

A Comparative Study of Satire in English Neo-classical Age and Persian Constitutional Era through Jonathan Swift's *A Modest Proposal* and Ali-Akbar Dehkhodā's *Dorūs Al-Ashyā*

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Extended Abstract

1. Introduction

Satire, as a popular genre in both eastern and western literary genre, viewed fundamental changes and a stable pattern; English and Persian satire were not exceptions and they also experienced such great improvements as well. This long path of change and progression was through the poets' and authors' artistic works on the one hand, and the literary critics and lexicographers' meticulous reflections on the other hand. Consequently, satire as a remarkable genre and a tool of social criticism could achieve its unique place among other literary genres. Then by the prosperity of prose writing and the advent of journalism within the Neo-classical age in England and Constitutionalist era in Iran, satire's glorious apogee emerged.

2. Aim

The major aim of this essay is to compare satire in English and Persian literature, to pursue its roots and definitions, its improvement and the way writers dealt with it. To do this, at first satire was clarified based on the well-known English and Persian scholars' views, of the past and present, and then a full prospect of its development and its golden age in Iran and England was depicted. At the end, in order to have a feasible grasp of the subject, two sample texts of English and Persian prose satire were reviewed and compared: *A Modest Proposal* by Jonathan Swift (1667-1745) and *Dorūs Al-Ashyā* [Lessons to be Learned from Things] by Ali-Akbar Dehkhodā (1879-1956).

3. Theoretical Framework and Methodology

This essay is an attempt to reveal a literary genre prevalent in English and Persian

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literature, and the way satire developed and reached its supreme position in both languages. To achieve this purpose the qualitative and library-based method was adopted while Russian and American schools of Comparative Literature were the primary frame of the inquiry. Following this methodology and insisting on the common genre in world literature, satire was discussed and compared within the compass of English and Persian literature. Therefore, the framework of this research caused an academic probe into the satire, the lexicography of the term, and a socio-historical inquiry into it both in English and Persian literature.

4. Discussion

Satire in English literature originates in two significant eras; one is the classical Greco-Roman age when great satirists like Juvenal, Horace, Persius and Aristophanes wrote their masterpieces, and the other is the Neo-classical age in 17th and 18th centuries which witnessed prominent satirists like Pope, Dryden, and Swift. However, Chaucer and Shakespeare's writings also include satirical traces and the novels of Austen and Dickens embrace satire as well (Griffin 1994: 276-269; Rawson 1994: 3). In fact, these so-called ages were kind of revolution in satire writings and no other historical periods could observe such big changes and improvement in the world of satire. Interestingly, the golden age of English prose and journalism were synchronized with the satires outburst.

Persian satire was also flourished at the Iranian Constitutionalist era when journalism and newspaper spread and prose developed. The fundamental political-social movements together with the changes in prose writing such as simplicity, clarity, and lucidity helped the satirists to compose their outstanding works at the time (Dād 1375: 209). Therefore, the development of newspapers and the press was one of the main reasons for the expansion of satires. Printing books and publishing newspapers, weekly, periodicals, and journals turned to be a completely new experience in the world of Iranian literature (Javādi 2004: 169). According to Edward Brown, about 371 publications were printed until 1912 (Javādi 2004: 169). After the declaration of constitutionalism in 1285 (Shamsi) during the reign of Muzaffar al-Din Shah, the press expanded in Iran surprisingly, and prose writing and criticism of the existing situation were noticed by poets and authors. Under the shadow of these changes the Persian satires suddenly flowered and its glorious period arrived.

Jonathan Swift, born on November 30, 1667 in Dublin is recognized as one of the famous Anglo-Irish satirists who could write supreme works in the field of political-social satire. Among his major satires are *A Tale of a Tub*, in which the author attacks the corrupted religious and educational established institutions in England, and the *Gulliver's travels*, a world classical masterpiece and narrative satire, which focused on the English society and the entire human beings as well. His other satire is *A Modest Proposal*, a Juvenalian and political work which was first published anonymously and the author's name was secret. Its purpose was to question the poverty in Ireland and to show the incompetence of British administrators and politicians.

