

ONOMASTIC DEVICES IN VOLTAIRE'S CANDIDE

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Voltaire dominates the literary and intellectual life of the French Enlightenment. But he is best remembered by the modern reader for his short novels, of which Candide or Optimism (1759) is the most famous. Flaubert himself called it the "résumé" of Voltaire's works.<sup>1</sup> The title juxtaposes the name of a hero with an abstraction, a philosophic idea, optimism, which will be the theme of the novel.<sup>2</sup> In the words of Will and Ariel Durant, Voltaire "put into a small compass, within the frame of a story of adventure and love, a telling satire of Leibnitz' theodicy, Pope's optimism, religious abuses, monastic amours, class prejudices, political corruption, legal chicanery, judicial venality, the barbarity of the penal code, the injustice of slavery, and the destructiveness of war."<sup>3</sup>

Optimism was a popular philosophic doctrine of the time set forth by the German philosopher Leibnitz, developed by Christian Wolf, and popularized by the English poet Alexander Pope in his Essay on Man. Leibnitz assumes that God is good and must have chosen the best of all possible worlds that he could have created.

He does not deny evil but finds it unavoidable in the scheme of things. Body and mind do not interact but function according to a "pre-established harmony," and everything has its cause or "sufficient reason."

These notions were popularized in Pope's Essay on Man, where the poet proclaims:

All Nature is but Art, unknown to thee;  
 All Chance, Direction which thou canst not see;  
 All Discord, Harmony not understood;  
 All partial Evil, universal Good;  
 And, spite of Pride, in erring Reason's spite,  
 One truth is clear, WHATEVER IS, IS RIGHT.<sup>4</sup>

Voltaire imagines a village philosopher in Westphalia, in the German Rhineland, whom he names Pangloss, from Greek pan, meaning "all," and glossa, meaning "tongue" or "language."<sup>5</sup> Pangloss serves as the voice of Leibnitz and teaches that everything is for the best in this best of all possible worlds, that there is no effect without a cause, and that everything has its "sufficient reason." Thus, noses were made to hold glasses, legs to wear shoes, and stones to build castles.<sup>6</sup> The subject of his teaching is described as "metaphysico-theologo-cosmolo-nigology."<sup>7</sup> The term cosmology had already been used by Wolf for the science that explains the general laws of the universe.<sup>8</sup> Nigology is a term fabricated by Voltaire and apparently derived from the French term nigaud, "booby."<sup>9</sup> George N. Havens interprets Pangloss's name as the equivalent of "windbag."<sup>10</sup>

For Voltaire, the doctrine that all is well reduces man to passive acquiescence in his misfortune and seems a doctrine of despair.<sup>11</sup> He objects to the notion that evil has no absolute existence but is merely a means to good and part of God's benevolent scheme of things.<sup>12</sup> W. H. Barber points out that "in creating Pangloss, the German pedagogue with his Leibnizian clichés, his irrepressible passion for metaphysical dogmatizing and his blind devotion to optimism, Voltaire was setting up a butt for satire at which all France could laugh."<sup>13</sup>

Fearing a hostile reaction by the authorities to Candide, Voltaire at first denied authorship, attributing it to a mythical German, Dr. Ralph, who is said to have died at Minden, Westphalia, in 1759. But Ralph is not a German name, and Voltaire appears to have been thinking of a minor English author, James Ralph, satirized by Pope in his Dunciad.<sup>14</sup> Minden was familiar to contemporaries as the scene of a bloody battle in 1759 in which the French were defeated by the Prussians.<sup>15</sup>

The hero, or anti-hero, is Candide, a gentle young man living in the castle of Baron Thunder-ten-Tronckh. Voltaire writes: "His judgment was rather sound and his mind was of the simplest; that is the reason, I think, why he was named Candide."<sup>16</sup> The French word candide is not synonymous with candid in English, but means "innocent, naive, pure, simple." The German national character at that time was viewed as one of extreme credulousness and

sentimental simplicity.<sup>17</sup>

Candide, imbued with the teachings of Dr. Pangloss, is, as Norman Torrey put it, "conducted on a tour of misery over the whole western world and hardly misses a spot where the wounds of humanity are particularly festering, or where nature is at her worst,"<sup>18</sup> until he finally settles on a farm near Constantinople, at length convinced that the only sensible way of living is to "cultivate one's garden."

