

CANDIDE SAMPLE COMMENTARIES

INTRODUCTIONS

The passage begins with Candide, Pangloss and the Anabaptist, Jacques, arriving by boat at Lisbon in a storm and depicts the death of Jacques and the earthquake that follows in the town. It is immediately preceded by the rescuing of Candide and his mentor by Jacques and their decision to depart together and follows intertextual themes common to the rest of the *conte* such as travel writing; the medieval quest; biblical allusion and references to the classical era.

In this episode, Voltaire utilises his distinct balance between absurdity and realism to both entertain the reader and encourage them to focus on seeking out a message from the text. He also employs the stylistic devices of situational comedy, satire, absurdity and melodrama to criticise Pangloss' optimism and reliance on gaining knowledge *a priori*. Structurally, this is achieved in three parts, the first being the death of Jacques; the second being the earthquake and the actions of the sailor and the third being Pangloss' explanation of the events.

The passage, taken from chapter five of *Candide*, opens as Candide is embarking on a journey to Lisbon after having been reunited with his old friend Pangloss. Both have endured many hardships including being shot by Bulgarian soldiers and contracting syphilis, respectively. This passage follows the pair through much more devastation, and in this case the almost biblical scale of the destruction caused by a storm and an earthquake affects more than just these two. Thus this passage sees Candide facing even greater challenges to his philosophy of optimism, and possibly shows him beginning to doubt.

The passage is constructed of three main parts: the storm/the drowning of Jacques, the earthquake and the fainting of Candide, as reflected by the structure of the passage in which these events make up the three longest paragraphs. A third person, omniscient narrator is maintained throughout, with brief moments of direct discourse between characters and varying sentence structure often enforcing the humour of this satirical situation.

This extract of *Candide*, Voltaire's most celebrated *conte philosophique*, centres around two disasters, first a tempest which destroys the ship upon which Candide, Pangloss and Jacques are sailing to Lisbon for business reasons; then an earthquake which devastates Lisbon itself.

Cathy 21/2/13 16:27

Comment [1]: SHOWS ABILITY TO GIVE AN OVERVIEW OF THE PASSAGE IN THE LIGHT OF THE TEXT-TYPES THAT V USES MORE WIDELY IN *CANDIDE*. THE WRITING IS EFFECTIVE BECAUSE IT SYNTHESISES THESE FEATURES, PRESENTING THEM PRECISELY BUT DEMONSTRATING VERY GOOD KNOWLEDGE AND UNDERSTANDING OF THE TEXT AS A WHOLE.

Cathy 21/2/13 16:26

Comment [2]: AGAIN THE ABILITY TO ANALYSE AND SYNTHESISE FORMAL DEVICES FOUND IN THE PASSAGE IMPRESSIVE HERE. THE READER OF THE COMMENTARY NOW KNOWS WHAT TO LOOK OUT FOR IN THE MAIN ANALYSIS

Cathy 21/2/13 15:26

Comment [3]: A CONCISE OVERVIEW OF THE PASSAGE'S THEMATIC CONTENT AND DIRECTION

Cathy 21/2/13 15:30

Comment [4]: CONCISE INTRODUCTION TO KEY FORMAL FEATURES OF THE PASSAGE, WHICH OPENS OUT TO ANTICIPATE WHY THEY MAY BE USED

These are only two examples of a series of tragedies, both natural and manmade, which fill *Candide*'s pages. However, although the passage describes catastrophe, its tone is highly comic, the omniscient third-person narrator often mocking the characters who suffer these misfortunate events in a way which disallows the reader from sympathising with them, thus distancing the reader from the text itself. The reader is therefore forced to connect with the passage logically, not emotionally. In doing so, s/he is met with a criticism of Leibnizian optimism, predestination and human nature which, through the use of satire, s/he is persuaded to agree with.

IN-DEPTH ANALYSIS: SAMPLE PARAGRAPHS

The alliteration in 'furieux' and 'frappe' (line 7) goes further to highlight the intensity and force of the events taking place and is contrasted with the physical comedy of the sailor hitting Jacques so forcefully that he falls from the boat (line 8) and then Jacques' own fall into the sea due to the effort he puts in to try to rescue the sailor (line 11). This contrast is typical of the tone of the passage and contributes to the implausibility of the events; encouraging the reader to view the passage critically.

