

## USE OF SATIRE IN *THE RAPE OF THE LOCK* AND *GULLIVER'S TRAVELS*: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS

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### ABSTRACT

*Satire is a genre of literature in which vices, follies, abuses, and shortcomings are held up to ridicule, ideally with the intent of shaming individuals, and society itself, into improvement. Writers of the Augustan Age were revered for their wit and satirical works as they managed to portray the evils of their period through it. This paper discusses with Alexander Pope and Jonathan Swift have portrayed society through satire. It also shows the style and significance, the similarities and dissimilarities in their use of satire. The main focus of this study will be on Alexander Pope's *The Rape of the Lock* and Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*, in terms of their satirical elements. In *The Rape of the Lock*, Pope satirizes the aristocratic women and men, their activities, the professional judges and politicians of the day etc. On the other hand, through *Gulliver's Travels*, Swift attempted to satirize the pride of the eighteenth century English people as well as human as species on earth. The methodology used in this study is analytic.*

**Keywords:** *Satire, Pope, Swift, Society, Galliver.*

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Most of the literature contains the writers' ideas of the social criticism. One of the most prominent forms used to bring reform or change in the society or in individuals is that of satire. "Satire is a literary technique in which behaviors or institutions are ridiculed for the purpose of improving society." (Applebee, 1997, p. 584). This study compares the use of satire between Alexander Pope and Jonathan Swift and deals with Pope's famous mock epic *The Rape of the Lock* and Swift's novel *Gulliver's Travels*. Pope wrote this mock epic in order to satirize English aristocracy in general and a specific event between two prominent Catholic families. Whereas, Swift's satire is inspired by what seems to be a general hatred of mankind. *Gulliver's Travels*, along with other Eighteenth Century

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satirical literature carried a higher purpose, with an explicit moral intention; it functioned as a method of constructive social criticism. Swift was a man of piercing intellect and this intellect showed the chaos, confusion and corruption of the eighteenth-century England. This paper intends to focus on the similarities and dissimilarities of these two authors in their use of satire.

### **1.1. Objectives of the Study**

The objectives of the study are as follows:

- a. To show how Alexander Pope and Jonathan Swift use satire in their writings.
- b. To exhibit the resemblances and the dissimilarities between Alexander Pope and Jonathan Swift in their ways of representing satire.
- c. To explore how satire has been regarded as an indispensable and most effective source of their writings to understand a society.

### **1.2. Literature Review**

Much of the work has been done on Pope and Swift. In most of this research, the major concern has been on satire, the golden age of satire, Pope and Swift. In this paper researcher tries to show the ways of using humour in literature of these prominent writers.

Stephen Holliday says,

*“The Rape of the Lock* is widely-considered the best mock-heroic (mock-epic) poem in all of English literature. Pope took as his subject an actual affair in which Lord Petre snipped off a lock of Miss Arabella Fermor's hair, which caused such a dispute within a small niche of upper-class English society. Pope's satire succeeds because he demonstrates the gulp between the foolishness of the 'rape' of hair and the very real consternation it caused in the upper-class participants and, in the end, the readers are forced to conclude, while laughing, that both the incident itself and the people involved are absurd.”

In the essay “Satire in 18th Century British Society: Alexander Pope's *The Rape of the Lock* and Jonathan Swift's *A Modest Proposal*”, Jonathan J. Szwec says, “Satires during this period aimed to point out the shortcomings of society through ridiculing accepted standards of thought, exposing Britain's flaws and chastising the hypocrisy of the time. Enlightenment writers Alexander Pope and Jonathan Swift used different mediums of satire, different types of logic, and different targets of ridicule in order to shine a light on separate aspects of British society, providing much-needed criticism of the profuse moral corruption of a society that sometimes seemed to forget the true ideals of its age.”

Jonathan J. Szwec also says, “The satirical works of Pope and Swift express their authors' profound dissatisfaction with their society. Literature that pushes for reform of any kind, social or political, acts, along with entrenched tradition itself, as a dialectic

force; it is the synthesis of that which is and that which is wanted that nudges society to a certain direction. Both Pope and Swift used their considerable literary talents to illuminate contemporary society, forcing them to acknowledge the shortcomings of the neoclassical period. Through *The Rape of the Lock* and *Gulliver's Travels*, Pope and Swift respectively aspired to influence the British mindset of their age and inspire it to move forward into a new era of true enlightenment with regards to social and political morality.”

