiftiness of narcissistic self-serving servility. Canvassing to succeed Fleury, who died in January 1743, in the *Académie*, Voltaire wrote a letter to members he also circulated in Paris and Versailles. In this letter he presented himself as a devout Catholic, great patriot and follower of Newton who more than any other scholar believed in God. His greatest pleasure, he stressed, would be to deliver the inaugural speech, reserved for new members, which would allow him to praise the heads of Church and State. Stooping lower still, he wrote a letter to the Bishop of Mirepoix denying authorship of the *Lettres Philosophiques*. Neither sycophancy nor abnegation secured him the desired seat. Forced to eat humble pie he went to play in the Prussian Court instead. Voltaire

³⁵⁰ Voltaire to Frederick II, King of Prussia, June 30, 1742, Besterman D. 2623. Andrews 46.

earned a seat in the *Académie* in 1746 and, by all accounts, delivered the promised insipid and obsequious inaugural speech.³⁵¹

The correspondence between Frederick and Voltaire exposes two ambitious and insincere men engaged in infantile stunts. It shows the younger Frederick often outsmarting his mentor whose great need to pursue this relationship often led him to compromise his integrity and on occasion also his safety. From the very first letter, in September 1736, we hear a defensive Voltaire agreeing with the Crown Prince how it is vile to be “merely a satirical poet, writing only to disparage others.”³⁵² Blinded by his addiction to fame and status, the brilliant poet was unaware of the Prince’s ironic and dismissive tone. Voltaire would swallow other rebukes from his ‘imperial student’ who did not appear to be overcome by the mentor’s wit or philosophy. When Voltaire admonished the King for invading Silesia and embroiling Europe in a war, the latter displayed a wit and sarcasm that would have made his mentor proud. First, he justified his behaviour with what he believed was a core Voltairean trait, following fads. Accordingly, he protested that “It is the fashion now to make war”. Second, he rejected Voltaire’s self-professed pacifism by pointing out the latter’s vicious verbal warfare with his literary rivals. He reminded his mentor of “the time when, if you {Voltaire} had an army, it would have marched against Desfontaines, Rousseau and Van Duren”, his three archenemies.³⁵³

³⁵¹ Mitford 280; Andrews 50.

³⁵² Voltaire to Frederick, Crown Prince of Prussia, September 1, 1736, Besterman. D. 1139. Brooks 58.

³⁵³ Mitford 169 does not identify the source of the quote.

The Prussian King and Voltaire had in common also their immature sexuality. Voltaire left a detailed description of the then Crown Prince's daily regimen. Accordingly, the morning routine included 'play time' with a favourite young lieutenant or cadet. A somewhat less direct exhibitionism was displayed in the dining room where the main ornament was a picture depicting humans and animals engaged in sexual activity.³⁵⁴ Much like his student, Voltaire evidenced an arrested sexuality where the evocative adolescent never matured into a full adult. According to a recent article by David Wootton, this developmental arrest can be attributed to sexual abuse which was rampant in Jesuit schools. In support of his thesis, Wootton cites excessively hostile references Voltaire made against Jesuits in his works and correspondence.³⁵⁵ Emotive language always served Voltaire well in attracting attention and tended to reflect self-indulgent expressiveness rather than honest feeling. His extravagant display of enmity epitomizes a narcissist's aptitude to create whole cosmogonies out of personal resentments. The amplified hostility directed against the Jesuits was a strategy he used to champion the trendy cause of anti-clericalism and might have had little to do with childhood wounds. On the other hand, the Jesuits who were historically the primary educators in France, likely earned Voltaire's wrath by posing a threat to his aspirations of becoming the grand preacher of morality. Ultimately, the Jesuits, who were banished in 1762, were an easy target, unprotected by Church or State.

Wootton uses the thesis of childhood sexual trauma also to hypothesize latent homosexuality. His evidence consists of a poem with erotic nuances Voltaire dedicated to Lord Harvey, his description of Mme. Châtelet as "a great man" and a letter addressed to the Duc de

³⁵⁴ Ibid., 180-81.

³⁵⁵ Wootton 137-155.

Richelieu declaring his commitment to Frederick: “ I gave myself to him passionately, blindly, and without reflection”.³⁵⁶ None of the instances in the above sample offers strong support to a thesis of homosexuality. First, Voltaire’s correspondence with women, young and old throughout his life, is strewn with expressions suggesting permeable boundaries between sentiments of affection and lustful thrills. Porous boundaries tend to underlie inadequate psycho-social development that manifests itself as fawning behaviour rather than in sexual orientation. Lord Harvey was one of the few remaining of Voltaire’s associates from England and thus clearly an object of regard, but not necessarily one with sexual appeal. Second, referring to Émily as a ‘great man’ reveals his valuation of women rather than his need to imagine her a man for purposes of sexual arousal. And lastly, the fifty-seven year old Voltaire writing to his friend was lamenting the injustices he suffered from the hands of Frederick the Great. This was vintage Voltaire assuming a victim role. Diversionary tactics are commonly used by narcissists whose fragile identity oscillates between the polar opposite of entitlement and heroic victimhood. Not acknowledged for their singularity, narcissists feel forever victimized, an image Voltaire marketed with unprecedented success.

Voltaire’s sexual orientation is of less consequence than the immature exhibitionistic behaviour apparent in his childish delight with graphic pornography and verbal promiscuity. In his mid-fifties he was as adolescent as in his mid twenties, verbally daring with sexual innuendos or explicit vulgarity while lamenting the limits of his frail and sickly body. While he wrote to his niece, Mme. Denis, in 1747 that his “heart and phallus send you the most affection” there is little

³⁵⁶ Ibid., 140-144. Voltaire met Lord Harvey while in exile in England and corresponded with him for years.

reason to believe this relationship was actually consummated.³⁵⁷ Voltaire, who was rushing to her arms in his letters, tended to procrastinate his actual arrivals and was hardly ever alone with her. Declaring himself in his youth unfit for love was probably an honest appraisal ignored by historians who mistook it for a figure of speech or a civil rejection of pursuing lovers. Tactless allusions to heightened sexual arousal in his letters reflected his tendency to be a bit more extreme than fashion allowed. Letter-writing was fashionable in the eighteenth century and lustful exchanges were also quite common. Furthermore, a relationship with one's niece was not deemed incestuous in France where such marriages occurred with Papal dispensation.³⁵⁸ What might have been unique in Voltaire's affair was the fact that he addressed her as "my child" while sending her a phallic salutation. Infusing lust with affection, regardless of the age of the love object or type of relationship, reflects promiscuity and fickleness suggestive of deficits in the principle of relatedness as established in the relation of an individual to the parent. Unfavorable bonding with the primary caregiver hampers future capacity to experience a mature relationship as uncle, lover or friend.³⁵⁹

The last notion will likely produce a clamorous protest by many who would point out several long term friendships and interpret his relationship with Émily as a passionate love affair. Details of intimate encounters between the lovers are few which is suspect in itself for Voltaire would surely have found an opportunity to share it with an audience in some literary form. His

³⁵⁷ The letter was written originally in Italian in September 1747. Mme. Denis had stricken out the word 'phallus' and replaced it with 'spirit'. Brooks 124.

³⁵⁸ Mitford 198.

³⁵⁹ Harding 125-167.

own summary of this relationship, however, renders the above conclusion credible. Days after Émily's death he had written to his niece: "...You can see by my present grief that I have a soul which is made for love; you are far dearer to me than a person for whom, as you know, my only feeling was that of gratitude."³⁶⁰ One could argue that this statement described accurately the latter part of his relationship with Émily and that it also was intended to highlight the importance of his new affair with Mme. Denis. On the other hand, one might want to accept Voltaire's disclosure that his primary feeling for Émily was one of gratitude rather than love. After all, she had offered him a safe haven, her vast knowledge and intelligence as well as opportunities to learn from her scholarly friends. Émily gave Voltaire, for a while, her undivided attention and he was grateful to this extraordinary audience of one who enabled him to pretend the world was his stage. He was incapable of mature love, but he did appreciate useful service, which was the basis of his relationships.

Scholarly output over time is a valid measure of one's intellectual development. Hence, a review of Voltaire's publications during the Cirey period provides evidence for appraising the direction his scholarship was taking. In this case, it will be demonstrated that the ceaseless outflowing of material, interpreted erroneously to signify a limitless fountain of intelligence and imagination, is not proof of a maturing and profound intellect. Rather, it is suggested that the frenetic pace of manufacturing written material, including correspondence, implies a compulsive restlessness steered by an insatiable need for attention. Since Voltaire felt compelled to share himself with the public, there is also ample evidence linking a marked psychological immaturity to his deficient scholarship.

³⁶⁰ Cited in Mitford 273.

One of Voltaire's greatest achievements during this period was the publication of the *Éléments*, a popularized version of Newtonian physics. Once again he had to rationalize a hasty production in the service of his need to be first. Being a master salesman, he published the first edition in Amsterdam in 1738 while the definitive version would appear in 1741. Characteristically, he was not a pioneer, but followed in the footsteps of Maupertuis, a proficient scientist, member of the *Académie de Sciences* and himself master popularizer and socialite. Maupertuis had published the first defense of Newtonianism in Paris in 1732.³⁶¹ Voltaire's later version relied heavily on notes he took during his tutorials with several scientists, Maupertuis among them, which he passed off often as his own ideas. There was little synthesis of the material presented, but apologists justify this flawed "hasty product" as a legitimate effort to present the masses with the new view of the world. This argument mustered regularly to excuse Voltaire's superficial work is almost as predictable as the scandals surrounding his seemingly pirated publications.³⁶²

Newtonian cosmology was already promoted in France by a work far superior to Voltaire's *Éléments*, but it lacked the latter's offensive vulgarity masked as progressive popularization. Through attack on Cartesianism Voltaire succeeded in creating a scandal that placed him again on the lips of Parisians. Equally predictable and rather banal, was his insatiable need to be first which required that he depose even Newton from the seat of great genius. To surpass Newton, Voltaire asserted that light too was subject to the law of attraction. Based on

³⁶¹ Wade, *The Intellectual Development of Voltaire* 432. Pierre Louis Moreau de Maupertuis published the *Discours sur les différentes figures des asters* in Paris in 1732.

³⁶² *Ibid.*, 427.

contemporaries' evaluations of his mathematical and scientific comprehension, there is reason to believe that Voltaire here made at best a common sense inference without understanding the scientific underpinnings of this assertion. Good summaries by no means reflect accurate understanding and apodictic assertions often suggest mental rigidity rather than knowledge.

If he were only an aspiring scientist, Voltaire was a recognized historian upon the publication of the *Siècle de Louis XIV*, considered by some his masterpiece.³⁶³ While this three volume opus was published in 1752, it was composed during the Cirey period. Upon its publication, Voltaire had already written histories of kings, universal tastes, national spirits and customs of nations. The professed purpose of the work declared in the preface was to present : “that which merits attention at all times, that which colours the spirit and customs of men, that which instructs and counsels love and virtue, the arts and the country.”³⁶⁴ For these expressed intentions to capture the age he is identified as a humanist and seen as a precursor of modern holistic historiography of the twentieth-century (e.g., Marc Bloch, Lucien Febvre and Fernand Braudel).³⁶⁵ Voltaire's stated objectives which were not new or original were also not actualized in the product. He seemed to have neglected often the adventures of the human mind in favour of Louis XIV's great military achievements. The teaching of the *Siècle* is that great men create great civilizations. Voltaire was keenly aware of the Enlightenment tendency to simplify and

³⁶³ Besterman, *Voltaire* 321.

³⁶⁴ Pomeau 313 quotes from Voltaire, *Œuvres historiques*, ed. R. Pomeau (1957) 620.

³⁶⁵ Pomeau 663 proposes the connection between the *Siècle* and modern historiography. Voltaire articulated his goal also in a letter addressed to the abbé Jean Baptiste Dubos (1670-1742), historian literary critic and diplomat. The letter dated October 30, 1738 is cited in Brooks 68. Besterman D. 1642.

standardize thoughts and life. This fit remarkably well with his intellectual need to reduce cultural phenomena to a few categories and manageable stereotypes.³⁶⁶ It is questionable, however, whether he grasped the implications of the concept 'spirit of a nation' which diminished the role of great men and dispensed with the worship of personality.

Voltaire complied with prevalent views of history as a story of spirits of nations and adopted the prevailing disdain for facts and details. Far from being original, he followed Fenelon (1651-1715) who found importance in observing changes in nations rather than following facts chronologically. He was in concert with contemporaries such as Fontenelle(1657-1757) who preferred to study the clocks in Paris to historical facts, Grimm (1723-1807) who offered to rescue humanity from dull pedantic fact seeking and Diderot who rejected the utility of relating facts for the sake of informing of facts.³⁶⁷ What he lacked in originality, Voltaire always managed to compensate for with exaggerated hostility cloaked in sardonic contempt. For him facts did not only represent an erroneous conceptual or methodological vehicle of inquiry, they were "a vermin that destroys all great works".³⁶⁸ Whatever Voltaire found disagreeable he also found threatening. In addition to subscribing to the dominant ideology, Voltaire was particularly antagonistic to details which involve time consuming tasks such as collection, verification and synthesis. Historical facts clearly disturbed his need for the rapid production of titillating publications.

³⁶⁶ Lovejoy, The Great Chain of Being 312 identifies *esprit simplicité* as fundamental to the Enlightenment mentality.

³⁶⁷ Becker 90-3 cites from the works of the listed historian-philosophers.

³⁶⁸ Brooks 69. The quote is taken from the letter sent to the abbé Dubos, October 30, 1738.

The weakest chapters of the *Siècle* are said to be those dedicated to art and science and as such the work is judged to be “a glorious failure to deliver the professed goal.”³⁶⁹ Brumfitt attributes the failure to a “natural lack of psychological and historical imagination”, a deficit which Wade accepts, but imputes to the age in general.³⁷⁰ One is hard pressed to apply such a conclusion to describe the historical analyses of David Hume. In France, Espiard’s *Essais sur le génie et le caractère des nations* (published in 1743) is still assessed to be the work which epitomizes eighteenth century historical thinking presented clearly and cogently.³⁷¹ The age might be known for its great simplifications, but also boasts great and erudite minds. Voltaire it would seem represented best the growing popularity of sensationalistic journalism where he reigned supreme. There seems to be a curious leniency in criticizing Voltaire’s intellectual legacy. It is as if he managed to convince posterity that he deserves special consideration for trying, especially for trying everything. The sheer volume of his publications and frequent conceptual ambiguity with its conflicting messages, have baffled historians to the point of uttering non sequiturs. Voltaire was “too rich a personality to give himself fully and finally to science” asserts a historian who concludes soon after that Voltaire failed because he lacked commitment to anything that had no immediate public affirmation.³⁷² Scholars apologize for his concreteness and support his literal interpretation of Virgil’s dictum that to be open to all muses means to know and create everything. Curiously, a fundamental canon of a genuine narcissist is to ‘keep all options open’.

³⁶⁹ Wade, *The Intellectual Development of Voltaire* 482.

³⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 493 quotes from J. H. Brumfitt, *Voltaire Historian* (Oxford, 1958) 102-104.

³⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 497-509 offers a detailed analysis of Espiard’s essays.

³⁷² Durant & Durant 376.

We collude with him in focusing on language rather than deeds (works) and in accepting the volume of production rather than quality as measures of excellence. This brilliant image builder managed to inveigle us into reframing his self-centered agenda and sterile sarcasm to signify distortive forms of protest against an oppressive social order he actually wanted to preserve.³⁷³

This indulgence was not limited to future generations. It was just as curiously granted by many contemporary critics. Even in the face of growing anti-Voltairean sentiments, Voltaire received a “respectful and indulgent” critique in the *Mercure de France* for his very flawed ‘oriental’ play *Zulime*.³⁷⁴ His critic ‘understood’ the author’s priority of producing a quick reply to his enemies over concerns for the quality of the piece. A less forgiving and more objective review of Voltaire’s historical, literary or epistolary works, exposes a large number of mediocre publications with a conservative social outlook that reserves the right to enjoy civilization’s benefits for a privileged minority. Either as historian or as dramatist, Voltaire was unable to bridge the gap between himself and his frozen generalities of speech nor could he “separate the complexity of human phenomena from the banal abstractions of words.”³⁷⁵ But despite his patrician outlook, overt disdain for the masses and mediocre works, he managed to impress on popular consciousness an image as a brilliant humanist.

³⁷³ Alan Ryan, ed. *Utilitarianism and Other Essays: J.S. Mill and Jeremy Bentham* (London: Penguin Books, 1987) 135. Mill addresses the bareness of negative thinking, particularly that of Voltaire and the *philosophes*.

³⁷⁴ Pomeau 387.

³⁷⁵ George Steiner, *A Reader* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984) 383 refers to a ‘sadistic’ personality who shares the tendency to regard human beings as abstractions with a narcissistic individual.

At the beginning of the Cirey period (1736), Voltaire produced an essay entitled Le Mondain in which he extolled the virtues of luxury and enjoyment of earthly life. This sermon in praise of moral libertinism and personal happiness did not introduce novel ideas nor was this promotion of self-love offensive to most French citizens. Yet it created a scandal that presumably threatened the author's life. The uproar was against his flippant treatment of the Biblical story of the Garden of Eden rather than the promotion of *luxe* and other earthly pleasures. Unable to articulate constructively an ideology of cultivated luxury, Voltaire delved into his overflowing store of destructive urges and surfaced with a disparaging depiction of the primitive living conditions Adam and Eve had suffered in the heavenly abode. This was a typical tactic of the binary world of bigotry where the 'other' is either demonized or caricatured. Voltaire's world was rather monistic in his claim to be the first which positioned him always against and never with others. With such brittle sense of self even symbols from the distant past can only assume roles as enemies or scapegoats.

