

Writers in the enlightenment period



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The Enlightenment Period

What is an enlightened thinker? It's when one can critically think or act for themselves. They are free-thinkers, can see the truth, they have an understanding, are aware of misleading claims, and are able to resist falsehood, as well as influential voices that may try to persuade them otherwise. It wasn't until the eighteenth century that sparked a movement amongst enlightened thinkers, known as the Enlightenment Period.

Common writers of this period included: Moliere whose style of writing was of comic that pointed out the flaws of humans (satirizing). Molière's characters were often those of single-mind or of a religious devotion whose mind could be influenced. However, he did incorporate characters who were enlightened thinkers, such as Cleante that seemed to be the voice of reason. In Molière's play, Tartuffe, the theme was based off religious hypocrisy. A comedy that mocks religions misuse but has an ending containing irony. Moliere offended and outraged many by writing this play. His mockery was pointed towards a religious authority that was greedy, lustful, and deceitful who preyed on others who were easily influenceable. Such mockery of the church resulted in the banning of Tartuffe.

The following is how I noticed the literary terms being used in Tartuffe.

Alliteration was used in act 1: 1 when Madame Parnell told Elmire “ She spun in her grave when you were wed; She's still a better mother, even dead.”

(Molière 57) A *metaphor* is used in act 1: 1 when Madam Parnell compares the family's reactions to the towers of Babylon. The family reacts in a way as guest do at a party; wild, out of control, and evil acts. “ It truly is the tower of

Babylon, where people babble on and on and on.” (Molière 60) And example of *personification* is in act 5: 7 when Tartuffe says “ Suffering for heaven is all I know, so revile me. It’s all for heaven’s sake” (Molière 107) Synecdoche: Damis says in act 1: 1 “ Am I’m to be as quiet as a mouse about this tyrant’s power in our house?” as a figure of speech when asking his Madam Panell why they should listen to his trickery. (Molière 57) Madam Panell references the nosey neighbor, Orante that lives in the neighborhood as one that should be listened is an example of *allusion* . “ But when Orante says things are out of joint, there’s a problem She’s a person who prays every day and should be listened to. She condemns the mob that visits here.” (Molière 59) *irony* has its way though. In act 3: 6 Orgon kicks Damis out of the house because of his accusations against Tartuffe. Then in act 5: 4, Tartuffe out of revenge against Orgon tries to kick Orgon and his family of the house.

A second writer of this period is Sor Juana Inès De La Cruz. She spoke out for her beliefs in women’s rights as well as argued the opinions of others towards women therefore keeping her writings in the feminist theme. Her passion of this clearly shows with strong emotions in her pieces through satire of men who saw women as objects and lacked intelligence. How is this style incorporated into her poem, Philosophical Satire? To start off, she exposes a strong emotion towards men and their allegations towards women using satire to argue her point to readers to enlighten them on this unfair treatment of women. I feel as though she is saying to the men who seduce women, that men put the women at fault if they fall for the seduction that is first brought on by a man. Cruz points out, “ But who has carried greater blame in a passion gone astray; she who falls to constant pleading, or he

who pleads with her to fall?” (316) Perhaps she is trying to persuade her audience to believe that women behave in such ways they do because of the way men chase after them? However, she takes a slightly different approach by saying that women can be equally in the wrong for their actions as men are. “ Or which may be more greatly must be faulted, though either may commit a wrong: she who sins for need of payment, or he who pays for his enjoyment?” (Cruz 330) By the end of the poem, she hopes to prove that her argument is to just accept women for what they are or accept what man has done to corrupt her.

An example of *alliteration* in the poem is “ Or which more greatly must be faulted, though either may commit a wrong: she who sins for need of payment, or he who pays for his enjoyment?” (Cruz 330) A *metaphor* is used to compare the idea that a man considers a woman to be a Thais (seductive) while he pursues her but once he wins her over she should become a Lucretia or a symbol of purity. “ With ridiculous conceit you insist that women be a sultry Thais while you woo her; a true Lucretia once she’s won.” (Cruz 329) *Personification* : “ What do we see, when we see you madly determined to see us so, but the child who makes a monster appear and then goes trembling with fear?” (Cruz 329) What this says to me is that men are determined to make women what think they want of them to be but once women become that idea, they ridicule them for being the way they have become. *Allusion* is used to call out man’s foolish behavior by saying “ Whose behavior could be odder than that of a stubborn man who himself breathes on the mirror, and then laments it is not clear?” (Cruz 329) I felt that *sophistry* was used at the end of Sor Juana de la Cruz’s argument when

she changed up her argument from straight putting blame on a man to a “reverse table” approach and saying that it could also be as equally a woman’s fault. That men just needs to go ahead and accept them as is or for what they create them to be. This could possibly point out the *irony* as well.

