

Voltaire; candide analysis assignment

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Discuss the novel as a medium of philosophical critique and the possible meanings of the final words: “ we must cultivate our garden” The picaresque novella “ Candide” written by Francois-Marie Voltaire explores the use of satire as a medium to comment and confront dominant philosophy of his context, Leibniz philosophy of optimism. Voltaire embeds a premise of protest against surrendering to apathy and minimalist desires instead of using logic and rationale to become accountable for ones own actions.

This is epitomized by the final words; “ we just cultivate our garden” inferring one must partake in the making of one’s own destiny. Voltaire uses the repetition of the phrase; “ all is for the best” embedded within the novella to parallel the common philosophies of one of the main characters, Pompanon, and a prevalent philosopher in Voltaire time , G. W Leibniz.

Leibniz believed that “ God created everything in the world for the good of man, if evil is in the world, then God created it for the good of mankind, so all is for the best” and it is this notion of blindly surrendering that Voltaire protests, the overly simplistic avoidance of agonizing evil and suffering. Voltaire conveys this through repetition as it continually undermines the merit of the phrase each additional time it is used. And to subtly challenge the reader to question this way of thinking.

He uses satire in the form of exhausted repetition to confront apathetic mindsets of surrendering to a dimension of fate; “ I like the things the way they are because they suit me and I don’t know any better” which is a direct allusion to the Pope’s speech of; “ whatever is, is right”. Voltaire parallels

these two phrases to trivialize their meaning whilst Hellenizing optimists who cling to the status quo out of fear of change or independent thought.

The parallel of annalistic urges to man is effectively used in reference to Darwinism. Voltaire utilizes irony to commonly mock and draw conclusions from factual evidence within his time and parallel that knowledge to disregard optimism; “ you are surprised by everything; why should you think it so strange that in some countries it is apes who enjoy the favors of young ladies? They are quarter human just as I am quarter Spaniard” (Chap. 16 page 40).

This is a reference towards Darwinism and that men are animals, or “ apes”, Voltaire heavily embeds a satirical tone throughout “ Candide” by exacerbating and hyperboloid’s situations to the point of complete incredibility, supported when Candide continually is confronted with friends and acquaintances with whom he had earlier died; “ It was as if he was looking at Mademoiselle Condone... Alive! And in Portugal... So were you not raped after all? And were you not disemboweled... Most certainly was, in both cases” (Chap. 7 page 18), and again when he was on a galley headed for the shores of Proportion to find Condone; “ is this a dream?... I really on this galley:’ can you kill Monsieur le Baron, whom I will kill? Can you kill Tanat de Maltreat Pompanos, whom I saw hanged?... How did I fail to kill you?... Pompanos, how can you still be alive after being hanged? And what are you both doing in a Turkish galley? ” (Chap. 27 page 84). The premise of the escapism value of naive optimism is undermined by the satirical elements attached to the hyperboloid’s experiences. Voltaire uses irony to exacerbate

situations into becoming ludicrous, and therefore make the reader question the sincerity, truth and depth of the encounter.

Voltaire uses rationale and logic, the epitome of Enlightenment, to mock and ridicule the ignorance of blind optimism. One can not argue that mankind should surrender to such annalistic desires and urges when we live in such a strict and rigid indoctrinated society led and shaped by rules; education, government, law, all of which are manmade. He argues it is naive to have no independent thought to comment on the universal human condition and analyses human behavior, inferred when Martin comments; “ Is there not pleasure in criticizing, in finding faults where other men think they see excellences?

That is to say that there is pleasure in not being pleased. ” (Chip. 25 peg. 79). The use of rhetorical questions challenges and argues that mankind can not be subject or surrender to such an omnipotent ubiquitous force; optimism infers a certain attitude to surrendering to the unknown or to a higher power rather than using logic, rationale and independent thought to explore human behavior and existential questions about mankind. Martin stands as a symbol that challenging ideologies is also a part of the human psyche.

Voltaire is rarely overly descriptive with the exception in violent scenes. This is used to briefly shock the audience by visceral descriptions but then dismisses as it as a chain of events that will lead him to something else, or the undeniable or unavoidable consequence of another action. No matter what had happened he would be led there, as opposed to taking account of

his actions in a civilized manner; “ all events form a chain in this, the best of all possible worlds... Had you not had great kicks to the behind for the love of Mademoiselle Condone... Ad you not run the Baron through with a fine thrust of your sword... You would not be here now’ (Chap. 30 pag. 93-94).

Through the characterization of Pompanon, Voltaire attacks how optimists are assured by their actions no matter atrocious or barbaric as inevitable and the point of leading to a greater, positive event. Voltaire protests against the apathetic nature of surrendering to analistic desires devoid of logic, and challenges the audience to question are these things moral. He does by inferring that it is acceptable to murder for the selfish pursuit of finding love.

Voltaire again exhausts the use of repetition to undermine merit or shock-value; “ men... Must have corrupted nature... They were not born wolves... Hey have become wolves... God did not give them... Cannons and bayonets, they have made bayonets and cannons to destroy each other” (Chap. 4 pag. 12). The use of repetition of key words like “ cannons”, “ bayonets” and “ wolves” highlights the ambivalent meaning that words can denote, they typically elicit violent imagery but are quickly undermined through repetition where the reader becomes Jaded to such novelties.

Through this Voltaire is slung satire to mock ten Tact man is not analistic, Tanat tense creations are manmade as a result of using logic and reason and one can not overlook atrocities or undermine them by saying it’s a natural act that has always been ingrained in mankind. Voltaire effectively uses satire to challenge common presumptions instead of directly inferring a point of view, as that would be morally presumptuous.

To “cultivate our garden” is homage to the cliché that you “reap what you sow”. After Candid’s disillusionment into gained knowledge through witnessing and hearing copious tragic acts and stories it is inferred that mankind and the world is made up of binary oppositions of tragedy and greatness and one must accept that one can not change the world. Voltaire mocks the premise that we live in the best of worlds as that is essentially a stagnant disposition, and is ludicrous.

The world is ever-changing, and people should partake in that by growing your “garden”, be active in the world around you, challenge ideas and don’t simply acknowledge the presence of a “garden” (ones life) but be a part of it. Enlightenment argues that we are shaped by our surroundings and should evolve from them, not simply acknowledge their presence and be content with that, and as Voltaire was a philosopher of Enlightenment argues that if we partake in intellectual pursuits we won’t become victims or slaves to animalistic drives.

He enforces this point by contrasting it to the ideology of optimism which infers surrendering to a higher power and barbaric, primitive tendencies, seemingly the nature of mankind, whereas Voltaire argues that since we live in a society that is dominated by indoctrinated activities – education, law, institutions, government etc, it would be naive to believe that we are devoid of rational thought or action. Through the use of hyperbole, irony, rhetorical questions and repetition Voltaire argues that there may be a time where you have to become accountable for your own actions and experiences and not solely rely only on destiny.

It is that apathetic disposition that Candied challenges, with the summation statement; “ we must cultivate our garden” enforcing the reader to use what one has and cultivate your own mind and thoughts, to not rely on others.

One should not sit idly by and watch things go by, and in this sense it is a metaphor for “ less talk more action” in the literal sense. Voltaire novella, “ Candied”, protests ignorance and intellectual apathy challenging the reliance and comfort to the status quo simply because it is recognized and familiar. He advocates change as a map for evolution; both physically and mentally.

Voltaire uses satire as a medium to infer such confronting notions without forcefully attacking the philosophical ideology of Leibniz optimism, thus making it accessible to a larger audience. Voltaire concludes with a summation statement; “ we must cultivate our garden”