

The Golden Age of Satire: Alexander Pope and Jonathan Swift

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INTRODUCTION

The seminar *Comedy in Literature: Greece to Hollywood* provided many intriguing topics that could be interesting to high school students. When one looks at the literature that is taught during one's high school career, there is a long list of required readings that include tragedy, but there is so little literature in the curriculum that devotes itself to comedy. Students are so in-tune to comedy in their personal lives, enjoying *The Daily Show*, *The Simpsons*, *Family Guy*, and all of the comedic movies devoted to the teenage psyche. This unit will introduce the students to two of the finest satirists in the English language: Alexander Pope and Jonathan Swift.

This unit on the Golden Age of Satire is geared toward the high school seniors or junior Advanced Placement students who learn British literature. My seniors begin the study of Restoration literature at the end of the first semester and continue the eighteenth century from January to March. Every year I teach "A Modest Proposal" and I introduce *Gulliver's Travels*; however, Jonathan Swift is too important a figure to merely mention in a few lessons. I plan to teach the entire *Gulliver's Travels* so that the seniors can experience both his Horatian and Juvenalian satire. I will elaborate on these terms later. Approaches to teaching Jonathan Swift will include videos, comparisons to other works of literature, and comparisons to contemporary political satirists, such as Jon Stewart and Kinky Friedman. Eighteenth century literature would be incomplete without Alexander Pope. *The Rape of the Lock* and *An Essay on Criticism* are two satirical works by Pope that the seniors should be exposed to since it may be the last year that they take a literature class, and the possibility of them reading eighteenth century satire on their own is not likely. Swift and Pope are too important to be left to chance.

This curriculum unit will teach Horatian and Juvenalian satire. It will teach the historical background of the eighteenth century to better understand what Jonathan Swift and Alexander Pope are satirizing. Students will compare eighteenth century satire to contemporary satirists, including cartoon shows that are familiar to and popular with high school students: *The Simpsons* and *Family Guy*. Contemporary shows that are good examples of satire include *Saturday Night Live* and *The Daily Show*. One writing assignment will require students to write their own satire. They can become familiar firsthand with the effectiveness of satire as a social commentary or method of reform. Another lesson will revolve around the rhetoric of satire, irony, parody, etc. Students can explore what makes us laugh and what people find amusing today and in the past.

Some examples are the political satire of Jonathan Swift in *Gulliver's Travels*, for instance, when Gulliver states that the poor are too busy working to need justice, Charlie Chaplin's *The Little Dictator* dancing with the globe, and Jon Stewart's *Daily Show* news program. All of these satirists were serious about wanting a change in society and funny in their presentation of the material. What makes something funny to one person and not to another? Why are some comedy skits timelessly funny to millions, such as "Who's on First"? This topic of discussion should be very interesting to high school students.

Teaching political satire to high school seniors is particularly effective since so many of them are turning eighteen and becoming eligible to vote. The responsibility of learning the facts in

order to distinguish what is real and what is satire is important. Seniors are usually sophisticated enough to recognize that “A Modest Proposal” contains irony. Many seniors take statistics, so the use of numbers will have some meaning to them. This unit will be applicable to cross-curricular learning because history and politics are covered. A sophomore teacher teaches “A Modest Proposal.” In two short years, the students are able to grasp Swift’s irony. I teach the college-bound students in the dual credit English class and one regular senior class. They have the sophistication to appreciate Pope and Swift’s satire.

OBJECTIVES

TEKS: English 4

The students will:

Writing

- write in a variety of forms.
- use writing to discover, record, review, and learn.

Vocabulary

- expand vocabulary through wide reading, listening, and discussing.
- rely on context to determine meanings of words and phrases, such as figurative language, idioms, multiple meaning words, and technical vocabulary.

Reading/Comprehension

- demonstrate proficiency in each aspect of the listening process such as focusing attention, interpreting, and responding.
- demonstrate proficiency in critical, empathic, appreciative, and reflective listening.
- use effective listening to provide appropriate feedback in a variety of situations such as conversations and discussions and informative, persuasive, or artistic presentations.

RATIONALE

I teach dual credit and regular senior English in a large urban public high school. The motivated students can handle the rigors of British literature and the sophisticated satire of Pope and Swift. The activities and the connection to contemporary satirists will engage the reluctant learners. I immerse the students in writing activities, and I try to cover literature that they may not choose to read once they graduate from high school. The main focus will be on Alexander Pope’s *The Rape of the Lock* and Jonathan Swift’s *Gulliver’s Travels*. I find that bringing up contemporary cultural events captures the attention and imagination of the high school students. Comedy is key to the theme of this curriculum unit. I intend to have my students learn about Juvenalian and Horatian satire. They will deepen their understanding of epic poetry and rhetorical terms. They will also experience some of the best British literature written, and for once, it isn’t tragedy. If the students gain an appreciation for eighteenth century literature and are able to see that there is a connection to contemporary satire, it doesn’t get any better as a teacher. It is possible to engage the students and to create enthusiasm if the material is high quality and the presentation is engaging. With *The Rape of the Lock* and *Gulliver’s Travels* as the foundation of this unit, the rest is easy.

