

Humanities 4: Lectures 7-8

Voltaire's *Candide*

Voltaire's *Candide*

- ✦ Intellectual Background
- ✦ Historical Context
- ✦ Biographical Sketch
- ✦ *Candide*
 - Literary Form
 - Official topic (optimism)
 - Targets of its criticism
 - Positive causes

Intellectual Background

- ✦ Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz
- ✦ French Enlightenment: The *Philosophes*

Gottfried Leibniz



- ✦ 1646-1716
- ✦ Universal genius
- ✦ As a philosopher
 - monadology
 - Principle of Sufficient Reason
 - Free will & determinism
 - *Theodicy* (1710)

Leibniz's Optimism

- ✦ Claim: This is the best of all possible worlds.
- ✦ Argument
 - God is omniscient.
 - God is omnipotent.
 - God is omnibenevolent.
 - Thus, God created the best possible world.
- ✦ Objection: Why, then, does evil exist?
 - moral vs. natural evil
 - ✦ free will
 - ✦ privation and permission

French Enlightenment

- ✦ Anti-cleric and anti-establishment
- ✦ The *Philosophes*
 - Montesquieu (1689-1755)
 - Diderot (1713-84) & D'Alembert (1717-83)
 - La Mettrie (1709-51) & D'Holbach (1723-89)
- ✦ Salons and Literacy

Historical Context: 18th Cent. France, Ancien Régime

- ✦ Political structure of the *Ancien Régime*
 - Absolutism: Louis XIV (1643-1715) & Louis XV (1715-1774)
 - Three Estates
- ✦ Economic structure
 - Taxes for military purposes & court at Versailles
 - Taxes obtained in inefficient and arbitrary ways
- ✦ Military Conflicts
 - War of Austrian Succession & Seven Years' War

Voltaire's Life (1694-1778)

- European-wide residencies
- Occupations
- Relationships
- Literary Range
- Temperament
- Lisbon earthquake

Candide as a Literary Work

✦ *Satire*

- *Definition: a literary technique that exposes the follies of its subject (individuals, organizations, or states) to ridicule, often as an intended means of provoking or preventing change.*

✦ *Picaresque novel*

- *Definition: a subgenre of usually satiric prose fiction that depicts in realistic, often humorous, detail the adventures of a roguish hero living by his or her wits in a corrupt society.*

Candide's Main Characters

- Candide
- Pangloss
- Martin
- Cunégonde
- Cacambo

Candide's Literary Structure

- ✦ Several possible divisions:
 - Three Parts: Old World (Chs. 1-10), New World (11-20), Old World (21-30), or
 - Two Parts: before and after Eldorado, or
 - Entrance & Exit of Candide's companions: Pangloss, Cunegonde, Cacambo, Martin, or
 - Quest: Quester, Place to go, Stated Reason, Challenges, Real Reason (Self-Knowledge)
- ✦ Accelerated Plot
- ✦ Resurrections
- ✦ Conclusion
 - “work our land”

Candide: The Official Topic

Optimism

- Possible Philosophical Consequences
 - Atheism?
 - Pessimism?
 - Denial of the relevance of philosophy?
- ✦ Rhetorical device
 - Foil for criticisms of particular issues

Voltaire's Targets

- ✦ Organized Religion (I and II)
 - Clergy (various orders)
 - Inquisition
 - Muslims
 - Jews
- ✦ The State
- ✦ The Military
- ✦ Man

V's Targets: Organized Religion

✦ The Clergy

- Having sex (repeatedly) & passing on syphilis (e.g., 8)
- Pope Urban X fathering a child (who becomes the old woman helping C & C) (20)
- Orders:
 - ✦ Franciscan friar steals Cunegonde's diamonds (19) and informs on C & C's travels when caught (29)
 - ✦ Benedict. friar buys C & C's horse at bargain price (19)
 - ✦ Jesuits in Paraguay encourage tribes to resist the kings of Spain and Portugal (19, 29)
- Theological debate in Europe is likened to syphilis (9)
- Monks "teach, argue, rule, conspire and burn people who don't agree with them" (39) & Parisian abbot (53-5)
- BUT, Jacques, the Anabaptist (6-7) is generous.

V's Targets: Org. Religion II

✦ The Inquisition

- *Auto-da-fé*. To prevent further earthquakes, Pangloss and C. are punished, “the first for having spoken, and the second for having listened with an air of approval” (13).
- Inquisitor “shares” Cunegonde with Issachar (16),
 - ✦ BUT C kills the Inquisitor.

✦ Muslims

- Fight vicious civil war, but still pray 5 times a day (23) and other absurd judgments (73-74)

✦ Jews

- Religious views aren't target, financial deals are.

Voltaire's Targets: The State

- Courts' inefficiency and cost (45)
- Police corruption (57)
- Policies (58)
- Deposed royalty at dinner in Venice (68)

Voltaire's Targets: The Military

- ✦ C's time in the Bulgar army (pp. 4-6)
Cunegonde's treatment (15)
- ✦ Various atrocities justified by "the law war" (25) or "international law" (22)
- ✦ Knowing the "Bulgar drill" is sign of special expertise (19, 28-9)
- ✦ Plymouth Execution (58-59)

Voltaire's Targets: Man

- ✦ “public miseries” vs. “secret sufferings”: envy, anxiety, disquiet (47)
- ✦ Power relations:
 - “weak loathe the powerful, while cringing before them, and the powerful treat them like sheep whose wool and meat go to market”
 - “A thousand assassins organized in regiments run from one end of Europe to another, carrying out murder and robbery”
- ✦ Three main preoccupations:
 - “love, speaking ill of each other, and talking nonsense” (48)

Voltaire's Positive Causes

- ✦ The treatment of women
 - The old woman (20ff.)
 - Paquette (60)
- ✦ Work (menial labor)
 - To relieve boredom?
 - To avoid theorizing?

Voltaire & the Enlightenment

- ✦ Highly critical of prevalent institutions
 - Esp. church in all of its forms
- ✦ Satire as his method presupposes rational standards
- ✦ No clear, positive proposal for progress