

CANDIDE

by Voltaire



THE AUTHOR

Voltaire was the pen name of Francois-Marie Arouet (1694-1778), the most prominent writer of the Enlightenment era in France. Even during the years of his education at a Jesuit college, the young writer both impressed and appalled those around him with the sharpness of his wit. When he launched his career as a writer, he first became known for his witty epigrams, similar to those coined by Ben Franklin in *Poor Richard's Almanac*, but typically much more cynical and biting. He went on to write plays and poetry, though much of his literary output consisted of letters and essays. His satire frequently got him into trouble; he served two short stretches in the Bastille (he took on the pen name *Voltaire* during his first imprisonment at the age of 24), and at one point was exiled to England for three years. The exile was hardly a punishment, however, since he was lionized by the English literati; while he was there, he developed a fascination with all things English that he retained for the remainder of his life. Voltaire became the close friend of Frederick II of Prussia, and stayed many times at Frederick's castle, though the two quarreled frequently over Voltaire's political ideas. Eventually, he purchased an estate at Ferney on the French-Swiss border. Ownership of this estate not only allowed him to escape over the border into Switzerland whenever the government objected to his latest broadside, but his home also became a gathering place for European intellectuals of all stripes. Voltaire was an outspoken opponent of all forms of abuse of power - by the government, by the aristocracy, and especially by the church. His anti-clerical stance earned him the hatred of the Catholic establishment, but, though he certainly did not favor Protestantism, his opposition to religious persecution helped to end the oppression of the Huguenots that had been French government policy since the revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1685 (the liberation of French Protestants became official with the passage of the Edict of Toleration in 1789). Voltaire died in 1778, but in 1791, the National Assembly ordered his bones exhumed and buried in the Pantheon in Paris alongside those of other great French thinkers. In 1814, his remains, along with those of Rousseau, were stolen by opponents of his ideas and cast into a pit of quicklime, where they were totally obliterated.

Candide, published in 1759, is generally considered Voltaire's masterwork. The satirical novelette directs its mockery against the optimistic determinism of German philosopher Gottfried

Wilhelm von Leibniz - the idea that “this is the best of all possible worlds.” The conclusion of the novel - that the best a man can expect is to “cultivate his own garden” - is typical of Voltaire’s approach to life. His answer is not a philosophical one - Voltaire was not really a philosopher in any strict sense of the word - but a practical one; that the best men can expect in this world is to leave one another alone and live at peace with each other.

PLOT SUMMARY

The novel begins with Candide growing up in the castle of a German baron in the state of Westphalia. He is the baron’s illegitimate son, but is treated well, and is tutored by a resident philosopher named Pangloss, who tells him that “this is the best of all possible worlds.” As time passes, Candide falls in love with Cunegonde, the baron’s daughter. When the baron catches the two of them kissing behind a screen in the castle, he kicks Candide out of the house. Wandering alone, Candide is soon drafted into the army of the Bulgars. He is treated cruelly and tries to escape, but is captured and brutally beaten. Finally, in the midst of a battle against the Avars (the Bulgars and the Avars are surrogates for the Prussians and the French in the story), Candide makes good his escape.

He flees to Holland, where he meets a kind Anabaptist named Jacques. Jacques takes him in. Soon after, he meets a deformed beggar, who turns out to be his old tutor Pangloss. The old man explains that he has contracted syphilis from Paquette, the baron’s maid, with whom he had been dallying. Pangloss tells Candide that the baron, his wife, and Cunegonde have all been brutally murdered by the Bulgar army. He still maintains, however, that this is the best of all possible worlds. Jacques also takes Pangloss into his household, and the three soon head for Lisbon. On the way, Jacques drowns during a storm. When Candide and Pangloss arrive in Lisbon, they find the city destroyed by an earthquake (this really happened in 1755) and the remaining population in the grip of the Inquisition. The two travelers are captured, and Candide is flogged within an inch of his life, while Pangloss is hanged as a heretic. After Candide is released, an old woman takes him to her home and treats his wounds, then takes him to Cunegonde, who, as it turns out, was not killed by the Bulgars after all. Instead, she was raped, kidnaped by the Bulgar captain and forced to serve as his mistress, then sold to a Jew named Don Issachar, who had also used her as a mistress. When the Grand Inquisitor of Lisbon met Cunegonde, he threatened to burn Don Issachar at the stake unless he allowed him to share her favors; Cunegonde was therefore being used by both of them for sexual purposes. Candide, wishing to enjoy her favors himself, is consecutively interrupted by her two owners, and kills them both. Candide, Cunegonde, and the old woman then flee to South America. While on board the ship, the old woman tells her story - she apparently was the illegitimate daughter of a pope (Voltaire uses the name of a pope who never existed), but had been raped on multiple occasions, enslaved, and had witnessed cannibalism.

