

Satire: jean-baptiste poquelin (moliere) and jonathan swift



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Both Jean-Baptiste Poquelin (Moliere) and Jonathan Swift use satire as a means of conveying their ideas concerning the actions of the characters in their respective works *Tartuffe* and *Gulliver's Travels*. The object of Moliere's satire is the false religiosity suffused the climate of his time. He parodies the lives of persons who profess Christianity and yet in certain situations behave in a manner non-concurrent with the message they preach. Swift too condemns a sort of hypocrisy in his tale, as the professed rank and honor of the leaders of his time come under attack in his portrayal of them.

Swift in particular uses a variety of different metaphors in order to change the scale of humanity and in so doing magnify the problem he seeks to point out. Both novels, therefore, demonstrate the role of satire as “mediator” between how life actually is and what is ought to be in the eyes of their authors (Bullit, 3). Moliere uses characters to typify the types of persons he wishes to satirize. The title character of his work, *Tartuffe* himself, represents the type of person in life who professes religion and yet in his action demonstrates himself to be in complete discord with the tenets of that religion.

Tartuffe performs actions that amount to fraud and yet acts in the name of the clergy and of Christianity. This man can be seen to stand in the place of the clergy of the Catholic faith (the dominant religion of France at the time) who collected funds (such as indulgences) or other otherwise ingratiated themselves to the masses under false pretences. The person upon whom the fraud is committed represents the masses who willingly give their all to these leaders of the church, whom they believe to be virtuous.

However, Moliere indicates that the money being appropriated by the church is being used for personal and non-religious reasons. The situation's remedy comes in the form of a king who finds out the truth and punishes Tartuffe for his guilt. Moliere's criticism of the clergy is complete in this description, as he indicates that God (ruler of the earth) is in no way supportive of the actions of these religious persons who claim to be doing His will. Moliere also satirizes the determination of some persons (especially the religious masses) to embrace ignorance and the misfortune that they fall into because of this behavior.

The character Orgon is eager to believe not only in the virtue of Tartuffe but also in the particulars of his claims. As a result, he is swindled out of his property and can only be rescued by the royal (divine) intervention of the King. The corrective proposition given by Moliere is that the clergy should seek to truly represent the knowledge and wishes of God by acting in accordance with his teaching. They should also seek to educate the masses, and by promoting education and transparency all round, virtue will increase.

Swift in Gulliver's Travels takes his readers to several different places, and the effect of this is to remove what he considers the self-imposed grandeur. This grandeur is imposed through the building up of socio-political and religious institutions based upon laws that profess to defend (among other things) a hierarchical view of humanity. In Lilliput and Brobdingnag, for example, the natives give air to Swift's true ideas concerning these institutions and the form of humanity that obtains within them.

The Lilliputians demonstrate the pride and high-mindedness of humans, underscoring how petty this form of behavior is. Such honors as the favor of the Court is demonstrated in the ministers of Lilliput challenge of jumping over a rope and the rewards they are granted. The various heights to which the rope is lifted represent the different titles to which nobles and clergymen might aspire. The Lilliputians who represent such people are small, and their size reflects Swift's satirical representation of the true size of humans in relation to their opinions of themselves.

Likewise, in Brobdingnag, the larger scale of the persons represents the magnification of humans' foibles and vices in a grotesque manner, as they vainly attempt to decorate themselves with a distinction of rank that does not truly exist. Gulliver's conversion throughout the tale from a person of naivete to one who is truly skeptical of human behavior represents method in which Swift indicates that humans should correct themselves. In becoming aware of humanity's own tendency toward pride and pettiness, people will become more likely to recognize and denounce it within themselves and others.