

Candide's tone of irony



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Voltaire wrote *Candide* in 1759 during an “era... in which the conventions and inequities of European society were being questioned and attacked on all sides” (v). It is apparent from the text that his ultimate goal in writing the novel was to point out flaws in French society, such as the importance placed on money, unquestioning following of religion, and foolish philosophical speculation. The reader is bound to find *Candide*, the main character, and his adventures amusing and humorous, but the underlying messages of this seemingly light story are evident. One of the devices Voltaire uses is an ironic tone, which aids in exposing his feelings about the class system in France at the time, in which *Candide* represents the elite. Voltaire particularly achieves irony by making fun of his characters, placing them in ridiculous situations, and exposing them under the light of humor. *Candide* maintains an overly optimistic view of the world throughout the story, even though he witnesses and experiences numerous disasters. His love for Cunegonde is challenged so many times it seems impossible that anything could ever come of it. He journeys the world, as he has been banished from his home for being seen kissing her, and struggles to survive. But *Candide* believes he lives in “the best of worlds” (7), an idea uttered so many times he and Pangloss appear idiotic, since they seem to live in the worst of worlds, plagued by tumultuous situations. *Candide* maintains a sunny outlook on the world because he relies on blind luck to save him. His perpetual good fortune is much like that of the aristocracy at the time, who Voltaire despised for their inherently unfair privileges. Voltaire's choice of diction also lambasts *Candide* and the blissful ignorance of the people he represents. Every incident is described as affecting *Candide* greatly, though nothing has any lasting effect on him. After being chased away from the

castle in which he lived, Candide “ walked a long while without knowing where, weeping, raising his eyes to heaven” (3). Candide suffers immensely, but Voltaire's choice of words gives the impression of how a child would act after he is sent to his room. A child would think of his punishment as catastrophic, until he is distracted by something else, just as Candide is by the dinner he soon attends. Candide's unrealistic array of adventures begins to seem never-ending after awhile. He sees a bloody battle take place, hears that Cunegonde and her entire family have been killed, and witnesses the man who took him in, Jacques, drown in a horrific storm. The reader is then made to think things might settle down or become easier for Candide. But he continues his journey, finding Lisbon destroyed by an earthquake when he arrives. Pangloss has been hanged for being a heretic, and Candide is beaten for believing Pangloss's philosophies after being hit with the news of his death. There is bittersweet news for Candide when he finds Cunegonde is not dead, but, rather, that she has been raped and made a sex slave. The two plan to get married; however, Candide's bad luck is far from over. He loses Cunegonde to a wealthier man who proposes to her. He resumes his tumultuous adventuring, which includes almost getting eaten by a Biglug tribe, and has the fortune he finds in El Dorado stolen from him. Candide is not a noble man nor an intelligent one, so the fact that he has lived through all of this, let alone remained optimistic, is outrageous; such experiences would send others into anger or despair. Even more ironic is the fact that everything turns out perfectly for Candide in the end; Cunegonde leaves her husband and marries him. Ironically, he “ had no wish to marry Cunegonde” (84), the love of his life. But he does so because Cunegonde begs her brother, the Baron of the castle Candide resided in, to allow them to wed.

Candide finds out Pangloss was not actually killed and bands with him once again. He takes up gardening and lives a very good life, reunited with several characters in a sudden and seemingly impossible fashion. To add to the irony of Candide, the characters are placed in humorous situations and use language that intensifies the comedic effect. Candide's optimism is an exaggerated trait that parallels the attitude of many people. Voltaire's point is, perhaps, that such an outlook is not the best policy. Maybe people should not go through life passively accepting what happens to them, hoping things will improve, but instead by being proactive. Candide's good luck is unrealistic and cannot be attributed to his manner of seeing the world. He loses his fortune as quickly as he comes across it, reflecting Voltaire's opinion that money should be earned; people who are born with it or randomly stumble upon it deserve to lose it quickly. He also is not fond of unnecessary formalities, revealed when he describes Pangloss as "professor of metaphysico-theologico-cosmologico-nigology" (1). Pangloss wants his title to be admired, but Voltaire incites the reader to find it laughably excessive. Thus, through its potent use of irony, Candide is a classic example of satire. The situations and attitudes in the story humorously parallel those existing in real life at the time. Voltaire uses irony in his descriptions to point out that the conditions in the story and, consequently, reality are ridiculous. It is hardly surprising that today, therefore, Candide is a prominent novel of historical importance.