Le Mondain defined Voltaire's humanism more accurately than his 'serious' productions. The content of his *esprit humain* reflected a naive concept of humanity concealed by sarcastic wit or satire which gave it an air of sophistication. Mostly, this was an opportunity to sing the praises of his good fortune and give his personal success a universal signature of legitimacy. Unlike Voltaire's light hearted treatment of the topic, other contemporaries wrestled more earnestly with the complex issues of progress, luxury and inequality. Diderot, who accepted the premise that the principal object of desire is luxury, tried to address the misery of the poor by condemning "ostentatious luxury" while praising the "pragmatic luxury" of the less spendthrift. Condillac, a fellow *philosophe* and economist, wrote of the imbalances produced by luxury and a flourishing

economy concluding that society needs wealth, but can do without the wealthy, an anathema to Voltaire's *la morale*.³⁷⁶

At Cirey, the scientist-historian-philosopher never neglected his dramatic pursuits and in August 1748, Voltaire produced one of his better plays *Sémiramis*, a tragedy in five acts written in verse. Characteristically, the theme was not original, but designed to outdo a previous play written by Crébillon père (1674-1762) which enjoyed an endorsement by Mme. de Pompadour. Voltaire's production premiered on August 29th and according to Longchamp, his secretary, both his master and his enemies had purchased sufficient tickets to insure respectively applause and disturbances during the performance. "*Sémiramis fallit tomber*", according to Pomeau, but its creator came upon "*l'idée d'une ruse singulière*" wherein disguised as an ecclesiastic, the fifty six year old Voltaire went to the Café Procope to listen to reviews of his play. Suffering great pain at the need to remain anonymous and contain a tongue itching to lash out at his detractors, he gathered the desired information for changing the play to please his audience. In its new form the play attained total acceptance.³⁷⁷ This theatrical episode depicts an immature middle-aged man less committed to his work than to an approving audience. Voltaire's intuitive ability to read his audience was reinforced obviously by cunning tactics. Fears for personal safety, the excuse frequently marshalled to justify Voltaire's scheming, was not a concern. It typified most of his histrionic allusions to danger. This anecdote reveals him as a man with compromised integrity

³⁷⁶ Roche 568 refers to David Hume's *Essay on Luxury*, translated into French into 1752; Diderot's article on luxury in the *Encyclopédie* and Condillac's *Essai sur le commerce et le gouvernement*.

³⁷⁷ Parton 439-542 quotes from Longchamp's diary. Pomeau 559 evaluates the play before and after the changes and describes Voltaire's disguised appearance at the Café Procope as "most cunning".

who directed much of his native intelligence to supply the demands of a domineering compulsion for public attention.

On October 10, 1748 Voltaire addressed the queen of France with a request to quash a rival's play satirizing *Sémiramis*. In the letter Voltaire beseeched her "not to permit these [his own] performances to be dishonoured by an odious satire against me that is being planned before your eyes in Fontainebleau".³⁷⁸ The queen's "humanity" was not "moved to [his] condition", but Mme. de Pompadour's was. The man who brutally criticized and satirized the living and the dead felt he was "put to death with anguish and shame" by a bit of his own medicine. This is a classic example of narcissistic moral inflation of an individual propelled by the contradictory admixture of feeling both extremely powerless and very deserving. For Voltaire there was a clear separation between the kind of freedom he felt entitled to and the narrow range he allowed others, especially those who criticized his work. This was not an isolated incident of self-righteous hypocrisy for Voltaire who deplored Church practices of burning books, recommended that his rivals' publications be thus destroyed.³⁷⁹

Despite an outpouring of published material, Voltaire exhibited little in the way of intellectual development or emotional maturation at the close of the Cirey experience. Voltaire used Cirey, place and people, as a playground from which to rehearse his various roles and practice the life style he would realize with the purchase of his estates. In preparation to lordship

³⁷⁸ Voltaire to Catherine-Sophie-Félicité-Marie Leszczyńska, Queen of France. Commercy, October 10, 1748. Brooks 128. Besterman, D. 3777.

³⁷⁹ Cranston 100 cites a letter by Voltaire, posing as champion of Christianity, urging magistrates in Geneva to burn Rousseau's books and punish the author "with all the severity of the law."

over his own *latifundia*, he acted the role of a landed aristocrat dealing with servants, running his own theatre and producing his own plays. Eventually, in his own domains, he would expand his connoisseurship with a polished culinary taste and the erection of a personal house of worship. His acquaintance with the Châtelets and their friends added to his respectability which allowed his own friends to promote him to the French court and make him a courtier between 1745-8. Following his failed attempt at overwhelming the Prussian palace, Voltaire was ready to serve his own King. Thus, in May 1745 he obliged his friend d'Argenson's request to honour the French victory over the British at Fontenoy with a triumphant ode. The pacifist had no trouble becoming a war poet and opera librettist in order to earn a seat at the King's table. Overwhelmed with his proximity to royalty, Voltaire could not contain his sycophantic urges and affirmation cravings and queried out aloud whether "*Trajan-est-il content?*". An irked Louis XV ignored a bewildered Voltaire for the rest of the evening.³⁸⁰

If his scholarly output during 1735-50 bespoke little growth his skills in the art of concealment and networking reached high levels of sophistication. Vigilant to social trends and forever ready to sharpen his quill, he had little difficulty in adopting the prevailing themes to denounce rivals, dead and alive, which included anyone who wrote on a subject he had appropriated as his area of interest. The future 'conscience of Europe', ratified, at this point, the necessity of poverty and the principle of equal taxes for aristocracy, himself and the poor peasant.³⁸¹ While reflecting the opinions of many contemporaries, he showed less humanitarian

³⁸⁰ Episode is cited in Durant & Durant 384.

³⁸¹ Brooks 131-136. Letter written to Jean Baptiste Machault d'Arnouville (1701-1794) who became controller-general of finance in December 1745. In 1749 he attempted to reform the levying of direct taxes.

inclination than several of his peers who advocated a more equitable distribution of wealth and denounced the deplorable state of destitution among the urban and rural poor. Voltaire espoused *Le Mondain's* 'good life' of privileged libertinism rather than the principled 'good life' of *eudaimonia* promoted by his Greek, Roman, or contemporary ego-ideals.³⁸² There were always two Voltaires, say many scholars who mistake his lack of commitment for diversity.³⁸³ In fact, there were many more Voltaires vigilant and ready to seize any opportunity to further his cause.

³⁸² Martha C. Nussbaum, The Fragility of Goodness; Luck and Ethics in Greek Tragedy and Philosophy (London: Cambridge University Press, 1999) xiv defines the 'good human life', *eudaimonia*, as consisting of activities associated with ethical virtues of courage and justice rather than material pleasures. This is another example of Voltaire's simplification of complex human ideas.

³⁸³ Pomeau 671; Wade, Voltaire and Candide " A study in the fusion of history, art and philosophy (Princeton, New jersey : Princeton University Press: 1959) xiii.

CHAPTER 6

CANDIDE - THE EMBODIMENT OF NARCISSISM

After decades of writing poetry, philosophy, history and popular science, Voltaire is said to have realized his full creative potential with philosophical tales and with *Candide* in particular.³⁸⁴ While there is little disagreement in viewing *Candide* as quintessentially Voltairean, there is less unison in the interpretation of the hidden meaning implied by the author. Enthusiasts rate *Candide* “a work of art which is flawless and complete” where “matters and manners are matched perfectly.”³⁸⁵ Even to more objective scholars this work represents “a fusion of history, art and philosophy.”³⁸⁶ A literary appraisal of its merits and deficits is beyond the scope of this thesis or the writer’s expertise. Existing reviews are brought to bear to support the idea that the narcissistic traits which underlie all Voltaire’s work emerge in *Candide* with exceptional clarity. Accordingly, what is often perceived as a unique writing style (e.g., rapid tempo and repetition of events/phrases) is interpreted instead as a reflection of compulsively driven behaviour and pedantry typical of narcissistic rigidity. It is also argued that the success of *Candide* was as much an outcome of craftiness as of craftsmanship assisted by the fortuitous evolution of a climate of public opinion supported by a growing culture of publicity and publication.

An outstanding image builder, Voltaire succeeded in persuading both scholars and popular imagination, that a unique morality was embedded in this disorderly tale which mirrored

³⁸⁴ Flaubert is quoted as having said that *Candide* contains the quintessence of Voltaire’s writings. Cited in J.G. Weightman, “The Quality of *Candide*.” Trans. & Ed. Robert M. Adams. *Candide : A New Translation Background and Criticism* , 151.

³⁸⁵ Peter Gay, *The Enlightenment: An Interpretation* 197.

³⁸⁶ The quote is part of the title of a book by Wade, *Voltaire and Candide: A study in the fusion of history, art, and philosophy*.

accurately its intellectually eclectic author. It is the argument of this thesis that the author's narcissism is reflected in the tale as a whole and not only in the character of the protagonist. Voltaire's narcissistic nihilism is interwoven in all aspects of the story and Candide as the hero is not more representative of its creator than other characters or literary features of the tale. *Candide's mise en scène* is quintessentially Voltairean in its negativity and the author's ability to reject, but not to create. It is autobiographical in the sense that it is an 'honest' reflection of Voltaire as an individual/artist devoid of psychological space and governed by the tyranny of his ubiquitous insecurity.

According to Ira Wade, ambiguity achieved by the parading of characters, scenery and plots, is the defining feature of the story.³⁸⁷ Wade's observation is crucial for this discussion since the lack of coherence which permeates *Candide* is typical of Voltaire's work in general and fundamental to his character. In seducing scholars to hunt for hidden meaning, *Candide* is probably his most artful projection of internal chaos as universal truth. Interesting is the fact that as a popularization marked for clarity of expression Voltaire's work is often judged as mediocre. As an obscurantist, on the other hand, he charmed intellectuals into believing that deeper meaning lurks beneath an overt confusion of crudely concocted and fabricated absurdities. Harmony between author and subject might have produced an idiosyncratic honesty of presentation which could account for some of *Candide's* appeal. Clandestine intrigues, sarcasm, uncritical zeal and the desire to dominate others, the undercurrent of *Candide* and the air Voltaire breathed, are also core traits of a typical narcissist. Allusions to hidden messages resonate with an audience seeking

³⁸⁷ Wade, *Voltaire and Candide* xiii

guidance in making sense of their confused experiences of reading the story and living in a rapidly changing culture.³⁸⁸

Another intriguing suggestion by Wade is the notion that the meaning of *Candide* is not only concealed from the reader, but was “clandestine for Voltaire himself”.³⁸⁹ While some would interpret this idea to reflect a common conception that creative acts often originate in the unconscious, it seems more plausible that the sense of ambiguity, in this case, was deliberate and calculated. The vagueness of plot, characters and implied moral conclusion was a matter of logistics rather than the product of a stream-like flow of the unconscious. Those aspects of the unconscious which dominated *Candide* and Voltaire’s work in general, emanated from a preoccupation with self-preservation. The latent psychological leitmotifs of *Candide* were manifested as a consuming hostility in the form of contemptuous sarcasm directed against those Voltaire feared and hated the most. The Jesuits were demonized enough to justify cannibalism expressed jauntily by the primitive Biglugs. “The most choleric” Jewish merchant’s lasciviousness and impudence of desiring a Christian woman, deserved an inhuman ending on a dunghill. And Pangloss, the rival philosopher, was afflicted with the appalling disease of leprosy “...covered with pustules, his eyes were sunken, the end of his nose rotted off, his mouth twisted teeth

³⁸⁸ Voltaire, “*Zadig Ou La Destinée*”, *Zadig and Other Stories*, ed. H.T. Mason (London: Oxford University Press, 1974) 72. In the opening paragraph of this philosophical tale which was presented as a translation of a book written by an ancient sage, Voltaire suggests that the book written for sheer amusement is “...a work that says more than it seems to say”. *Zadig* was published in 1750.

³⁸⁹ Wade, *Voltaire and Candid* 225.

black...".³⁹⁰ The latter being a most revolting projection for Voltaire who was obsessively preoccupied with apparent neatness.

Voltaire's unconscious was also evidenced in his unrelenting restlessness which was reflected in the frenetic pace and chaotic nature of the plot, diverting mechanisms to ward off insecurity that threatens the survival of the ego. The compulsive effort to master and control others, the only way narcissists obtain self-affirmation, was manifested literally in *Candide* as owning relationships. Candide actually purchased his fellow members of the garden in Turkey from various other owners which entitled him to plan and determine the group's social structure, goals and life style.³⁹¹

William Bottiglia, an ardent Voltairean, views *Candide* as the writer's 'ego trip' which he deems an artistic virtue rather than a vice.³⁹² Accordingly, the vapid nature and superficiality of *Candide*'s characters is a necessary outcome of the writer's ego which dominates the story with an "absolute tyranny". What stands out is the "rationally elevated" "rarefied ego" of the author which integrates the various components of the tale. Bottiglia's valuation of Voltaire's success at infusing order into a chaotic representation of the world is questionable. Voltaire's tyrannical ego

³⁹⁰ Voltaire, *Candide* ch. 16 32-33. "It's a Jesuit, a Jesuit! We'll be revenged and have a good meal; let's eat some Jesuits." Ibid., ch. 9, 16-17; Ibid. ch. 4 7

³⁹¹ Harding 93 identifies hostility, restlessness and the need to dominate as mechanisms of self-preservation of regressive personalities governed by their unconscious needs.

³⁹² William F. Bottiglia, *Voltaire's Candide : Analysis of a Classic*, Studies in Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century, ed. Theodore Besterman, vol. VII (Geneva: Institute et Musée Voltaire, 1959) 85.

seems to be scrambling to assert itself by repeatedly debasing others and finally achieving the desired control by reducing his world to a garden with inhabitants he purchases.

Against the domineering “ego” of the author, stands the rest of the cast of characters who “represent functional elements of the author’s rationally abstracted ego, symbolically decomposed and dramatically projected.”³⁹³ Voltaire would have embraced this esoteric portrayal of himself likely adopting it as his own. In admitting that the characters have no identity beyond reflecting Voltaire’s overbearing ego, Bottiglia supports the thesis of an egocentric man who saw others only as appendages of his demanding and dependent self.³⁹⁴ That the characters in *Candide* lack psychological depth is an opinion shared by all. Those who define a philosophical story as inherently moralistic justify the use of passive stock characters as a requirement for teaching and moralizing.³⁹⁵ This position is flawed on several counts. First, a philosophical story can easily become a stage for debate instead of a pulpit for preaching. Second, there are numerous works which address moral dilemmas through psychologically complex personages.³⁹⁶ Third, critics of Voltaire’s dramatic and poetic efforts find his characters invariably to be flat and unidimensional.³⁹⁷ Hence, the dullness of *Candide*’s figures is not inherent to the genre, rather it

³⁹³ Ibid., 153.

³⁹⁴ For discussion of ‘primitive’ ego development see Harding 204.

³⁹⁵ Bottiglia 63, 142.

³⁹⁶ The two Biblical Testaments easily qualify (the book of Job being paradigmatic) as would Boethius’ Consolation of Philosophy and Erasmus’ In Praise of Folly .

³⁹⁷ Wade, Intellectual Development of Voltaire 242, 246, 378. Wade, Voltaire and Candide reflects repeatedly on Voltaire’s type-cast lifeless literary characters. Hulliung 221, 239 discusses Voltaire’s tendency to replace the stage with a pulpit evidenced in his tragedies which are saturated by homilies.

mirrors the author's restricted range of emotions, lack of psychological mindedness and insatiable ego. This conclusion is reached also by Wade who admits that Voltaire's characters are "dead abstractions" when compared to the "meaningful discourse" offered by Montaigne, master exegist of human folly.³⁹⁸ *Candide* was not about the human condition as much as an enactment of an ego-syntonic fantasy to rule.³⁹⁹

Candide is always disappointed by his fellow 'travellers' who failed to teach him anything. He was surrounded by lascivious clerics, libidinal mistresses, stupid ministers and aristocrats and foolish pedantic scholars, a crew needing to be led. No wonder the 'society' of pathetic losers he kept had nothing to offer him. It should be noted that this miserable crew represented the social classes that mattered in Voltaire's world. Thus, incapable of identifying with anyone, Voltaire proudly declared that : "... I have read a great deal and I have discovered nothing but doubts, lies and fanaticism; I am just about as wise, in what really concerns our existence, as I was in the cradle...".⁴⁰⁰ The ability to be open to and receive from others, prerequisites for learning, require sufficient faith in oneself. Voltaire who was deficient in both projected his incomprehension unto the rest of humanity.

There are two types of women in *Candide*: (1) the privileged few represented by Cunegonde, a baroness, the Old Woman, and daughter of a Pope and a princess, and (2) the

³⁹⁸ Wade, *Voltaire and Candide* 265.

³⁹⁹ Charles Rycroft, *A Critical Dictionary of Psychoanalysis* (New York : Basic Books, Inc., Publishers, 1968) 41. Behaviour and wishes are said to be ego-syntonic if they are compatible with the person's ideals and conception of himself.

