

Comparative analysis of voltaire's candide and fielding's tom jones

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Voltaire's work portrays a profound admiration for social and political English models. As a young man, he met an exiled Tory statesman in 1722, Viscount Bolingbroke who represented a form of cultural pre-eminence that thrilled him. This encounter and Voltaire's desire to make a name for himself propelled him to his work that advanced English literature in France. By the 1750s, Voltaire's youthful enthusiasm waned giving way to a more critical approach of English literature. His response to English fiction, such as the works of Henry Fielding, rejects English literature as an unworthy art form. However, Voltaire felt the attraction of English fiction that inspired his final works. La Place's translation of Fielding's novel, *A History of Tom Jones*, shows striking contrasts to Voltaire's *Candide*. The narrative, words choices, imagery and turn of phrases in the translation mirror those of Voltaire's *Candide* eliciting a parody like adaptation. *Candide* is Voltaire's most remarkable masterpiece and has notable similarities and distinctions in the film adaptation of *Tom Jones* in terms of both characters and thematic concepts.

Candide's first chapters make explicit reference to *Tom Jones*. The audience can decipher that the inspiration of the characters: *Candide*, *Cunegonde*, and *Pangloss* comes from La Place's characters: *Tom Jones*, *Sophia Western*, and the philosopher *Square*. Voltaire aims to reverse what he feels as Fielding's primary purpose by creating the openly sexual *Cunegonde*, which is ironic since it undermines *Candide*'s symbolic quest of love from her. *Tom*'s life is adventurous; his encounter with a troop of soldiers on their way to fight rebels in Scotland reflects *Candide*'s early life. *Candide* gets expelled from his hometown, recruits for and joins the *Bulgar* army, then travels to *Holland*

afterward. Tom's eagerness for the Hanoverian cause against the Scotch insurgents finds its partner in Candide's drive to serve the Kings of Spain and Portugal in their war against Jesuits.

The film and the novel have a shared narrative formula. Candide mirrors Fielding's story of a benevolent, but weak and naïve orphan raised by a nobleman. In both narrations, sexual awakening of the protagonists leads to their cruel eviction from their childhood homes. As young adults, the protagonists traverse the land in search of female lovers. Tom exposes himself to evil and suffering thus familiarizing himself with the brutality and hypocrisy of the world. Both Tom and Candide predictably reach a level of maturity and objectivity when reunited with their darlings. Tom marries the charming Sophia whose name signifies wisdom, while Candide consents to marry Cunegonde despite his initial doubts. At the end of the story, Cunegonde becomes hopelessly ugly to the disappointment of Candide. Therefore, it is no coincidence that the narrative of these stories is similar, albeit with slight deviations.

Both Fielding's and Voltaire's novels follow an Aristotelian tripartite narrative design. Tom Jones has 18 books divided into six units: for the country, road, and city. Similarly, Candide has 30 chapters that constitute three allegorical guides. Chapters 1-10 are about the optimistic Pangloss, Chapters 11-20 are about the skeptical Cacambo, and the novel ends with the pessimistic Martin in the final Chapters 21-30. Each of these illustrative guides portrays a specific philosophical outlook, and each links to a certain geographical region. Voltaire's borrowings in the initial chapters are easy to recognize. Set

in the area of Westphalia, the audience speculates whether Voltaire's choice was an inspiration by Fielding's "the western division of this kingdom." Voltaire knew Fielding on a personal level to the extent of making acquaintances with his relatives. Fielding molded the character Sophia Western after his wife. Looking at Cunegonde's role, it partly mirrors that of Sophia. While *Candide* has different settings and characters, one cannot help but notice the similarities in the plot settings given Voltaire's close relationship to Fielding.

Both stories have a tale within a tale. Tom and Partridge sojourn to find a group of soldiers in their quest to go to Scotland. They embark on a cold, bleak journey on foot. Peter's thoughts of his love, Sophia initially keep him warm while Partridge complains about the cold weather. Romantic yearnings and wishes continue to preoccupy Tom while they both climb a steep hill. To Partridge's joy, he spots a far-off light from a cottage where they go to seek shelter. Here, they meet the Man of the Hill who gives them a place by the fire. His is a story of how he lost his principles at college and eventually cast aside by family because of addiction to gambling and alcohol. The woman he loves abandons him and finally endures the pain of betrayal from his best friend.

On the other hand, the Old Woman in *Candide* is a different story but shares a thematic structure to the Man of the Hill. The Old Woman is a narration of how the engagement of an attractive princess to a handsome prince falls apart. The princess finds herself a victim of rape, war and, finally old age. Both tales are about young, good-looking, and fortunate individuals who

undergo extreme disappointment through suffering and rejection.

Abandoned by their loved ones, the Old Woman and Man of the Hill contemplate on the unusual theme of suicide. Tom challenges the Man of the Hill objecting that he still trusts in Sophia's love, who in turn reminds him of how he used to have faith in such illusions. The tale within a tale in both stories is vividly similar as a way to show that Voltaire learned from Fielding's work.

The protagonists' melancholy is evident in both *Candide* and *Tom Jones*. The often-cheerful *Candide* arrives in Venice only to find that his love, Cunegonde, is not there to receive him. Despite this disappointment, *Candide* refrains from making merry in a city famous for pleasure. Conversely, Tom dresses up for the masked ball, only to find out that he mistakenly presumed that Sophia wanted to meet him at the ball. Both protagonists are eager to reunite with their beloved to their dismay.

The theme of society and class recurs in both accounts. Voltaire depicts hereditary power as corrupting and ultimately meaningless. Leading families own slaves and servants. Power is temporary, and even though the Baron clings to his family status, he works in a chain gang. Voltaire vividly portrays this temporary nature when *Candide* encounters six dethroned kings in the span of one night. The main characters' fortunes change as the story develops. Tom contends that some individuals are naturally superior to others, and authority comes with birth. He lives with different British classes: the poor Seagrim family residing on Squire Allworthy's land, and the wealthy Lord Fellamar who has numerous servants. Fielding's work reveals the good

and bad sides of the characters, whether high up or lower on the social ladder.

Sex is rampant in *Candide* and Voltaire never mentions it positively while *Tom Jones* is as raunchy as one can get. Sexual exploitation is prevalent in *Candide*, where Voltaire crushes the sexual expectations of women. *Candide* is aware of countless incidents of sexual abuse in his country and is startled to learn of the multiple assaults that his love interest, Cunegonde, goes through affecting her beauty and innocence. Tom lies with Molly Seagrim getting her pregnant, and they have an unwelcome shotgun wedding. However, marriage does not limit Tom as his love of sex lands him into trouble especially when he discovers that he may have inadvertently committed incest with his long-lost mother. After this close brush with incest, Tom decides to abandon his old ways and marries Sophia to live happily ever after. The recurrence of this theme shows the authors' motive to emphasize the manipulative nature of sex.

One cannot help but notice the stark contrasts while reading Voltaire's *Candide* and watching the film *Tom Jones*. Voltaire's work echoes that of Fielding in a chronological structure. While the characters and narrations are different, *Candide* contains signs of influence from *Tom Jones*. *Tom Jones* came out first, and one can decipher that Voltaire made use of a pre-existing text to adapt and create his novel. The thematic concepts of love, morality, society and class, family, philosophical viewpoints, suffering, and betrayal are evident in both stories. The authors build their characters and themes around romance resulting in great, educative pieces of writing.