Jonathan Swift’s style of writing contained a strong satire and wit towards political strategy, war during this period, judgement of those holding a religious authority, as well as the sinful nature of man (lust, vanity, and greed). He was able to paint a vivid picture of the dark side for his reader’s concerning these matters in A Modest Proposal possibly trying draw readers to have pity on the Irish. I found the title to be a bit deceiving and really thought Swift might possibly have a wonderful solution to poverty when I first began reading. As stated in our textbook, “ What he said he most wanted was to ‘ vex’ his readers with an uncomfortable awareness of the follies of the world.” (Puchner, et al. 331) In my opinion, Swift accomplished just that in A Modest Proposal. I’m not going to lie, I was completely horrified by his though process he was proposing. In order to reduce poverty, mothers should sell their babies as meat therefore benefiting the public? How absurd! It wasn’t until the end of Swift’s proposal that I realized he was exaggerating his mockery, but in a rhetorical way, towards the government’s lack of concern of the Irish people in poverty thus offering an economic solution.

Swift uses a *metaphor* when he states, “ It is true, a child, just dropped from its dam, may be supported by her milk for a solar year with little other nourishment;” (384) My interpretation of this is that he is comparing the treatment of a woman giving birth to a child in comparison to an animal (dam) giving birth to its baby. “ I have already computed the charge of

nursing a beggar's child (in which list I reckon all cottagers, labourers, and four-fifths of the farmers) to be about two shillings per annum," (Swift 386) Is an example *alliteration* with the constant "c" sound. Swift used what I thought to be a rather disturbing example of *allusion* when described roasting a child as you would a pig. One I would rather not imagine. "Although I rather recommend buying children alive, and dressing them hot from the knife, as we do roasting pigs." (Swift 386) I was rather relieved when I found that the *irony* of the story was that Swift was not being serious about his proposal but rather he had just the opposite advice. Swift admits in the last part of his proposal, "I profess, in the sincerity of my heart, that I have not the least personal interest in endeavoring to promote this necessary work, having no other motive than the public good of my country, by advancing our trade, providing for infants, relieving the poor, and giving some pleasure to the rich." (389)

Voltaire is another famous writer of this time who was a very strong opinionated writer that was unafraid to express freely his freedom of speech by using mockery towards powerful authorities such as corrupted priest and egocentric kings. Though his style contained wit, satire, and reasonable debates his thoughts were that of human rights, freedom and tolerance, and to end human suffering as it's goal. How did Candide fit into this style of writing? Basically, Voltaire was angered by an assertion written by Alexander Pope that stated, "Whatever is, is right." (Puchner, et al. 422) Voltaire did not agree with this nor could he fathom this as being God's will for a universe he created. The many tragic events that happened throughout Candide seemed to be illustrations of unnecessary bloodshed, religious

intolerance, limitations of speech and religion, and human suffering that were taking place during this period that fueled Voltaire's anger. Voltaire seemed to also use mockery towards royal authority. Voltaire uses the following as an example " You insolent dog, replied the baron, you would have the effrontery to marry my sister, who has seventy-two quarterings!" (446) This suggesting the royal authority does not allow people outside of royalty into their family. This statement is emphasized several times throughout the story concerning Candide's relationship with Cunègonde. Pangloss is what you consider a blind optimist and lacked practical thinking therefore viewing that " all is for the best in this best of all possible worlds." Also, an example of a *metaphor*. His optimism is a great example of most types of thinkers during this period that famous writers such as Voltaire attempted to persuade to turn their thinking as of an enlightened thinker. Another example of a metaphor used in the story is at the end when Candide suggests giving up their way of perceiving ideas adding " We must cultivate our garden." (Voltaire 482) In other words, satisfy their life by hard work using their given skills. This is also an example of *sophistry*. " That is very well put, said Candide, but we must cultivate our garden." (Voltaire 482) Candide has the idea that all is well because had all these tragedies not happened then they would not be all together cultivating their garden, or the end of their trials they went through. This is also a great example of *irony* in the story. Not how I would expect Candide to act after going through all those trials. Voltaire uses an example of *alliteration* in Candide with the repetition of " v's in the following, " The French captain soon learned that the captain of the victorious vessel as Spanish and that of the sunken vessel was a Dutch pirate." (Voltaire 458) The town of Wesphalia is portrayed as a

paradise by Voltaire in chapter 2 when he writes “ Candide, ejected from the earthly paradise, wandered for a long time without knowing where he was going;” (426)

What I found to be the common trait amongst all the writer’s is rational thinking. They all seemed to focus their mockery towards political authority, religion, the government, and ethics of society bringing forth the truth and reality of each. In one way or another their writings tried to convince their readers that their process of thought, actions, and morals should be derived out of reasonable or logical thoughts rather than by impulse or influence. One they should use their own understanding instead of letting another (Government, politics, religion, etc.) influence their thoughts. The Enlightened Period seemed to be a period of new ideas that could lead to improvement in humanity resulting in decisions being made from reason and logic rather than emotions. Steering away from a monarch government thus improving the government, politics, religion, and their own conditions of living. Through enlightenment one could find freedom of the mind.

- Puchner, Martin, eds, et al. The Norton Anthology of Western Literature. 9th ed, vol 2, W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 2014.