⁴⁰⁰ Andre Morize," The "Moment" of *Candide* and the Ideas of Voltaire". trans. and ed. Robert M. Adams. *Candide or Optimism* (New York: Norton & Company, Inc., 1966) 111.

disenfranchised majority personified in Paquette, a prostitute. Birthright was the only legitimate standard of respectability for women while men could earn regard and status through genius and financial success. The modicum of respectability bestowed by social status, however, did not protect women from Voltaire's stereotyping which cast them as ignorant, helpless and unfaithful enchantresses in their youth maturing into ugly middle aged domestics. The young, fragile, sensuous and well bred Cunegonde possessed the same practical treachery evidenced by the savage girls of the Biglugs tribe and can easily be replaced with Almona in *Zadig*.⁴⁰¹

"Mutability and fragility" were characterizations allocated particularly to women, in Voltaire's stories, a curious device for a man who fashioned his physical frailty into a personal myth of heroic victimhood and his protean 'adaptability' into a new practical morality.⁴⁰² While his views were common to the period, other *philosophes* did express more enlightened attitudes towards women and advocated greater equality for them.⁴⁰³ Voltaire's perceptions of women reflected his approval of a traditional social order, desire for social stability and resistance to change. Women were typecast along with the rest of humanity. A stable and predictable environment fostering an illusion of control is more conducive to domination. Voltaire, who never saw a link between himself and others, justified with ferocious intensity and conviction his entitlement to special rights as if belonging to an order superior to the human race. As usual, he

⁴⁰¹ Voltaire *Zadig* 6; *Candide* 31-32.

⁴⁰² Georges Ascoli, "Voltaire: The Storyteller's Art". trans. & ed. Robert M. Adams. *Candide or Optimism* 130-136.

⁴⁰³ In this respect Roche 528 refers to the writer Marivaux and the *philosophes* Diderot and Condorcet.

managed to be construed as spokesman for social reform while putting himself beyond the collective protocol.

As mature women, Cunegonde became “remarkably ugly and sour-tempered” whereas the Old Woman grew “even more ill-humoured”. Redeemed by their submission to Candide’s rule, they become productive as “an excellent pastry cook” and laundry maid respectively. The former harlot retaining some of her beauty and uselessness “took up embroidery”.⁴⁰⁴ This description is interpreted by some as promoting the bourgeois values of marriage as an institution embodying sober respectability and productivity over “sentimental quixotism”.⁴⁰⁵ While Voltaire might have personified an *honnête homme*, his depiction of the fate of the aging women represents an attempt to ward off psychologically aging rather than attesting to his bourgeois mentality. Candide is not subjected to the same laws as others whether natural or man-made and thus he does not grow old or ugly. He only sees changes in others from whom he is desperate to separate in order to deny his banality and mortality. This is a false separateness of a Self that cannot transcend the panic of self-preservation in response to real or imagined danger.

Clerics were most frequently subjected to the wrath and derision of Voltaire’s caricatures. While his outrageous expressions of anti-clericalism are said to represent a fight with superstition and corruption, it is also apparent that the complex nature of religion with its long history offered an ample target for plethoric self-expression. In one of many cogent satirical moments, Jonathan Swift remarked that “..If Christianity were once abolished, how could the Free Thinkers... be able

⁴⁰⁴ Voltaire, *Candide* 74-77.

⁴⁰⁵ Bottiglia 242.

to find another subject so calculated in all points to display their abilities?"⁴⁰⁶ Master of this kind of caricature was Voltaire. His contestatory nature suffused with moral indignation amounted to a ruthless weapon against anyone who stood in his way of his advancing his peculiar morality. Underneath a seemingly tempestuous mien, however, lay a traditional man with a conservative outlook on religion. While ridiculing clerics masterfully, Voltaire never contested Church dogma. Voltaire's depiction of the Grand Inquisitor as a power hungry satyr conveyed an aura of irreverence toward the Church. Linking church ministry with debauchery and abuse of power was not new to Parisians who were informed of a history of papal scandals. The *abbé* Paul François Velly who was portrayed, by the Police Inspector of the Book trade, as a very clever man and skirt chaser, was characteristic of a monk upon leaving the monastery.⁴⁰⁷ Local culture kept a pace with art and was not outraged by these facts. Voltaire did not shape public opinion nor did he stimulate discussion on religion or religious practices. He closed debate by polarizing views and forcing the audience to choose between him and the caricatured clergy. Once seduced by the outrageous silliness of a character the audience was trapped into agreeing with the author or risk the chance of being identified with the ridiculous and contemptuous. Uniquely gifted in the art of manipulating by polarization, Voltaire held many great minds captive by masking conventional thinking and an inordinate sense of entitlement with deceptive negativity.

The Grand Inquisitor was despicable for sharing Cunegonde's favours with a Jew not for his sexual indiscretions. Despite his sins he merited a modicum of respect from the author who kept him nameless and granted him a grand funeral. The Jew, on the other hand, was identified

⁴⁰⁶ Andrews 102.

⁴⁰⁷ Darnton, The Great Cat Massacre 158.

as Don Issachar and thrown “on the dunghill” once slain by Candide.⁴⁰⁸ Voltaire’s flagrant hostility towards Jews, living or fictional, poses difficulties for those who view him as the great humanist of the Age of Enlightenment. Apologists ascribe his anti-Jewish sentiments to a general secularization expressed by all *philosophes*. After all Voltaire devoted his last twenty years to *Écrasez l’infâme* and *Candide* is riddled with derisive criticism of the Clergy. Thus, in addition to the lecherous Grand Inquisitor there is a Franciscan friar suspected of stealing and a Benedictine prior taking advantage of Candide and the two helpless women.⁴⁰⁹ Other Voltaireans minimize his blatant hostility toward Jews rendering it a minor flaw in an otherwise exemplary life in pursuit of justice and religious tolerance.

Among less accommodating critics, Voltaire’s attitude towards the Jews represents an extreme case of intolerance against anyone who stood in the way of his winning uniformity of taste and of opinion.⁴¹⁰ The separateness of the Jews stood in stark contrast to the Parisian monopoly on culture and Voltaire’s aspirations to the status of the universal man. Socio-culturally the Jews occupied the liminal space of the unfamiliar which excited Voltaire’s xenophobia. The apparent ‘otherness’ of Jews accentuated their potential threat to him. To Voltaire, Jews represented a great deal more than a religious anachronism. They were outside the realm of his influence, ‘others’ he could not manipulate who were a true separateness he found threatening. Unlike the chosen detachment of the Jew, Voltaire’s apparent individualism masked a false separateness which was founded on a hostility based self-defense. Because he could never

⁴⁰⁸ Voltaire, *Candide* ch. 9 17.

⁴⁰⁹ Ibid.,

⁴¹⁰ Andrews 129.

comprehend nor master the detached separateness of the 'exiled' Jew, an anxious Voltaire transformed them into a loathsome other.⁴¹¹

Jewish eccentricity did not qualify as an exotic topic. *Zadig*, a Persian/Arabian archetype of Saladin tales, assumed a Voltairean idealization of wit and wisdom. Following another banal drama of piratic publication in 1756, Voltaire released an essay on the history and spirit of nations where he devoted two chapters to China, two to India and two to the Arabs, but "mentioned the Jews only in passing".⁴¹² The statement was made by Besterman who proceeds to praise the two "masterly chapters" on Christianity which Voltaire concluded with a witty apodictic statement attesting its divinity: "seventeen centuries of rascality and imbecility had failed to destroy it."⁴¹³ According to this logic, surviving three thousand years of Jewish/Hebraic incredible upheaval should have qualified easily as heavenly intervention. Besterman was not disturbed by the historiographic and logical lacunae perhaps agreeing with Bottiglia that an author's tyrannical ego supersedes truth and logic.

To Ira Wade, Voltaire's rejection of the Hebraic God was a compensatory act to bolster his insecurities. A friendlier providence was more soothing to a *mondain* morality of self-interest than a harsh and demanding father image.⁴¹⁴ Fearing the unintelligible Jewish God, Voltaire ignored the impact of the Old Testament on the evolution of Christianity and Islam. But Jewish

⁴¹¹ Harding 93-115.

⁴¹² Besterman, *Voltaire* 407. Reference is to the *Essai sur l'histoire générale et sur les mœurs et l'esprit des nations*, published in seven volumes in 1756.

⁴¹³ *Ibid.*, 409 cites from the *Essai sur les mœurs*, ix; M.xi.235.

⁴¹⁴ Wade, *The Intellectual Development of voltaire* 721. Roche, 591 expresses a similar view.

influence suggested greater danger than contamination by intellectual discourse for it touched Voltaire's core narcissistic fear of anonymity. Jews not only maintained their exclusivity, but to most of them he was completely inconsequential or even unknown, the dread of a malignant narcissist who depends on external affirmation for survival. Voltaire, who preferred to be reviled than ignored, projected onto Jews a rageful helplessness.

Stallybrass and White offer an intriguing notion that cultures are best understood by what they negate and marginalize *qua negata grata*.⁴¹⁵ The underlying psychological mechanism of such identity formation is projective identification, a principal means by which unconscious subjects obtrude on consciousness and render the unacceptable acceptable.⁴¹⁶ Unable to accept a daemonic self, a painfully un insightful Voltaire projected his own offensive attributes onto Jews. What he professedly deplored in them were his signature traits and practices: usury, lust for money, shady dealings and furtiveness.⁴¹⁷ By owning Cunegonde, Don Issachar violated both Judaic and Christian laws, risking shunning by the Jewish community and his life with the Church and secular authorities. Behind Don Issachar's mask of bourgeois respectability, lurked an imposter, a phallo-erotic demiurge. For these sins and for breaking the law the rich Jew was

⁴¹⁵ Peter Stallybrass & Allon White, The Politics and Poetics of Transgression. (New York: Doubleday, 1986) 17.

⁴¹⁶ Masterson & Klein 221, 227.

⁴¹⁷ In November 1750, Voltaire secured the services of one Abraham Hirschel a Jew known for making forbidden money transactions. Reneging on the deal, Voltaire also refused to give back the diamonds the '*Juif*' had given him as collateral. What followed was a ridiculous law suit in which Voltaire cried victimization in correspondence with many of his friends. Correspondence, Besterman D. 4260, from November 1750 throughout the next few months in 1751.

scapegoated ending up in a dunghill. Purged and relieved, Voltaire identified consciously with Candide. Thus, underlying his ferocious hostility toward Jews was a fear of recognizing the reflection of an unacceptable self. Projection is not a process of attributing wrong perceptions to others. Rather, it is an effort to purge unacceptable content of the Self by condemning it in others. Most revolting for Voltaire would be the possibility that the contemptible image he projected onto Jews inhabited his unacceptable self. Voltaire, it would seem, had a lot more in common with Jews than with his urbane aristocratic friends. A contemporary Police Inspector of the Book Trade, characterized Voltaire as: “..Tall, dry [with] the bearing of a satyr” not unlike the ‘scape goat’ Don Issachar.⁴¹⁸

Beyond an unbridled hostility towards Jews, Voltaire’s treatment of the subject of religion reveals a superficial nonconformity which stops short of delving into meaningful issues. According to the contemporary *Journal de Trévoux*, controversy was promoted by crude satire rather than by theological issues.⁴¹⁹ As with most topics, from religion to science and art, Voltaire was largely a conformist following trends.

Pangloss, court philosopher and teacher, bore the brunt of sarcasm aimed at Voltaire’s secular rivals. Pangloss is identified with Leibnitz and *Candide* is seen as a refutation of Leibnitizian optimism which permeated eighteenth century thinking. One of the supreme intellects of all times, the polar opposite of Voltaire, Leibnitz was said to have expressed his complex thinking in a convoluted and dull style which kept him out of popular circulation.⁴²⁰ Secular

⁴¹⁸ Darnton, *The Great Cat Massacre* 161.

⁴¹⁹ Quoted in Pomeau 906.

⁴²⁰ The quote is taken from Russell 563.

underpinnings of his theodicy were predicated on a distinction between 'essence' and 'existence' whereby the former can be known outside of experience whereas the latter is bound by contingent language. According to Leibnitz, observed contradictions in the world reflect the relationship between finite existence and the logical order of essences which humans comprehend only through sensible impressions. Echoing seventeenth-century preoccupation with the essence of Divine Intellect, only God knows nature in its intelligible reason.⁴²¹

Voltaire lauded Leibnitz on occasions and debated with him on an intellectual plane.⁴²² But, in *Candide* he simplified the German philosopher expediently using his terminology to highlight and invent absurdities. Assuming an audience ignorant of Leibnitz' theories, Voltaire was able to misconstrue logical principles as physical facts producing uproarious laughter by turning 'sufficient reason' into a sexual encounter.⁴²³ Addressing serious issues with childish derision betrays both puerile comprehension and intellectual laziness which still resonates as popular entertainment.⁴²⁴

Correlated with Leibnitz' notion of pre-established harmony were questions of good and evil in the world. To Leibnitz goodness was a generative creative process which included all possibilities, all degrees of privation. Infinite variety reflected the essence of Divine Reason.⁴²⁵

⁴²¹ Lovejoy, *The Great Chain of Being* 165.

⁴²² Wade, *Voltaire and Candide* 55.

⁴²³ Voltaire, *Candide* 2. Pangloss' teachings of "experimental physics to a young brunette is emulated by Cunegonde and Candide resulting in the expulsion of the latter from the castle in Westphalia.

⁴²⁴ Cobban 739 makes the observation of puerile comprehension.

⁴²⁵ Lovejoy, *The Great Chain of Being* 52.

With the neo-platonic definition of Goodness as *omne bonum est diffusivum sui*, Leibnitz preserved the unity of apparent contradictions.⁴²⁶ Accordingly, good and evil, sin and free will or choice, are bound together to reflect all possibilities of a unified divine essence. A protean Voltaire, known as a man of contradictions, had great difficulty relating to this notion. Quoting Pope's assertion that "each situation contains both happiness and misfortune" he proceeded to reject the poet's definition of optimism which was consistent with that espoused by Leibnitz.⁴²⁷ Curiously, while making Leibnitz and Pope the laughing stock for the readers of *Candide*, Voltaire had no qualms singing their praises in other publications he released concurrently.

Following the great earthquake of Lisbon (November 1, 1755), Voltaire published his famous poem "*The Lisbon Earthquake*" protesting the maxim, "whatever is, is right". Misinterpreting "*tout est bien*" expediently, to mean happiness, Voltaire rejected Pope's implied determinism rebuking the poet "...vous criez "*tout est bien*" d'une voix lamentable". A few months later, he published a newer version of the *Disastre* as well as a modified edition of the *Lettres Philosophiques* where he granted Pope greater accolades than he did in the original version. A perplexed Wade, who believed the only possible explanation for this strange behaviour was Voltaire's desire to be always right, stops short of drawing conclusions regarding a writer's tendency to compromise intellectual honesty in support of rigid ego needs.⁴²⁸ In *Le Siècle de Louis XIV* published in 1750, Leibnitz was deemed the "most universal scholar in Europe"; an

⁴²⁶ The quote attributed to Plotinus (204-270 A.D.), founder of Neoplatonism, is cited in Lovejoy Ibid., 64. Paraphrase of the quote: "All encompassing goodness is the fulness of its diversity."

⁴²⁷ Wade, *Voltaire and Candide* 71.

⁴²⁸ Ibid., 81.

“alter ego” or a ‘Voltaire want-to-be’. As Pangloss in *Candide*, the brilliant scholar is an ineffectual philosopher who becomes a productive member of society by assuming the function of a bookkeeper, a more useful personage for Voltaire and modern market morality.⁴²⁹

The simplification of people and issues characteristic of Voltaire’s mental comprehension was also a key to his great success. His intuitive understanding of the importance of brevity in insuring a successful projection of appealing images and gaining sympathy from his audience was remarkable. His notable intellectual laziness is consistent with the mentality of a renegade, “one who wants what he wants and refuses to pay the price. ... always seeking to exploit the industry of others.”⁴³⁰ As children such individuals incorporate greed both as physical satisfaction and as attention seeking. In adults, this hunger becomes tyrannical in its demands of others, real or fictionalized. What Voltaire failed to understand he rejected as chimeric or absurd distorting these expediently to generate laughs and earn notoriety. Whether motivated by egotism, cynicism or nativity, Pangloss was a product of intellectual dishonesty which is the most damning criticism of *Candide*. “Truth cannot exist without intellectual loyalty” a characteristic which was lacking in most of Voltaire’s work and evidenced with great clarity in *Candide*.⁴³¹

Against the supporting cast of prototypical clergymen, villains, fools, nobility and women stands a cleverly disguised naive Candide. More cunning and self-disciplined than Zadig and

⁴²⁹ Voltaire, *Candide* ch. 4 9.

⁴³⁰ H.G. Baynes, *Mythology of the Soul* (London, 1940) 4 cited in Harding 55.

⁴³¹ Horkheimer 286.

Micromégas⁴³², he saves his patronizing and triumphant tone to the end. Ultimately, however, Candide is just another unidimensional, predictable, cartoon-like character delivering yet another moralizing spectacle. Zadig's gift was disclosed immediately and displayed monotonously throughout the tale culminating in a benediction that "all men blessed Zadig, and Zadig blessed Heaven."⁴³³ Zadig's position *vis-a-vis* the human race and God left no room for latent meaning.

