



Candide (French Edition)

Voltaire

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Candide ou l'Optimisme est un conte philosophique de Voltaire paru à Genève en janvier 1759. Il a été réédité vingt fois du vivant de l'auteur, ce qui en fait un des plus grands succès littéraires français. Prétendument traduit des « additions » [réf. nécessaire] du docteur Ralph (qui, en réalité, n'est que le pseudonyme utilisé par Voltaire pour éviter la censure), cette œuvre, ironique dès les premières lignes, ne laisse aucun doute sur l'origine de l'auteur, qui ne pouvait qu'être du parti des philosophes : « Les anciens domestiques soupçonnaient que [Candide] était fils de la sœur de Monsieur le Baron et d'un bon et honnête gentilhomme du voisinage, que cette demoiselle ne voulut jamais épouser parce qu'il n'avait pu prouver que soixante et onze quartiers, et que le reste de son arbre généalogique avait été perdu par l'injure du temps. » On perçoit immédiatement, dans la fin du premier paragraphe de l'œuvre, le sarcasme moquant le conservatisme social de la noblesse arrogante, certes tel que Molière un siècle plus tôt le pratiquait aux dépens de la petite aristocratie provinciale³, mais surtout annonçant le Figaro de Beaumarchais : « Si le Ciel l'eût voulu, je serais fils d'un prince¹. » Candide est également un récit de formation, récit d'un voyage qui transformera son héros éponyme en philosophe, un Télémaque d'un genre nouveau. L'onomastique, en matière d'interprétation des textes voltairiens, se révèle souvent féconde⁴. Le mot « candide » vient du latin « candidus » qui signifie « blanc » et a pour second sens « de bonne foi, avec candeur, simplement ». Le choix d'un tel nom indiquerait l'innocence du héros, voire sa naïveté. C'est vierge sur laquelle on marque en apparence tout, il s'étonnera de ce qu'il observera au fil de ses tribulations, à la façon apparemment enfantine de Socrate dans les dialogues platoniciens, personnifiant ainsi l'ironie selon l'étymologie du mot, : « ignorance feinte ».

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