The switch of tense from a combination of verbs in the past historic, imperfect and passé composé to using the present tense in this sentence also gives this scene immediacy creating one stand-out moment of chaos amidst the general chaos of the storm that seems frozen in time as it is not a completed action. This is to foreground Jacques' death against all the general misery created by the semantic field of despair established through phrases like 'angoisses inconcevables' and the anaphora of 'personne' in line 6 emphasising the hopelessness of the situation. Jacques' death is highlighted as a moment of irony as the man known for saving people is not himself saved from drowning.

The conciseness of language used in the passage, as explored above, is further shown in epithets used for characters such as 'Le bon Jacques' and 'Le philosophe Pangloss'. By combining the character name with their signature trait their function in the text is immediately known and the characters become symbolic of goodness and philosophy respectively, therefore helping to create the satirical nature of the passage. However *Candide*

Cathy 21/2/13 16:28

Comment [5]: VERY GOOD OVERVIEW OF THE MOODS CONVEYED IN THE PASSAGE AND THEIR ASSOCIATION WITH OTHER, SIMILAR EFFECTS EMPLOYED REPEATEDLY IN THE WORK

Cathy 21/2/13 15:56

Comment [6]: NOTE THE CONCISION HERE: NARRATIVE STYLE IS NOT SIMPLY NOTED BUT INTERPRETED AS HAVING A PARTICULAR EFFECT ON THE READER

Cathy 21/2/13 16:28

Comment [7]: THE RANGE OF THEMES ADDRESSED IN THE PASSAGE ARE CLEARLY LISTED, SHOWING AN ABILITY TO EXTRACT AND SYNTHESISE MATERIAL

Cathy 21/2/13 15:33

Comment [8]: PRECISE IDENTIFICATION OF RHETORICAL FEATURES AND CLEAR LINK TO THEIR EFFECT

Cathy 21/2/13 15:34

Comment [9]: PERCEPTIVE FOCUS ON THE COMIC ELEMENTS OF THE PASSAGE

Cathy 21/2/13 15:52

Comment [10]: EXCELLENT OVERVIEW OF THE USE OF TENSES IN PARA 1. THE EFFECTS OF V'S USE OF THIS STRUCTURAL FEATURE ARE CLEARLY WEIGHED UP RATHER THAN SIMPLY OBSERVED

Cathy 21/2/13 15:48

Comment [11]: IMPACT OF THE DROWNING EPISODE CLEARLY ANALYSED (IN TERMS OF IRONY) RATHER THAN SIMPLY DESCRIBED

Cathy 21/2/13 15:51

Comment [12]: ANOTHER FORMAL FEATURE – THE DEVICE OF NAMING – IS CLEARLY IDENTIFIED AND INTERPRETED. HERE THIS DEVICE IS CLEARLY LINKED TO SATIRE, BUT COULD ALSO HAVE BEEN LINKED TO V'S FONDNESS, IN THIS TEXT, FOR PARODYING THE CONTE FORM

is not given an epithet showing him to be capable of change in character as we see during this extract.

Cathy 21/2/13 15:53

Comment [13]: FURTHER ANALYSIS OF THE FORMAL FEATURE OF NAMING, WITH AN EXCELLENT INTERPRETATION OF THE EVIDENCE ON THE PAGE

In the chapter summary at the beginning of the extract, tripling is used to undermine the brutality and impact of the disasters to follow. They are reduced to mere items in a list. Immediately thereafter, however, the reader is thrown into the midst of a description of chaos. Voltaire here makes use of a semantic field of suffering, containing words such as 'affaiblis', 'angoisses' (1) and 'agitées' (3) to describe the condition of those on the boat.

Cathy 21/2/13 16:03

Comment [14]: ABILITY TO ANALYSE V'S VOCABULARY CHOICES, PRESENT THESE IN AN ORGANISED WAY, AND INTERPRET THEIR USE SHOWN HERE

However, although this description of the passengers' panic is in some way emotive, being filled with suffering, it is nonetheless brief, and the reader is given no more than a general view of the situation. The passengers are divided into 'la moitié' (1) and 'l'autre moitié' (4) and the mention of 'angoisses inconcevables' draws the reader out, implying that s/he cannot comprehend the misery. Again, tripling is used, here to trivialise the carnage as the ship is destroyed (4-5). The overall effect of this is to distance the reader from the scene. Instead of focusing on the picture of suffering, s/he envisages a mass of people screaming and running about hysterically in a comic way.

Cathy 21/2/13 16:03

Comment [15]: SYNTACTICAL STRUCTURE WELL OBSERVED HERE AND SUBSEQUENTLY INTERPRETED (readers 'cannot comprehend the misery.')