Micromégas, another fount of hidden wisdom, is more secretive and cunning in delivering his final message to the learned members of the Paris Academy of Sciences:

...He promised to supply them with a fine book of philosophy, written in minute characters for their use, and in which they would find the essence of things. He actually, gave them the volume before his departure. It was carried to Paris before the Academy of Sciences; but when the old secretary came to open it, he saw nothing but blank pages. Ah! said he, "this is just what I expected".⁴³⁴

Master of deception, Voltaire pulled out another clever trick that leaves the reader with a familiar moral caution of the blinding power of pride. Using intellect for self-evasion rather than discovery-vintage Voltaireanism-he keeps us ignorant of what could open our eyes while professing to have the elixir.⁴³⁵ Judging by the lack of depth and wisdom which characterized

⁴³² Voltaire, *Micromégas, Zadig and Other Stories*, ed. H.T. Mason (London: Oxford university Press, 1974) 71 first published in London in 1752. Its conception might be dated to 1739.

⁴³³ Voltaire, *Zadig* originally entitled *Memnon, an Oriental Tale* was printed in Amsterdam in 1747. The text used here is based on the critical edition of Georges Ascoli (Paris, 1929). Zadig's perfect disposition is found in the opening paragraph of the tale whereas the quote is the last sentence.

⁴³⁴ Voltaire, *Micromégas*. The quote is the last paragraph of the tale.

⁴³⁵ Lasch 80.

most of Voltaire's work, it is safe to conclude that the blank page mirrored accurately the barrenness of his arrogant and complacent negativity.

Candide was meant to be more clandestine than Zadig and Micromégas, a naive, passive, trusting young man metamorphosed into an enigmatically clever leader. According to Wade, the fact that Candide never shows his 'true colours' is dangerous duplicity.⁴³⁶ The danger in misunderstanding Voltaire does not stem from the subversiveness of his ideas or style. Both were rather transparent and predictable. Rather, it is the scholar's tendency to reject the simplistic sterility that is incredibly dissatisfying in exchange for a more palatable "elevated and delicately sensuous rationality" which poses a threat to intellectual integrity.⁴³⁷ Voltaire who was mostly savage rather than subtle, banked on his audience to search for esoteric meaning and seduced them into believing he had something to offer. Candide was not a more mature Zadig or sophisticated Micromégas. Instead, he was a more 'cultivated' cynic compensating for feeling increasingly threatened by isolation and old age. His furtiveness increased *pari passu* with an hostile insecurity which produced twenty-nine chapters of deriding his 'companions' so they can be redeemed at last by submitting to his will.⁴³⁸ For all its opaqueness, *Candide's* finale expressed rather clearly arrogant contempt towards others. What remained hidden from the author and many subsequent interpreters is the perverse irony that Candide's fate was inextricably tied to those he despised. This is the ultimate agony of narcissists whose insatiable need for affirmation

⁴³⁶ Wade, Voltaire and Candide 316.

⁴³⁷ Bottiglia 131. Bottiglia seems to value an author expressing his tyrannical ego throughout his work as an artistic achievement.

⁴³⁸ *Ibid.*, 243 seduced by the notion of a tyrannical ego approves of this 'trick'..

binds them forever to those they both fear and scorn. To maintain his leadership, Candide needed to keep his 'little society' stupid and ugly and himself, ultimately, fearful and alone.

An avatar of malignant narcissism, Candide never listens to anyone throughout the tale.⁴³⁹ Considered a "superb conversationalist", careful reading of *Candide* as well as his correspondence, proves Voltaire to have delivered monologues rather than engaging in dialogues.⁴⁴⁰ Verbal exchanges, in *Candide* were Voltaire's opportunity to dazzle the reader with rhetorical skills while reinventing himself through the various characters. The 'mature' Candide stopped responding: "...Martin in particular concluded that man was bound to live either in convulsions of misery or in the lethargy of boredom. Candide did not agree, but expressed no positive opinion."⁴⁴¹ This is the point when Candide ultimately assumes Voltaire's identity after trying on other personalities which he progressively rejects. He was not as practical or loyal as his valet Cacambo or the old woman who numerous times saved him, not depressed or patient like Martin, not lascivious and miserly like the Grand Inquisitor or the loathsome Jew, not stupid like the hot-headed absurd aristocrats, not useless or ugly like Pangloss, not joyless like the wealthy Venetian nobleman, Pococurante and not successful like the old Turk who was satisfied managing his private affairs. Candide never experiences others as agents of self-confirmation thus remaining with an identity based on negation, an inner void.⁴⁴²

⁴³⁹ Wade, *Voltaire and Candide* 306.

⁴⁴⁰ Bottiglia 63

⁴⁴¹ Voltaire *Candide* ch. 30 75.

⁴⁴² Kohut, *The Kohut Seminars* 95-107.

Seducing others to his path was Candide's greatest success and Voltaire's not so hidden aspiration.⁴⁴³ But it was a success built on devaluation of others without a sense of a coherent personal identity. Many view Candide's directive to his cast to cultivate one's garden a practical suggestion leading to a productive existence. Rendering the statement obscure is what enabled this misinterpretation of the text. Candide, who by then literally owned his crew, dismissed Pangloss' attempt to infuse meaning into their lives and ordered them in a final act of domination to tend the garden: "...and Pangloss sometimes used to say to Candide:--All events are linked together in the best of possible worlds;.....--That is very well put, said Candide, but we must cultivate our garden."⁴⁴⁴ This is an example of excessive individualism which destroys individuality by domination rather than an effort to build a productive community. Typical of underdeveloped psyches where childish will and egotism replace competency-based maturity and wisdom, Candide's only way to engage with others is either being governed or governing.⁴⁴⁵ Always overawed by the learnedness of others and at the same time resistant to learned authorities, he was immune to actual learning. Hence, Candide's contribution to the 'little society' remains hidden maintaining superiority as an act of will rather than as a merit-based or earned position. Like Voltaire, Candide got what he wanted because he willed it. Deservedly or not he felt entitled.

⁴⁴³ Kristeva 200 stresses the *jouissance* in seduction as a pleasure in the power of leading others astray and into one's own path.

⁴⁴⁴ Voltaire *Candide* 77.

⁴⁴⁵ Harding 315 addresses the psychological structure of a non-individuated ego.

In looking for messages, latent or manifest, one finds in *Candide* a great deal of ersatz and faddish topicality. The tale is overflowing with allusions to political events, disasters, past feuds, present personal acquisitions and historical figures. Pangloss is encumbered with the task of impressing the audience with Voltaire's vast knowledge in philosophy, religion, history, science, etc. Voltaire's facts fetish, a common tool use by narcissists to bolster their ego, inadvertently reveals irrational aspects of his personality. The refined connoisseur discloses a crude taste for gratuitous violence cloaked in lamentable depictions of the aftermath of natural disasters and war. Voltaire's portrayals of the results of the Lisbon Earthquake, the gore of the Seven Years' War and Damien's attempt on the life of Louis XV, suggest a thrill and fascination with horror. An histrionic character emerges clearly also from his correspondence on these topics. "*J'y gémis sur le genre humain*" he wrote to a friend in an obsessional frenzy with the attempted regicide an event which produced fifty letters in eight days. While life in Paris went back to normal, a groaning Voltaire continued to predict the fatal demise of humanity.⁴⁴⁶ His uncanny ability to turn personal pathologies into didactic moral teachings, was epitomized in *Candide* where fascination with violence was transformed into a rage against the futility and cruelty of war.

The evil Voltaire attributed to war seems to stay within the realm of bodily harm or material destruction. For Voltaire, good and evil, right and wrong, were often based on the pain-pleasure principle. Satisfaction of bodily needs and avoidance of pain as prime motivators for approving or rejecting behaviour are characteristic of individuals who are not detached from

⁴⁴⁶ Geoffrey Murray, *Voltaire's Candide : the Protean Gardner, 1755-62*, Studies in Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century, ed. Theodore Besterman, vol. LXIX (Geneva : Institute et Musée Voltaire, 1970) 154. The quote is taken from a letter Voltaire addressed to Charles-Jean-Francois Hénault, January 13, 1757. Besterman D.7117.

early attachment to physical senses and never outgrow the domination of the somatic.⁴⁴⁷

Sympathetic to Voltaire's incessant preoccupation with physical ailments, André Maurois noted he was a dying man all his life.⁴⁴⁸ Psychologically this translates into an ego that could never see beyond its physical needs and subjective aesthetic interests. Declaring himself a man of culture, Voltaire succeeded in distracting us from the fact that his cultural appreciation was limited to his personal desires or familiarity. All the gardens, inns, palaces, food and clothing in *Candide* point to a single centre, Voltaire's backyard. Curiously, Paris was missing from the spectacles of war, perhaps a gesture of deference toward the police among whom he had many friends.⁴⁴⁹

Much like his condemnation of war, Voltaire's account of the catastrophic earthquake in Lisbon remained at the somatic level and was not followed with reflections on possible amelioration for the suffering victims. Voltaire could describe a city in ruin and people being physically maimed and hungry. But at no point did he allude to the emotional pain associated with loss of life nor did he offer people solace or help in handling their misfortune.⁴⁵⁰ In *Candide* he used the event to ridicule those who tried to infuse the earthquake with moral significance. Connections between natural disasters and immoral conduct were rejected by many contemporary

⁴⁴⁷ Harding 30 describes the false separation of underdeveloped egos whose self-centeredness restricts experiences to the somatic.

⁴⁴⁸ André Maurois, Foreword, *Candide*, by Voltaire, trans. Lowell Bair (New York: Bantam Books, 1981) 1.

⁴⁴⁹ Bottiglia 152 points out this omission and suggests the possibility of deference to the Parisian police.

⁴⁵⁰ Voltaire *Candide* ch. 5 10-11.

scientists even in Catholic Spain and Portugal.⁴⁵¹ Among those who tried to reconcile the disaster with the philosophical principle ‘the best of all possible worlds’, only a minority subscribed to the simplistic formulation of punishment for sins. For many scholars, the earthquake was a tragic event in a world which contains all possibilities manifesting the one, unified God. Voltaire must have realized that the philosophical concept of perfection did not correspond with happiness, but his agenda was not to clarify ideas, disseminate scientific information or argue with Church dogma which he never contradicted. His goal was to point out absurdities, real or fabricated, to an audience he was content to keep in the dark. An impatient Voltaire in need of spectacles knew that raw bigotry and radical simplifications would captivate an audience much faster than an honest presentation. Voltaire was not interested in getting people to think, he only wanted to capture their attention.

Most reflective of Voltaire’s limited humanism and weak humanitarianism was his lack of attention to and understanding of emotional pain and powerlessness associated with loss. The man who decried suffering more loudly than the sounds of the street, was oblivious to Pascalian human torment because he denied psychological reality.⁴⁵² Insensible to the sense of inferiority in himself and others, he was unaware that his outrage with the determinism of the optimists fizzled into a passive resignation by the end of the tale, the kind of surrender he deplored in the simple folk who needed religion. Critics argue that the account of the earthquake in *Candide* was an

⁴⁵¹ Wade, *Voltaire and Candide* 99-100 cites several contemporary opinions on the subject: Da Silva, the Portuguese king’s doctor, thought the connection between sin and earthquake to be absurd and attributed it to physical forces. A work by a Nunios Reveiro Sanches also concluded that earthquakes do not have moral significance.

⁴⁵² Ibid., 107 cites from “*Le poème sur le désastre de Lisbonne*”: “*Au sein de l’infini nous élançons notre être; Sans pouvior un momemt nous voir et nous connaître*”.

opportunity to produce another *gros rire* discharging a chronically pent up irritability.⁴⁵³ Less damning, though emphasizing Voltaire's shallowness, are views that Candide's swinging on the optimism-pessimism pendulum was in response to external events and lacked personal conviction.⁴⁵⁴ Resolution of faith-based dilemmas through internal conflict, the kind faced by Job, Boethius and Pascal, must have been completely incomprehensible to Voltaire whose legendary fetish for the facts became a hallmark in modern consciousness. For one obsessed with threats to self-preservation, adaptation and the reinvention of self are more advantageous than coherence or conviction. Odysseus, shrewdest survivor among the Greeks, should have been Voltaire's ego-ideal, but his obvious cunning was not conducive to the cultivation of an aesthetic response that could compete with Church morality and pass for humanism.

Voltaire exhibited a consistent and predictable discrepancy between his fictional expressions of humanitarianism and 'real-life' financial decisions. His outrage against wars in *Candide*, did not translate into shying away from taking advantage of 'idiotic' monarchs to augment his coffers. Making a habit of profiting from wars in his youth, as a universal trader he bought Turkish rugs taken from a British vessel which was captured by the French, during the Seven Years' War (1756-1763).⁴⁵⁵ A similar inconsistency is found between the humanitarian homilies against slavery voiced in *Candide* and his correspondence on the topic. In the tale, slavery was depicted by a black man suffering physical hardships with a resulting handicap,

⁴⁵³ Whitmore 66.

⁴⁵⁴ Wade, *Voltaire and Candide* 138.

⁴⁵⁵ Murray 318.

missing an arm and a leg, because "...If we catch a finger in the sugar mill where we work, they cut off our hand; If we try to run away, they cut off our legs; I have undergone both these experiences. This is the price of sugar you eat in Europe."⁴⁵⁶ In a letter to a friend, Voltaire expressed different sentiments: "It is said that we don't have more negroes to work in our sugar plantations, I am confident we'll be supplied."⁴⁵⁷ This does not only reflect an artist's ability to distance himself from his fictionalized concerns for humanity, but a cynic's ability to profit doubly from war and from righteous indignation against war. In general, the man who protested the cruelty of war showed great agility with practical morality in turning war to profit.

To a friend, the Comtesse de Lutzelbourg he lamented in 1756 the frustration of being far from the fight which he referred to as "*du théâtre où cette grande tragédie se joue.*"⁴⁵⁸ And again to the same lady he wrote in April 1757 that "...*Il faut regarder tous ces événements comme une tragédie que nous voyons d'une bonne loge, où nous sommes très à notre aise.*"⁴⁵⁹ Wade rejects this as evidence of indifference suggesting instead that this mode of expression was a means to ward off intolerable anxiety.⁴⁶⁰ This view which is consistent with the thesis that Voltaire's

⁴⁵⁶ Ibid., 321. "*Quand nous travaillons aux sucreries, & que la meule nous entrappe le doigt, on nous coupe la main: quand nous voulons nous enfuir, on nous coupe le jable: je me suis trouve dans le deux cas. C'est à ce prix que vous mangez du sucre en Europe.*"

⁴⁵⁷ Ibid., quotes from Besterman, *Correspondence* 7412. "...*On dit que nous n'avons plus de nègres pour travailler à nos sucreries. J'ai bien fait de me pourvoir.*"

⁴⁵⁸ Letter from Voltaire to the Duchesse de Saxe Gotha, November 9, 1756, Besterman, D.7051.

⁴⁵⁹ Voltaire to the Duchesse de Saxe Gotha, April 21, 1757. Besterman, D.7243.

⁴⁶⁰ Wade, *Voltaire and Candide* 129, 140.

behaviour was often motivated by the need to contain a free-floating anxiety, does not negate the fact that he viewed life, including war, as a theatre he wanted to direct. He felt triumphant in his achievement of purchasing the best seats, his three estates, from which he could watch how others were caught in the absurdities of life.

As early as 1740, Voltaire articulated in a letter to his friend Argenson his notions of history and of historiography which initiated the project of composing the history of Louis XIV: "... I have a funny idea in my head; that our dry and barbaric history can borrow some interest from tragedy makers. Mezerai and Daniel bore me; they are without knowledge, pain or passion. It is necessary in history, like in a theatrical piece to have display, content and outcome."⁴⁶¹ Little changed between 1740 and 1759, in his views, language and dramatics. There was no difference between the content of *Candide* and his histories; both depicted world events as endless cascades of crimes committed by almost identical versions of absurd criminals.⁴⁶² Unlike nonfictionalized history, the puppeteer ended his story with Candide/Voltaire at the helm saving his ridiculous companions/humanity from themselves.

"*Il faut cultiver notre Jardin*", *Candide*'s closing remark is one of the most recognized literary lines of the last two centuries. Its great success affirms Voltaire's remarkable intuitive grasp of the seductive powers of deliberate opacity. Resonant with anachronism and a brand of 'practical morality', the statement gained unprecedented popularity. Voltaire did not value

⁴⁶¹ Voltaire to René Louis de Voyer de Paulmy, marquis d'Argenson, January 23, 1740. Besterman, D. 2148 January, 1740. "*J'ai une drôle idée dans ma tête; c'est qu'il n'y a que des gens qui ont fait des tragédies qui puissent jeter quelque intérêt dans notre histoire sèche et barbare, Mezerai et Daniel m'ennuient; c'est qu'il ne savent ni peindre ni remuer les passions. Il faut dans histoire, comme dans une pièce de théâtre, exposition, noeud, et dénouement.*"

⁴⁶² Becker 130 makes this comments about the histories only.

physical work over philosophizing for himself or the privileged minority that counted. On the contrary, he delegated labour to the ignorant and stupid majority. Taken literally, which is more fitting with Voltaire's mentality, the phrase loses its enigmatic allure and reflects the personal reality of the hero-author. After losing influence with the Prussian monarch, Voltaire never earned his 'rightful' respect in the French court. Despite being a court historian, he decided after several years of despair and panic to purchase his own kingdom. Correspondence preceding the publication of *Candide* reveals a "cowardly timidity" reflected in confused childish questioning.⁴⁶³ The sense of calm which followed this crisis, much like that which succeeded his 'exile' in England, was restored by excellent financial decisions which earned him unparalleled independence, the *sine qua non* of his outrageous popularity. The background to *Candide* was the acquisition of large estates in the French-Swiss border which he turned into self-sufficient domains fit for a king. He equipped his realm with a private theatre and a personalized church, "Deo Erexit Voltaire MDCCLXI".