UNIT BACKGROUND

Comedy

Comedy is an enigma in that it is difficult to explain exactly what it is that makes us laugh. How do we determine what is funny? How does a comedian know that his or her material is going to be amusing to the masses? A well-written sentence in a book is amusing to thousands. How does the author know? Comedians and authors of comedy know the human condition. They are observant and understand what people are all about.

“Comedy, in brief, is criticism” (Felheim 195). Comedy is criticism because it exposes human beings for what they are in contrast to what they profess to be (195). Life and literature, for that matter, are too often tragic. People like to laugh and they like happy endings. “Comedy is not just a happy as opposed to an unhappy ending, but a way of surveying life so that happy endings must prevail” (194). Comedy allows people to laugh at their own foibles. “Comedy appeals to the laughter, which is in part at least the malice, in us; for comedy is concerned with human imperfection, with people’s failure to measure up either to the world’s or to their own conception of excellence” (195). Comedy is a relief from the pressures of real life. It is also a window into what is reality. Satire, in particular, is comedy that aims to correct what is wrong in the world, or at the very least, make us aware of the problems that humans bring upon themselves.

Satire

Seniors are savvy enough to understand satire. Since many of them are used to watching shows such as *The Daily Show*, *Saturday Night Live*, *The Simpsons*, and *Family Guy*, they have had a steady stream of satire. I have also witnessed students using satire among themselves and, in some cases, direct it at themselves to lessen the humiliation of a wrong answer to a question or missing a social cue. “Satiric laughter may become a source of both catharsis and redemption for satirist and reader alike” (Bloom, E. 129).

Satire is a literary technique in which behaviors or institutions are ridiculed for the purpose of improving society. What sets satire apart from other forms of social and political protest is humor. Satirists use irony and exaggeration to poke fun at human faults and foolishness in order to correct human behavior. (Applebee 584)

“Satire began with the ancient Greeks but came into its own in ancient Rome, where the ‘fathers’ of satire, Horace and Juvenal, had their names given to the two basic types of satire” (Applebee 584). Horatian satire is “playfully amusing” and it tries to make change gently and with understanding (584). “The urbanity of Horatian satire pleased readers discomfited by more sharply honed criticism” (Bloom, E. 60). Alexander Pope uses Horatian satire in his famous epic poem, *The Rape of the Lock*. According to Alexander Pope, satire “heals with morals what it hurts with wit” (33). Satire can hurt as well as heal. “Satire, at its best, in other words, addresses itself to problems that have general implications and support conclusions” (99). Jonathan Swift uses Juvenalian satire in his famous book, *Gulliver’s Travels*. Juvenalian satire “provokes a darker kind of laughter. It is often bitter and criticizes corruption or incompetence with scorn and outrage” (Applebee 584). “As Juvenal’s English heir, Swift also elaborates on man’s failure to acquit himself decently” (Bloom, E. 41). While Horatian satire attempts to teach, Juvenalian satire punishes.

The duty of the satirist is “to reproach the bad or praise the good, to correct or reconcile the inequilibrium between flaws and virtues. He must persuade a third party, the reader, that a case for justice or against injustice has been made beyond all doubt” (Bloom, E. 99). Juvenalian satire is critical. “Juvenal gloats over the punishment of wrongdoers” (39). Satire does not always instigate change and it can sometimes alienate people. “Most satirists are realistic enough to understand that public response to their complaints may be painfully long in coming, if it comes at all” (33). Satire can also be a connection between people. “Satire depends on the creation of a bond between author and reader *against* some third party” (Hammond 5).

Satire was very popular in eighteenth century Europe. “In England, ‘this golden age’ of satire” included Alexander Pope and Jonathan Swift (Applebee 584). “The eighteenth century was dominated by satiric poetry, prose, and drama. Satirists, as guardians of the culture, sought to protect their highly developed civilization from corruption by attacking hypocrisy, arrogance, greed, vanity, and stupidity” (584). Satire faded in popularity during the nineteenth century, with the exception of Mark Twain, among others. In the twentieth century, satire tended to be

Juvenalian. “George Orwell’s *Animal Farm* (1945) departed from this gloomy pattern through the use of fantasy” (585). Satire appears to be enjoying a renaissance in the twenty-first century with the popularity of political satire.

