

# Voltaire

*Francois-Marie Arouet*



*By Michelle Miao*

## *Letter to the Reader*

In present day, many do not find it surprising to see the world as an imperfect place capable of improvement. However, this was not always the case. Especially during the epoch of Enlightenment, commoners and fresh free-thinkers thought of the world as an ideal universe where all that existed was supremely unrivaled by any other potential solution. Many saw the universe without fault, without flaw, without folly. The day that a person born with the name of Francois-Marie Arouet, later becoming widely known as Voltaire, changed this light-hearted façade. As he began to set out to establish his revolutionary beliefs, the ideals that he set forth through his meticulously created masterpiece, Candide, would challenge and overturn the widespread fallacious hopefulness of that age to become the habit of thinkers in the modern days. The reason that this certain person came to my mind out of all the great numbers of significant persons in the world was due to my keen interest in philosophy and how what people think affects how they act. Voltaire's importance in striking the truth for all to realize struck me as a paramount reason for choosing him as the hero of this project. Through the polished premises and critical conclusions created by Voltaire, perhaps others may see fit to cultivate their gardens as well.

Yours truly,

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### Voltaire: Writer of Philosophy

*“I know also,’ said Candide, ‘that we must cultivate our garden.’”*

*-Voltaire, Candide, 1759*

Voltaire, originally known as Francois-Marie Arouet, was born in Paris, France on November 21, 1694. Later in his life, Voltaire would write what is widely considered his magnum opus, Candide, which challenged the thoughts of the common people through **wit** and **satire**. This would allow people to completely rethink what was truly important in life. Before the age of Voltaire, all people believed that the world, no matter how insufferable or merciless it seemed, was nevertheless the best choice for living in. After Voltaire wrote the novel Candide, this ideal was seriously questioned. Voltaire established thoughts full of cunning and practicality through this book that contradicted popular philosophy to force all people to think twice about what they believed in.

Before Voltaire, the period of **Enlightenment** was still in its infancy and was not quite developed yet. Free-thinkers and those who only obeyed the rules blindly thought quite similarly—that anything awry in the name of love, philosophy, politics, life—the world that they lived in could not be anything better than what was already existing.

After Voltaire's birth, he developed ways of thinking that clashed with these ideals. He began writing Candide in 1758 and "Voltaire completed 'Candide' [in] 1759... the short novel... challenges the popular notion that we live in 'the best of all possible worlds.'" (Means). In the book Candide Voltaire released the claims that he held averse to the popular belief: that the existence of people in "the best of all possible worlds" was untrue.

In the brief novel, Voltaire establishes the adventures of a naïve character called Candide, discovering through the hard obstacles that he encounters that the belief of living in the most perfect of all universes was a folly: "'What is this **optimism**?' said Cacambo. 'Alas!' said Candide, 'it is the madness of maintaining that everything is right when it is wrong.'" (Voltaire 53). Voltaire relentlessly criticizes the flaws of the prevalent ideology, where Martin, a philosopher character in the novel, states, "I have been in several provinces. In some... half of the people are fools, in others... too cunning, in some they are weak... in others they affect to be witty, in all, the principal occupation is love, the next is slander, and the third is talking nonsense." (Voltaire 54). Throughout the book, Voltaire proves that the world was not as perfect as many wanted to believe it to be, revealing inexorably the harsh truths in life to substantiate it. By the end of the book, Candide reaches the conclusion that the most important thing was to "'cultivate one's garden', a... philosophy excluding excessive idealism" (Pomeau), contrary to the idealistic popular opinion.

Considered as the top work of his life time, Voltaire triumphantly overturned the widespread idea of world perfection in Candide, displaying the magnificence of simple **truthfulness** even beyond his time that brought the world to realize that it itself was not truly flawless.

Works Cited

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Garden of Philosophy

Many believe that there was no truth,

The world had always been this way

And there was no better universe

Than the one that human beings existed on.

*But the garden proved them wrong.*

The truth that lies in the world

Is undeniably denied by many

And its gaze avoided by all

Who know that it is unavoidable.