Scholars, in contrast to popular lore, do not argue with the fact that Voltaire was obsessed by a desire to befriend kings, ministers and ladies of influence.⁴⁶⁴ The first two were used to secure social status whereas the latter were a vehicle to gather and transmit information and gossip. Nor is there disagreement over the fact that he purchased the estates to become sovereign of his own garden. Debatable are notions imputing to his gardening a "forward-looking socially useful way of life".⁴⁶⁵ According to Roche, Voltaire at Ferney was a typical nobleman who

⁴⁶³ Wade, *Voltaire and Candide* 108.

⁴⁶⁴ *Ibid.* 138.

⁴⁶⁵ Bottiglia 42.

demanded liberty for himself without accepting the principle of equality for all, not even for peers. Like the physiocrats, he promoted the argument that education for all would result in a diminished labour force and a decrease in revenue.⁴⁶⁶ Robinson Crusoe, the proto-typical self-sufficient bourgeois, declared proudly that “..If I had pleased I could call myself king or emperor over the whole country which I had possession of.”⁴⁶⁷ Candide, on the other hand, used a language of efficiency to conceal his domineering urges thus personifying the prudential morality of bourgeois mentality. Cultivating the garden was extremely profitable and soothing to a self-centered and anxious Voltaire who had little intention of benefitting others. Attention to progressive agricultural methods reflected their potential to increase profits for the master rather than concerns for farmers or the promotion of a productive way of life.

Stallybrass and White’s principle of defining a culture by what it marginalizes elucidates the meaning of *Candide*’s garden. The story depicts several gardens which Voltaire rejected in favour of the last mysterious realm in Turkey. Westphalia was a conception of childhood innocence guided by metaphysical silliness. A privileged nobility excluded him because of his illegitimate birth. Aristocratic bastardy was a popular literary theme (e.g. *Tom Jones*) and more palatable than accepting a non-aristocratic social origin. While Voltaire inherited his social connections and business acumen from his bourgeois father he imagined himself the illegitimate offspring of an obscurely ancient noble stock.

⁴⁶⁶ Roche 403, 432.

⁴⁶⁷ Ian Watts, *Myth of Modern Individualism: Faust, Don Quixote, Don Juan, Robinson Crusoe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996) 139.

Utopian Eldorado offered happiness or wealth to an entire society. This is where Voltaire's provincialism and bourgeois mentality shines with particular clarity. There was little of nature or of the natural in this haven where streets were paved with gold and gems, the epitome of the bourgeois reification of the economy and accumulation of wealth. A major shortcoming of this system was the absence of private property, fundamental to Voltaire's entitlement to privileges in addition to his genius which conferred on him unique freedoms and rights.⁴⁶⁸ A related failing of Eldorado was the fact that wealth was shared by all its members, including children, and money could not buy titles or people. Voltaire's description of Eldorado exposed both a lack of imagination and a provincialism which are masked by garishness and a flood of facts. The inns resemble European palaces, the enormous amount of food resembled a display of bourgeois gluttony and the children dressed in European garb play familiar games. Eldorado made Candide homesick, he was bored and most importantly anonymous : “.If we stay here, we shall be just like everybody else, whereas if we go back to our world, taking with us just a dozen sheep loaded with Eldorado pebbles, we shall be richer than all the kings put together, we shall have no more inquisitors to fear, and we shall easily be able to regain Miss Cunegonde.”⁴⁶⁹ This, in a nut shell, was Voltaire's philosophy of life and the secret meaning of his garden: obtaining great wealth is a matter of wit, rather than hard work, which translated into buying guarantees leverage with Kings and Church and enables the purchase of relationships and of notoriety.

Voltaire compared his 'gardens' to the Court of Versailles and himself to a conquering monarch. “...*Je conduit tout le détail de trois terre*”, he wrote to a friend after he purchased his

⁴⁶⁸ Macpherson 234 .

⁴⁶⁹ Voltaire, *Candide* ch. 18, 39.

three estates.⁴⁷⁰ His iconography boasted not only regal status over his domains, but titled him an architect: "...*Je suis devenu plus grand architect que jamais.*"⁴⁷¹ To Voltaire, a misplaced Greek demagogue, the position of architect signified much more than a designer of gardens. Adopting a title that connotes notions of 'earliest', 'first' and 'creator' was an expression of entitlement to power and status. Master of deception, he lured his contemporaries and posterity into using his autistic expressions as if they were shared communication.⁴⁷² It was Voltaire who initiated the appellations he became known by, from *laboureur, Jardinier, cultivateur, patriarche* etc.⁴⁷³ Voltaire's *patriarche*, like his *architect*, was not restricted to the connotation of a wise elder, but undoubtedly included the broader meanings of 'father of the human race' or head of Church. Writing incessantly to an ever growing circle of friends/readers, he managed to increase the number of intimates who addressed him in his own language which metamorphosed into common parlance. Two hundred years later, when most of his work is not read, only a few know that Voltaire usurped his titles and forced them on others through unrivaled persistence and cunning.

This language of connivance defines much of our perceptions of Voltaire who charmed many into likening his life as a landed lord to the existence of a hermit. Rejected by the Prussian emperor and feeling despondent, a sixty year old floundering Voltaire was in pursuit of finding a suitable court. Outrageously wealthy, he realized he could erect his own palaces and create a court in his three domains. While playing the part imagining his conduct of global affairs from his

⁴⁷⁰ Murray 42 quotes from a letter Voltaire sent to Cideville. Besterman, 7654.

⁴⁷¹ Ibid., quotes from a letter addressed to Mme de Fontaine. Besterman, 7568.

⁴⁷² Murray 17 develops the notion of Voltaire's language of connivance with his intimates.

⁴⁷³ These titles are strewn all over his massive correspondence from 1755 onward.

provincial seat, he was careful to conceal his fantasy with terms of feigned modesty and submissiveness. The grand estates were called a hermitage and the lavishly decadent life style was termed a retreat. But the secluded residence of solitude and reflection became a beehive of activity and a gathering place from which letters and messages went out with a frequency that rivaled his three competitors, the Prussian, Russian and French courts.

Voltaire's popular legacy as a great humanitarian is incredible against biographical data that figure him an aspiring aristocrat who despised most people and definitely the masses. Voltaire succeeded in convincing humanity that beneath his aristocratic disdain beat a common heart. Fact citing from Besterman's *Correspondence*, Murray offers a list of letters where Voltaire refers to himself as: "comte de Tournay", "seigneur de Tourneil et de Freney", "gentilhomme ordinaire du roi".⁴⁷⁴ Frederick of Prussia responded in jest with : *Je me recommande à la muse du vicomte de Tournay, baron des Délices, seigneur de Versey, Gex...et d'autre terres, gentilhomme extraordinaire.*⁴⁷⁵ Voltaire, unabashedly referred to some Genevan inhabitants as "vassals de Ferney".⁴⁷⁶ This represented the essence of *Candide's* garden where the labels and the members of the 'little society' were bought, including his wife, but with the exception of *frère Giroflee*. Typically cautious with Heaven and shrewd with earthlings, Voltaire did not procure a 'man of the cloth' taking the pulpit himself. Great as his intuitive skills were, Voltaire owed his masterly accomplishment as image maker to a new market mentality and a civilization in search of new icons to reassure its growing angst at the growth of science. There is

⁴⁷⁴ Murray 340

⁴⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁷⁶ Ibid., 340-41

good reason to believe that he would have been dwarfed by the superior minds of the seventeenth-century and caricatured by the tempestuous romantics of the next century.

Voltaire's narcissistic traits are also revealed in the style and structure of the tale. *Candide's* celebrated ambiguity concealed a world of chaos and paradoxes that was brought to order by reducing it to a small manageable garden ruled by one person. This is the ultimate fantasy of an extremely insecure person who requires total control of his environment to insure the survival of a fragile ego. The world of *uomo universale* was as large as money could buy and small enough to be subdued.

Another prominent feature of *Candide* is its repetitive nature. Ideas, phrases (e.g., *tout est bien*) and facts (the different wars: Bulgarians with the Avars, the North Africans in the story of the *vieille*, and those in the Americas) are reiterated over and over at a frenetic pace. Wade believes the numerous repetitions were designed to conceal weakness of ideas unimpressively argued.⁴⁷⁷ Bottiglia, who rejects the idea that the composition was largely a stream of the unconscious, also views repetition as a consciously motivated act.⁴⁷⁸ While behaviour might be deliberate in execution, the decision of what to repeat and how often, reasons for engaging in the behaviour can be irrational and not accessible to one's awareness. Rituals performed by individuals suffering from obsessive-compulsive disorders (OCD) are highly stylized, repetitive and executed carefully and deliberately to ward off irrational fears. Voltaire's obsessive repetitions suggest both an intense need to control his audience as well as a paucity of ideas. Voltaire hammered his facts into his readers *ad nauseum*, literally 'bending their ear' to insure

⁴⁷⁷ Wade, *Voltaire and Candide* 271, 261.

⁴⁷⁸ Bottiglia 160.

they heard what he wanted them to hear. While very aware of this goal, he had little insight into his desperate need for control as a means for containing his devouring ego.

Vulgarizing psychoanalytic terminology, Bottiglia depicts Voltaire anachronistically and erroneously as an artist-genius with a refined sublimated personality. The principle that psychic changes are produced by self-reflection and not by conscious manners and opinions underlies most if not all personality development theories.⁴⁷⁹ Thus, awareness of trendy topics and claims to refined taste, two defining attributes of Voltaire, are not necessarily a product of sublimation. Rather than re-channeling his somatic-based hostility and anxiety, Voltaire seems to have cultivated a unique capacity to be irritated with the 'foolishness' of the dead and living alike. Pascal understood the Sisyphean absurdity and anxiety-based tragedy of the human condition. An unseeing Voltaire, unable to tolerate the precarious state of human kind acted out his non-sublimated raw instincts. Awareness and appreciation of cultural subtleties cannot only coexist with a consciousness that is oriented only towards itself, but even with the capacity to rationalize injustice and cruelty.⁴⁸⁰ The appeal of *Candide*'s action-packed yet ultimately monotonous narrative reflects the success of marketing illusory excitement. It bespeaks a growing desire to flee from anxious boredom rather than a true exchange between a refined author and a cultivated audience.⁴⁸¹

⁴⁷⁹ Harding 27.

⁴⁸⁰ High ranking Nazi officers are known for playing classical music and reading poetry at death camps.

⁴⁸¹ Steiner, Language and Silence 77 develops the concept of 'marketing excitement'.

Attention has also been given to the language Voltaire used in *Candide*. Commonly the work is said to have had a functional vocabulary delivered in rapid motion designed for reciting to and entertaining salon audiences.⁴⁸² Frequent use of infinitives is identified as a means for expressing energy and action. Superlatives dominate the tale adding to the impression that everything is either too little or too much, but never adequate.⁴⁸³ The last characteristic is fundamental to rigid personalities whose bifurcated Manichean world allows only extreme experiences of 'all or nothing' and choices of 'us or them'. Quick to idealize and quick to discard, these individuals oscillate between idealizing and resisting others. Either way they are impervious to learning and change. Outbursts of extreme enthusiasm were common to Voltaire who referred to Bayle, among others, as "...the greatest dialectician who has ever written" and "the eternal humor of human reason" before cutting him down to size.⁴⁸⁴ Voltaire was often deceptively generous with praise to great achievers; this would invariably be followed by criticism or dismissive remarks leaving him no one to emulate.

Voltaireans tend to view the action-packed story and its rapid pace as mirroring his life as an active man who deplored passivity. Reflecting narcissistic traits, the mania for action like that for consumption, is a filler of a sense of emptiness and survival mechanism to ward off fear of death.⁴⁸⁵ Much like the overabundance of facts and actions is the excessive use of ironic devices:

⁴⁸² Bottiglia 208, 70.

⁴⁸³ Wade, *Voltaire and Candide* 246, 253.

⁴⁸⁴ Phillip Russell, *The Glittering Century* (New York: Charles Scribner & Sons, 1936) 27.

⁴⁸⁵ Lasch 80, 138.

volumes of absurdities, sardonic manner and thought, euphemisms, paronomasia, figurative comparisons and melodramatic pathos.⁴⁸⁶ Voltaire put on a dazzling performance of what he knew best, the art of rhetoric. After a few laughs, the stinging bite grows tedious and depressing offering nothing but disaffirmation, an experience described frequently by those involved in relationships with narcissistic individuals.

Ideologically *Candide* seems to resonate with modern themes like efficiency, practical morality, individualism and the myth of the self-made man. Stated authoritatively, Voltaire's long lists of facts produces a sense of great knowledge and by association also of depth and wisdom. In a culture where faith-based worship is replaced by idolatry of the factual, Voltaire's dazzling display of information is misjudged for creative intelligence. The glaring absence of self-reflection is not a flaw for the modern ethos which adopted the idea that man was born for action.⁴⁸⁷ In a work filled with humanitarian homilies silence concerning social inequality speaks louder than repetitive depictions of brutality. The point of morality is not to put existing abuses on display, but to alter them.⁴⁸⁸ *Candide* is strewn with *ad hominem* attacks on kings and aristocrats, but not once was Voltaire concerned with modifying the unbalanced fiscal system which the 'conservative' *Parlement* of Paris tried to modify in 1725, 1748 and 1756.⁴⁸⁹ This was a concern for other members of the French Enlightenment, but never for Voltaire, the budding seigneur.

⁴⁸⁶ Bottiglia 208-238.

⁴⁸⁷ Horkheimer 95 presents the concept of 'the idolatry of the actual'.

⁴⁸⁸ Bernard Williams, *Morality: An Introduction to Ethics* (Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 1972) 33 makes the point about the function of morality. The notion of 'practical morality' is in reference to Bottiglia's view of the messages in *Candide*.

⁴⁸⁹ Roche 467.

The blustering anti-clerical language of *Candide* was more a ploy of sensationalism than a war on religion which some view as *Candide's* central concept. Voltaire himself toned down an outrageous diatribe against religion written by the country priest Meslier. Ultimately, the “morality in action” depicted in *Candide* was not a crusade against Church dogma as much as an elevation of excessive individualism to a “rarefied order superior to life”.⁴⁹⁰

In summary, *Candide* as vintage Voltaire was a spectacle of popular and trendy themes addressed to entertain a developing public opinion. Its success, which mirrored the good fortunes of its author, arises from the allure of sensation rather than artistic or intellectual competence. The mystery attributed to the writer and his story does not reflect deep or esoteric meaning as much as an incoherence generated by a confused outpouring of facts. Bombarded by an unparalleled accumulation of chaotic happenings, scholars who rate his work repeatedly as mediocre are reluctant to judge him for his lack of intellectual commitment and creative deficits. “Questions of distinguishing between Voltaire’s poetic creation and his expedient thinking is very ticklish and it is doubtful that literary history can ever settle it”.⁴⁹¹ Such intellectual paralysis accounts for Voltaire’s success to market ambiguity, intellectual laziness and fickleness as celebrated practices of ‘practical morality’ where timing and opportunism reign supreme. Like Voltaire who found the existence of evil intolerable and left it to the realm of the unexplained, many scholars choose the comfort of wreathing story and author in a shroud of ambiguity to the possibility of facing a blank page hidden behind a verbal pomposity.

⁴⁹⁰ Bottiglia 49.

⁴⁹¹ Wade, *Voltaire and Candide* 111.

Candide like Voltaire could not make up his own mind before annihilating others. Both experienced jouissance in domination as a temporary relief from anxiety.⁴⁹² In typical Voltairean style, Candide disdained his fellow travellers whose only redeeming quality was their final submission to his rule, i.e., cultivating his garden. All characters in *Candide* altered as they matured, except Candide himself who remained puerile in his appearance and views of life. Self-absorbed and ego-centric he expected others to cater to his wishes while he dismissed them with childish will.

The world view espoused in *Candide* features one of the more simplistic ideas of the Age of Enlightenment: happiness is achieved by ridding the world of a few errors perpetuated by religious and metaphysical beliefs.⁴⁹³ What follows the purge is a unified sensibility of conformity where everybody is owned by Candide and accepts his enigmatic solution to the riddle of the universe. Diderot, less known, but more representative of Enlightenment sensibilities, understood the limitations of factual knowledge in the affairs of a tempestuous heart. With age he grew more hesitant with answers while posing questions more frequently and showing a growing awareness of personal limitations as well as the bounds of the spirit of Enlightenment. Civilization progressed through doubt and questions, two mental skills that were sorely lacking in Voltaire. His great understanding of marketing books and images, which insured the simultaneous publication of *Candide* in as many sites as he could afford, was the secret to his success in a rising mass market economy and a culture replacing old miracles with new spectacles of diversion.

⁴⁹² Kristeva 177 makes the observation of the narcissist need to dominate in order to feel safe.

