Mark Twain once said, “To get the full value of joy you must have someone to divide it with.” Life is much more enjoyable when one has someone to go through it with. Humans thrive on socialization and struggle without it. *Candide*, written by Voltaire, and *Notes from Underground*, written by Fyodor Dostoyevsky, make claims against the societal problems occurring during the time period in which they were written in and through the irrational actions and thoughts of the characters, emphasize that companionship is the driving force of humanity.

Fyodor Dostoyevsky includes this theme of a desire for companionship as a statement against the society he was living in. *Notes from Underground* was written in the late 19th century, during the Enlightenment and Age of Reason. This was a time of an increase in rational thinking and a decrease in abstract thinking. There was a movement away from religious thought and an increase in scientific thought. Dostoyevsky saw, and disagreed with, the way that mankind was beginning to conform to what was assumed as rational. The symbol he uses in *Notes from Underground* of what society believes to be perfect is the crystal palace. Dostoyevsky claims that the underground man is afraid of this structure because in the crystal palace, “it won’t be possible to stick one’s tongue out even furtively” (726). He means here that a person cannot be their true self in a utopian society governed by reason. The only way for a place like this to exist is if human desire is completely destroyed. To contrast this, he created the character of the underground man to show that humans should be valuing their ability to exert their own will, even if it is not reasonable. Dostoyevsky says that the most advantageous thing for people is to have the free will to desire something, even if it is something completely irrational and stupid,
instead of desiring only what is rational and smart. This desire, he emphasizes in his writing, that drives us to make decisions is the desire for companionship.

The underground man is isolated from society, strives and desires for interactions with people, and acts on those desires in unreasonable ways. Unfortunately, his isolation from society leaves him a lack of social skills and causes him to be quite inappropriate with peers. This is evidence that Dostoyevsky wants this character to act irrationally, in a way that he acts upon his desires and not in the way that society expects of him. During one instance in his life, the underground man is reunited with old, school peers who don’t desire his presence. However, the underground man thinks, “it seemed to me that to include myself so suddenly and unexpectedly would appear as quite a splendid gesture and that they’d all be smitten at once and regard me with respect” (742). This thought and action make no sense to an outside reader, but it is embracing the fact that the underground man is taking advantage of his free will to follow his desire for companionship. The author created this character to show that if we are isolated from others and do not have that companionship that is necessary for humans, then we will not live a full life.

Without these interactions, the underground man locks himself away in solitude. The underground man constantly desires to be with people like the officer, his school friends, and Liza and spends all of his time debating to himself how those brief interactions with those people might occur. When he does socialize with these people, he ends up making a spur of the moment decision instead of complying with his rational and thought out plans. He bumps into the officer and invites Liza to his home for advice and comfort. “Here’s my address, Liza. Come to see me” (765). The underground man followed his desire to help Liza, his new companion. Ironically, this irrational decision caused him to over think his actions and isolate himself more. Rather than
submitting to the laws of reasonable thinking of the modern times, the underground man embraces the complex nature of human beings. As bizarre as his actions appear to the reader, they are representations of what humanity is really about, the will to follow desires.

This unique character makes the readers confused and uncomfortable throughout the text even though the reader is able to relate to the underground man. There is a sense of detachment from the character because he thinks in such abstract ways. At the beginning of the story, the underground man states “I cant possibly “get even” with doctors by refusing their treatment; I know better than anyone that all this is going to hurt me alone, and no one else. Even so, if I refuse to be treated, it’s out of spite. My liver hurts? Good, let it hurt even more!” (708). He is constantly contradicting himself and his beliefs. He comes off as being indecisive, angry and unfathomable. Most people while reading the text find it hard to believe that the underground man has any similarities to them. However he is a representation that humans are actually very irrational and incomprehensible. In addition, the readers relate to the underground man’s motive, the desire for companionship. This desire is a gift to humanity because it allows irrational actions.

In a similar way to *Notes from Underground*, *Candide* is a story written about a character that is driven by desire for companionship. However, the author, Voltaire, criticizes the irrational actions of society instead of favoring them. *Candide* was written during the Inquisition in Europe and as a part of this movement, thousands of lives were tortured and lost in the name of religion. Voltaire saw these acts of suffering as very intolerable actions that are not governed by reason.

Voltaire uses sarcastic and blunt tone to demean the society in the way that they irrationally and hypocritically respond to situations. One way that he directly criticizes the Christian society is when the readers find out that auto-de-fe is a way of repenting and “averting
total destruction” (109). During the Inquisition, auto-de-fes were used as a ritual of public penance of heretics. There is a hypocritical component of these acts because it is a sin to murder, however the church was the leader of these executions. Voltaire recognizes this in his writing. He uses this auto-de-fe to belittle the way the societal leaders were irrationally responding to situations. In addition to this, Voltaire used the character of Candide to be an example of more of these irrational choices made during the Inquisition.

Candide is a character that is driven by the desire to be united with his love, Cunégonde. Candide come upon Eldorado, a place in which everyone is filled with joy, wealth, and health, but chooses to leave in hopes to be united with Cunégonde. He said, “the castle where I was born does not compare with the land where we now are; but Miss Cunégonde is not here” (130). Candide had the potential to be happy in Eldorado, however his desire to be with his love drove him away. This burning desire to be united with Cunégonde led Candide to make irrational decisions that he would not have done otherwise.

Candide followed a very optimistic philosophy during his traveling adventures to be united with Cunégonde. Voltaire chooses to criticize this optimistic philosophy by punishing Candide and his companions. Time and time again, this “everything is for the best” (102) philosophy prevented the characters from making realistic, reasonable judgments of the world around them and therefore preventing Candide from his reunion with his love, Cunégonde. When Candide was united with Cunégonde’s brother, he was filled with joy until her brother was angered with the news of Candide’s intentions to marry Cunégonde. Without thinking, Candide took his sword and stabbed Cunégonde’s brother and immediately thought to himself “I am the best man in the world, and here are three men I’ve killed already and two of the three were priests” (123). Candide is a representation of society and their irrational, spur of the moment
judgments to persecute people during the Inquisition. He criticizes the public official’s confidence in themselves by saying that they believed that what they were doing were actions that made them the best in the world.

Voltaire gives a brief hint at what it looks like to live a life governed by reason opposed to a life governed by irrational desires. Candide went on a long, extravagant journey to follow his ultimate desire for companionship, and is united with Cunégonde. However Cunégonde has become “remarkably ugly” (159). This is a way that Voltaire is punishing Candide for making irrational choices. This can be related back to society. If society continues to make irrational choices like killing people in acts like auto-de-fes, the church may get the result that they want, but they won’t be happy because the results won’t be as attractive as they have intended. Not everyone’s desires will be satisfied in a society that is handled with absolutism. Additionally, at the end of the Candide, the character of Candide has moved away from an optimistic philosophy into a life of rational thinking. He has come to this realization not from making many his many mistakes, but from observing a very average Turk who appears to be content with his life. After meeting this man, Candide says, “This good old man seems to have found himself a fate preferable to that of the six kings with whom we had the honor of dining” (159). Candide, from then on, changed his lifestyle to be more rational and he was content. Perhaps our desires are not truly recognized until we see someone else living them out. This new rational thinking is represented in Candide’s actions of purchasing property, settling down, assigning relevant roles to his companions, and making his own decision to cultivate the garden.

Dostoevsky and Voltaire both show that humans will follow their desire for companionship even if it leads to irrational decisions. In Notes from Underground Dostoevsky identifies the problems with a society based on reason alone and this view contrasts with that of
Voltaire’s in *Candide*. Both authors support these claims with the rash decisions of the characters of the underground man and Candide.