

I do not agree with what you have to say, but I'll defend to the death your right to say it. ~ Voltaire (actually misquoted, said by Evelyn Beatrice Hall in her book- The Friends of Voltaire)



VOLTAIRE

Catherine Qiu

BACKGROUND

- François-Marie Arouet
- Born in Paris- November 21st, 1694
- His father, François Arouet, was a minor treasury official and his mother, Marguerite d'Aumart, was from a noble family in Poitou.
- Educated in the Collège Louis-le-Grand by Jesuits.
- After he left school, he wanted to write but his father wanted him to be a lawyer.
- He pretended to be an assistant to a notary but instead wrote poetry.
- His father found out and sent him to study law in Caen, Normandy
- He almost eloped with a woman named Catherine Olympe Dunoyer but his father foiled his plans.



- He continued writing and his works became popular with aristocratic families he mixed with.
- He had a lot of imprisonments and exiles for his satirical works.
- He wrote a satirical work in 1717 about le Régent- Philippe II, Duke of Orléans- accusing him of incest with his daughter and was imprisoned in the Bastille for 11 months.
- There he wrote Œdipe – Oedipus. Which was first performed in 1718 and was huge success. And Phillippe II congratulated him on it.
- In the Bastille, he also adopted the name Voltaire which was an anagram for the Latin spelling of his last name.
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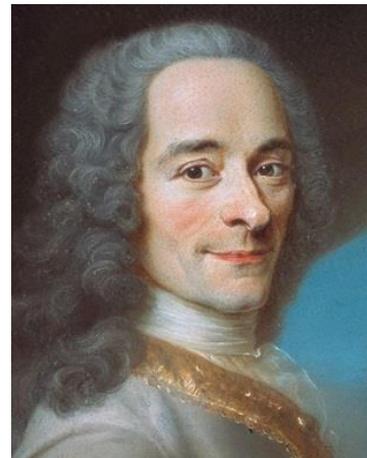
EXILE TO ENGLAND

- He returned an insult from Chevalier de Rohan and was willing to duel in 1726
- The Rohan family got lettre de cachet, a decree signed by King Louis XV to get rid of trouble makers.
- It warranted him to be imprisoned in the Bastille without a trial.
- He feared being imprisoned indefinitely so he suggested exile to England.
- He was there almost 3 years
- He was intrigued by constitutional monarchy, by their freedom of speech and religion, and developed an interest in their literature – Shakespeare.
- He published Letters Concerning the English Nation when he got back in 1733.
- The book was banned and burned and he was forced to flee again.



MADAME DU CHATELET AND CIREY

- He became rich after he came back from England because he bought the state's lottery and gained one million livres and became richer after good investments.
- He was invited to live in Cirey by Madame du Chatelet, who was married and had three children. Her husband knew about the affair and visited them often in his Chateau.
- They studied the natural sciences in his laboratory and had a library of over 21,000 books.
- He wrote many books praising England and their scientific progress, especially Newton.
- Their affair lasted 16 years
- He found a new love, his niece
- Mme Chatelet also got a new lover
- She died in childbirth in 1749



POTSDAM 1750

- He was good friends with Frederick the Great of Prussia
- Frederick paid him 20,000 francs a year.
- Voltaire got into an argument with Maupertuis, the president of the Berlin Academy of Science.
- Wrote *Diatribes du docteur Akakia*, to satirize Maupertuis's abuse of power.
- Frederick the Great got angry, burned the book and arrested Voltaire.



GENEVA AND FERNEY

- He left Potsdam and headed for Paris but Louis XV banned him from the city.
- He bought a large estate in Geneva in 1755
- He wrote *The Maid of Orleans*- a poem about Joan of Arc- which was published against his will
- He left the city and traveled to Ferney in 1758 where he bought a bigger estate
- In 1764 he published the *Dictionnaire Philosophique*- a series of articles on Christian history and dogmas and his own knowledge



REST OF HIS LIFE

- He fought for unjustly persecuted people like Jean Calas- a Huguenot- and overturned the conviction.
- He was a friend of Benjamin Franklin
- He was initiated into the Freemasonry.
- He returned to Paris to see the performance of his tragedy- Irene.
- He was a Deist- believing in a distant God
- When he was dying and a priest was asking him to renounce the devil, he reportedly said, "Now is not the time to be making new enemies."



IMPORTANT WORKS

- Candide- satire that criticizes optimism. Set at the time of the Seven Year's War. It criticized European civilization and organized religion- mocking the Jesuit order and Catholic Church.
- Age of Louis XIV- new ways to look at the past, warning against bias by the part of the historian.
- Henriade- made Henry VI of Navarre a hero for trying to institute tolerance with the Edict of Nantes
- L'Homme aux quarante ecus- The Man of Forty Pieces of Silver- criticized social and political ways of the time
- Favorite phrase- écrasez l'infâme- crush the infamous- meaning abuses of power by royalty and clergy and danger of superstition.



IMPORTANCE

- One of the great French Enlightenment thinkers
- He fought for civil rights like the rights to a free trial and the freedom of religion.
- He denounced the Ancien Régime- the unfair balance of power between the clergy + nobles, and the commoners + middle class who had the heaviest burden of taxes.
- He was credited as one of the forerunners for the French Revolution.
- He believed only an enlightened monarch could bring change- and distrusted democracy because it spread the idiocy of the masses.



IMPORTANCE CONT.

- He advocated for the separation of Church and State.
- He criticized the French Institutions of the time.
- He was a strong advocate of social reform.



FUN FACTS

- He reportedly drank coffee 50-72 times a day, which is why his book *Candide* might have been so fast paced and manic
- He had over 80 canes

