Candide By Voltaire Essay, Research Paper

My book report is on Candide by Voltaire and consists

of 326 pages. Voltaire’s Candide is the story of an

innocent man’s experiences in a mad and evil world,

and his struggle to achieve happiness without having

to work and taking the easy way out of all situations.

Everyone has to work and eventually they will achieve

happiness and joy but in Candide’s case, after a long

and difficult struggle in which Candide is forced to

overcome misfortune to find happiness, he concludes

that all is not that easy and that he must work in

order to find even a small amount of pleasure in life.

Candide grows up in the Castle of Westphalia

and is taught by the learned philosopher, Dr.

Pangloss. Candide is abruptly exiled from the castle

when found kissing the Baron’s daughter,

Cunegonde. Devastated by the separation from

Cunegonde, his true love, Candide sets out to

different

places in the hope of finding her and achieving total

happiness. On his journey, he faces a number of

misfortunes, among them being tortured during army

training, yet he continues to believe that there is a

"cause and effect" for everything. Candide is

reunited with Cunegonde, and regains a life of

prosperity,

but soon all is taken away, including his beloved

Cunegonde. He travels on, and years later he finds

her

again, but she is now fat and ugly. His wealth is all

gone and so is his love for the Baron’s daughter.

Throughout Candide, we see how accepting situations

and not trying to change or overcome obstacles

can be damaging. Life is full of struggles, but it

would be nonproductive if people passively accepted

whatever fate had in store for them, shrugging off

their personal responsibility. Voltaire believes that

people should not allow themselves to be victims. He

sneers at naive, accepting types, informing us

that people must work to reach their utopia (Bottiglia

93).

In Candide, reality and "the real world" are

portrayed as being disappointing. Within the

Baron’s castle, Candide is able to lead a Utopian

life. After his banishment, though, he recognizes the

evil of the world, seeing man’s sufferings. The only

thing that keeps Candide alive is his hope that

things will get better. Even though the world is

filled with disaster, Candide has an optimistic

attitude

that he adopted from Dr. Pangloss’ teachings. In

spite of his many trials, Candide believes that all is

well and everything is for the best. Only once, in

frustration, does he admit that he sometimes feels

that

optimism is "the mania of maintaining that all is well

when we are miserable" (Voltaire 41). Candide’s

enthusiastic view of life is contrasted with, and

challenged by the suffering which he endures

throughout the book. Voltaire wrote this book in a

mocking and satirical manner in order to express

his opinion that passive optimism is foolish (Richter

134).

Candide eventually learns how to achieve

happiness in the face of misadventure. He learns that

in order to attain a state of contentment, one must be

part of society where there is collective effort and

work. Labor, Candide learns, eliminates the three

curses of mankind: want, boredom, and vice. In

order to create such a society, man must do the

following: love his fellow man, be just, be vigilant,

know how to make the best of a bad situation and keep

from theorizing. Martin expresses this last

requirement for such a society succinctly when he

says, "Let’s work without speculating; it’s the only

way of rendering life bearable" (Voltaire 77).

One of the last people that Candide meets in

his travels is an old, poor Turkish farmer who

teaches Candide a lesson which allows him to come to

terms with the world and to settle down

happily. The revelation occurs when Candide and his

friends hear of the killing of two intimate

advisors of the sultan, and they ask the Turkish

farmer if he could give them more details about the

situation.

Upon learning that this man did not own "an enormous

and splendid property" (Voltaire 76), but rather a

mere twenty acres that he cultivates with his

children, Candide is startled. He sees that the man

is

happy with his life, and at that point Candide decides

to build his own life around the principal of being

productive. He decides that all he needs to be happy

is a garden to cultivate so that he, too, can keep

from the three great evils.

Candide’s garden symbolizes his surrender to

the world and his acceptance of it. He eventually

realizes that his former ambitions of finding and

achieving a perfect state of happiness were fulfilled,

though his successes were not as great as he had

wished. Instead, he has found happiness in a simple

way of life. He also learns that everything in life

is not evil, which he perceived to be the case while

undergoing misfortunes. He also concludes that Dr.

Pangloss was right all along, "everything is for the

best."

Throughout the entire book, we observe Candide

searching for happiness, sustained by his

dream of achieving that happiness. He believes, in

his optimistic way, that he will find Cunegonde, his

true love, and Dr. Pangloss, his mentor, and all will

be well. When Candide is reunited with both he

realizes that he was right not to lose hope. In

essence, it was Candide’s optimism that keeps him from

a

state of total dejection, maintaining his sanity

during troubled times. Candide eventually achieves

happiness with his friends in their simple, yet full,

lives. The book’s ending affirms Voltaire’s moral

that

one must work to attain satisfaction. Work helps

Candide overcome his tragedies and enables him to

live peacefully and in contentment. The message of

Candide is: "Don’t rationalize, but work; Don’t

utopianize, but improve. We must cultivate our own

garden, for no one is going to do it for us"

(Richter 161).