

Dr. Santosh Kumar
Assistant Professor
Department of English
L.N.T. College, Muzaffarpur
Email: santoshwebid@gmail.com

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(Major Trends in Different Periods)

Augustan Verse Satire

Three terms are before us: Augustan, verse and satire. Augustan refers to 18th century literature, verse to poetry and satire is used as a corrective tool of the literature. It refers to 18th century poetic form that mocks the society in order to correct its vices. Satire is a genre of literature in which vices, follies, abuses and shortcomings are held up to ridicule in order to improve them. The original Augustan Age was the brilliant literary period of Virgil, Horace, and Ovid under the Roman emperor Augustus (27 B.c.-A.D. 14). In the eighteenth century and later, however, the term was frequently applied also to the literary period in England from approximately 1700 to 1745. The leading writers of the time (such as Alexander Pope, Jonathan Swift, and Joseph Addison) themselves drew the parallel to the Roman Augustans, and deliberately imitated their literary forms and subjects, their emphasis on social concerns, and their ideals of moderation, decorum, and urbanity.

One of the most popular satiric modes during the Augustan period was the mock epic, a literary form that creates a burlesque of the classical epic. The satirist imports the formula characteristic of the epic—the invocation of a deity, supernatural machinery, etc.—to discuss a trivial subject. The use of classical epic devices thereby establishes an ironic contrast between the work's structure and its content, exposing the triviality of the satirical subject. The best-known mock epics in the English language are John Dryden's *MacFlecknoe* (1676), an attack on Thomas Shadwell and Pope's *The Rape of the Lock*, a social satire.

MacFlecknoe is a fine short satirical poem in which Dryden has treated Thomas Shadwell with humorous contempt. It is both a personal and literary satire. Dryden presents Shadwell as a dull

poetaster, a plagiarist and an obese idiot. Dryden uses heroic couplet for satirical purposes. Although MacFlecknoe is a personal satire, but ultimately, Dryden uses the persona of bad poet to criticize the decline of literary standards of his time. Thus MacFlecknoe does not remain a mere lampoon on a personal rival, but becomes a delightful work of art – a satire on a larger social scale. And satire in the poem is enlivened with wit and humour.

Dryden exposes the dramatic skill of Shadwell by saying that his comedies make people shed tears and his tragedies create laughter. His fools justify their author's want of sense; they are the models of dullness. Dryden also accuses Shadwell for copying from others' work without paying the attribute to them. And further Dryden ridicules Shadwell's physical built up; Shadwell is a fat and bulky fellow but without brain and common sense. The particular comparison of Shadwell to Jonson, in which Dryden says that the only thing that Shadwell has in common with Jonson is his potbelly, is devastating because Shadwell considered himself the true literary heir of Jonson. He suggests Shadwell not to base his characters upon experience and knowledge of mankind.

Pope's remarkable poem The Rape of the Lock is essentially a social satire. The poem exposes in a witty manner the follies and absurdities of the aristocratic life of the 18th century England. The principal targets of satire in the poem are the fashionable and aristocratic ladies and gentlemen of the time. In this poem, Pope reveals himself essentially as the spokesman of his age.

At the very beginning of the poem, Pope calls our attention to the idleness and late-rising aristocratic ladies of the time who possess keen interest in domestic pets. The vanities of those ladies, such as their love of gilded chariots are also made known to us in the very beginning of the poem. Their ambition to get married to peers and dukes or other high officials is also ridiculed in the opening canto of the poem.

Then, we can find that the coquetry, the art, the artifice and the false pride and vanities of the aristocratic ladies are the chief concern of Pope in this poem. These ladies in the very early of their life learn how to blush in a coquettish manner. Their heart shifts from one beloved to another according to their need. They would sink on their rich quilts and pretend sickness so those young gallants should come to inquire after their health and should see the costly gowns on their bodies.

Toilet i.e, makeup-room is the chief concern of these aristocratic ladies. In The Rape of the Lock, Belinda is described at her dressing table. We are told that before commencing her toilet operations, Belinda offers a prayer to 'the cosmetic power'. She gathers all the fashionable items from all over the world-Indian glowing gems, Arabian perfumes, files of pins, puffs, powders, patches etc. Moreover, the moral bankruptcy of these ladies is further ridiculed. Thus, we may conclude that Pope attempts to expose the follies and absurdities of the royal English society in a witty manner. Here, he has employed all the recognized weapons of satire in an effective way.