⁴⁹³ Lovejoy, *The Great Chain of Being* 64.

CHAPTER 7

THE CONSCIENCE OF EUROPE OR A LUCKY BRILLIANT OPPORTUNIST

Many Enlightenment researchers acknowledge that Voltaire's intellectual accomplishments lacked profundity. That his desire for notoriety often superceded genuine intellectual interest, has also been accepted by period scholars, including proponents. Demonstrating that his intellectual limitations mirrored emotional deficits, while evident profusely in his work, correspondence and conduct, nonetheless is likely to stimulate a debate regarding the validity of a psycho-historical framework in historical research. Furthermore, attempting to divest Voltaire of the title 'the conscience of Europe' would still constitute an act of heresy or *hubris* in many academic circles and likely throw the modern pantheon of popular heroes into disarray. One might question the wisdom of rejecting one more tradition and denying modern consciousness yet another myth. The purpose of interpreting Voltaire and his work as representing the spirit of narcissistic entitlement in the Age of Enlightenment, is not to demythologize an individual or an era nor to minimize their contributions to modern culture. Rather, the intent is to shed new light on the evolution of a psycho-social mind-set that has been imprinted on modern and post-industrial consciousness. Rather than denying Voltaire an important role in the landscape of Western civilization, this work has attempted to clarify the nature of his contribution.

There seems to be a curious parallel between Voltaire's facility with changing opinions and loyalties and his audience readiness, then and now, to suspend critical judgment and succumb to his endless arsenal of *ad hoc* rationalizations. Thus, petty raw bigotry against Jews, unbridled verbal hostility towards the Church, unrestrained attacks against personal enemies, contrived

clandestine and scandalous publicity stunts, shady and unethical business dealing, abandoning loyalty to country and monarch for position or title, and an overall dismissive attitude towards most of humanity, have been rendered inconsequential against his purported commitment to the struggle for religious tolerance from 1762 until his death in 1778. Taking up the case of the Calas, a Huguenot family tried by the existing harsh judicial process, has been designated the pivot of Voltaire's campaign to promote religious tolerance. In addition, his intense involvement with the legal issues of this case is said to have directed his attention to systemic deficits which led to his calling for changes that resulted in a global European movement of law reform. Voltaire acquired the status of 'the conscience of Europe' by projecting a persuasive image as proclaimer of religious tolerance and law reform.

The lexical meaning of the term conscience raises questions concerning Voltaire's deservedness of the honour bestowed upon him. If 'conscience' includes underlying motives, then the deep lying reasons for carrying a crusade against the church should be addressed. His often compulsively driven correspondence abounds with evidence suggesting that the image of a selfless individual championing the cause of a Huguenot family victimized by the arbitrary powers of the Catholic church is disingenuous. Voltaire's association with the favourable turn of events reflected his readiness to capitalize on existing currents and his remarkable understanding of the machinations of mass communication in the growing arena of public opinion rather than a genuine investment in the family or religious tolerance. To be entitled to the status of 'conscience of Europe', Voltaire's supposed achievements should be subjected to an ethical review.⁴⁹¹ The

⁴⁹¹ Kathleen O'Flaherty, Voltaire, Myth and Reality (Oxford: Cork University Press, 1945) 26. O'Flaherty argues that the outcomes of Voltaire's campaign against the Church gave him an undeserved reputation as champion of tolerance.

ability to separate outcome from intention, a fundamental cognitive skill in the moral development of children, is a useful criterion for reviewing Voltaire's conduct in the Calas affair.⁴⁹⁴ While imputing motives to actions can be arbitrary, evidence provided by Voltaire over time and across circumstances, supports the plausibility of the argument that both the affair and the ensuing anti-church campaign presented very timely opportunities in a lifelong crusade of self-aggrandizement.

It is important to acknowledge furthermore, that the desired historical outcomes associated with Voltaire's war against the Church have not only stifled criticism of his motives and tactics, but also ignored the undesirable effects of his anarchic negativity. Voltaire espoused social stability and would have been horrified by the prospect of a French Revolution. Nonetheless, his indiscriminate irreverence promoted sufficient hostile disregard for all symbols of authority thus contributing to the ensuing social disintegration.⁴⁹⁵ In popular lore, Voltaire is known as an individual who inspired the French Revolution with notions of egalitarianism he essentially rejected. Most of his audience has been captivated, through direct knowledge or hearsay, by his peculiar style of 'amusing sarcasm' unaware of the long term destructive effects this relentless negativity had on the French cultural landscape and the future of Western society in general.⁴⁹⁶

⁴⁹⁴ Lawrence Kohlberg, The Psychology of Moral Development: The Nature and Validity of Moral Stages (San-Francisco : Harper and Row, 1984). According to Kohlberg's theory, a child progresses from relying on outcomes of behaviour to identifying motives as the primary factor in ascribing moral value to actions.

⁴⁹⁵ O'Flaherty 27.

⁴⁹⁶ Marcello T. Maestro, Voltaire and Beccaria as Reformers of Criminal Law (New York: Columbia University Press, 1942) 155.

The fact that Voltaire showed little interest in criminal law until the Calas affair is agreed by all. He did not direct criticism against torture in *Le Siècle de Louis XIV* published in 1751. His correspondence concerning the torture of Damians who had made an attempt on the king's life in 1757, revealed him indifferent to the practice.⁴⁹⁷ As well, the 1761 edition of *Essai sur les mœurs* contained no criticism of torture or a clear stance on issues concerning criminal law. These were added in later editions of this treatise.⁴⁹⁸ While attacking clericalism for years and stirring up Parisian opinion to assault the Jesuits with *Candide*, Voltaire was not involved in the controversy regarding social discrimination against Huguenots in France until 1762.⁴⁹⁹ Interestingly, his public deistic criticism and the beginning of his outcry against *l'Infâme* which started around 1762 with the Calas affair, coincided with the expulsion of the Jesuits and the weakening of the Church and the monarchy.⁵⁰⁰ It is also during this time that Voltaire published a toned-down version of Meslier's anti-Church *Testament* which he had in his possession for twenty- five years.

According to Wade, the flurry of anti-clerical activities, from 1762 onward, indicated a movement of great proportions which could not have been mustered in short order.⁵⁰¹ It suggested a long period of deliberation on the issues. The delay, Wade proposes, reflected

⁴⁹⁷ Ibid., 36.

⁴⁹⁸ Ibid., 38.

⁴⁹⁹ René Pomeau et. al., eds. , *Voltaire en son temps* , vol. 2 (Great Britain: Fayard , Voltaire Foundation, 1995) 111.

⁵⁰⁰ Wade, *The Intellectual Development of Voltaire* 531. These observations were made by P. Verniere in 1954 and Pomeau in 1956.

⁵⁰¹ Ibid., 532.

Voltaire's reluctance to "grant authenticity" to his work until he was sure of its potential influence as well as the natural process of underground publication which consisted of circulating the work among a select intellectual elite uncontaminated by censorship or public appeal.⁵⁰² Throughout his adult life Voltaire was never but in an agitated state. His sense of worry was likely augmented by age and a growing fear of isolation and death anxieties.⁵⁰³ Publicity, Voltaire's *raison d'être*, was always realized by writing with sufficient éclat and irreverence to attract attention. Attributing the onset of Voltaire's anti-church activity in 1762 to the vicissitudes in the circulation of underground material could be replaced with the notion of his uncanny ability for discerning the timely moment for striking opponents. The ousting of the Jesuits coupled with restrictions placed on clerics (e.g., their right to deny sacraments) created a climate that allowed Voltaire to attack the church mercilessly and with impunity. Forever, in search of avenues to further personal causes, Voltaire recognized the opportunity the Calas affair offered and seized upon it with the frantic zeal of an aging narcissist.

Censorship and regulation of the book trade in France after 1761 was under the authority of Chrétien Guillaume de Lamoignon de Malesherbes, a great administrator and advocate of the *philosophes* who attacked the administrative apparatus of the state with a vigour and directness more subversive than Voltaire's outrageousness.⁵⁰⁴ There was as little threat to Voltaire's campaign against the church in 1762 as there was novelty in his ideas. In 1758, Helvétius, a fellow *philosophe*, generated turmoil with church and government authorities, with a major

⁵⁰² Ibid., 532.

⁵⁰³ Maurois 3.

⁵⁰⁴ Roche 279.

publication from which Voltaire chose to dissociate himself.⁵⁰⁵ He not only failed to support a fellow *philosophe*, but withdrew his articles from the *Encyclopédie* when the publication was banned and Diderot and d'Alembert were exposed to personal threats. The former not only persisted, but dared to appoint as co-editor a titled Calvinist, the chevalier Louis Jaucourt.⁵⁰⁶ In 1762, Voltaire did not originate or lead a movement of religious tolerance. Others prepared the stage for his timely offensive against the church. Rather than an honest gesture, his calculated move epitomizes a narcissist's concealed cowardice and the masterly shrewdness of an upstart with a remarkable capacity to present personal agendas as objectives of humanity.

The above conclusion is also supported by the fact that in his fight with *l'Infâme*, Voltaire was busy doing a great deal of "remaniement" rather than producing novel ideas.⁵⁰⁷ His relentless dissemination of material during this period was consistent with an obsessional work schedule evidenced throughout his life as well as with the tendency to revise his work and reshuffle the ideas of others. Every period in Voltaire's adult life was characterized by an incessant outpouring of printed matter which was instrumental in creating an illusion of an endless font of creative energy. It is then after 1762 that Voltaire published a tamer version of the Meslier's *Testament* and started showing interest in Spinoza, the "righteous atheist". The latter's *Tractatus* was long available in the library at Cirey, but Voltaire had little use for it until the Calas affair.⁵⁰⁸ While association with the Amsterdam philosopher posed some danger in France, his work was

⁵⁰⁵ Wade, The Intellectual Development of Voltaire 765; Maestro 31 ; Roche 758.

⁵⁰⁶ Roche 758; Adams 106.

⁵⁰⁷ Wade, The Intellectual Development of Voltaire 541.

⁵⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 694-695.

circulated and read by many contemporaries. Spinoza's religious background and pantheistic ideology became useful to Voltaire's attempts to project an image of religious tolerance.

Voltaire's war with the church, clearly the focus of his life from 1762 onward, was essentially a life long struggle with a principal rival that threatened his identity as master instructor of morality. His contributions to criminal law reform were largely a by-product of his efforts to cripple the moral authority of the church. The campaign against the church, like most issues he addressed, rested on ideas originated by others which he often passed as his own and popularized with great success. It is as broadcaster of change that his contributions to the European socio-cultural landscape are undoubtedly warranted.

The Calas Affaire

To support the position that his interest in law reform was tangential to his battle with the church and that his grasp of legal matters was rather superficial, it is necessary to address the circumstances of Calas' trial and Voltaire's involvement during and following the affair. The events said to have ignited Voltaire's battle with *l'Infâme* took place in the city of Toulouse in the province of Languedoc which suffered a severe economic slump following the Seven Years War.⁵⁰⁹ Contrary to Voltaire's depiction of Toulousans as superstitious and headstrong, others note that this Catholic community allowed its clergy to preach tolerance prior to as well as after the Calas trial.⁵¹⁰

⁵⁰⁹ Pomeau Vol. 2 112.

⁵¹⁰ David Bien, The Calas Affair (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1960). Bien sets the Calas tragedy in a socio-economic context arguing the affair was an aberration in an otherwise more tolerant community.

On September 14, 1761 Francois Rochette, a Huguenot minister, was arrested and charged with preaching, an activity forbidden to Huguenots. He was executed on February 1762 following a painful judicial ordeal.⁵¹¹ Voltaire's silence on this matter has been interpreted as evidence of his typical eschewing association with organized religion.⁵¹² Voltaire himself expressed a more callous attitude towards the affair. In March 1762 he attributed, with ironic indifference, the execution of the pastor to the *parlement's* (of Toulouse) distaste for the poor verse of the Psalms of David, on which Rochette's sermon was based.⁵¹³ This flippant quip was consistent with another remark he made to his friend Cideville in a letter a year earlier, where he joked about purchasing Huguenot preachers for his roof-rack.⁵¹⁴ Apologists excuse this "unfortunate" remark as expressing frustration with the Genevan clergy which banned his plays and the fact that ultimately he rallied for "real cases of injustice".⁵¹⁵ There is just as much evidence to argue that ultimately it was contempt disguised as flippancy which characterized Voltaire's attitude towards humanity as the position that his derision concealed the beating of a truly humanitarian heart.

⁵¹¹ Besterman, Voltaire 426 n. 32; Pomeau 111.

⁵¹² Besterman, *ibid.*, 425-426.

⁵¹³ Voltaire to Charles Augustine Ferio, comte d'Argental, March 2, 1762, Besterman D.10353: "...Ce parlement de Toulouse n'aime pas les mauvais vers."

⁵¹⁴ Voltaire to Pierre Robert Le Cornier de Cideville, January 4, 1761., Besterman D. 9520.

⁵¹⁵ Graham Gargett, Voltaire and Protestantism (Oxford: The Voltaire Foundation; Taylor Institute, 1980) Vol. 188, 281-282.

Suggesting that Voltaire was ignorant of the 'real' restrictions imposed on the Huguenots in France before 1762, seem ludicrous given public debates that raged from 1751 to 1760 and his life long contact with them in France, England and Holland. The debates of the 1750's were provoked by Jean Baptiste Machault, Controller-general of Finance, who recommended that the French Calvinists of the diaspora be invited to assist to end the economic crisis brought on by the War of the Austrian Succession.⁵¹⁶ Pro and con propaganda flourished throughout the decade and while Voltaire was not involved openly, he was well versed in the issues and informed of the contentious literature.⁵¹⁷ Voltaire's silence which has been interpreted as lack of interest reflected, more likely, a prudent tactic. There was too much to lose in committing to a formal stance on government policies. Association with power is not conducive for invoking righteous indignation. Circumstances surrounding the Calas family, on the other hand, offered the right conditions for intervention. There was nothing to lose in appearing to assist the weak, even if the legal case were lost, and much to gain in projecting an image of defender of the innocent. The country was rife with polarized opinions on the issue and Voltaire could take sides as champion of the people against a ruthless church without compromising himself in any way with the government.

Voltaire's silence over Rochette's fate did not only reflect typical calculated caution, but was also consistent with an ideological stance he held throughout his life until the Calas trial. In the *Siècle de Louis XIV*, the Huguenots were portrayed as a subversive group which had to be

⁵¹⁶ Adams 87.

⁵¹⁷ Voltaire to Jacob Vernes, February, 1759, Besterman D.8119.

crushed for the sake of maintaining social stability. This position, reiterated in the 1753 *Supplément* to the 1751 opus, depicted French Protestants as religious fanatics who fomented discord for which they were broken on the wheel by laws that were implemented impartially.⁵¹⁸ Ten years later, at the height of the Calas affair, he revised his opinion in the *Traite sur la tolérance* stating that while first generation Reformers were fanatics, their followers had become well-read gentle folk. A predominantly Lutheran, orderly and flourishing Alsace was used to prove his point.⁵¹⁹ To insure good standing with the king, however, Voltaire also reiterated that fanatics did not deserve tolerance, thus justifying the expulsion of the Jesuits.

Throughout the 1750's, Voltaire was busy scrapping with Laurent Angliviel de La Beaumelle, a Protestant pamphleteer who gained favour with the court for a short while, thus earning the former's envy and ire. This interaction yielded more proclamations of Huguenot fanaticism and political disloyalty from Voltaire rather than pleas for tolerance. Concurrent exchanges between Voltaire and Genevan intellectuals also reveal that his professed acceptance of diverse belief systems concealed a proselytizing agenda. Rather than respect their tenets he viewed the 'progressive' elements among the Reformers as potential converts to his peculiar brand of natural Deism.⁵²⁰ Voltaire was not only indifferent to the plight of the Huguenots until 1762, but ostensibly antagonistic to their theology as well as to their anti-hierarchical republicanism.⁵²¹ No one could have accused him of harbouring pro-Protestant sentiments,

⁵¹⁸ Adams 126-132.

⁵¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 219.

⁵²⁰ *Ibid.*, 119-132 describes the relationship between Voltaire and La Beaumelle.

⁵²¹ Gargett 255.

religious or political. The undertaking of Calas' defense was easily transformed into an act motivated purely by humane considerations. It is not suggested that Voltaire foresaw these events, but rather that his insatiable need for attention and remarkable capacity for discerning appropriate conditions favourable for publicity enabled him to seize the moment with artful deception and obsessional zeal. This reflexive aptitude to frame personal ambition as humanitarian objectives and implement indefatigably a campaign to support this image were quintessential elements in the dynamics of Voltairean narcissism.

On October 13, 1761 Jean Calas, a *pater familias* of a Huguenot household, was arrested on suspicion of murdering his son who allegedly intended to convert to Catholicism. Calvinist precepts allowing a father to put a son to death for filial disobedience were said to have influenced the judges' opinion that a murder rather than a suicide had taken place.⁵²² The state of religious unrest, notwithstanding, the circumstance surrounding the death of the Calas son were far from clear. Jean Calas, backed by his family, produced two contradictory versions of the event. The first account pointing to murder was later justified as the family's attempt to hide the shame associated with suicide. Accordingly, the family professed to have taken the hanging body down and covered strangulation marks on the neck. In the second version, the family 'admitted' to a suicide, but constructed a scenario that presented improbable conditions for suicide to have occurred.⁵²³ Furthermore, letters from the family's solicitor which were intercepted indicated that family members were coached in producing the second version. While there was sufficient

⁵²² Besterman, Voltaire 426 cites Calvin's *Institutio religionis christianae*.