*But in the garden lies flagrant truth.*

For those that find the world perfect;

The best of all possible worlds,

They will find themselves mistaken

And unfortunately in the wrong once

*They learn to cultivate their garden.*



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# The Changing Times

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Paris, France — 1759 — 2 pages

five cents

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Times are changing drastically since the first philosophers of the beginning of the Enlightenment era.

All believed that the world we exist in as of now is our best option for living in--there is no better place for existence in. Or so this was our misconception.

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Voltaire, Francois-Marie Arouet

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Francois-Marie Arouet, with the pseudonym of Voltaire, is a French writer, famed for his honest philosophies and writings of all types, including plays and novels. Born in the popular city of Paris, France on November 21, 1694 to a humble, middle-class family, Francois was raised mainly by his godfather: Abbe de Chateauneuf, who provided Francois his education as well as Francois'

## Garden of Philosophy

By Michelle Miao

Though published in secret, once *Candide* was revealed to the public, controversy was almost immediately instigated. The ideas inside the brief novel defied those of all that had come before it. It would be surprisingly safe to say that most, upon reading this short tale of adventures, were struck with consternation at the proposal of such ideas. What exactly had this book done to achieve such strong reaction among the public--plebeians and philosophers alike?

To offer a brief overview of the novel *Candide*, the story provided a tale of how a naive character named Candide had once believed that the world in which he and all other humans lived on was the "best of all possible worlds", as referred to by Dr. Pangloss within the novel. In other words--absolute perfection had been attained, and further improvement was not necessary. However, this particular character is continuously preoccupied with a great number of misfortunes, forcing him to deny this false optimism by the end of his journeys, or so to speak, by the end of the novel.

At first glance, this novel

The exact quote from the novel states: "I know also," said Candide, "that we must cultivate our garden." At the conclusion of this brief satire, after usurping the optimistic facade of all commoners and elites on the subject of the world, Voltaire sets forth a solution so pragmatic and practical in its suggestion that it nearly made it strange to deny, yet difficult to accept so suddenly. By cultivating one's garden, one avoids the nebulous subjects of how the universe was the most ideal for all, and instead focus on the realities in life, which was indeed not flawless and subject to much potential enhancement.

Although Voltaire had no outstanding background and a majority of his plays were unfamiliar to the majority of the people, what is observed to be the magnum opus of his life, *Candide* had found a subtle yet mind-shocking way to show its audience that the solution to the vexing situations in life, as a result of the belief that the world was without fault, was a garden. To simply cultivate your garden of philosophy

inspiration to perceive the world through the eyes of a free-thinker. From this rather typical upbringing, Francois grew into an educated young man who began to develop his own thoughts of how the world truly worked. It is by no exaggeration that this article brings you that Francois, now better known by his pen-name: Voltaire, as of this remarkable year, has introduced to us an idea of rare intelligence that confronts the ideas of our forefathers with pioneer truth and ingenuity.

clashed with the prevailing belief that all was well in the world and that no matter what menial or morbid events occurred from one day to the next, this universe created for all people was the ultimate and greatest option of all options. Despite this, it was quite apparent from the novel itself that Voltaire did not see eye-to-eye with all others on this matter. As a finale, he proposed a solution to his newly introduced ideology, perhaps by far the most important aspect of his composition.



Voltaire's Garden: Exposition of Resolution by Michelle Miao

It comes as a drastic misfortune that I lie awake for many hours at this humble abode in Ferney as I dwell upon the matters that revolve about this at fault yet still awesome creation as known to humankind as the world. However, an even more inconvenient matter is the culprit of my soulful deprivation. It comes to my understanding that as I complete this novel that I proclaim as *Candide* it had come under my observance that among those in the world who lay eyes upon this creation, there will be a considerable number who may not comprehend the true intentions of the text. Hence therefore, it appears necessary for an exposition.

Before I leave the clock's hands to pass relentlessly I first address this to you, the Reader, that there is a garden that I had once left barren and to waste in the yard at the posterior of this dwelling. I have now learned to cultivate it to grow those that raise beauties to the eyes and those that enhance the stomach's survival and hunger's leave. Perhaps it is genius of the mind, or mere truth, but without much doubt I find that you will find this terrifyingly irrelevant. With that in mind, I will not mind relating to you the inner workings of my potential masterpiece: *Candide*.

