



THE FUNCTION OF SATIRE IN 18TH-CENTURY BRITISH  
LITERATURE

SATIRANING 18-ASR BRITANIYA ADABIYOTIDAGI FUNKSIYASI  
ФУНКЦИЯ САТИРЫ В БРИТАНСКОЙ ЛИТЕРАТУРЕ 18 ВЕКА

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**Abstract:** *This article analyzes the role and functions of satire in 18th-century British literature. Through the genre of satire, the article examines social-political criticism, moral values, and the exposure of societal flaws. Using the works of writers such as Jonathan Swift, Alexander Pope, and Samuel Johnson as examples, the power and significance of satire are revealed.*

**Keywords:** *satire, 18th-century British literature, Jonathan Swift, Alexander Pope, social criticism, Age of Enlightenment*

**Annotatsiya:** *Ushbu maqolada 18-asr Britaniya adabiyotida satiraning roli va funksiyalari tahlil qilinadi. Satira janri orqali ijtimoiy-siyosiy tanqid, axloqiy qadriyatlar va jamiyatdagi illatlarning fosh etilishi o'rganiladi. Jonathan Swift, Alexander Pope va Samuel Johnson kabi yozuvchilarning asarlari misolida satiraning ta'sir kuchi va ahamiyati ochib beriladi.*

**Kalit so'zlar:** *satira, 18-asr Britaniya adabiyoti, Jonathan Swift, Alexander Pope, ijtimoiy tanqid, ma'rifatparvarlik davri*

**Аннотация:** *В данной статье анализируются роль и функции сатиры в британской литературе XVIII века. В рамках жанра сатиры в статье рассматриваются социально-политическая критика, моральные ценности и разоблачение пороков общества. На примере произведений таких писателей, как*



*Джонатан Свифт, Александр Поуп и Сэмюэл Джонсон, раскрываются сила и значение сатиры.*

**Ключевые слова:** сатира, британская литература XVIII века, Джонатан Свифт, Александр Поуп, социальная критика, эпоха Просвещения.

## **INTRODUCTION**

The eighteenth century marked a pivotal moment in British literary history, particularly in the development and refinement of satire as a powerful literary form. During this period of immense social, political, and intellectual transformation, satire emerged as one of the most potent vehicles for social commentary and cultural critique [1]. The Age of Enlightenment, with its emphasis on reason, progress, and intellectual discourse, provided fertile ground for satirists to examine and criticize societal norms, political corruption, and human folly.

The period witnessed an unprecedented flourishing of satirical literature, with writers wielding their pens as instruments of both entertainment and reform. This era saw the emergence of sophisticated satirical techniques that went far beyond simple mockery or criticism. Writers such as Jonathan Swift, Alexander Pope, and Samuel Johnson developed complex literary mechanisms that combined wit, irony, and social commentary in ways that continue to influence literature today [2]. Their works demonstrated that satire could serve not only as a mirror to society's flaws but also as a catalyst for change.

The significance of 18th-century British satire lies not only in its literary innovation but also in its role as a social force. During this period, satirists addressed themselves to an increasingly literate middle class, helping to shape public opinion and contribute to political discourse. The coffee houses and literary circles of London became centers for the dissemination and discussion of satirical works, creating a new kind of public sphere where ideas could be debated and criticized openly [3]. This social context was crucial in determining both the form and function of satirical writing during the period.

## **METHODOLOGY AND LITERATURE REVIEW**



The research methodology employs comparative-historical, typological, and hermeneutical analysis approaches to examine the complex functions of satire in 18th-century British literature. A systematic review of primary and secondary sources has been conducted to understand both the historical context and contemporary scholarly perspectives on the subject.

Rogers [1] provides a foundational understanding of the literary landscape from 1660-1780, detailing how political and social changes influenced satirical writing. This work is complemented by Marshall's [8] detailed analysis of satirical practices in England, which traces the evolution of satirical techniques over more than a century. Quintero [2] offers a broader perspective on satire's development, placing British contributions within a wider literary and cultural context.

Weinbrot's [3] seminal work establishes crucial theoretical frameworks for understanding 18th-century satire, examining both textual strategies and contextual factors. This theoretical foundation is further developed by Griffin [6], whose critical reintroduction to satire provides important analytical tools for understanding the genre's functions and effectiveness.

Lock's [4] focused study of Swift's "Gulliver's Travels" demonstrates how individual works contributed to the broader development of satirical literature. Nokes [7] provides essential insights into Swift's personal and literary development, helping to contextualize his satirical approaches. Smith's [5] introduction offers a comprehensive overview of the period's major satirists and their techniques.

Significant contributions to the understanding of 18th-century British satire have also come from Uzbek scholars. Sultanov's "Ingliz Adabiyotida Satira" (2018) provides valuable perspectives on how British satirical traditions influenced global literary development [9]. Additionally, Karimov's "G'arb Adabiyotida Satirik An'analar" (2020) offers important comparative analysis between Western and Eastern satirical traditions [10].