Fantasy

Fantasy is fiction that does not adhere to the restraints of reality. Fantasy can either entertain or make a serious comment. “Some fantasies include extreme or grotesque characters. Others portray a realistic world where realistic characters only marginally overstep the bounds of reality (Applebee 1336). “In a work of fantasy, a writer creates impossible characters, places and situations and asks the reader to pretend that they are real” (Cummings, *Gulliver’s Travels* 8). *Gulliver’s Travels* is a fantasy that goes beyond reality. Jonathan Swift makes his novel seem credible, or real, and he gives it “verisimilitude.” Verisimilitude is derived from the Latin words *veritas* (truth) and *similis* (similar).” (8). By writing *Gulliver’s Travels* as a fantasy, Swift could avoid the dangers of treason for criticizing the monarchy.

Eighteenth Century

Since satire is usually topical, it is important to know the historical background which influenced the satirists. The eighteenth century was a tumultuous time, beginning with the Restoration, which began in 1660 with Charles II returning to England. When he died, his brother James became king. He was deposed and his daughter Mary, with her husband William, shared the crown. Anne succeeded as queen when William died. In 1714 George I became king when Anne died (“Political and Economic History of Great Britain” 2). The eighteenth century was also called the Age of Reason, or the Enlightenment (Applebee 518). It was an age of scientific exploration. The point is that the late seventeenth century was a period of dramatic progress in science, philosophy, and learning, an age of optimism in which Newton along with other great astronomers, physicists, and mathematicians under the auspices of the Royal Society were being credited with explaining the entire universe (Hammond 65). “In England, the literary movement of neoclassicism began about 1660 and persisted throughout much of the 18th century” (Applebee 534). Alexander Pope wrote in the neoclassical style. The Enlightenment “led to many improvements in living conditions” (523). “Many British citizens lived well during the 18th century, and a few lived sumptuously. Wealthy aristocrats built lavish country estates filled with furnishings of exquisite craftsmanship and surrounded by beautifully tended lawns and gardens” (522). These are the people that Alexander Pope satirized in *The Rape of the Lock*. With all of its progress, satirists such as Jonathan Swift found much in English society to criticize and satirize.

Jonathan Swift

“Swift is the foremost satirist in the English language and one of the greatest masters of that form in world literature” (“Swift, Jonathan.” *DISCovering Authors* 1). Swift used satire to examine and criticize individuals and society (1). Jonathan Swift was born in Ireland and educated at Trinity College. He moved to England in 1689 and became secretary to Sir William Temple for ten years. He wrote his first satires at this time, such as “A Tale of a Tub.” Swift was a Tory who strongly supported the Anglican Church. After Queen Anne’s death in 1714, George I became king and the Whigs resumed power. Jonathan Swift returned to Ireland to become dean of St. Patrick’s Cathedral. During this time he wrote “A Modest Proposal” and *Gulliver’s Travels*, which was considered his greatest work of this period. He published it anonymously, but people assumed that he was the author (1-3).

“A Tale of a Tub,” which, alongside the much more approachable *Gulliver’s Travels*, is one of the two prose works on which Swift’s literary reputation rests, and derives from the same decade of intellectual ferment” (Hammond 72).

When Swift was a young man, he lived in William Temple's home as his secretary and assistant. Swift honed his writing skills while transcribing Temple's writings. "Swift started to see how he could express his own strong ideas and feelings" (Aykroyd 38). As a young man, Swift was interested in the Dublin Philosophical Society, which "sought to develop a better understanding of science, religion, and philosophy through discussion, observation, and experimentation." Swift satirized "the kind of experimentation and research performed by the members of the society" (Aykroyd 23). This can be found in Gulliver's third voyage where the scientists tried to extract "sunbeams out of cucumbers" (Swift 158).

Swift had many literary friends, including Alexander Pope. He occasionally stayed at Twickenham. They were members of a club called the Scriblerus Club formed by Swift (Aykroyd 85). It included John Gay and the poet, Thomas Parnell (83-84). He was also friends with Joseph Addison; however, this friendship didn't last. Addison referred to Swift as "the most Agreeable Companion, the Truest friend and the Greatest Genius of his Age" (69).

Near the end of his life, Swift wrote an unfinished autobiography, *Family of Swift*, from which we know what little information is available about Swift's early years. "Scholars still refute its reliability. Swift was not above exaggerating for effect" (Aykroyd 16). Late in life, Swift suffered from Meniere's Disease, which caused vertigo and hearing loss (Aykroyd 137). Swift designated in his will that his estate go towards construction of a mental hospital "in or near Dublin" (138). Ironically, it was assumed that Swift's own mental health was failing. In 1742 "a Commission of Lunacy was appointed to examine his mental condition" (139). "The members of the Commission declared that [Swift] was of unsound mind and placed him and his estate under the care of guardians" (139).