Jonathan Swift's satire is inspired by what seems to be a general hatred of mankind. He was, nevertheless known for his kindness and unselfish work for the poor. In *Jonathan Swift: Political Writer*, Downie says, “And where the Lilliputians highlight the pettiness of human pride and pretensions, the relative size of the Brobdingnagians, who do exemplify some positive qualities, also highlights the grossness of the human form and habits, thus satirizing pride in the human form and appearance. In the voyage to Laputa, the actual device of a floating island that drifts along above the rest of the world metaphorically represents Swift's point that an excess of speculative reasoning can also be negative by cutting one off from the practical realities of life which, in the end, doesn't serve learning or society”

Ewald in *The Masks of Jonathan Swift*, states that, "As a satire, the main purpose of *Gulliver's Travels* is to show certain shortcomings in 18th century English society." [Ewald, 151]

According to Robert P. Fitzgerald, “Ironically but just as assertively, Swift is telling what he took to be the most important kind of truth, moral truth about human nature and human history, for which the fantasy provides a vehicle.”

## 2. METHODOLOGY

This study follows the method of descriptive analysis. This study has been depended upon available facts, ideas and opinions have been gathered in the course of this research. The sources which have been used are as follows:

- a. Primary sources: *The Rape of the Lock* by Alexander Pope and *Gulliver's Travels* by Jonathan Swift.
- b. Secondary sources: Available comments, discussions, reviews etc. on the primary sources are considered here as secondary sources.

## 3. ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

Satire is a genre of literature. Satires intend to correct individuals, countries or even the world by criticizing their follies and foibles and are usually meant to be funny. Satire is broadly divided into two types, Horatian and Juvenalian. Horatian satire playfully criticizes some social vice through gentle, mild, and light-hearted humour. Pope is an excellent example of the first style: of mild, indulgent, smiling Horatian satire. His most

famous satire is *The Rape of the Lock*. In literature, any bitter and ironic criticism of contemporary persons and institutions is termed Juvenalian satire. Swift is an excellent example of the second style: of harsh, contemptuous Juvenalian satire his most famous satire is *Gulliver's Travels*.

Pope's satire is unique, intellectual and full of wit and epigram. *The Rape of the Lock* has been an excellent medium of his reflecting a complete picture of the 18<sup>th</sup> century fashionable English society. The inspiration for the poem was an actual incident among Pope's acquaintances in which Robert, Lord Petre, cut off a lock of Arabella Fermor's hair, and the young people's families fell into strife as a result.

Jonathan Swift was an Anglo-Irish satirist, essayist, political pamphleteer, poet and cleric who became Dean of St Patrick's Cathedral, Dublin. Swift is probably the foremost prose satirist in the English language. In showing Swift's satire of the social condition, the discussion of Lemuel Gulliver's voyages to four different lands becomes symbolic and significant.

### **3.1. Satire in *The Rape of the Lock***

*The Rape of the Lock* is a social document because it mirrors contemporary society and contains a social satire, too. Pope clearly depicts the absurdities and the frivolities of the fashionable circle of the 18th century England. The world of Belinda – the world of fashion is a trivial world. The whole life of Belinda is confined to sleeping, make-up, enjoyment and alluring the lords. Belinda represents all the fashion struck women, busy in such stupidities.

Pope satirizes man's nature that is always weak at beauty. Men sacrifice everything at the altar of beauty and even the most intelligent man behaves foolishly when he falls a victim to beauty. The opening lines of the poem introduce the reader to the satirical stance he is taking towards the society portrayed in the poem. Pope says,

“What dire Offence from am'rous Causes springs,  
What mighty Contests rise from trivial Things,”  
[*The Rape of the Lock*: I.1-2]

In order to make his satire sharper and effective, Pope introduces the aerial machinery, which facilitates the satire. He satirizes women who are interested in fashionable life and who go on exercising their evil influence even after their death. He satirizes women of fiery, coquettish mischievous and yielding nature and gives them different names. Pope says,

“A *Beau* and *Witling* perish'd in the Throng,  
One dy'd in *Metaphor*, and one in *Song*.”  
[*The Rape of the Lock*: V. 703-704]

The satire in *the Rape of the Lock* is directed not against any individual, but against the follies and vanities in general of fashionable men and women. Belinda is not Arabella Fermor. She is the type of the fashionable ladies. The Baron represents not Petre alone but typifies the aristocratic gentleman of that age. The strange battle between the sexes shows what kind of people they are. In the poem, Pope says,

“When bold Sir *Plume* had drawn *Clarissa* down,  
*Chloe* stept in, and kill'd him with a Frown;  
She smil'd to see the doughty Hero slain,  
But at her Smile, the Beau reviv'd again.”

