

THE AUGUSTAN AGE IN ENGLISH LITERATURE: ALEXANDER POPE'S SATIRICAL STYLE AND SOCIAL CRITICISM

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Abstract

This article is devoted to the Augustan Age (the first half of the eighteenth century) in English literature and to the social criticism and satirical style of its central poet, Alexander Pope. Augustan literature sought to reflect ideals of reason, order, and civic virtue. Pope, the most influential poet of this period, perfected the “Heroic Couplet” and used satire to expose the vanity, superficiality, and moral corruption of his society. In *The Rape of the Lock*, he mocks the aristocratic class for giving excessive importance to trivial matters, creating one of the finest examples of the mock-epic genre. Through his works, Pope defends the principles of order and rationality while offering moral instruction against the artificiality and frivolity of his age.

Keywords: Augustan Age, Alexander Pope, Satire, Mock-Epic, Heroic Couplet, Social Criticism, Vanity, Order.

Аннотация

Данная статья посвящена Августовскому периоду в английской литературе (первая половина XVIII века) и сатирическому, социально-критическому стилю его центрального поэта — Александра Поупа. Литература Августовского века стремилась отражать разум, порядок и гражданские добродетели. Александр Поуп был наиболее влиятельным поэтом этого периода и довёл до совершенства форму “героического двустишия” (Heroic Couplet). Главная цель его сатиры — разоблачение тщеславия, поверхностности и морального разложения общества. В частности,

в поэме “Похищение локона” (The Rape of the Lock) он высмеивает аристократическое общество, придающее чрезмерное значение незначительным проблемам, что делает произведение ярчайшим образцом жанра “мок-эпоса” (mock-epic). Через свои произведения Поуп отстаивал принципы порядка и разума, предлагая моральное наставление по отношению к искусственному и беспечному образу жизни своего времени.

Ключевые слова:

Августовский век, Александр Поуп, сатира, мок-эпическая поэма, героическое двустишие, социальная критика, суэтность, порядок.

Annotation

Ushbu maqola Angliya adabiyotidagi Avgust davri (XVIII asrning birinchi yarmi) va uning markaziy shoiri Alexander Pope'ning ijtimoiy tanqid va satirik uslubiga bag'ishlangan. Avgust davri adabiyoti aql, tartib va fuqarolik fazilatini aks ettirishga intilgan. Alexander Pope ushbu davrning yagona eng ta'sirchan shoiri bo'lib, o'zining "Qahramonlik kupleti" (Heroic Couplet) uslubini mukammallikka olib chiqqan. Uning satirasining asosiy maqsadi — jamiyatning manmanlik, yuzakilik va axloqiy buzilishlarini fosh etishdir. Xususan, "Soch tutamining o'g'irlanishi" (The Rape of the Lock) asari orqali u aristokratik jamiyatning arzimas muammolarga haddan tashqari ahamiyat berishini masxara qiladi, bu esa "Mock-epik" (mazaxiy epos) janrining eng yorqin namunasidir. Pope o'z asarlari orqali tartib va aql tamoyillarini himoya qilib, o'z davrining sun'iy va beparvo turmush tarziga nisbatan axloqiy o'gitni taqdim etadi.

Kalit so'zlar: Avgust Davri, Alexander Pope, Satira, Mock-epik Doston, Qahramonlik Kupleti, Ijtimoiy Tanqid, Behudalik, Tartib.

INTRODUCTION

The Augustan Age refers to the literary style that developed in Britain during the first half of the eighteenth century, under the reigns of Queen Anne and Kings George I and George II. This era came to an end with the deaths of Alexander Pope and Jonathan Swift in 1744–1745. Writers of this period saw themselves as heirs of

the original Augustan Age of Ancient Rome—the era of Virgil, Horace, and Ovid. They aspired to embody classical ideals of order, refinement, and civic dignity.

The main values of the Augustan era were order (a rational and harmonious view of the world), reason (a commitment to moral and intellectual clarity), and satire (a tool used to correct folly and vice through public criticism).