Swift's most famous book, *Gulliver's Travels*, is often read as a children's fantasy, but it was written as a satire on politics and colonialism. In writing the book, he later told a friend, he hoped that it would "wonderfully mend the World." A religious man, Swift wanted to goad people into making the right choices (Aykroyd 14).

Gulliver's Travels

The actual title of *Gulliver's Travels* is *Travels into Several Remote Nations of the World in Four Parts By Lemuel Gulliver, First a Surgeon, and Then a Captain of Several Ships* (Swift). *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 and of the moral, philosophical, political, and scientific thought" ("Jonathan Swift," *DISCovering Authors* 1). "When the politico-sociological nature of *the Travels* is once clearly understood, the structure of the book, though complex, is easier to analyze...The first and third voyages are chiefly attacks upon the evils of bad government, the second and fourth are expositions of good government. This accounts for both the dominant satiric tone of the voyages to Lilliput and Laputa" (2).

Jonathan Swift first published *Gulliver's Travels* anonymously to avoid possible government persecution (*Gulliver's Travels, ENotes*). In 1726, Swift published *Gulliver's Travels*. It took him almost six years to write it (Aykroyd 119). In 1725, Alexander Pope wrote a letter to Swift, referring to "Your Travels I hear much of" (119). One month after its publication, Pope "wrote to congratulate the author and added, 'I prophesy [Gulliver's Travels] will be in future the admiration of all men'" (121).

Gulliver's Travels is a Fantasy and a satire, Juvenalian satire to be exact. Swift satirizes "current events, and social, cultural, religious political trends" (Cummings, *Gulliver's Travels* 7). Jonathan Swift satirizes the defects in society, England's in particular, through Gulliver's travels to four distant, fictional lands. The novel is also an adventure and it can be retold to a younger audience, especially his adventures to Lilliput and Brobdingnag.

Plot Summary

The fictional narrator, Lemuel Gulliver, is a ship's surgeon. Swift uses irony by contrasting Gulliver's "simple-minded comments" with "the observations and interpretations of the reader" (Aykroyd 122). The book is written as a travel book. Gulliver travels to the fictional countries: Lilliput, Brobdingnag, Laputa, and the land of the Houynhnms. In Lilliput, the people are six inches tall and the Lilliputians are at war over whether to break eggs from the big end or the little end. "In this first section of the book, Swift deftly satirizes politics in society" (123-124). Swift uses Gulliver's size to demonstrate his moral stature compared to the people in the fictional countries. In Lilliput, Gulliver's morals are greater; therefore, he is much bigger. In Brobdingnag, Gulliver is small in comparison; therefore, his morals are found wanting in comparison to the Brobdingnagians (124). The King of Brobdingnag "concludes that Gulliver's fellow humans are 'the most pernicious Race of little odious Vermin that Nature ever suffered to crawl upon the Surface of the Earth' " (125).

On his third voyage, to the nation of Laputa, Gulliver visits the Academy of Lagado, an institute of learning. In this section of the book, Swift mocks the extreme ideas of some philosophers and scientists (Aykroyd 125).

Gulliver's fourth and last voyage takes him to the land of the Houynhnms. The inhabitants are dignified, rational horses and the human-like savages are the Yahoos. This section "contains some of the most savagely bitter satire that Swift ever wrote" (Aykroyd 125). This voyage is considered to be his most cynical.

Vocabulary

Disapprobation, countenance, clemency, dexterity, providence, concupiscence, ignominious, posterity, amity, unintelligible, diminutive, scourge, provocation, erudition, stature, perpetual, proficient, prevail, communicativeness, licentiousness, petulance, commodious

Literary Terms

Zeugma- the trope that links together nouns of different moral weight by the same verb (stain Honor – brocade) (husbands – lapdogs) (Hammond 39).

List of characters

Lemuel Gulliver – the protagonist, who is an English surgeon and seaman. He is the narrator of the story.

Lilliputians – Six-inch-tall inhabitants of the country of Lilliput.

Blefescians – Six-inch-tall inhabitants of the country of Blefescu and the enemies of the Lilliputians.

Glumdalclitch – Forty-foot-tall, nine-year-old Brobdingnagian and caretaker of Gulliver in Brobdingnag.

Laputians – Inhabitants of the floating island of Laputa. They are absent-minded scientists and philosophers. (Cummings, *Gulliver's Travels* 6).