Cathy 21/2/13 16:02

Comment [16]: 3-FOLD REPETITION OR ARTICULATION OF MATERIAL IS AN EFFECTIVE RHETORICAL DEVICE, OFTEN USED BY SPEECH MAKERS. HERE THIS DEVICE HAS BEEN IDENTIFIED AND INTERPRETED

The narrator then zooms in on Jacques the Anabaptist, giving for the first time an individual account of the tragedy. Although Jacques tries to help save the crew including the sailor, who struck him on the bridge of the boat, his altruistic deeds are useless and he drowns whilst the brutish sailor, who does nothing to help him, survives. The events leading up to Jacques' cruel death are described by the narrator in a fast-paced, slapstick manner, epitomised by the humorous description of the sailor as 'accroché à une partie de mât rompue' (10). Furthermore, the use of present tense during one short sentence (7-8) adds to the impression that the narrator is telling a joke. The joke here is on optimism: Jacques has been characterised as a good man by his forgiving actions such as his rescue of the sailor (10-11) whereas the sailor is described in a direct parallel as 'ce brutal' against Jacques, 'le vertueux' (18). That the good man died whilst the bad man 'nagea heureusement jusqu'au rivage' (19) shows that death is simply pot luck, a message which is reinforced later as people of all kinds are killed in the earthquake (29-30)

Cathy 21/2/13 16:05

Comment [17]: EFFECTIVE OBSERVATION OF THE SHIFT IN PERSPECTIVE FROM THE BROAD TO THE PARTICULAR

Cathy 21/2/13 16:14

Comment [18]: HERE ONE EXAMPLE IS GIVEN OF THE REPEATED CONTRASTS MADE BETWEEN JACQUES AND THE SAILOR IN PARAGRAPH 1. THIS SHOWS THE ABILITY TO SIFT, SORT AND PRESENT RELEVANT MATERIAL. AGAIN THIS IS IMMEDIATELY INTERPRETED

SAMPLE CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, this passage follows the heightened hardships of Candide and Pangloss, to the extent that we start to see development in the thinking of Candide.√ This is a development that continues throughout the rest of the novel as Candide faces many more challenges but is eventually resolved in his famous final statement “il faut cultiver notre jardin”¹. We begin to see this character development in this passage through the repeated use of juxtaposition, hyperbolic imagery and structure that create irony, features which can be found throughout the novel as Candide faces ever more testing scenarios. These events, especially the earthquake, do stand out due to the impact they have on Candide, however they are only some of many absurd events to befall him.

The overall message to be gleaned from this series of parallel events and actions is ambiguous: although the text criticises the lack of aid given by the sailor and Pangloss to those suffering under the Lisbon earthquake, when positive action is taken, as Jacques attempts to rescue the sailor, it is criticised as futile. The reader must question whether the text advocates activism or passivity, a question also raised by *Candide*'s ending. The call to rationality present in this extract ridicules further the events of the next chapter, wherein an *auto-da-fé* creates more suffering rather than stopping the earthquakes. The text highlights not only the inevitability of disaster but also our tendency to worsen it, becoming a criticism not only of Leibnizian optimism but of human nature itself.

Cathy 21/2/13 16:15

Comment [19]: SHOWS THE RELEVANCE OF THE PASSAGE TO THE WORK AS A WHOLE

Cathy 21/2/13 16:16

Comment [20]: EFFECTIVE SYNTHESIS OF KEY FEATURES FOUND IN THE PASSAGE, WHICH ARE NOW LINKED TO THE WIDER WORK

Cathy 21/2/13 16:19

Comment [21]: EFFECTIVE SUMMARY OF HOW THE PASSAGE WORKS STRUCTURALLY

Cathy 21/2/13 16:20

Comment [22]: EXCELLENT READING OF THE AMBIGUITIES IN THIS PASSAGE IN THE LIGHT OF THE TEXT'S ENDING (THIS OPENING-UP OF THE DISCUSSION OF THE TEXT'S IMPACT IN THE WORK AS A WHOLE IS PRECISELY WHAT THE CONCLUSION IS FOR)

Cathy 21/2/13 16:22

Comment [23]: IT CAN BE EFFECTIVE TO EXAMINE WHAT THE TEXT IMMEDIATELY ANTICIPATES, AND ALSO ITS BROADER EFFECT WITHIN THE WORK AS A WHOLE

Susannah Wilson 21/2/13 15:19

Comment [24]: Excellent point: *Candide* is a satire of human stupidity in general.

¹ Voltaire, *Candide* ([n.p.]: Larousse, 1990) p.216