[*The Rape of the Lock*: V. 711-714]

He satirized those friends whose friendship is lust, those politicians who do not have a deeper insight and cannot see beyond the shows and take steps just for their own interests. It is in fact a satire on feminine dandies. Women are all frivolous beings, whose genuine interest lies in love-making. It paints the ideal life of the pleasure-seeking young men and women. These pleasures are petty – flirting, card-laying, driving in Hyde Park, visiting theatres and writing love-letters.

Pope satirizes of the husbands and wives of the day. Husbands think that their wives have been merry making with their lovers. Wives are also not virtuous at all. They love their lap-dogs more than their husbands. And the death of husbands is not more shocking than the death of a lap dog or the breakage of a china vessel. He says,

“Not louder Shrieks to pitying Heav'n are cast,  
When Husbands or when Lap-dogs breath their last,”

[*The Rape of the Lock*: III. 447-448]

The gallants of the time are not spared by Pope. They are the target of mockery which is as sharp and keen as the satire on the ladies. Baron not only represents Petre but also typifies the aristocratic gallants of the age. Sir *Plume*'s affectations are ridiculed with reference to his amber snuff-box and his spotted cane. We laugh at his "unthinking face" and his habit of excessive swearing. He says,

“With tender *Billet-doux* he lights the Pyre,  
And breathes three am'rous Sighs to raise the Fire.  
Then prostrate falls, and begs with ardent Eyes  
Soon to obtain, and long possess the Prize:”

[*The Rape of the Lock*: II. 189-192]

It was a common practice among the young gallants and lords to approach a sweet lady of the equal status. They proposed love and marriage to her. And it was at the will of the lady to accept or reject this amorous offer. It was customary to play flirt among men and the women alike.

The moral bankruptcy of the ladies is further ridiculed when Thalestris points out the need for sacrificing everything, even chastity, for the sake of maintaining a good reputation. Virtue might be lost, but not a good name. Pope says,

“Honour forbid! at whose unrival'd Shrine  
Ease, Pleasure, Virtue, All, our Sex resign.”

[*The Rape of the Lock*: IV. 573-574]

The poet also makes fun of Belinda by telling us that, when she wakes up, her eyes first open on a love-letter in which the writer has spoken of "wounds, charms, and ardours". The poet laughs not merely at a fashionable lady's desire to receive love-letters but also at the conventional vocabulary of those love-letters.

He satirized the judges and the system of courts of 18<sup>th</sup> century. He says that at 4 O'clock in the afternoon the judges hurriedly sign the sentences and rush to their homes for dinner in time. This was their sense of responsibility and punctuality. Pope says,

“Mean while declining from the Noon of Day,  
The Sun obliquely shoots his burning Ray;  
The hungry Judges soon the Sentence sign,  
And Wretches hang that Jury-men may Dine;”

[*The Rape of the Lock*: III. 310-314]

The satire in *The Rape of the Lock* on aristocratic manners is a commentary on polite society in general, and on fashionable women in particular. It ridicules the laziness, idleness, frivolities, vanities, follies, shams, shallowness, superficiality, prudery, hypocrisy, false ideas of honour, and excessive interest in self-embellishment of the aristocratic ladies of the eighteenth century.

### **3.2. Satire in *Gulliver's Travels***

“Swift is the foremost satirist in the English language and one of the greatest masters of that form in world literature” (Swift, Jonathan, 2003). Swift used satire to examine and criticize individuals and society. Gulliver's first voyage takes him to the Land of Lilliput, where he finds himself a giant among six-inch-tall beings, in which Swift satirizes the littleness of human beings. His next voyage brings him to Brobdingnag, where his situation is reversed: now he is the midget in a land of giants, is the satire on the meanness of humanity. His third voyage leads him to Laputa, the floating island, inhabited by strange beings that derive their whole culture from music and mathematics, is a satire on scientists and philosophers. Gulliver's fourth and final voyage places him in the strangest land of the Houyhnhnm, a society of intelligent, reasoning horses, is the satire on the denunciation of human species. Thus, these four voyages of Gulliver represent Swift's criticisms and concerns about his own time and the future of humanity.