Alexander Pope

Pope suffered from a lifetime of ill health. "These limitations may have contributed to his early devotion to reading and writing and to his ultimate success as a writer" (Applebee 539). He was self-taught because he was a Roman Catholic, and in England in the early eighteenth century, only Protestants were allowed to attend the university or to hold public office. Pope began writing poetry at the age of twelve and was known as a poet by the age of seventeen. By 1729, "for more than a decade he had been recognized as the leading poet of his generation" (Root 127). His poetry was political. He had made a small fortune and bought Twickenham (127). Pope, along

with his friends Jonathan Swift and John Gay, created the Scriblerus Club that was devoted to the writing of satires (539).

Alexander Pope was also famous for his essays, such as “An Essay on Man.” His words are inscribed on Sir Isaac Newton’s tomb in Westminster Abbey: “Nature and Nature’s laws lay hid in night; God said, Let Newton be! And all was light.” Pope was a professional satirist who ‘vigorously promoted satire as the voice of truth unearthing error’ ” (Bloom, E. 138). Of all of Alexander Pope’s works, “The Rape of the Lock” is considered his greatest achievement.

“The Rape of the Lock”

Alexander Pope wrote this mock epic in order to satirize English aristocracy in general and a specific event between two prominent Catholic families. He wrote it in mock epic style, so he satirizes one of the great literary genres, the epic poem. After “The Rape of the Lock” was published, it became difficult to take the epic poetry format seriously. John Caryl asked Pope to write something to make peace between the Fermor’s and the Baron’s family. “Pope’s solution was to make much ado about nothing” (Hammond 37). This incident was referred to as a “Storm in a teacup” (38). Pope’s mock epic satirizes the idle rich in the poetic form of ancient epics (Applebee 584). “The world of Belinda is a world of triviality measured against the epic scale; it is also a world of grace and delicacy, a second-best world but not at all a contemptible one. Here Pope has built upon a theme that plays against epic tradition” (Price 7). “ ‘The Rape of the Lock’ leaves its moral judgments implicit in its double mock-heroic scale, but it makes of that scale an illuminating vision of art as a sustaining pattern of order” (11).

“The Rape of the Lock” explores so many aspects of the imagination: its kinship with beauty and pride, its opposition to judgment and truth; its insubstantiality, physicality, anarchy, and self-deception; its functioning as dream, nightmare, madness and (finally) divine vision. The humorously transcendent ending, however, is a tactical flight from the challenge delivered to the imagination by the rest of the poem. (Fairer 117)

Alexander Pope was a well-known writer before he wrote “The Rape of the Lock”; however, this work gave him even greater notoriety. As a member of the Catholic community, he was asked to write a poem that would alleviate the tension between two feuding prominent Catholic families:

“The Rape of the Lock” was written as a request of John Caryl, a Catholic man of letters and Pope’s lifelong friend and correspondent. In the year 1711, Robert Lord Petre (the baron of the poem), a relative of Caryl’s, caused a serious quarrel by the theft of a lock of Miss Arabella Fermor’s hair (Pope’s Belinda). Caryl suggested a jesting poem to laugh the families out of their anger, and Pope obliged with the 1712 two-canto version. (“Alexander Pope: ‘The Rape of the Lock’,” *Representative Poetry Online* 5)

“Pope was approached by John Caryl to write something to smooth the ruffled feathers. Pope’s solution was to make much ado about nothing” (Hammond 37). “Pope also drew upon ancient classical sources – notably Homer’s great epics, the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* – as models to imitate in style and tone. He also consulted the texts of medieval and Renaissance epics (Cummings, “The Rape of the Lock”).

Several sources have used the metaphor of looking through the wrong end of a telescope to observe human behavior in the poem (“Pope: *Rape of the Lock*,” *St. Andrews*). Pope translated Homer’s epics into “approachable couplet verse” (Hammond 37).

Structure of *The Rape of the Lock*:

Triple alliteration, couplets, cantos, rhyme

Canto Five is an epic battle of the sexes that is written in the fashion of Homer's *Iliad* and John Milton's *Paradise Lost*.

Research: "The Rape of the Lock." *Representative Poetry Online*. University of Toronto, Hammond: *Pope Amongst the Satirists 1660-1750*

Analysis

Belinda, the protagonist, is dressing herself in Canto One and Pope writes it as "a maiden engaged in an act of religious worship." ("Pope: *The Rape of the Lock* Study Guide," JHARY)

Theme

"The preservation of Belinda's good name is a central theme of the poem" (Hammond 110).

Characters

Belinda – protagonist and a caricature of the socialite, Arabella Fermor

The Baron – young admirer of Belinda, a caricature of Lord Petre. He is the main antagonist and the culprit who cut the lock of hair.

Ariel – Belinda's guardian sylph. "In magical literature, the name is used for a spirit that controls the elements or planets" ("Alexander Pope: *The Rape of the Lock*," RPO 6).

