

# Voltaire's *Candide*

Lecture 8 (January 27, 2012)

# Lecture Outline

1. Literary Form
2. Optimism
3. Expectations and Progress
4. Happiness?

# Literary Form

- Satire: literature “in which prevailing vices or follies are held up to ridicule” (OED)
- Critique of targets who ought to be respected
- Time and culture specific
- Message is ‘hidden’ (requires interpretation)
- *Candide* as a farce

# Characters and naming

- Narrator, Doctor Ralph
- Candide - 'solid judgment and openness of mind' (Ch I)
  - Candid, naive, blank slate
- Pangloss - 'all tongue'
  - Optimist, philosopher
- Cunégonde, Cacambo, and Martin

# Candide's journey



# Movement of the plot

- Global view
  - Old World (west), to New World, return to Old World (east)
- Garden motif
  - Westphalia (Eden) to El Dorado (Paradise) to Conclusion ('garden')

# Optimism

- This is the best of all possible worlds (Leibniz)
- Voltaire's use of the term
  - Element of naiveté
  - Experience of suffering
  - Redefinition of optimism (43)
  - As an irresponsible philosophy

# Expectations

- Text frustrates relationship between progress, reason, and expectations
- Predictive power of cause and effect
  - Pangloss's discourse (Ch I)
  - Girls and Apes (Ch I 6)
  - Readers' expectations
    - Jacques the Anabaptist, Cacambo, and multiple deaths

# Progress

- Knowledge as a dead end?
  - El Dorado, Pococurante, Turkish dervish
- Humane treatment of others?
  - Invocation of international law
  - Presence of real good people
- Reason as a tool of progress?
  - Practical reason of Candide, Cacambo, and Martin

# Happiness

- Westphalia (Garden of Eden)
  - Innocent, 'ignorance is bliss'
- El Dorado (Paradise)
  - Candide & Cacambo are happy!
  - Problem: will be like everyone else
    - Power, wealth, and distinction
    - Desire and restlessness
    - Isolation of El Dorado

- Other possibilities
  - Kings at dinner (power, distinction) (Ch26)
  - Pococurante (wealth, knowledge) (Ch25)
- Conclusion: “That is well said,” replied Candide, “but we must work our land.”
  - Alternate: “but we must cultivate our garden” (*le jardin*)
  - Repetition of the point (Yes, but...)
  - Cultivating your garden
    - Literal and spiritual readings

# Possible interpretations

- Cultivation/work as a process, not an end in itself
- Quiescence: Keep your mouth shut / don't ask questions
- Fight boredom, depravity, and poverty
  - Suffering vs. boredom - 'that's a tough question' (77)
  - Struggle against the negatives (not actualize the positive)