

## Satire and "The Rape of the Lock" as a piece of satire.

The term 'satire' has been derived from the Latin word 'satura lantx' which is the name of a plate filled with the various first fruits of the year offered in ancient times to the goddess Ceres. From this fact, satire came to mean a sort of miscellany and it was at first written partly in verse and partly in prose, and was full of scurrility and abuse. It was only gradually that it gained in dignity, and abuse gave place to correction of vice.

In Roman literature, Juvenal and Horace are the most famous satirist in verse. The former's satire is pointed, full of force and, not seldom; Horace's irony is more graceful and easy which he hides with a smile.

Medieval England produced two great examples of satire in Chaucer and Langland. They typify at the outset the two classes into which Dryden divided English satirists - the followers of Horace's way and the followers of Juvenal's - the men of the world, who assail the enemies of the commonsense with the weapons of humour and sarcasm; and the prophets who assail vice and crime with passionate indignation and invictive scorn. Since Dryden's time neither lines has died off out, and it is still possible with all reserve to recognize

the two strains through the whole course of English literature: the one represented in Chaucer, Donne, Marvell, Addison, Arbuthnot, Swift, young Goldsmith, Canning, Thackeray and Tennyson; the other in Langland, Skelton, Lyndsay, Nash, Martson, Dryden, Pope, Churchill, Johnson, Junius, Burns and Browning.

Langland was a medieval Juvenal.

The object of his great poem was to secure through the latitude afforded by allegory, opportunities of describing the life and manners of the poorer classes of speaking bitterly against clerical abuse and the capacity of the fairs of denouncing lazy workmen and sham beggars - in a word to lash out against all the numerous forms of falsehood, which are practised everywhere at all times. In spite of many essential differences, it is not difficult for us to find here a striking likeness to the work of the Roman Juvenal. Langland's satire is not so fiery as that of his prototype, but it is less & profoundly despairing. He satires evil rather by exposing it and contrasting it with good than by vehemently denouncing it. His prophetic spirit finds expression in the figure of the great reformer, Pier, the ploughman, who was to remedy all abuses and restore the world to a right condition.

After Chaucer and Langland, we must look to the poems of William Dunbar, Sir David

lyndsay, and others to preserve the apostolic succession of satire. William Dunbar is one of the greatest of English satirist. His "Dance of Seven Deadly Sins," is a better indictment of the utter corruption of all classes in the society of his period. So to name all the writers who, in this fruitful epoch of English literature, devoted themselves to this kind of composition, would be impossible. Perhaps the finest satire which distinguished the Elizabethan era was the 'Argent' of John Barclay, a politico-satiric romance.

The 'Hudibras' of Samuel Butler, in its mingling of broad, almost extravagant humour and sneering mockery, has no parallel in English literature. Butler and others simply prepared the way for the man who is justly regarded as England's greatest satirist. The epoch of John Dryden has been fittingly styled as the "Golden Age" of the Elizabethan English Satire. The Elizabethan period was perhaps richer, numerically speaking in representatives of certain types of satirical composition, but the true perfection, the efflorescence of the long growing plant, if we are allowed to use the expression, was reached in that era which extended from the publication of Dryden's 'Absalom and Achitophel' in 1681 to the issue of Pope's 'Dunciad' in 1742. During these sixty years appeared the choicest of English satires: Dryden's & finest pieces, 'The Medal', 'Mack Flecknoe'; Swift's 'Tale of

of a tub?" and finally Pope's poems.

But satire during this "succession" did not remain absolutely the same. She changed her garb with her epoch. Thus the robust bludgeoning of Dryden and Shadwell, of Gay and Steele, gave place to the sardonic ridicule of Swift and polished raillery of Arbuthnot and sarcasm of Pope. In this connection, we should not ignore the tremendous influence of the French critic and satirist Boileau, on the writers.

### 'The Rape of the Lock' as a piece of satire

As a piece of satire, The Rape of the Lock, greatly surpasses all its predecessors. It sparkles in every line. The touch is never too heavy, and air of gay good humour is preserved throughout.

The nicest proportion is kept, on a mere lock of hair the powers of air, as well as earth are centred. But the Sylphs are no more too great for their task than are Milton's archangels for theirs. They preside over fashions, and

oft, in dramas, invention we bestow

To change a flounce or add a fur below.

They are the spirits of coquettes, and in a new generation re-impose the vanities they themselves have felt of old:

With varying vanities from every part,

They shift the moving toyshop of their heart

Where wigs with wags, with sword-knots sword  
knots strive,

Beaux banish beaux and coaches drive

She over whom they preside is worthy of such spirits. Her eyes first open on a billet-doux. She adores the cosmetic powers and bends to the heavenly image in the glass; which 'the inferior priestess'.

Trembling begin the sacred rites of pride.

The poem is a social satire and the poem as Pope himself declared was "to laugh at the little unguarded foibles of female sex". Through Belinda, the poet satirises the foibles of the whole frivolity. It continues the strain of mocking hoops and patches and their wearers, which supplied Addison and his colleagues with materials for many spectators. The toilet was ~~so~~ women's great scene of business, and right adjustment of their principal job. The woman used to be fashionable and entertained visits even in their beds. In The Rape of the Lock, Pope displays the world of fashion in its most gorgeous and attractive hairs. The beauty of Belinda, the details of her toilet, the troops of admirers, are not of one Belinda alone but of every lady of court in Pope's time.

Lap-dogs were as favourite with women as Shaks was a favourite dog of Belinda. They had nothing useful to do. They left their beds late in the day, and the only drudgery they knew was the toilet. The powers they worshiped were no ordinary powers, but the

'cosmetic powers'. The toilet-table for them was an altar for the worship of goddess Beauty or god Love. Every ~~part~~ sort of fashionable object could be seen on their table:

This casket India's glowing gems unlocks,  
And all Arabia breathes from yonder box.

Pope satirises in the following lines the prevailing fashions of love-affairs among the young beauties

But chiefly love to love an after built,  
Of twelve worst French Romances, neatly gilt  
There lay three Garters, half a pair of gloves;  
And all the Trophies of his former loves.

How satirically he points out that it was a common fashion with women to lose their hearts at a ball. The court of Hampton remained always busy with singing, laughing, ogling and all that. "The spirit of the poem is thus permeated with the spirit of satire. And the ~~over~~ aim of this Satire is to establish peace between the two quarrelling families in particular, and to reform the fads and fashion of the contemporary society in general.

The Rape is after all a creation of young soul full of mirth and wit, humour and irony.

Compton-Rickett says that the poem is a light satire on the upper class, "The artificial tone of the age, the frivolous aspect of ~~the~~ femininity, is nowhere more exquisitely pictured than in this poem. It is the epic of triflings."