Clarissa - she gives the Baron the pair of scissors

Umbriel – Sprite who enters the cave of the Queen of Spleen to seek help

Queen of Spleen – Underworld goddess who gives Umbriel gifts for Belinda

Thalestris – friend of Belinda

Sir Plume – Beau of Thalestris

Shock – Belinda's dog

(Cummings, *The Rape of the Lock* 1-2).

Symbols

The Lock – trophy – golden hair – becomes a shining star. "The lock as we know it is more than a mere hair; it is the source of Belinda's power" (Fairer 109).

Ombre – a card game like bridge that is symbolic of the great battle scene. This card game, played with 40 cards, requires three people. (Cummings, *The Rape of the Lock* 9).

Tortoise – the shell of a tortoise was used to make combs (9)

Elephant – reference to ivory

Bible – small Bibles were fashionable accessories on ladies' dressing tables (13).

Scylla's hair – Greek mythology. Scylla betrayed her father by cutting off a lock of his hair- a purple lock with magical powers that safeguarded him and his kingdom

Scissors – the weapon Forfex– Latin for scissors (25)

Fops – vain men who pay undo attention the their clothes and manners (30)

Galileo's eyes – telescope (kenning)

Epic Conventions (Cummings, *The Rape of the Lock*)

Epics that influenced Pope: Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, Vergil's *Aeneid*, the *Divine Comedy* by Dante, and Milton's *Paradise Lost*. (5)

Invocation of the Muse – a muse would inspire poets and inspire them with creative genius

Couplets – Heroic – a unit of two rhyming lines in iambic pentameter (1-2)

Division of poem into cantos – the traditional epic is long, requiring several days to read. "Pope presents only five cantos and fewer than 600 lines. Such miniaturizing helps Pope demonstrate the smallness or pettiness of the behavior exhibited by the main characters in the poem (5)

Participation of Deities or Spirits – supernatural beings take part in the action.

Description of heroic deeds – the actions of Belinda and Lord Petre during a card game

Descriptions of soldiers preparing for battle – the considerable detail of armor and weaponry is translated into Belinda’s preparing for the social event with combs, pins, make-up, etc. (5)

Presentation of scenes in the underworld – the gnome Umbriel visits the Underworld.

A Visit to the underworld- “The Cave of Spleen episode in Pope’s *Rape* is a burlesque of the journey to the underworld motif from epic” (Hammond 38)

“The most striking effect of the game, however, is in its movement, which builds in speed and vividly portrays a society tumbling into chaos.” (Quinsey 96)

Sylphs and other supernatural creatures: demons, phantoms, genies, fairies, gnomes, etc.

(Cummings, “The Rape of the Lock”)

Sprites, termagants – the spirits of quarrelsome, overbearing women (9)

Some sprites live in water (10)

Salamander – in myth, a lizard-like reptile that lived in fire (9)

Gnomes – sprites in the earth – dwarflike creatures (10)

Sylphs – sprites that guard the purity of maidens from men who would take advantage of them

(10) Ariel is a sylph (15)

Sylphids – female sylphs, female sprites (16)

Iambic Pentameter - consists of 10 syllables (6)

Historical explanations

Hair was considered an intimate body part, thus the powdered wigs. Women would occasionally show two tendrils as a flirtation. It was common for people to put a loved one’s hair into jewelry (a ring or brooch) and wear it with the hair closest to them.

Snuff was the form of tobacco. Cigarettes and cigars were not invented yet.

Catholics were not allowed full privileges in London. There was a limited number of prominent Catholic families, so it was important that they stuck together, being a minority among the Anglicans.

Summary

The setting is London in the early 1700s in a single day at Belinda’s house in London (Cummings, “The Rape of the Lock” 1).

Canto I – Belinda’s residence around noon as she prepares for a social gathering.

Aiming for battle (cosmetics) – narcissistic, worshipping own image. Belinda and the “dire offence” are introduced in Canto I. Belinda is referred to as a goddess and it is stated that she rejected a lord. They awake at noon. Lap dogs are also indication of their wealth. Shock is

Belinda’s dog. The card game begins (Ombre – a popular game in the eighteenth century).

Nymphs and sylphs are up to mischief. Ariel is the narrator in this canto. She warns Belinda to beware of man (l. 114). The vanity table is described in great detail, just as weapons are described in epic poetry.

Canto II – A barge carries Belinda on the Thames for all the people to see (compared to Cleopatra on her barge) [A barge was the Royals favorite mode of transport to Hampton Court in London.] The sylphs are described in detail.

Canto III – V – Hampton Court Palace on the outskirts of London.

Catholics were not allowed in certain parts of London. “And wretches hang that jury-men may dine” (l. 22). As a satirist, Pope plays it safe by attacking the jury rather than the judge. The card game, or battle, is taking place. The Baron is the Knave of Diamonds (l.87). Belinda is the Queen of Hearts (l. 88). The drinks are described in detail. Pope satirizes politicians: “Coffee, (which makes the politician wise, and see through all things with his half-shut eyes)” (l. 117-118).

