

# Critical thinking on violence in candide and macbeth

[Literature](#), [William Shakespeare](#)



Candide is Voltaire's attack on the philosophy of such Enlightenment thinkers as as Gottfried Wilhelm von Leibniz, who believed that the present world was the best of all possible worlds, and that all things turn out for the best. They also believed that God exists, and since God has to be perfect, his world has to be perfect as well. The only reason that people see imperfection in the world is that they have limitations on their understanding. The violence that happens around (and to) Candide, and his fellow optimist, Pangloss, is Voltaire's way of ridiculing the claim that imperfections are not real. All three of the major female characters in the story, Cunegonde, Paquette, and the old woman, experience rape, and all are sold into sexual bondage - difficult fates to imagine, and extremely difficult to view as the best of all possible endings. Also, the religious authorities in Spain execute heretics by burning them, and both religious and political leaders blackmail the women over whom they have power into granting them sexual favors. The sheer shock value in the instances of sexual violence in Candide is one of Voltaire's rhetorical strategies in demonstrating the folly of the idealistic optimists of the Enlightenment. In Chapter 6, the question is rightly posed: "If this is the best of all possible worlds, what are the others?"

In Macbeth, the role of violence is similar - but also different. In both works, the purpose of violence is to demonstrate masculine prowess, but while in Candide that prowess comes in the form of exploiting women, in Macbeth the violence comes on the battlefield, and in the audacity that goes with murder. Macbeth, Young Siward and Macduff must demonstrate that they are true men by killing. When these men give themselves over to the drive for violence, though, they ask the question: "have we eaten on the insane

root that takes the reason prisoner?"\*(I. iii.) While violence brings on tragedy in both stories, at least the majority of the victims in Macbeth are also men, able to fight for themselves, instead of helpless victims, as many of the women in Candide are.