⁵²³ O'Flaherty 28 highlights the contradictory details in the two versions.

evidence to suspect the veracity of Jean Calas' story, his courageous protest of innocence throughout his torture had given rise to doubts of his culpability.

On April 4, 1762, following the execution of Jean Calas, Voltaire wrote to Étienne Noël Damilaville that he was certain the judges thrashed a most innocent man.⁵²⁴ On April 15, he wrote to an unidentified destination that while young Donat Calas had excited his pity and curiosity, he [Voltaire] had no opinion on the matter which he labeled parricide.⁵²⁵ While suggesting the possibility of being deceived as late as July 9, Voltaire had already embarked on a writing frenzy soliciting his powerful friends to join him in his new campaign to "raise heaven and earth" for "the cause" of the innocent family.⁵²⁶ His stated position, during the Calas affair, was that religious bias played a role in the conviction and that the judges were swayed by an ambiance of fanaticism.⁵²⁷ Years later in 1776, he admitted that it was Donat's meekness and assurance that his father did not possess a violent temper that had convinced him of the man's innocence rather than the actual facts surrounding the event.⁵²⁸ Those who conclude that "Voltaire cried out because Donat wept" not only confuse the former's notorious theatricality with genuine empathy,

⁵²⁴ Voltaire to Étienne Noël Damilaville, April 4, 1762, Besterman D. 10406.

⁵²⁵ Voltaire to ? , April 15, 1762, Ibid. D. 10414.

⁵²⁶ Voltaire to Dominique Audibert, July 9, 1762. Ibid. D. 10573 addresses the issue of a possible deception. Voltaire to Phillipe Debrus, July 8, 1762, *ibid.*, D. 10568 provides the new refrain : "...souvenons toujours le ciel et la terre, c'est la mon refrain."

⁵²⁷ Pomeau, Vol. 2, 120.

⁵²⁸ Pierre Jean Bourcet de La Saigne to Voltaire, February 1, 1776. Besterman D. 19897.

but support the idea that the dramatic aspects of the events supersede questions of veracity.⁵²⁹

Neither the favourable outcomes of the case nor the impact it had on future law reform should lend legitimacy to the fact that Voltaire's purported over-identification with his client motivated his judgement more than the facts of the case.

In letters he wrote to his powerful friends, Voltaire misrepresented Jean Calas in order to elicit sympathy and pity.⁵³⁰ According to Voltaire's depiction, Jean Calas was a sixty three year old enfeebled man who could not possibly have overpowered his strong young son. Calas was also depicted as a benevolent father who provided his deceased son with a generous annuity, thus proving also they had a cordial relationship. Finally, Calas was not only generous, but also practiced religious tolerance and employed a Catholic as a domestic. In fact, Jean Calas was a robust man who did not grant his son an annuity and was obliged by law to employ a Catholic servant. To add further credibility to Calas' plea of innocence, Voltaire furnished his friends false information regarding the family's conduct in the matter of their son's death. In Voltaire's version the family called the police, in reality it was a suspicious neighbour who alerted the authorities.⁵³¹ The above details marred the humanitarian possibilities inherent in rescuing a weak and defenseless family from the arbitrary clutches of the infamous church. Details are anathema to narcissistic expressions of entitlement disguised as righteous indignation against a great

⁵²⁹ René Pomeau, *La Religion de Voltaire* (Paris: Bizet, 1969) 326-332 stresses Voltaire emotional involvement in the affair.

⁵³⁰ Voltaire to Charles Augustine Ferriol, comte d'Argental, July 8, 1762, Besterman D.10566. Voltaire to the above, September 14, 1762, Besterman D. 10702.

⁵³¹ O'Flaherty 30.

injustice. *Vrai* and *vraisemblable* were forever interchangeable for Voltaire. For the grand puppeteer it mattered little whether he pulled the strings of marionettes or real people.

As soon as Voltaire started canvassing on behalf of the Calas family, the boundaries between the specifics of the case and a cry to save humanity became blurred. In June 1762, Voltaire circulated a twenty-two page pamphlet in the form of a letter written on behalf of Madam Calas who had little talent for prose. A second letter, composed for the youngest son Donat, was followed by the "*Mémoires de Donat Calas*" which exposed the dangers of fanaticism.⁵³² To exonerate the Calas name, Voltaire hired Elie de Beaumont, a lawyer who communicated with the greatest names in France, thus, propelling himself to the centre of the French social arena. He pled his case with Choiseul, the minister of foreign affairs and with the King through Madam de Pompadour.⁵³³ With the release of the two Calas daughters from confinement in a convent in October 1762, aided by Comte de Maurepas⁵³⁴, Voltaire had set the stage and prepared an audience for his new production the *Traite sur la tolérance*.⁵³⁵

Voltaire's dismissive attitude towards the Calas bolsters the argument that his apparent dedication was another successful ruse in his arsenal of self-glorification rather than an honest humanitarian gesture. That defending truth was not a primary concern for Voltaire is evident in the ease with which he falsified information to garner sympathy for his purposes. References to

⁵³² Pomeau 126.

⁵³³ Andrews 108.

⁵³⁴ Jean Frédéric Phélypeaux Comte de Maurepas (1701-1781) was a minister in Louis XV court. He was among those (e.g., Montesquieu) who rejected Voltaire's application for a seat in the *Académie* in 1742.

⁵³⁵ Roche 365.

the Calas', in subsequent correspondence, disclosed little empathy and a great deal of the disdain he reserved particularly for the less fortunate. In 1762 Voltaire asked his friends, on several occasions, to support him in his campaign on behalf of "the little imbecile Huguenot", referring to the widow.⁵³⁶ Twelve years later, reminding his friends of his great achievement, he remembered her exactly as the same "*petite Huguenot imbécile*".⁵³⁷ To dismiss this as typical Voltairean humour is to misunderstand his fundamental contempt towards others and the mass of humanity in particular. The disrespect Voltaire expressed towards the Calas widow reflects the tragic essence of narcissistic self-serving servility whereby one's success (i.e., survival of the ego) is predicated on serving those one despises.

In Voltaire's copious correspondence there is ample evidence for the idea that the Calas affair was a great demonstration of his ability to assess vulnerabilities in others and favourable conditions for pursuing his objectives. In January 1762, the Sirven family found itself in circumstances similar to those of the Calas' save for the fact that the father managed to escape the country and the wheel of torture. While Voltaire undertook their case, he was well aware that the less tragic circumstances were not conducive to creating a spectacular sensation because "unfortunately nobody was broken on the wheel".⁵³⁸ To combat their consuming sense of dread, narcissists belittle and negate others constantly. When nothing remains sacrosanct, flippant

⁵³⁶ Besterman D. 10702, n.39. Voltaire to Jean L Rond d'Alembert, November 28, 1762, Besterman D10810.

⁵³⁷ Voltaire to Alexander Marie Francois de Paule de Dompierre d'Hornoy, October 2, 1774, Besterman D. 19134.

⁵³⁸ O'Flaherty 31 cites a letter written on November 7th, 1765.

derision leads invariably to an anarchic and chaotic sense of self. On a societal level, the result is a destructive nihilism of false transparency and annihilation of meaning.⁵³⁹

Voltaire's instinct for self-preservation reflected a core narcissistic trait and had little grounding in actual threats to his survival, a possibility he projected successfully. His reflexive self-protection emerged clearly in the execution of the Chevalier Jean Francois de La Barre, a nineteen year old accused of mutilating the crucifix who was also observed to have in his possession the works of Voltaire and other *philosophes*. Instinctively, Voltaire distanced himself from the unfortunate youth by labeling him a "madman" and rejecting the possibility that the latter owned his work as a "dangerous and odious rumour".⁵⁴⁰ Denial and negation are the primary mode of existence for narcissists whose basic functioning is to ward off danger. Voltaire's unparalleled success lay in infusing personal circumstances with contemporary events and imprinting on posterity's consciousness an image of himself as fighting the odds under grave danger. In reality, more often than not, Voltaire sacrificed very little for the common good and gained a great deal from the labours of others who promoted the spirit of the times while experiencing great personal privation.

The events of the Calas affair epitomized the 'secrets' of Voltaire's success in creating an image by which he wanted to be remembered. By protesting the plight of a Huguenot family he presented himself as a man of religious tolerance fighting for human rights and against social inequity. Ultimately, he was an ideal merchant who did not subscribe to the idea of rights for all,

⁵³⁹ Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, trans. Sheila Faria Glaser (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan press, 1994) 159-164.

⁵⁴⁰ Voltaire to Jeal Le Rond d'Alembert, July 1, 1766, Besterman D. 13382.

yet without compromising himself managed to depict himself as defender of the oppressed.⁵⁴¹

Using the appeal of “lacrimose philosophy”, Voltaire confessed to fainting annually at the anniversary of the St. Bartholomew’s massacre, but until the Calas affaire had never addressed the issue publicly.⁵⁴² Making the victimization of a distant collective the most one’s own which is in reality least personal, is typical of a narcissist’s abstraction of empathic understanding.⁵⁴³ Voltaire showed little difficulty addressing victims of injustice he rescued with indecent jocularity, but professed to faint yearly at imagining a distant historical massacre. Interestingly, rather than feeling incensed and outraged by past atrocities, he chose to collapse and avoid the conscious choice of criticizing his revered patron monarch, Louis XIV, who revoked the Edict of Nantes in 1685, thus, removing the protection the Huguenots enjoyed since 1589. Ultimately, his confessed sensitivity to atrocities committed against the Huguenots was hypocritical and convenient for he seemed to thrive on reliving vividly, with graphic details and casual sarcasm the bloodshed of many massacres in *Candide*.

It is important to note that the legal cases Voltaire pursued were tried in civil courts, that the available evidence did not point necessarily to the judges’ prejudices and Calas’ innocence and that petty family disputes were implicated in the fate of young La Barre. Rather than teaching tolerance, Voltaire aimed to replace religious sentiment with public opinion as the basis for law. “Laws are made by public opinion... Opinions govern the world, and in the end the *philosophes*

⁵⁴¹ Roche 380 describes him as the ideal merchant.

⁵⁴² *Ibid.*, 476 speaks to a “lacrimose philosophy”. O’Flaherty 65 notes his pretension to deep sensitivity regarding the massacre of the Huguenots in 1572.

⁵⁴³ Harding 200.

govern men's opinion" he wrote in his supplementary remarks on the *Essai sur les moeurs*, published in 1763.⁵⁴⁴ Despite such a blatant declaration of entitlement and the clarity of his self-serving agenda, Voltaire earned the title 'the conscience of Europe' not only for promulgating religious tolerance, but also for promoting criminal law reform.

Voltaire and Criminal Law Reform

The evolution of Voltaire's interest in criminal law paralleled the history of his concern for the Huguenots. It is commonly agreed that matters of criminal law were of little interest to him until the Calas affair which he saw as a fight against the Church rather than a struggle with a legal system.⁵⁴⁵ Voltaire's stance toward Damien's torturous execution, in 1757, was one of cold indifference although the accused died without revealing the names of accomplices in his attempt on the King's life. In subsequent presentations of desired legal systems, Voltaire approved of torture as appropriate punishment for regicide and other serious crimes. There was no criticism of torture in the *Siècle de Louis XIV*, published in 1751 or in the *Essai sur les moeurs*' edition of 1761.⁵⁴⁶ Until Cesare Beccaria's publication of the *Treatise on Crimes and Punishments* in 1764, Voltaire's vague and often contradictory attitude concerning criminal law, points to an emotional reactivity to individual cases rather than thoughtful attention to jurisprudential issues.⁵⁴⁷

⁵⁴⁴ Besterman, *Voltaire* 427.

⁵⁴⁵ Maestro 34-41; Roche, 365.

⁵⁴⁶ Maestro *ibid.*

⁵⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 51-72 presents facts about the in Beccaria and the and treatise.

Voltaire's primary achievement in criminal law reform during the Calas affair was the call for making trials public.⁵⁴⁸ While his principal purpose was not to address systemic flaws as much as to enlist public opinion and discredit the Church, the success of his demand proclaimed a new era in criminal law proceedings. Otherwise, he did not offer innovative ideas nor did he recognize the need for global reform. While the *parlement* of Rouen demanded in 1759 that regular judicial procedures be respected and its members be accorded safeguards from *lettres de cachet* and other arbitrary practices that hindered their judicial power, Voltaire continued to harp on the *lettres* as instruments of despotism without recommending changes to amend the situation.⁵⁴⁹

In 1764, Voltaire published the first edition of the *Dictionnaire Philosophique* where he repeated the demand for public trial, but ignored a host of systemic problems that were addressed by other *philosophes* and earlier French scholars.⁵⁵⁰ Pierre Bayle's condemnation of the use of torture in 1686 which was publicized by Bernard Fontenelle in 1691 paralleled the Dutch theologian Bathazar Bekker's campaign to decriminalize superstition and sorcery.⁵⁵¹ As early as 1721, Montesquieu rejected the utility of punishment as a deterrent and in 1748 articulated the need for clarity of laws to protect against arbitrariness. He thought that infamy was often the greater part of punishment and relegated the consequence of sins against God to the judgment of the Almighty, unless other individuals were hurt by an alleged transgression. In 1754, the Chevalier de Jaucourt included an essay on "crime" in the *Encyclopédie* supporting

⁵⁴⁸ Ibid., 49; Pomeau 122.

⁵⁴⁹ Roche 471 referring to Voltaire's publication of *L'Ingénu* in 1767.

⁵⁵⁰ Maestro 47.

⁵⁵¹ Ibid. 21-23.

Montesquieu's argument that severity of punishment was not a useful means for curbing crime.⁵⁵²

In 1764, Voltaire had little to say about any of the above.

Voltaire's disinterest in criminal law and more importantly his inability to grasp fundamental systemic issues stand out particularly in comparison to his royal pupil, Frederick the Great of Prussia. Already in 1740, only three days after his accession to the throne, Frederick restricted torture to high treason and abolished it completely between 1754-56. He introduced the principle of proper proportion between crime and punishment and constructed civil and penal codes which were published after his death.⁵⁵³ Against the activities of the Prussian despot stood Voltaire, "the conscience of Europe" and law reformer who wrote to Beccaria, as late as 1768, that Calas would have deserved his fate had he been guilty.⁵⁵⁴ Voltaire did not seem to concern himself with fundamental principles of the penal code as much as with enhancing his sense of omnipotence. This is the restricted world of narcissists who abstract empathy, but fail to grasp the deeper meaning of overarching concepts because they cannot conceive of a reality separate from themselves.

In 1765, a twenty five year old Césaire Beccaria, Milanese jurist and economist, published a treatise on crime and punishment in which he introduced the following points: (1) Divine justice is immutable and separate from human justice which varies and is determined by necessities. (2) Punishment should be fixed by the legislator and bind all members of society. (3) Laws should be

⁵⁵² Ibid. 23-27.

⁵⁵³ Ibid. 28-29.

⁵⁵⁴ Voltaire to Césaire Bonesana marquis de Beccaria, May 38, 1768, Besterman D. 15044.

articulated clearly. (4) Verdicts requires absolute proof of guilt and trials should be public. (5) The accused should be judged by their peers. (6) Torture should be abolished. (7) Punishment should be proportional to the offense with the goal of preventing re-offense. (8) The severity of crime is measured by the injury it inflicts on society. This criterion should be applied to all members of society. (9) Education is the most effective tool of crime prevention.⁵⁵⁵

This comprehensive legal treatise was composed by a young, quiet melancholy individual who preferred a professor's chair of economics in 'provincial' Milan to the Parisian limelight. Eschewing publicity, Beccaria also rejected Voltaire's advances for correspondence, i.e., public intercourse. Beccaria had a tremendous impact on contemporary scholars, including the *philosophes*, but shunned publicity. As a result he never penetrated popular consciousness and did not become a marketable commodity.⁵⁵⁶ On the other hand, a septuagenarian Voltaire, master propagandist and profiteer, who did not comprehend the scope of the treatise, but recognized its salability, used his "inimitable" style to disseminate vulgarized versions of the essay, thus, acquiring the status of 'law reform advocate'.

At the end of 1766, Voltaire published his commentary on Beccaria's book. Although Beccaria's treatise was in circulation two years earlier and in Voltaire's possession since 1765, the opening statement of the commentary cunningly referred to it as "the little book" he [Voltaire] had just opened. Pretending to acknowledge Beccaria's work, Voltaire actually dismissed it as a

⁵⁵⁵ Maestro 51-72.

⁵⁵⁶ Ibid., 70 discusses Diderot's enthusiasm over the treatise and its implications.

“little book” of no consequence to his own ideas.⁵⁵⁷ Although a blatant prevarication, Voltaire’s account has been adopted by many who curiously also interpret his opening statement of the commentary as an acknowledgment of Beccaria’s achievement.⁵⁵⁸ His sensational victory in the Calas affair and the favourable turn of future events seem to have rendered Voltaire’s crudest of tricks beyond reproach. It is as if Voltaire’s amusing style lulled his audience into brief spans of distracted attention rendering entertainment paramount and content immaterial. Voltaire understood the basic principles for attracting and maintaining public attention. Fun, the current cultural equalizer, might have originated with the powerful exchange value assigned to it by Voltaire, the incomparable commodifier.