Candide is not only a satire of the novel of adventure; it is also a hagiographic parody. There were two saints named Candide; the relics of one of them were transferred during the reign of Pope Urban VI in the fourteenth century to the town of Volterra--which bears a curious resemblance to Voltaire's name.<sup>19</sup>

Thunder-ten-Tronckh, with its alliteration and spelling peculiarities, is not really a German name. The first part is the English word thunder; the last part, however, may have been inspired by Baron Trenck, leader of the Pandours, the irregular Hungarian infantry during the Seven Year's War.<sup>20</sup> The neighboring town is called Valdberghoff-Trarbk-dikdorff.<sup>21</sup> Voltaire knew German very imperfectly and disliked it, finding it very difficult to pronounce. Thence, the satire on German place names.

The baron's daughter, whom Candide loves, is named Cunégonde. There were three historical figures with that name: Kunigunde of Bavaria, wife of Emperor Conrad I in the tenth century;

Kunigunde, daughter of Frederick of Austria, a fifteenth century Emperor; and Kunigunde, daughter of the first Count of Luxembourg and wife of Emperor Henry II of Bavaria in the eleventh century.<sup>22</sup> This last named Empress remained involuntarily chaste even after her marriage, since her husband was impotent. Accused of infidelity, she proved her innocence by walking barefoot across some red hot plowshares. Thus she earned the title of virgin spouse and was later canonized.<sup>23</sup>

Voltaire's choice of Cunégonde as the name of his heroine is obviously ironic, since she is raped by Bulgarian soldiers and sold to a Jewish banker who is forced to share her with the Portuguese Grand Inquisitor. Subsequently she becomes the mistress of the Governor of Buenos Aires and finally of Count Ragotsky (or more correctly Rákóczy) of Transylvania before she marries Candide in Constantinople. The initial syllable of her name, cu, suggests the vulgar French word for "anus" (cul). A few years after Candide, in 1767, Voltaire wrote a facetious anecdote entitled Canonization of St. Cucufin.<sup>24</sup>

Candide, having dared to kiss Cunégonde, is discovered by the Baron, who chases him out of the "finest and most agreeable of all castles" with "great kicks in the behind." He meets two men dressed in blue working for the King of Bulgaria who, after offering him a meal, put irons on his legs and take him to their regiment. The King of the Bulgarians is obviously Frederick II of Prussia,

whose hospitality Voltaire had once accepted and with whom he later quarreled. Voltaire had reason to think that Frederick was a pederast, and the French term bougre, like English bugger, is derived from Medieval Latin Bulgarus, "Bulgarian."<sup>25</sup>

Escaping after a bloody battle, Candide goes to Holland, works for the good Anabaptist Jacques and finds Pangloss again; both accompany Jacques on a trip to Portugal, but the ship sinks and Jacques drowns. Candide and Pangloss swim ashore just in time for the Lisbon earthquake of 1755. They are then accused of provoking the earthquake through their heresy; Candide is flogged and Pangloss is supposed to be hanged. Candide is then led to Cunégonde by an old woman servant who later describes herself as the daughter of Pope Urban X and Princess Palestrina. Voltaire adds the following footnote: "Observe the author's extreme discretion. There has been up to now no Pope named Urban X. The author fears to assign a bastard daughter to a known Pope. What circumspection! What delicacy of conscience!"<sup>26</sup>

Cunégonde is being shared by an Inquisitor and a Jewish financier named Issachar. Issachar is the name of the ninth son of Jacob, the fifth by his first wife Leah. According to Genesis, Leah had purchased from her sister Rachel, who was Jacob's second wife, the right to sleep with Jacob in exchange for having given Rachel some mandrakes found by her son Reuben. There seems to be a superficial resemblance between Issachar and the Inquisitor sharing

Cunégonde and the Biblical account of the two wives of Jacob buying and selling the right to sleep with him.<sup>27</sup>

Candide kills Issachar and the Inquisitor and flees with Cunégonde to Buenos Aires, where the Governor, Don Fernando d'Ibaraa y Figueora y Mascarenes y Lampourdos y Souza, who "loved women with a frenzy," immediately has designs on Cunégonde. The Governor, Voltaire writes, "had the pride befitting a man who bore so many names. He spoke to men with the noblest disdain, bearing his nose so high, raising his voice so pitilessly, assuming so imposing a tone, affecting so lofty a bearing that all those who addressed him were tempted to give him a beating."<sup>28</sup>

Candide had brought with him from Spain a valet, Cacambo, who "was one quarter Spanish, born of a half-breed in Tucumán." The name seems derived from zambo, an Indian and black half-breed, which may have once been spelled with a ç. Professor Havens, noting the alliteration, speculates that there is perhaps a suggestion of America by analogy with words like cacao and cacahuete (peanut).<sup>29</sup> There is also a possible pornographic allusion, since caca is a child's term for 'feces'.