Mirza Ali-Akbar Dehkhodā, a famous Iranian writer, lexicographer and satirist, was born in Tehran around 1297 (Shamsi). Undoubtedly, his art of journalism and satirical writing was not unrelated to his European travels. When he returned to his homeland, he experienced the Iranian constitutional revolution. Most of Dehkhodā's satires were focused on the topic of governmental, tribal, and religious tyranny, so that none of the government officials and religious hypocrites were safe from the sharp blade of his writings. He fought with superstitions and attacked all the baseless superstitions and prejudices of the people in his homeland. It seems that his *Dorūs Al-Ashyā* is a follower of older Persian humorous mocks where the clowns and madmen used to show an unbalanced and contradictory appearance to express socio-political issues. Humor with a paradoxical nature, and with the help of repeated inversions, used to show social wounds and pull out the pus inside those wounds.

The method Dehkhodā practiced in his humorous narratives turns to be sincere, friendly, and simple; friendly because his way of speaking is sweet and pleasant, and simple because he has been able to reveal the subjects clearly and to make his readers to believe it easily. Unlike *A Modest Proposal*, in which Swift used a naive narrator and the technique of "Ignorance of Knowledge" to impose a serious but disgusting proposal on his audience, *Dorūs Al-Ashyā* begins by a form of parable to express the subject humorously. The narrator in *Dorūs Al-Ashyā* first uses common and simple language, and the closer we get to the end of the text, the tone of his speech becomes sharper and more explicit. This is despite the fact that in *A Modest Proposal* the narrator has chosen a serious and formal language from beginning to the end to disclose his proposal, and this linguistic and verbal seriousness is in conflict with the topic which is cannibalism. As a result, these features made Swift's work a winning satire. It seems that *Dorūs Al-Ashyā* is closer to Horatian satire, because we are dealing with a well-educated and witty character who points out the hypocrisy and stupidity of others. But when he complains and attacks the mistakes of individuals or social classes, he comes close to Juvenal's humor.

5. Findings and Conclusion

The results of this research show that English satire as a literary genre has more integrity and harmony between the constituent parts of the genre, and the English satirists did better than their Persian counterparts. This is because the tradition of English satire writing revived after the Enlightenment, and also the literary-cultural rebirth of the Renaissance before it helped its progress, as well as the deep effects of the ancient Roman satirists. It means that satirists in the 17th and 18th centuries in England, benefiting from the great examples of satire of ancient Roman writers, were able to achieve great success in their careers in the shadow of the expansion of prose in the Age of Enlightenment. In other words, English satire in the Neo-classical period, as the name of this period indicates, was a new look at the examples and works of ancient Rome and its classical era. Satire in Iran's Constitutionalist age also reached a significant prosperity, but compared to satire in the English Neo-classical era, it must

be acknowledged that Persian examples in terms of structure and methods of writing do not follow a specific pattern, and most Persian poets or satirists have practiced mixed techniques to create their works. Perhaps this goes back to the history of satire in Persian classical literature and the scattered streaks of humor among the works of its poets. In addition, the history of satire in the Persian language reveals that humor was originally a literary technique, and Persian satire historically preceded it. It should also be noted that Persian satire has become independent and stable in the period of Iranian Enlightenment and Constitutionalism under the influences of journalism, which undoubtedly has a long past in European literary history.

Therefore, the factors involved and influential in the emergence of satire in English Neo-classical period can be considered as follows: 1. Historical factors: imitation of ancient Roman satirists such as Juvenal, Horace, Aristophanes, and Persius; 2. Political factors: political disputes and controversies, especially in the 17th c., which led poets and satirists to conflict their rivals; a prominent satirist of this period is Dryden; 3. Intellectual factors: Enlightenment as well as the 18th c. wisdom which had a direct relationship with the prose of that time; 4. Social factors: the desire of poets and writers to reform society and the desire of society to read satire. But Persian satire reached a significant growth in the early 20th c. with the advent of Constitutionalism and the possibility of freedom for writers and poets. This flourishing and maturity of Persian satire is relevant to several factors: 1. Political factors: the Constitutional revolution and the awakening of different classes of society, which led to many political-social criticisms among writers and poets; 2. Intellectual factors: the desire for enlightenment among the majority of writers and their efforts to enlighten the public at different levels of society; 3. Socio-cultural factors: the emergence of journalism and the press, and the satirists' efforts to raise the cultural consciousness of people, as well as the desire of people to read and become culturally improved.

Keywords: English and Persian Satire, Jonathan Swift, Ali-Akbar Dehkhodā, *A Modest Proposal*, *Dorūs Al-Ashyā*

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