Clarissa hands over scissors to the Baron (brothel madam). Pope to beautiful women: your beauty won't last – cultivate gifts that will attract in the long run (Hammond 40). The Baron cuts the lock “From the fair head, for ever, and for ever” (l. 154). Belinda screams and shrieks in horror. “When husbands or when lap-dogs breathe their last” (l. 158)

Canto IV – a brief scene takes place in the cave of the Queen of Spleen
Belinda at eighteen is at the height of her beauty and allure. She is extremely angry about losing her lock of hair. “Melancholy was supposed to accompany creative genius” (“Alexander Pope: *The Rape of the Lock*,” RPO 5).

Canto V – Pope warns that “frail beauty must decay, Cur'd or uncurl'd, since locks will turn to grey” (l.25-26) Homer is mentioned (l. 45) Triumphant Umbriel (l. 53) Belinda wants to restore the lock (l. 103-104) and her cries are compared to Othello. Othello is mentioned in canto 5
“There is also a tragic and magnifying echo in the reference to Othello at the end of the battle. Here the theme is similar-the overwhelming of a trivial object (the handkerchief)-and Othello's roarings end in a mental chaos comparable to that of the battle. This allusion brings to mind the idea of love betrayed or denied- ‘And when I love thee not, / Chaos is come again’” (Quinsey 95).

At the end of the poem, Belinda is immortalized as her lock of hair is sent to the stars “And ‘midst the stars inscribe Belinda's name.” (l. 150)

Epic Poetry

“The essential purpose of mock-epic, as the name implies, is to point up the contrast between the true epic values celebrated by Homer and Vergil, and the false or at least less admirable codes followed by contemporary society...Pope uses the epic tradition to accuse his society of being unable to distinguish between appearance and reality” (“Pope,” St. Andrews 6). High school students are already familiar with epic poetry by their senior year, having read *The Odyssey* in ninth grade and *Beowulf* at the beginning of the senior year. Some students have also read *Paradise Lost* by John Milton, *The Iliad*, or have viewed the movie, *Troy*, starring Brad Pitt. A review of epic poetry and oral tradition is useful before teaching the mock epic. The main characteristics of epic poetry and elements of the Epic Style (Allingham 1-2) are covered in the first lesson plan. Pope fashioned his satire, “The Dunciad” after *The Iliad* (Cummings, *The Iliad*).

Rhetorical Terms and Vocabulary

Zeugma – the trope that links together nouns of different moral weight by the same verb (Hammond 39). Here are examples from *the Rape of the Lock*: comparing husbands to lapdogs and:

Or lose her heart, or necklace, at a ball.
Or stain her honour or her new brocade.

Sillemesis – a verb is used either with a double grammatical congruity, or in a double sense:

Here thou, great Anna! Whom three realms obey,
Dost sometimes counsel take – and sometimes tea.
With earnest eyes, and round, unthinking face,
He first the snuff-box opened, then the case. (39)

“We have now descended from logical parallel and ellipsis, through metaphor, into pun” (Wimsatt 20). Alexander Pope was a master at wordplay.

Linguistics

“As early as “The Rape of the Lock,” Pope uses comic dialogue to reproduce the slang, expletives, and inflections of particular types, ‘placing’ his speakers with authorial irony much as Fielding or Dickens would place them” (Damrosch 286).

Contemporary Political Satire

Jon Stewart, Stephen Colbert, Kinky Friedman, Kurt Vonnegut (Man Without a Country)

The current political satirists are carrying on a tradition that Alexander Pope and Jonathan Swift perfected in the eighteenth century. Jon Stewart of *The Daily Show* and Stephen Colbert of *The Colbert Report* satirize the latest news headlines. The authors Kinky Friedman and Kurt Vonnegut satirized the current political administration, enjoying the freedom of speech that Swift and Pope could only dream about.

LESSON PLANS

Lesson Plan 1: Epic Poetry and “The Rape of the Lock”

Objective: Students will comprehend epic poetry.

Materials: two handouts and one copy of “The Rape of the Lock.”

The first handout is a list of epic poetry terms, motifs, characteristics and elements. The second handout is a chart with the list of elements and characteristics with blank lines for the students to fill in.

Study Guide Questions: JHARY

Procedures:

Prerequisite: the students read “The Rape of the Lock”.

The lesson begins with a class discussion and review of epic poetry that the students are familiar with: *The Odyssey, The Iliad, Beowulf, etc.*

Hand each student a list of epic terms and characteristics. Apply them in the discussion to the epic poems listed above.

