

## Comparing *Candide* and *X Out of Wonderland*

*X Out of Wonderland* is a novel modeled after Voltaire's *Candide*. I use the form of *Candide* in order to try to do what Voltaire did so well--satirize a commonly held belief. If you give your main character a commonly-held notion that motivates him, then allow that character to collide over and over again with reality, the commonly-held belief just may be revealed as ridiculous.

*Candide* believed that he lived in the best of all possible worlds because the world was created by a Good God, and a Good God would create only the best world. But the reality he confronts in his journeys is a world of incomprehensible suffering and horrible death, a world much too complicated to be explained by his mentor's simple "best of all possible worlds" mantra.

My main character, X, believes that his world is the best of all possible worlds because the Global Free Market "has provided more food, shelter, medicine and toys than all the oppressive old gods put together." He believes that the twin virtues of this world are Choice and Mobility, and that anyone who is hungry or homeless, or without sufficient purchasing power, need not be so long as he or she chooses to make the sacrifices necessary to move and retrain.

In other words, X has been taught to believe that if you are suffering in this brave new world run by the Global Free Market, then you are not making the correct choices.

But circumstances cast X, as they do *Candide*, out of his comfortable life in his bountiful home country, and bounce him around the world and back again. Brutal circumstances test his smug philosophy. Pursuing a woman he loves, X's heroic journey takes him through prison, sweatshops, war, and an incessant search for employment amid nonstop economic upheaval and natural disasters. He's forced to lose his idealism, but never his optimism, and he becomes a good natured pilgrim of our times--doing whatever he has to do to survive and stay close to the people he loves.

While illuminating the absurdities of our time, X's journey, like *Candide*'s, illustrates the universal predicament of all human beings in all cultures, in all times: the need to find meaning and dignity in our lives despite the certainty of death and suffering.

### What the reviewers said about *X*, *Candide*, Voltaire and other satires:

*X out of Wonderland* "a tale in the manner of Voltaire's *Candide* -- which, like its prototype, puts tongue in cheek and takes on nothing less than the state of the nation and the state of the world. And neither, ruled by the global free market, is in good shape.....Cates's world is futuristic in tone yet based on our very own world today, in a witty, skillful, amusing--an unrelentingly clear-eyed -- satire." --Kirkus Review

"A biting satire of modern capitalism.... Caustic, but never cynical." --Publisher's Weekly

Voltaire's eighteenth-century satire *Candide* poked fun at the philosophical notion then in vogue that we live in "the best of all possible worlds." Closely imitating the format and plot of Voltaire's classic but updating its biting wit for modern readers, Cates skewers the current capitalistic enthusiasm for **free trade** while following the fortunes of a man known simply as X. Cates drives home with painful black humor the inequities of a global economy. Perhaps this should be required reading for die-hard capitalists and corporate CEOs. -- Booklist

*Candide* is a cheeky book, and admirably so. The same can be said of David Allan Cate's *X out of Wonderland: A Saga*, a modern adaptation of Voltaire's satire....This is humor that stings a little, and the author's observations are funny and fine-tuned throughout --The Believer

"This short novel is at once a swipe at capitalism run amok, a brilliant narrative of one man's optimism in the face of misfortune and an example of how a writer can take on big themes without overlooking fiction's obligation to offer compelling characters." — The Kansas City Star

Author David Allan Cates has come up with a short, powerful, delightful ...hilarious, upsetting, uplifting, upbraiding story that's a perfect combination of Vonnegut, Voltaire, and Seinfeld. In place of "Everyman," Cates introduces us to a public radio home improvement host, "a young man who, in order to protect from

unwanted commercial solicitations, we'll simply call X." And like in all sagas, our intrepid X's world goes wrong, he's downsized (something to do with a glut of wheat crackers and toothpicks on world markets), and therein begins the story Cates has called *X Out of Wonderland*.... And who ever would have thought, so many centuries after Voltaire, so many decades after Vonnegut, we would all still be smoking the same "best of all possible worlds" stuff that was going around before the enlightenment? Well, Cates for one. And I'm glad of it. --*Ken Krimstein Dusty Wright's Culture Catch*

Candide has returned. And what was true in Voltaire's day remains so today.....In David Allan Cates's new novel, *X Out of Wonderland*, Candide resumes his optimistic role as the character X from the surreal yet recognizable country of Wonderland. Blessed with a beautiful house, his own radio show and a tantalizing African Wonderlandian woman named C, X earnestly believes that "Wonderland's abundance had not been accidental, but created by brave religious and economic refugees who, despite offensive Old World habits, such as massacring natives and importing slaves, had the genius and pluck to build the Global Free Market." — *Missoula Independent*

David Allan Cates' re-imagining of Candide, the just-published *X Out of Wonderland*, substitutes the Voltairean idea of ultimate justice despite evil for an examination of the 21st-century ideal—as stipulated by the Global Free Market—of ultimate economic justice, despite rampant inequality. --*Willamette Week*

David Allan Cates, 2005