This diverse body of scholarship demonstrates the continuing relevance of 18th-century British satire to literary studies and its influence on global literary





traditions. The literature reveals how satirists developed increasingly sophisticated techniques for social and political commentary while maintaining artistic excellence.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The analysis of 18th-century British satire reveals several distinct and significant functions that shaped both literary development and social discourse during this period. These functions operated on multiple levels, from direct social criticism to subtle moral instruction, creating a complex web of literary and social influence.

The primary function of satire during this period was social and political criticism. Jonathan Swift's "Gulliver's Travels" stands as perhaps the most sophisticated example of political satire from this era. The work employs elaborate allegorical structures to critique contemporary political institutions and practices [6]. Through his protagonist's journeys to fictional lands, Swift creates a series of mirrors that reflect and distort familiar political and social realities, making their flaws both visible and ridiculous. His portrayal of the endless war between Lilliput and Blefuscu, for instance, serves as a biting commentary on the seemingly pointless conflicts between European nations. The effectiveness of Swift's approach lies in his ability to combine fantastical elements with recognizable political and social situations, creating a form of criticism that is both entertaining and profound.

Alexander Pope's contribution to 18th-century satire demonstrates another crucial function: moral education through social commentary. In "The Rape of the Lock," Pope addresses the superficiality and moral vacuity of upper-class society with remarkable subtlety and wit [7]. By elevating trivial social incidents to the level of epic poetry, Pope creates a devastating critique of social priorities and values. His work demonstrates how satire could serve as a tool for moral instruction while avoiding heavy-handed didacticism. The poem's intricate structure and sophisticated use of the mock-epic form allowed Pope to criticize social foibles while simultaneously creating a work of lasting artistic merit.

The cultural critique function of 18th-century satire is particularly evident in Samuel Johnson's work. His poem "London" presents a comprehensive criticism of urban life and its impact on traditional values and social structures [8]. Johnson's satire



focuses on the broader cultural implications of societal change, examining how urbanization and modernization were transforming British society. His work demonstrates how satire could address large-scale social transformations while maintaining a focus on individual human experience.

Beyond these specific examples, the period saw the development of increasingly sophisticated satirical techniques. Writers learned to combine different forms of irony, from gentle mockery to savage indignation, creating a flexible literary tool that could address various social and political issues. The use of personification, allegory, and classical allusion became more refined, allowing satirists to create works that operated on multiple levels of meaning.

The effectiveness of 18th-century satire was enhanced by its ability to reach a growing reading public. The rise of coffee house culture and literary societies meant that satirical works could generate widespread discussion and debate. This social context helped make satire an important part of public discourse, allowing it to influence both popular opinion and policy debates.

The period also saw the development of more subtle forms of satirical criticism. Writers learned to use humor and wit to make their criticisms more palatable while simultaneously making them more effective. This sophistication in technique meant that satire could address increasingly complex social and political issues without losing its popular appeal.

Another significant aspect of 18th-century satire was its role in developing a new kind of political discourse. Satirists helped create a language and set of literary techniques for discussing political issues that influenced both contemporary debate and future political writing. Their work demonstrated how literary art could contribute to political discourse while maintaining aesthetic values and entertaining readers.

These various functions of satire combined to create a powerful form of social commentary that was uniquely suited to the intellectual and social climate of 18th-century Britain. The sophistication and effectiveness of these satirical techniques helped establish patterns of literary and social criticism that would influence writers for generations to come.



## **CONCLUSION**

The legacy of 18th-century British satire extends far beyond its immediate historical context, establishing paradigms of social criticism that remain relevant in contemporary literature and media. Through their masterful use of irony, wit, and moral commentary, the great satirists of this period demonstrated how literature could serve both artistic and social purposes, entertaining readers while simultaneously promoting critical thinking about social and political issues.

The enduring influence of 18th-century satire can be seen in its lasting impact on literary technique and social commentary. The sophisticated methods developed by Swift, Pope, and their contemporaries for exposing human folly and institutional corruption continue to inform modern satirical writing. Their works showed that effective satire requires not just wit and humor, but also a deep understanding of human nature and social structures.

Moreover, the period's satirical works provide valuable insights into the development of modern democratic discourse. By creating a space for public criticism and debate, these writers helped establish the principle that authority and tradition could be questioned through reasoned argument and artistic expression. This contribution to the development of public discourse and critical thinking remains one of the most significant legacies of 18th-century British satire.

The period's satirists demonstrated that literature could be both intellectually engaging and socially transformative, establishing patterns of literary and social criticism that continue to resonate in our own time. Their work reminds us that effective social criticism requires not just keen observation and moral conviction, but also artistic skill and an understanding of human psychology. In this sense, 18th-century British satire remains not just a historical phenomenon, but a living tradition that continues to inform our understanding of literature's role in social discourse and reform.

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