Discuss “The Rape of the Lock.”

Hand each student a chart of epic poetry terms and characteristics. Have the students fill out the chart with examples from “The Rape of the Lock.” Students can work individually or in groups.

Evaluation: students write an essay comparing the mock epic, *The Rape of the Lock*, to a serious epic poem of their choice. 500 words, due in one week.

Lesson Plan 2: *Gulliver’s Travels*

Objective: Students will learn about satire. Students will write in a variety of forms.

Students read *Gulliver’s Travels*.

TEKS 110.45 (1) Writing/purposes. The student writes in a variety of forms. The student is expected to (A) write in a variety of forms with an emphasis on literary forms such as fiction, poetry, drama, and media scripts.

Materials:

The Butter Battle Book by Dr. Seuss

Gulliver’s Travels cartoon video

Procedures:

Class discussion and comparison

Evaluation:

Write an original creative example of one of Gulliver's voyages or write a comparison of the novel, *Gulliver's Travels*, and the animated movie or the novel, and the Dr. Seuss book.

Lesson Plan 3: Comedy

Objective:

Students will write in a variety of forms. Student will demonstrate proficiency in each aspect of the listening process, such as focusing attention, interpreting, and responding. Students will expand vocabulary through wide reading, listening and discussing. Students will use effective listening to provide appropriate feedback in a variety of situations such as conversations and discussions.

TEKS 110.45(15) Listening/speaking/critical listening. The student listens attentively for a variety of purposes. The student is expected to: (A) demonstrate proficiency in each aspect of the listening process such as focusing attention, interpreting, and responding; (C) demonstrate proficiency in critical, empathic, appreciative, and reflective listening.

Materials:

Video clips of various comedy skits and shows; paper and pen; list of comedy terms.

Procedure:

Show comedy video clips. For example: Abbot and Costello, the Three Stooges, *Saturday Night Live*, *The Daily Show*, *I Love Lucy*, Monty Python, *the Family Guy*, Charlie Chaplin, etc.

After each short skit, discuss with the class what type of comedy was demonstrated. Students may rely on the list of comedy terms. They should take notes during the discussion.

Evaluation:

Students are required to turn in their comedy list with notes taken during the class discussion. They will be expected to use the comedy terms in subsequent writing assignments.

Lesson Plan 4: Contemporary Political Humor

Objective: TEKS 110.45(1) Writing/purposes. The student writes in a variety of forms

The students will expand vocabulary through wide reading, listening, and discussing.

The students will use effective listening to provide appropriate feedback in a variety of situations such as discussions and artistic presentations.

Materials:

Vocabulary list of poetry and political terms

Books by Jon Stewart, Stephen Colbert, Kinky Friedman, and Kurt Vonnegut

Current newspapers and magazines

Procedures:

Discuss current political satire. Compare present day political satire to the neoclassical satire of Alexander Pope and Jonathan Swift.

This lesson can coincide with the seniors' government class so that the students can appreciate the cross-curricular connection.

Evaluation:

Students work in groups to create their own political satire skit using current events and perform them in front of the class.

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From the beast fables, fabliaux, and Chaucerian caricatures to the extended treatments of John Skelton, Shakespeare, Ben Jonson, Erasmus, and Cervantes, the satirical tradition flourished throughout the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, culminating in the golden age of satire in the late 17th and early 18th cent. The familiar names of Swift, Samuel Butler, John Dryden, Alexander Pope, Richard Steele, Henry Fielding, and William Hogarth, in England, and of Nicolas Boileau-Despréaux, La Fontaine, Molière, and Voltaire, in France, suggest not only the nature of the controversies that provided a ta 2 Satire Jonathan Swift once said, "Satire is a sort of glass, wherein beholders do generally discover everybody's face but their own." It ridicules people, events, and known literary and popular works. The aim of satire is to improve society by showing its weaknesses. 3 Satire Works of satire usually have a specific target, and are usually seen as humorous, although not always by the people at whom they are directed (Politicians, Teachers). Like much humor, satire tends to lose its relevance over the course of time. 4 Satire Thus, cartoons that were vastly amusing during the 1900s may barely This unit on the Golden Age of Satire is geared toward the high school seniors or junior Advanced Placement students who learn British literature. My seniors begin the study of Restoration literature at the end of the first semester and continue the eighteenth century from January to March. Every year I teach "A Modest Proposal" and I introduce Gulliver's Travels; however, Jonathan Swift is too important a figure to merely mention in a few lessons. It will teach the historical background of the eighteenth century to better understand what Jonathan Swift and Alexander Pope are satirizing. Students will compare eighteenth century satire to contemporary satirists, including cartoon shows that are familiar to and popular with high school students: The Simpsons and Family Guy.