In book one; Gulliver observes that the Emperor of Lilliput chooses his ministers not on the basis of their ability to govern but on their ability to walk on a tightrope. This is Swift's criticism of how George I, the King of England, chooses his ministers--in this

case, not on their ability to walk a tightrope but on their connections within the court. In another instance, Swift, through Gulliver, criticizes the religious animosity within English society by telling us about the hatred between those Lilliputians who open their eggs from the small end or the large end first.

The two political parties being differentiated by the height of their heels points out how little substantive difference there was between Whig and Tory.

Gulliver explains that, “there have been two struggling parties in this Empire, under the names of *Tramecksan* and *Slamecksan*, from the high and low heels on their shoes, by which they distinguish themselves.” [*Gulliver's Travels*: I. iv. p-33]

The methods of selecting people for public office in Lilliput are very different from that of any other nation. In order to be chosen, a man must “rope dance” to the best of his abilities; the best rope dancer receives the higher office.

Gulliver is surprised “when a great office is vacant either by death or disgrace (which often happens) five or six of those candidates petition the Emperor to entertain his Majesty and the Court with a dance on the rope, and whoever jumps the highest without falling, succeeds in the office. ....Flimnap, the Treasurer, is allowed to cut a caper on the straight rope, at least an inch higher than any other lord in the whole empire.” [*Gulliver's Travels*: I. iii. p-23]

Here Swift satirizes such an absurd practice of selecting officers in Europe.

In Gulliver’s second voyage, he finds himself in a strange land, where everything around him many times the normal size. When he encounters the first natives, he fears for his life, “for as human creatures are observed to be more savage and cruel in proportion to their bulk” [*Gulliver's Travels*: II. i. p-73]. While in Lilliput Gulliver had been treated with respect, largely due to his size; here in this land of giants, Brobdingnag, he is treated as a curiosity.

Gulliver tells us: “I would hide the frailties and deformities of my political mother, and place her virtues and beauties in the most advantageous light. This was my sincere endeavor in those many discourses I had with that mighty monarch, although it unfortunately failed of success.” [*Gulliver's Travels*: II.vii. p-119].

In contrast, Brobdingnagian society has many things to recommend it such as excellence “in morality, history, poetry, and mathematics,” although Gulliver ironically laments that these are only applied to the practical aspects of life and not used for abstractions.

The main focus of social criticism in the voyage to Laputa is on intellectuals, such as scholars, philosophers, and scientists, who often get lost in theoretical abstractions and conceptions to the exclusion of the more pragmatic aspects of life, in direct contrast to the practical Brobdingnagians.

In the floating island Laputa, Gulliver discovers a race of people who are so detached from reality that they require their servants to carry inflated bladders and hit them in order to remind them bring them back from highly speculative thought to real-world concerns. Swift is satirizing the over-abundance of genuine "projectors" in England who were constantly coming up with outlandish and unworkable ways to cure society's problems. The Laputians excel at theoretical mathematics, but they can't build houses where the walls are straight and the corners are square. The satire in Voyage three attacks both the deficiency of common sense and the consequences of corrupt judgment.

Most obviously, in Laputa, Swift satirizes the power relations of Britain and Swift's native Ireland or, more broadly, the rich and poor. We find that Laputa is used to subdue Balnibarbi by threats to block the sun or rain, by throwing down rocks onto them.

When Gulliver lands in the land of the Houyhnhnms, he discovers a race of horses which are perfectly rational, unemotional, logical beings, and the uncivilized brutes of this society, the Yahoos, are human beings. Swift is satirizing anyone who chooses a philosophy over reality.

It is during Gulliver's fourth journey that Swift's satire reaches its pinnacle, where "Swift put his most biting, hard lines that speak against not only the government, but human nature itself" (Glicksman). With great irony, Swift brings Gulliver into contact with a Yahoo once again.

"My horror and astonishment are not to be described, when I observed, in this abominable animal, a perfect human figure;" [*Gulliver's Travels*: IV. ii. p-218].

Voyage four contains Swift's clearest attack on human pride. As such, the satire directed against the pretensions of court, political corruption, and the excesses of speculative reasoning.

Exaggeration is another literary technique Swift uses throughout the text that categorizes it as satirical. This is apparent as Houyhnhnms represent the extremes of reason. In *Politics vs. Literature: An Examination of Gulliver's Travels*, George Orwell describes "Houyhnhnms are exempt from love, friendship, curiosity, fear, sorrow and — except in their feelings towards the Yahoos, who occupy rather the same place in their community as the Jews in Nazi Germany — anger and hatred." (Orwell, p. 333).