I will leave the details for the Reader to discover solely by perusing the novel itself. There will be no need for I myself to destine the curious Reader that you may be to a fate of already knowing what has not been known as of yet. My exclusive intention is to enlighten those who see no truth in the doctrine that I have subtly placed within the story's conflicts throughout, and who seek no answers even still. You have my sincerest apologies for having kept you waiting—the story has only now begun to unfold.

The exploits of a young, unfortunate man who goes by the title of "Candide" divulges a single reality raised from the shattering of his false beliefs that the world was truly an unparalleled universe. Is the Reader stilled in consternation that I relate the ideologies of this unsophisticated character as a façade? Truly the world that all human beings, all creatures, all objects of creation live within and atop is the ultimate choice of all possible universes, and to think of enrichment was a folly; Reader, should you think similarly, then I am obliged to the duty of waking you from this slumber of illusions. It is of apex significance to state this with all due respect yet utmost firmness: The world as all exist in is as imperfect as the way humans perform error diurnally. It should be of little to no surprise that I have usurped the Reader's calm of thought only moments ago. Albeit, there is no need for fright nor fury—do not propose that I do not have a solution to the dilemma that I am fully aware that I have just imposed.

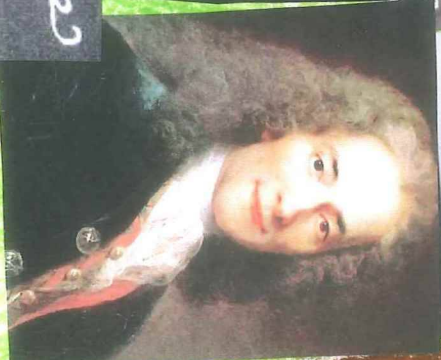
For progress to duly occur, one must see the world through the lens of practicality and sensibility. As I had set forth this statement in my novel, it is simply to cultivate one's garden. The Reader is not excluded from such a commonsensical panacea to the fallacious reveries of an unrivaled society. To till the land is comparable to the elevating of the mind—one rears physical utilities and *les belles fleurs*, beautiful flowers, while the other brings about flaxen tranquility that follows the truthful perspective of one's bearing. To regard the world with veracity, to cultivate one's garden of conviction is the singular truth of the universe.





COMMON SENSE IS NOT SO COMMON

*Voltaire*



Voltaire

MADNESS IS TO THINK OF TOO MANY THINGS IN SUCCESSION TOO FAST, OR OF ONE THING TOO EXCLUSIVELY.

CANDIDE



Prejudices are what fools use for reason.



...ask a man by his questions rather than his answers.



## NOTES PAGE

- **Unifying Element:** the unifying element of my overall project was the garden. This was due to Voltaire's theory that was mainly developed in his Candide, where he concluded by the end of the novel that the most important thing in life was to "cultivate one's garden", which was an idea that encouraged simple acceptance of reality and excluded complex thoughts in metaphysics.
- **Expository Text:** Within the expository text the garden is mentioned as the conclusion to Voltaire's idea that the world that all humans lived in was not the "best of all possible worlds". The idea of developing one's garden was to allow people to find it easier to accept the truths in the world in order to improve.
- **Poem:** the entire poem orbits around the idea of the garden helping to justify Voltaire's belief that the world should be seen through a realistic and simple perspective instead of the false optimism that many common people believed to be true. The poem uses the unifying element of garden to show that this component was what helped Voltaire prove the belief of the majority of people wrong and justify his own.
- **Image:** The drawing shows the layout of a garden with Voltaire sitting on a bench writing. Within the image are some places where pictures relevant to Voltaire are taken to show the connection between the garden and Voltaire.
- **Newspaper Article:** the news article is mainly focused upon exploring more of Voltaire's theory having to do with the garden and simpler ideals.
- **First Person Memoir:** in the memoir the idea of growing one's garden is seen through the eyes of the person responsible for creating the idea, who was Voltaire.