When Candide and Cunegonde arrive in Buenos Aires, their marriage plans are thwarted when the governor sees Cunegonde and proposes to her. Because of the financial advantages of the match, she accepts. Meanwhile, officials from Portugal arrive in search of Candide for his murder of the Grand Inquisitor. Candide and his valet Cacambo flee to the interior, where they meet a band of Jesuits. He is amazed to discover that the head of the Jesuits is Cunegonde’s brother, who also survived the Bulgar attack. When Candide announces his intention of marrying Cunegonde, her brother insists that he will never allow her to marry a commoner, whereupon

Candide becomes so enraged that he runs the Jesuit through with his sword, after which he and Cacambo flee into the jungle. There they narrowly avoid being eaten by a tribe of cannibals.

After escaping from the cannibals, Candide and Cacambo arrive in the fabled land of Eldorado, a utopia where gold and precious stones are everywhere, there are no churches, no courts, no crime, and the people live in peace with one another and place no value on the gold and gems that litter the streets. After a month in this paradise, Candide asks to leave because of his desire to find his beloved Cunegonde again. The king of Eldorado helps him to leave the concealed valley, sending with him a flock of red pack sheep laden with a plentiful store of the wealth for which they have no use. Upon arriving in Surinam, Candide sends Cacambo back to Buenos Aires to find Cunegonde and purchase her from the governor using their newfound wealth. Meanwhile, Candide is robbed of much of his fortune by an unscrupulous merchant named Vanderdendur. Candide then sets sail for Europe with a pessimistic companion named Martin. On the way, the Spanish ship on which they sail sinks Vanderdendur's ship and he recovers some of his money.

After arriving in Europe, Candide and Martin travel first to Paris, where Candide encounters a number of aristocrats who relieve him of a number of his jewels. The travelers then proceed to Venice, where they search in vain for Cunegonde. They do meet Paquette, the chambermaid who had given Pangloss syphilis, and Count Pococurante, a bored nobleman who values none of the riches with which he is surrounded. Cacambo then shows up; he is now the slave of a former Turkish monarch, and he tells Candide that Cunegonde, enslaved herself, is now in Constantinople. Candide purchases Cacambo's freedom, and the three travel to Constantinople. On the way, they encounter Pangloss and Cunegonde's brother (no, neither one died from their previous hanging and sword-thrust), who are now galley slaves. Pangloss is still as optimistic as ever. Candide purchases their freedom, then finds Cunegonde and the old woman and purchases their freedom, too, though Cunegonde has become quite ugly as a result of her trials and tribulations. Candide keeps his promise, agreeing to marry her anyway, though her brother still objects, and he is forced to send the obstreperous fellow back to the galleys. The rest of them buy a small farm, but soon begin quarreling among themselves. Candide finally meets a nearby farmer who is so busy raising his crops that he has no time for speculation or argument. Inspired by his example, Candide and his friends begin to work hard on their farm, and finally are able to live in peace, concluding that the best thing to do in life is to "cultivate your own garden."