Gimmickery of presentation notwithstanding, the content of the *Commentaire* highlighted fundamental differences between Beccaria and Voltaire’s conceptions of core jurisprudential issues. Unlike the Italian jurist who defined the death penalty as public murder, Voltaire did not reject it in principle, settling instead for the King’s opinion. What defies good judgment are conclusions that Voltaire evidenced a “remarkable evolution” in his thinking about criminal law from 1765 to 1766. Voltaire’s ‘new’ ideas after 1765 were almost verbatim Beccaria’s except in those instances where he either failed to understand the Italian’s concepts or rejected them in favour of a more conservative ideology (e.g., seeking the approval of the king for the death penalty rather than abolishing it). It is remarkable how successful Voltaire has been in passing others’ ideas as his own and at the same time concealing his own unrefined thinking.

⁵⁵⁷ Ibid. 85 cites the opening from Voltaire’s *Commentaire sur le livre des délits et des peines*.

⁵⁵⁸ Ibid. 85.

In 1777 Voltaire published the *Prix de la justice et d'humanité*. The treatise opened with Beccaria's preference for rewarding virtue to punishment as a means of crime prevention and was followed by old ideas, his own as well as those of others. Conceding lack of revolutionary vision for law reform and admitting that his best essay on the subject written at the age of eighty-three was less impressive than the conceptual formulation and practical applications offered by the twenty-five year old Beccaria, Marcello Maestro, historian and jurist, bows to Voltaire's special form of genius which "can conquer great sections of public opinion" and titled his book "Voltaire and Beccaria as Reformers of Criminal Law". To reflect historical truth and intellectual honesty the title should have read "Beccaria and Voltaire as reformers of Criminal Law". While Voltaire's "inimitable" style played a critical role in propagating the spirit of the Enlightenment, his success was predicated on ideas furnished by others. Creativity and genuine advocacy for social reform have become secondary in a culture where "image is everything", Voltaire's most genuine legacy to posterity.

Voltaire's genius lay in recognizing the growing power of public opinion which ruled by spectacle, notoriety and amusement. The most prolific propagandist, and popularizer/disseminator of ideas, Voltaire became a household name among his contemporaries and entered the pantheon of social reformers as an icon of ideals he essentially rejected (e.g, equality and democracy). A book titled "Voltaire and Beccaria" stood a better chance of publication than one entitled "Beccaria and Voltaire". Maestro, like many social historians, appears to have been affected more by Voltaire's marketing tactics than by Beccaria's advanced teachings of legal justice. Prophet of mass-market civilization, Voltaire foresaw the power of advertising with its relaxed attitude towards veracity. Truth has become what sells and what one wants people to

believe.⁵⁵⁹ There is little room for intellectual honesty and personal integrity in this world view. This form of excessive individualism practiced by Voltaire, foreshadowed with remarkable accuracy the post-industrial culture of opinions and simulated truth, the hyper-reality of narcissistic existence.

⁵⁵⁹ Jules Henry, Culture Against Man (New York: Vintage Books , 1965) 49 discusses advertising as a philosophical system.

CONCLUSION

It is said that in the Calas affair Voltaire made his cause humanity, one infused with his passion and moral indignation.⁵⁵⁸ On the other hand, it is also argued that while campaigning against *l'infâme* under the protection of Malesherbes, the sympathetic censor of the book trade, he neglected to advocate social reform because he never realized the need to reform society.⁵⁵⁹ These contradictory positions in Voltaire do not reflect complexity of character, a prevalent perception of many historians. Rather, it manifests a confusion of attempts to make sense of a self that is defined by polarization of opinions and lacking intellectual honesty or commitment. Voltaire's clandestine activities had little to do with privacy, his nemesis, or danger, as much as a self thriving on spectacles and the need to reinvent himself constantly. Beneath the projected image of a humanitarian genius resided a narrowly self-centered utilitarianism glued together by flexible moral relativism. Against popular belief, he espoused an intolerant secular deism which he preached with a tyrannical lashing tongue. Voltaire's life long mission was to replace the moral authority of the Church with his unique blend of deism and religious dogma. By dramatizing the circumstances of the Calas family, the greatest puppeteer of the eighteenth century delivered his most convincing performance by projecting the personal agenda as an affront to human morality. Thereby he propagated his desired image as 'the conscience of Europe'.

In popular lore and among many academics, Voltaire's image has come to represent core attributes of Western modernity. He is known as an enormously rich self-made man and the only

⁵⁵⁸ Darnton, The Forbidden Best Sellers 196.

⁵⁵⁹ Roche 279, 316.

one, in his time, to have supported himself through writing. His name conjures up the figure of an irreverent genius, a rebel and social reformer who risked his life for the common good. A closer examination of the biographical evidence and of his work discloses great gaps between the perceived image, actual practices, expressed values and the quality of his intellectual output. This incompatibility has generated a confusion amongst academics which has often been resolved by the myth of the misunderstood complex genius. The hypothesis advanced in this thesis is that Voltaire's success was an outcome of a compatibility between his talent to market a false image of himself, an audience increasingly exposed to the emotional parsimony of non-reflective entertainment and the growing influence of public opinion. Rather than possessing a superior intellect or complex personality he was both very cunning and extremely lucky.

Voltaire was immensely rich, but his wealth was not generated by literary work. On the contrary, it was his business acumen which financed the outpouring of printed material, personal vendettas and other propaganda. With an exhibition of incomparable output of publications and publicity, Voltaire has dazzled humanity into accepting his self-proclaimed status of genius. In a culture of consumption where surmounting barriers to unlimited accumulation and attention is emblematic of success, Voltaire might indeed be unrivaled. He was a financial wizard with an obsessional need for attention and great talent for manipulating people and perceptions. But, he showed mediocre skills as poet, dramatist, historian and philosopher. Even admirers admit to his lack of artistic originality and are hard pressed to identify work of superior quality. Apologists accept his rationalization that his work was compromised by a felt urgency to educate the public. Excuses notwithstanding, the jewels of genius in the crowded crown of Voltaire's publications are

quite rare and the few respectable productions hardly justify recognition beyond the probability of achieving a modicum of success in a multitude of trials.

Instead of supporting notions of genius, and omniscient individualism, Voltaire's history is proof of the rewards promised by the Protestant ethic of hard work. In view of his unparalleled compulsive diligence, claims to intellectual greatness become rather suspect, particularly in light of the paucity of quality work. But in an growing climate of market morality, epigrams, aphorisms and clichés are saleable. Easily remembered and infused with righteous sarcasm, moral maxims are seductively appealing in their pseudo familiarity and subjective utility. If Voltaire did not invent the modern myth of a misunderstood egotistical artist, he disseminated the idea which ultimately, *malgré soi*, has also been adopted by the masses.

The observation that Voltaire lacked intellectual depth points out fundamental aspects of his personality and highlights the gap between the perceived image and facts concerning the person and his work. As poet and dramatist Voltaire has been criticized for lacking both artistic talent as well as the ability to grasp the meaning of the tragic in the human condition. The former explains not only the overall mediocrity of his artistic productions, but also his ambivalent servility toward seventeenth century French classics. At one and the same time fawning yet asserting superiority, he did not enhance his masters' legacy and only managed to produce inferior imitations. Unable to make decisions on their own, narcissists struggle to assert themselves through mimicry which is invariably inferior to the creative models they both adore and demean. Being largely fakes, they fail to develop original material, but show great facility with fabricating ersatz.

Of greater consequence, however, is the notion that Voltaire lacked psychological insight into the tragic in the human condition. This criticism, rendered by an ardent admirer, points not only to an intellectual-artistic deficit, but also a lack of empathic understanding which renders overt manifestations of humanitarianism superficial posturing.⁵⁶⁰ The least self-reflective individual, among his contemporaries, Voltaire had no room for carrying on an internalized dialogue, the essence of the self as a psychological being. Like Ovid's Narcissus, Voltaire presented a dazzling exterior with a false and empty interior. Devoid of contemplation, Voltaire could not grasp the idea that the self is constituted or dissolved in a psychological terrain. The Roman poet condemned Narcissus to transformation not because the youth had sinned, but because he lacked the state of psychological-contemplative inner being which to Ovid was the categorical imperative of human/social connectedness. If empathic understanding is predicated on self-reflection both were lacking in Voltaire. The idea that he failed to comprehend the tragic in the human condition is very plausible. This conclusion is of great consequence because it brings into question Voltaire's capacity to feel empathically and by implication also the veracity of his apparent humanitarian overtures.

The Enlightenment-Modernist myth of a self-made individual was personified in Voltaire's spectacular financial success and public notoriety. His utilitarianism has resonated with a society for which economic values and public attention have become supreme. The appeal of his simplism was enhanced by the Enlightenment climate of simplification and scientific notions of standardization which were disseminated by a rapidly growing publishing industry. The mediocre quality of Voltaire's work and trivialization of all value systems have been justified as a felt

⁵⁶⁰ Wade, The Intellectual Development of Voltaire 81, 107, 115, 156, 200, 242.

urgency to educate the masses. His publications have often received low grades not only from detractors, but also from proponents who, baffled by an outpouring of material and self-proclaimed intellectual superiority, adopted his ruse of hidden messages to justify the apparent ordinariness of his work. "Feeble power of analysis", however, was not the prevailing intellectual disposition of the Enlightenment as much as it was the fashion in French *salons*.⁵⁶¹ Furthermore, scepticism which relies heavily on negative/critical thinking, decidedly Voltaire's specialty, is not inherently shallow as evidenced by Hume's profound and subtle analyses. The latter, however, was not a popular figure nor were his theories designed to entertain/educate the masses directly. Through Voltaire's popular curriculum, the masses were essentially seduced into staying in the narrow and rigid world of good and evil, but instead of the familiar definitions of the Church they were now subjected to the homogeneity of Voltaire's opinions.

Voltaire embodied the narcissistic anxious self dominated by bodily insufficiency. Never outgrowing somatic discomfort, immediate gratification remained paramount and was eventually rarefied as universal needs. As an adult, he exhibited typical narcissistic traits of egotism, cynicism and naivety, the blend that has baffled posterity. Being bound by the somatic also defined his ego and moral development. Physical frailty, real or imagined, was used to justify performance inadequacies and a pseudo liberated sexuality (e.g., promiscuity and fickleness) devoid of passion. His peculiar moral system of right and wrong, good and evil never strayed far from the pain-pleasure principle.

The predominant mood exhibited by Voltaire was an undercurrent of depression-melancholy projected as idealization of self and others. This absence of interiorized self-esteem

⁵⁶¹ Mill, 135 notes that "France had Voltaire and his negative school of thinking."

resulted in an oscillating ego wavering between hope and anxiety, disdain and sycophancy.

Voltaire expressed both adoration and virtuosity in rejection, but hardly ever genuine respect and appreciation. His attempts at showing regard were ultimately stratagems to negate the other and assert his superiority. It is the transparency and consistency of his deliberate deceptions that might account for his surprising success in convincing good minds to look for unseen communication. Not understanding the 'primitive' ego level of narcissists which rests on instinct self-preservation, onlookers find it difficult to accept the outrageousness of their entitlements, hostility-based self-defence and flexible ethics.

Possessing an infantlised ego Voltaire lived in a bifurcated Manichean world of good and evil, the former reflected as personal urgent necessities and the latter personified in others as rivals. Unaware that the troubles (e.g. irascibility, paranoia) reside within, this dichotomous and antagonistic personality pursued an isolated and predatory existence projecting a personal persecution complex that became an assault on humanity. A sense of victimization, inherent in chronic depression and fostered by a narcissistic sense of entitlement, was propelled by emotional liability expediting an exaggeration of trivial injuries. Lacking interdependence, Voltaire had many acquaintances, but ultimately no friends or peers. Concurrently, paranoid and contemptuous, he either manipulated or lorded over others through financial obligations, intimidation or rageful outbursts.

André Maurois thought that Voltaire was a dying man all his life.⁵⁶² While Maurois' reference addressed physical frailties, the notion could also be applied to Voltaire's mental and emotional states. Narcissist's self-absorbed anxious entitlement is predicated on a survivor's

⁵⁶² Bair 1.

mentality devoid of curiosity and of genuine learning. Lacking a sense of personal history and motivated by fear of being surpassed or superceded, Voltaire was a barren existence without children or personal legacy. If everything is an extension of the self there is no future or a sense of continuity. What he left to posterity was an image, a phantom, a legacy of a dying man disguised as enlightenment. Europe inherited his consumptive mentality frantic to fill the void of an unsupportable self and his frenetic pace of obsessional writing and compulsive self-preoccupations to flee an existential void. His was not a legacy of self-love, but that of a haunted preoccupation with fleeing the self. This consciousness represents the ubiquitous anxiety of the anarchic self of modernity, a banal internality that is lacking self-love and playfulness and is kept alive by "*novitas furoris*".⁵⁶³

Voltaire's simple notion of well-being as getting what one wants has resonated with a culture intoxicated increasingly with self-centeredness, fascinated with celebrity and in relentless pursuit of happiness. His infantile unempathic psyche, false separateness and overwhelming will to power, disguised as enlightenment, announced current Western non-contemplative subjectivism and self-alienated anti-social self-centeredness. The *salon* mentality which celebrated mediocre chatter and homogeneity of social performance, foreshadowed the tyrannical assault of public opinion against individuality. In seeking to replace priestly authority with an ethic espoused by men of letters, the French Enlightenment with Voltaire at the helm cleared the path for future fashion designers (e.g., psychotherapists and the multitudes of consultants) to claim authority as interpreters of human morality.

⁵⁶³ Ovid , 347

In traditional historiography protagonists tend to define Voltaire's genius by his many and changing declared interests. Antagonists use the same evidence to depict him as a superficial opportunistic charlatan. Pro-Voltaireans have minimized the attitude of contempt he lavished on others consistently throughout his long life by pitting it against the great success of the Calas affair and the promotion of religious tolerance. To detractors, his Vertumnal disposition bespeaks opportunism and disloyalty to people, country and monarchs. The psycho-historical formulation presented in this thesis offers a plausible alternative for clarifying the inconsistencies which traditional interpretations find baffling. Shedding light on the nature of a narcissistic personality also permits a reevaluation of Voltaire's work and contributions to the Age of Enlightenment. Integrating the concept of narcissistic entitlement into Enlightenment research adds to the understanding of various influences that shaped the era and linkages to later development.

It is the confusion expressed by Voltairean protagonists rather than contradictory opinions of detractors which indicate a need to incorporate alternate hypotheses into this area of research. Unaware of a personality configuration whose domination by immediate personal urgencies are manifested as a cynical-egotistical-naivety, outstanding historians have failed to decipher "the concealed persona" and have resigned themselves to absurd solutions. Unable to understand Voltaire's seeming compulsion toward "pandering serious phenomena with childish delight", Ira Wade apologizes shamelessly for Voltaire whose "exigencies of day to day living eroded his efforts to practice sincere theism".⁵⁶⁴ The same scholar also concludes that Voltaire had no grasp of the tragic in the human condition, but failed to see a connection to infantilized irreverence. The

⁵⁶⁴ Wade, The Intellectual Development of Voltaire 449.

psycho-historical perspective presented in this thesis represents a preliminary attempt at clarifying some aspects of this befuddlement.

Furthermore, the concept of narcissism elucidates the difference between morality and moralizing. If morality is about changing the world not merely exposing its absurdities, than Voltaire failed posterity miserably. In comparing himself to a contemptible multitude he actually committed an amoral act which was the most stable trait he exhibited through his life. Being a *monos pros monom* he had no position but to destroy and obliterate others, as in a theatre of the absurd. His satirical zest concealed the banality and pedantry of anxious self-scrutiny which has been woven into the present social texture of entertainment. Images promoting the need for continual verification and affirmation simulate the Voltairean compulsion to recreate himself through an endless stream of obsessional writing. Unaware, we have adopted his language of destruction and loss, superficial cynicism, contrived identity through heroic victimology and relentless flight from self-knowing.

On the 22nd of June, 1762, a mature sixty eight old Voltaire wrote to the Duc de Richelieu his opinion of Rousseau's social theories: "...Only he is mad enough to say that all men are equal and that a state can survive without a hierarchy. He has carried the madness of his paradoxes so far as to say that if a prince were to find the hangman's daughter honest and pretty, he ought to marry her and his marriage ought to be universally approved."⁵⁶⁵ According to current popular lore, Voltaire's radical social views were largely responsible for the French Revolution. Some ardent proponents, who are prolific scholars, are also of the opinion that he

⁵⁶⁵ Voltaire to Louis-Francois-Armand du Plessis, Duc de Richelieu, June 22 1762, Besterman D. 10522. Translation by Brooks, 231. Two of Rousseau's works appeared in 1762, *Émile* and *The Social Contract*.

was an “aggressive social reformer”.⁵⁶⁶ This inconsistency which has been interpreted to imply exceptional abilities has baffled good minds for a long time. If his work did not evidence superior intellectual ability by what forces did he propel himself to the centre stage of modern civilization? The psycho-historical model proposed in this work offers a new theoretical framework for addressing facts and deriving alternate solutions for understanding this human enigma of appearances, this awesome apparatus with jejune insight.

⁵⁶⁶ Peter Gay, The Enlightenment” An Interpretation 200.

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