Leaving Cunégonde in Buenos Aires, Candide, who fears arrest, goes with Cacambo to the Jesuits of Paraguay, where he meets Cunégonde's brother and apparently kills him when the brother will not consent to Candide's marriage with Cunégonde. Fleeing into the interior, Candide and Cacambo come to the land of the Oreillons, or

in Spanish, the Orejones, whose name means big or pierced ears. The Orejones were a tribe living near the Napo river in the area that is now between Colombia and Ecuador, and were accustomed to distending their ears with wooden plugs or heavy ornaments.<sup>30</sup> As Candide and Cacambo, tightly bound with ropes of bark, are about to be boiled or roasted alive by the naked savages, Candide wonders "what Dr. Pangloss would say if he saw what the pure state of nature is like."<sup>31</sup> Pangloss in this instance obviously represents Jean-Jacques Rousseau's notions of a return to nature and of the noble savage.<sup>32</sup>

Our heroes, freed through Cacambo's ingenuity, make their way to the land of Eldorado, where reason and justice reign supreme and there are no priests, monks or law courts. Eldorado, meaning "land of gold," is based on a sixteenth century myth found in Garcilaso de la Vega's History of the Incas, which was translated into French in 1744.<sup>33</sup> The mythical nature of this country is implicitly acknowledged by Voltaire in his choice of Eldorado as a name for his utopia.<sup>34</sup>

Candide and Cacambo then move on to the Dutch colony of Surinam, where they meet the rascally merchant Vandendendur, who later steals some sheep laden with gold that Candide had taken out of Eldorado. The name Vandendendur is apparently a combination of Vanderdüssen, an Amsterdam magistrate who in 1709 refused to give Louis XIV an armistice,<sup>35</sup> and Van Düren, a Dutch publisher whom

Voltaire had accused several times of having robbed him.<sup>36</sup> The last part of the name, which a Frenchman would pronounce like dent dure, "hard tooth," also suggests the rapacity of the merchant.<sup>37</sup>

Back in Europe, Candide goes first to France and then to Venice, where he meets Senator Pococurante, whose name means in Italian "caring little" or "indifferent." Voltaire on March 10, 1759, wrote to his friend Thiériot: "I seem to rather resemble Signor Pococurante here." The Senator is presented as a rather blasé Venetian nobleman, indifferent to music, hostile to Homer and Milton. Surrounded by wealth, formal gardens, servants, paintings, he finds fault with everything. He admires English freedom of speech but blames the violence of English party spirit. Candide wonders at that great genius whom nothing pleases, while Candide's second valet, Martin, notes that Pococurante is disgusted with everything he owns.<sup>38</sup> Pococurante's opinions on Homer, Virgil, and Tasso are the same as Voltaire's in his Essay on Epic Poetry (1728).<sup>39</sup>

In Venice too Candide comes upon Paquette, a former maid at the Baron's castle who has become a prostitute and whose name suggests paquerette, "daisy," and her companion Father Giroflée, "gillyflower," whom Candide considers in "the flower of health." Despite appearances, both are desperately unhappy.<sup>40</sup>

Candide's second valet, Martin, is a complete pessimist whose name may have been suggested by Saint Martin, one of France's patron saints and one of only two saints that Voltaire considered

virtuous men since Saint Martin had refused "to shed blood for religious ideology."<sup>41</sup>

On numerous occasions Voltaire makes sarcastic references to his detractors. Thus the Academy of Bordeaux awarded a prize to a "scholar from the north" for explaining the red color of Candide's Eldoradan sheep "by  $A + B - C$  divided by  $Z$ ." The reference is to the mathematician Maupertuis, who had tried to give mathematical proof of the existence of God.<sup>42</sup> The baron's son tells Candide that after the destruction of his father's castle, the Reverend Father Croust "conceived the most tender friendship for him," the implication being that he was initiated into a homosexual relationship. Father Croust, the Jesuit rector of Colmar in Alsace, had harrassed Voltaire during the latter's stay in Colmar.<sup>43</sup> There are also references to Fréron and Archdeacon Trublet. On the other hand, the execution of British Admiral John Byng aroused Voltaire's indignation; Candide is so shocked that he refuses to set foot in England.<sup>44</sup>

In general Voltaire's characterizations are sketchy, since the central interest is in events and ideas rather than psychological analysis. The characters typically have only a single name--Candide, Cunégonde, Martin, Pangloss, Cacambo--or else no name at all, as in the case of the Baron's son, the old woman, the Grand Inquisitor, the mutilated slave, the abbé from Périgord, the venerable Turkish farmer, and the dervish. None of the Eldoradans--

the King, the wise courtier, the innkeeper, or the schoolmaster-- has a name. Only Don Fernando, Governor of Buenos Aires, has a full name in keeping with his arrogance.<sup>45</sup> All the same, Voltaire's choice of names is generally appropriate and often very amusing. His names do not appear to have been chosen at random or without purpose, and they contribute in no small measure to the effectiveness of his satire.