MAJOR CHARACTERS

- Candide - The protagonist of the novel, Candide is a kindly but naive young man who has been taught by his tutor that he lives in "the best of all possible worlds." After being thrown out of his home, he wanders the world in search of Cunegonde, his true love, encountering a variety of misfortunes on the way but maintaining his optimism.
- Cunegonde - Candide's half-sister with whom he falls in love. When their love becomes known, Candide is ejected from the baron's castle. Shortly thereafter, the castle is attacked and Cunegonde is raped, almost killed, and sold as a sex slave. After many other misadventures, she and Candide finally marry, though by this time she is quite ugly and the two quarrel constantly.

- Pangloss - Candide's tutor. He catches syphilis from sleeping with the castle maid, survives hanging for heresy in Lisbon, and finally is reunited with Candide at the end.
- Paquette - The Baron's maid, with whom Pangloss has been having an affair and from whom he gets syphilis. She turns to prostitution, and is later seen in the company of Brother Giroflee.
- Jacques - A Dutch Anabaptist who takes Candide in after he escapes from the Bulgar army. He also takes Pangloss in, and later is drowned on the way to Lisbon when he tries to save the life of a sailor.
- The Old Woman - Cunegonde's servant and companion, she is the daughter of a pope who suffers rape and slavery and witnesses cannibalism. She remains with Cunegonde through all her journeys and misfortunes.
- Don Issachar - A wealthy Jew who purchases Cunegonde and makes her his mistress; he is later forced to share her with the Grand Inquisitor in order to avoid the stake, and is eventually killed by Candide.
- The Grand Inquisitor - He is the religious leader of Lisbon. After the earthquake, he has Pangloss and Candide arrested, hanging the former and flogging the latter. He is sharing Cunegonde's charms with Don Issachar, and he, too, is killed by Candide when he interrupts his tryst with his beloved.
- Don Fernando - The governor of Buenos Aires, he proposes to Cunegonde when she and Candide arrive in South America. She accepts because of the marriage's financial advantages.
- Cacambo - Candide's valet in South America, he accompanies Candide to Eldorado, is later enslaved by a Turk, and finally leads Candide to his final reunion with Cunegonde in Constantinople.
- The Baron - The son of the baron who threw Candide out of his home and thus the brother of Cunegonde, he survives the sack of the castle, eventually becoming a Commander of the Jesuits in South America. Candide runs him through with a sword when he refuses to allow him to marry his sister; he survives, becomes a galley slave, is liberated by Candide, and finally sent back to the galleys when he still refuses to give his consent to Candide's marriage to Cunegonde.
- Vanderdendur - A greedy merchant who steals one of Candide's wealth-laden sheep, but is killed when his ship is sunk at sea by the Spanish.
- Martin - A pessimistic scholar who becomes Candide's companion on his return from South America. He manages to see the black lining in every silver cloud.

- Brother Giroflee - A monk who purchases Paquette's services. When Candide gives him a large amount of money, he, like Paquette, squanders it and remains unhappy.
- The Abbe of Perigord - A rich Parisian churchman who cheats Candide out of a lot of money.
- The Marquise of Parolignac - Parisian aristocrat who seduces Candide and steals his money.
- Count Pocourante - A Venetian nobleman who cares little for anything in life despite his tremendous wealth.

NOTABLE QUOTATIONS

“He proved admirably that in this best of all possible worlds, His Lordship's castle was the most beautiful of castles, and Her Ladyship the best of all possible baronesses.” (p.18)

“‘Well said,’ replied Candide, ‘but we must cultivate our garden.’” (p.120)

ESSAY QUESTIONS

Discuss the following in a five-paragraph essay:

1. At the heart of Voltaire's *Candide*, with its mockery of the notion that “this is the best of all possible worlds,” lies the problem of evil. Discuss Voltaire's treatment of the problem of evil in the novel, including solutions he rejects as well as the one he espouses. Is his approach to the problem a biblical one? Why or why not?
2. Discuss the incidents in Voltaire's *Candide* in the context of the age in which Voltaire lived. How does the satire in the novel address social problems of his day? How does his treatment of these matters correspond with what you know of Voltaire's philosophy of life?
3. In what ways do the social problems satirized in Voltaire's *Candide* paint a picture of the environment in which revolution arose in France? What characteristics of pre-revolutionary France are pictured prominently in the novel? Does Voltaire present any solutions for these problems?
4. Discuss the role played by the protagonist's visit to Eldorado in Voltaire's *Candide*. To what extent does the civilization of the mythical city give a picture of Voltaire's ideal society? What, according to Voltaire, would characterize the ideal society? Do you agree? Why or why not?