Gulliver's depiction of lawyers is scathing in tone and a very one-sided in its explanation: "I said there was a Society of Men among us, bred up from the Youth in the Art of proving by Words multiplied for the Purpose that White is Black, and Black is White, according as they are paid". This is an example of oversimplification, which Swift uses to portray a negative view of Lawyers.

An important technique Swift employs to further the satirical message of the novel is the role of the narrator, Gulliver. The gradual change in Gulliver's character provokes the reader to question the narrator's reliability. For the first time, the reader is able to view Gulliver as a permeable character; he is affected and consequently changed by the knowledge he garners on this Land. The more he learns from the Houyhnhnm's society, the more his misanthrope intensifies.

### 3.3 Comparative Focuses In Terms of Findings

Alexander Pope and Jonathan Swift are two prominent satirists of 18<sup>th</sup> century England. Although both men had small segments of seriousness and rationale; they both used satirical techniques throughout the majority of their works, to express their ideas on the ridiculous politics and lifestyles of the English upper class. By going through their satires, this study can trace the following comparison between the uses of satire of these two writers:

1. Pope is a mild-mannered, gentle Horatian satirist, Swift is a vulture-manned, indignant Juvenalian satirist, which is a style that can be used to good purpose when and where the need arises for it.
2. *The Rape of the lock* is not a satire on the whole contemporary society but a particular class of the society specially the aristocratic society. On the other hand *Gulliver's Travels* is a Fantasy and a satire where Swift satirizes current events, and social, cultural, religious and political trends. Swift satirizes the defects in society, England's in particular.
3. In *The Rape of the Lock* Pope is making fun of upper-class customs, but mildly. He's having a joke at society's expense, but it's more teasing than condemning. In *Gulliver's Travels* Swift condemns his targets. His satire is not teasing or endearing, it is vehement and bitter.
4. Swift is unrelenting in his criticism of high society, and though Pope tackles that subject as well, there seems to be a strange dichotomy between his criticism and admiration for the highest of society.
5. *The Rape of the Lock* offers an ironic perspective on contemporary manners combined with a deep appreciation for the vitality of the eighteenth-century beau monde. With sensitivity, exquisite taste, high-spirited wit, and gentle satire, the poem forces a continuous comparison between insignificant and significant things, between the mundane and the exotic. Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* is a multifaceted text- both in interpretation and genre, functioning as both a parody of travel literature and a satire of human nature. Swift employs satirical devices such as irony, exaggeration, juxtaposition, comparison and the role of the narrator to portray misanthrope and to comment on the conflicting nature of man.
6. Swift is using Gulliver's voyages to satirize various aspects of English society. Gulliver's various conflicts in the lands he visits allow Swift to discuss a number of problems he sees with English society and the way England is governed. On the

- other hand, Pope has satirized frivolities of the women. Critics find too much harshness in Pope's satire on feminine frivolity.
7. While Swift focused more on English and Irish politics, Pope divulged into the everyday lives of the upper class. The two authors creatively placed sections of their thoughts and ideas, in the text, that were more serious and rational. The majority of the two texts are expertly shrouded in satirical humor and drama to make their points but Swift and Pope were creative in putting straightforward views within the text.
  8. Gulliver's Travels is alternately described as an attack on humanity and a clear-eyed assessment of human strengths and weaknesses. It is a complex study of human *nature*. Pope has the similar goal to oust the complexion of high society England, but he focuses on the superficial lifestyle rather than politics.
  9. Both Pope and Swift use satire and fantastical places to set their stories overindulgence, criticizing the society in which they lived. Swift, however, took it much farther than Pope.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

As can be seen from the myriad works of both the master satirists discussed above, it can be said that both Pope and Swift were major proponents of satire. Though they employed different types of satire, they used satire as a form of complaint and defense against a society that was uncompromising but fickle in its attitude. *The Rape of the Lock* is a real picture of the condition of the age. The satire in *The Rape of the Lock* is not a satire on the whole contemporary society but a particular class of the society. The four books of the Travels are presented in a parallel way so that voyages I and II focus on criticism of various aspects of English society at the time, and man within this society, while voyages III and IV are more preoccupied with human nature itself. After the first voyage, his image of humanity is little changed, likewise for the second, although after this point, Gulliver's image steadily declines until the fourth voyage, when he meets the Yahoos. In this way, Swift presents his commentary on the human condition through *Gulliver's Travels*.

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