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Will and Ariel Durant, The Age of Voltaire (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1965), p. 726.

<sup>2</sup>R. L. Frautschi, Barron's Simplified Approach to Voltaire: Candide (Woodbury, N.Y.: Barron's Educational Series, 1968), p. 21.

<sup>3</sup>Durant, p. 726.

<sup>4</sup>Voltaire, Candide (edited by George R. Havens) (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1969), pp. XXXV-XL.

<sup>5</sup>Voltaire, Candide, Zadig and Selected Stories (translated by Donald M. Frame) (New York: New American Library, 1961), p. 16.

<sup>6</sup>Candide (Frame), p. 16.

<sup>7</sup>Candide (Frame), p. 16.

<sup>8</sup>Germaine Brée, editor, Three Philosophical Voyages (New York: Dell, 1964), p. 185 (notes by Julian Eugene White, Jr.).

<sup>9</sup>Candide (Frame), p. 16.

<sup>10</sup>Candide (Havens), p. 115.

<sup>11</sup>W. H. Barber, Voltaire: Candide (Woodbury, N.Y.: Barron's Educational Series, 1960), p. 57.

<sup>12</sup>W. H. Barber in Jean Sareil, Voltaire et la Critique (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, 1966), p. 115.

<sup>13</sup>Barber, Voltaire: Candide, p. 49.

<sup>14</sup>Candide (Havens), p. 113.

<sup>15</sup>Frautschi, p. 28.

<sup>16</sup>Candide (Frame), p. 15

<sup>17</sup>A. Owen Aldridge, Voltaire and the Century of Light

(Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 1975), p. 252.

<sup>18</sup>Norman Torrey in Sareil, Volt., p. 112.

<sup>19</sup>Nelly H. Severin, "Hagiographic Parody in Candide,"

French Review, vol. L, No. 6 (May 1977), p. 843.

<sup>20</sup>Jean Sareil, Essai sur Candide (Geneva: Droz, 1967), p. 94.

<sup>21</sup>Candide (Frame), p. 18.

<sup>22</sup>Candide (Havens), p. 115.

<sup>23</sup>Severin, pp. 843-844.

<sup>24</sup>Severin, p. 849.

<sup>25</sup>Candide (Frame), p. 17.

<sup>26</sup>Candide (Frame), p. 36.

<sup>27</sup>D. H. Jory, "The Source of a Name in Candide," Romance

Notes XIII (1971), p. 113-116.

<sup>28</sup>Candide (Frame), p. 42.

<sup>29</sup>Candide (Havens), p. 122.

<sup>30</sup>Frautschi, p. 46.

<sup>31</sup>Candide (Frame), p. 50.

<sup>32</sup>Candide (Frame), p. 47.

<sup>33</sup>Brée, Three Phil. Voy., p. 187.

<sup>34</sup>Barber, Voltaire: Candide, p. 34.

- <sup>35</sup> Pierre Castex, Voltaire: Micromégas, Candide, L'Ingénu  
(Paris: Centre de Documentation Universitaire, 1964), p.73.
- <sup>36</sup> Voltaire, Romans et Contes (Paris: Bibliothèque de la  
Pléiade, Nouvelle Revue Française, 1954), p. 681 (Notes by René  
Groos).
- <sup>37</sup> Candide (Havens), p. 127.
- <sup>38</sup> Candide (Havens), pp. 136-138.
- <sup>39</sup> Brée, Three Phil. Voy., p. 189.
- <sup>40</sup> Candide (Frame), p. 82.
- <sup>41</sup> Severin, p. 845.
- <sup>42</sup> Brée, Three Phil. Voy., p. 188.
- <sup>43</sup> Brée, Three Phil. Voy., pp. 187-188.
- <sup>44</sup> Brée, Three Phil. Voy., pp. 157, 189.
- <sup>45</sup> Barber, Voltaire: Candide, pp. 18-19; Frautschi,  
pp. 23-24.
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