In literary terms, the age experienced a flourishing of satire across prose, drama, and poetry. Satire was not merely a form of entertainment; it was understood as a moral instrument. Alexander Pope was recognized as the single most influential poet of the period, perfecting the heroic couplet and expressing social criticism most vividly through the mock-epic genre.

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Pope's Satirical Style and The Rape of the Lock

Alexander Pope's satirical style reaches its height in *The Rape of the Lock*. A mock-epic poem, the work adopts the structure and elevated tone of classical epic, but applies them to a trivial subject. Its aim is to create humor by placing a minor social incident within an exaggeratedly grand framework.

The Rape of the Lock (published in 1712) is based on a real incident in which Lord Petre cut a lock of hair from the beautiful Arabella Fermor, causing a social quarrel between two aristocratic families. Pope magnifies this petty event by comparing it to the great epics of Homer, adding supernatural beings such as Sylphs to heighten the comedic effect. Belinda's trip to Hampton Court mirrors Aeneas's journey in Virgil's *Aeneid*, while her morning beauty routine becomes humorously comparable to a hero arming himself for battle.

Pope's use of the Heroic Couplet—rhymed iambic pentameter arranged in pairs—reflects the Augustan desire for balance, precision, and harmony. Through wit, irony, and intellectual sharpness, Pope exposes the flaws of polite society.

Social Vanity and Aristocratic Superficiality

Pope directs his satire at the shallow values and priorities of aristocratic society. In *The Rape of the Lock*, he critiques the vanity, idleness, and obsession with

trivialities that characterized life at Queen Anne's court. He depicts card games, feasts, fashion rituals, tea-drinking ceremonies, and the exaggerated pride in lap-dogs to highlight the absurdity of the elite lifestyle.

Pope also highlights the superficiality of women in high society—whose greatest concerns revolve around appearance and social reputation. For example:

- The breaking of a delicate piece of china is treated as seriously as the loss of a woman's honor.
- Arriving late to a dance is considered as grave as neglecting prayer.

Through these exaggerated comparisons, Pope reveals a society whose values have become inverted.

Belinda, the heroine of the poem, embodies the archetype of beauty and vanity. She wakes at noon and worships her reflection, a ritual described as though it were a sacred ceremony—an intentional contrast between religious devotion and aristocratic frivolity.

Moral Purpose Beneath the Satire

Though filled with humor, the poem delivers a serious moral message. Clarissa's speech in Canto V provides the ethical framework of the work. She reminds society that beauty cannot preserve admiration unless accompanied by wisdom and virtue:

“Oh! If to dance all night, and dress all day,
Charm'd the small-pox, or chase'd old-age away...”

Her message suggests that human dignity depends not on external beauty but on rationality, moderation, and good sense.

Pope's Broader Satirical Works

Beyond *The Rape of the Lock*, Pope used satire for intellectual and moral critique throughout his career.

- In *The Dunciad* (1728–1743), he attacks the stupidity, pretension, and bad taste of his era's writers and critics. The goddess Dulness and her chosen servants bring ignorance, corruption, and mediocrity to Britain.

- In *Epistle to Dr Arbuthnot* (1735), Pope defends his satirical writing as a service to virtue and public morality, not as an expression of personal malice. Despite living under restrictions as a Catholic, he considered himself a moral voice of his age.

CONCLUSION

Alexander Pope perfected the ideals of the Augustan Age—order, clarity, and reason—through his masterful use of the heroic couplet. His satirical style, especially his innovative use of the mock-epic form, exposed society’s excessive concern with trivial matters. In *The Rape of the Lock*, he humorously yet sharply criticizes the vanity, materialism, and moral superficiality of the upper classes.

For Pope, satire was not merely a literary technique but a moral duty. His works sought to correct social follies and advocate for universal values such as rationality, good sense, and moderation. His stylistic precision and moral conviction secure his lasting influence in eighteenth-century English literature.

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