5. Gottfried Wilhelm von Leibniz is the philosopher whose views are satirized by Voltaire in his novel *Candide*. Leibniz taught that, because the world was created by a good, all-powerful God, then it must be the best of all possible worlds. Therefore, what appeared to be evil was really good in disguise; we simply did not yet know how things would all work out for the best as God accomplished His purposes in history. In your opinion, how effective is Voltaire's rebuttal of Leibniz's philosophy? Support your arguments with details from the novel.
6. Gottfried Wilhelm von Leibniz is the philosopher whose views are satirized by Voltaire in his novel *Candide*. Leibniz taught that, because the world was created by a good, all-powerful God, then it must be the best of all possible worlds. Therefore, what appeared to be evil was really good in disguise; we simply did not yet know how things would all work out for the best as God accomplished His purposes in history. Voltaire refuted Leibniz's philosophy by means of a narrative of unremitting calamity visited upon the kind-hearted but naive Candide. Do you agree with the philosophy of Leibniz? If so, how would you support it from Scripture. If not, how would you use Scripture to refute it?
7. In Voltaire's *Candide*, Pangloss and Martin serve as foils. In what ways is this true? Does Voltaire favor one over the other, or does he see both of their philosophies as inadequate? Support your conclusions with specifics from the novel.
8. Discuss the role of religion in Voltaire's *Candide*. Would you describe Voltaire as being anti-religious? Why or why not? Support your conclusion with specifics from the book.
9. Discuss the role of philosophy in Voltaire's *Candide*. Would you describe Voltaire as being opposed to philosophy? Why or why not? Support your conclusion with specifics from the book.
10. Discuss the role of wealth in Voltaire's *Candide*. Is Voltaire's view of the dangers of wealth biblical? Why or why not? Support your conclusion with specifics from the book and the Bible.
11. In Voltaire's *Candide*, characters frequently return from supposed deaths. What do you think is the significance of these "resurrections"? What do they contribute to the themes of the novel? Do they ultimately convey an optimistic or pessimistic view of the world? Why do you think so?
12. Discuss the role of politics in Voltaire's *Candide*. Does the author take any discernible political position in the novel, favoring one form of government over another? What can you discern about Voltaire's political views from his most famous novel?
13. What is the significance of the garden to which the protagonist and his friends devote their energies at the end of Voltaire's *Candide*? What does this symbolism tell us about Voltaire's philosophy of life? Use details from the story to support your arguments.

14. Based on the perspective communicated in Voltaire's *Candide*, to what extent would you consider the author to be a pragmatist? Defend your position with specifics from the novel.
15. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, a bitter opponent of Voltaire and his philosophy, argued that man in a state of nature was naturally good - the "noble savage" - but that he was corrupted by the influences of society. How does Voltaire's portrayal of the Biglugs serve to satirize Rousseau's view of human nature? Be sure to use details from the text to support your arguments.
16. Compare and contrast the sufferings of the male and female characters in Voltaire's *Candide*. What may Voltaire be saying through the differences that he portrays? What do these plot elements communicate about the gender views of the eighteenth century? About Voltaire's own ideas of gender?
17. Analyze the function of hyperbole in Voltaire's *Candide*. How does he use exaggeration as a tool in communicating his ideas and the themes of the novel? In your opinion, does he overuse this literary device? Why or why not?
18. Does the protagonist undergo change in the course of Voltaire's *Candide*? If so, in what way? If not, how do you know? What does this change, or lack thereof, tell you about the message of the book? Be specific in supporting your arguments.
19. Discuss the view of war promulgated by the author in Voltaire's *Candide*. Analyze his use of language in communicating the biting satire with which the novel treats this subject. Be sure to support your argument with specific quotations.