

Perception of satire in gulliver's travels, the tempest, and diderot's explicator...

[Literature](#), [William Shakespeare](#)



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Nowadays, it became a commonplace practice among many people to refer to the play *The Tempest* (by William Shakespeare), the essay *Supplement to the Voyage of Bougainville* (by Denis Diderot) and the novel *Gulliver's Travels* (by Jonathan Swift), as such that represent a particularly high literary value.

The main reason for this is that, in the discursive sense of this word, the mentioned literary masterpieces were much ahead of their time – something that can be illustrated, in regards to the fact that all three literary pieces promote the idea of intellectual enlightenment/progress, as something that has the value of a 'thing in itself'.

What is also similar between the literary works in question, is that they do it in the thoroughly entertaining manner – namely, by the mean exposing readers to the humorous twists of the affiliated plots.

In this respect, it can also be noted that in their works, Shakespeare, Diderot and Swift did succeed in revealing the sheer erroneousness of the assumption that White people had the 'natural right' to exploit indigenous populations in different parts of the world, while justifying this practice by the references to the presumed 'inferiority' of the latter.

Thus, it will be thoroughly appropriate to suggest that the mentioned authors did contribute rather substantially towards undermining the conceptual legitimacy of the discourse of colonialism, as we know it.

This simply could not be otherwise. While utilizing humor and satire, as the instruments of making a point, Shakespeare, Diderot and Swift were able to expose the inconsistency of the euro-centric idea of the so-called 'White

man's burden', concerned with the assumption that the world's indigenous peoples are essentially sub-human, and that there is nothing wrong about subjecting them to exploitation.

In my paper, I will explore the validity of this suggestion at length, while expounding on the specifics of how the authors' humorous/satirical treatment of the euro-centric stereotype of 'naive savage' helps readers to broaden their intellectual horizons.

I will also expound on what can be considered the indications that, while ensuring the satirical sounding of their masterpieces, all three authors nevertheless remained well within the ideological framework of the discourse of euro-centricity.

One of the most effective methods to ensure the satirical sounding of a particular episode in the work of literature, is to overplay the idea that people are actually quite capable of not even noticing the dichotomy between how they act, on one hand, and what happened to be the set of their beliefs, as to what accounts for one's proper behavior, on the other.

In its turn, this creates the objective preconditions for the emergence of many humorous situations, because it does entertain people a great deal to see others being utterly arrogant of their own arrogance.

Evidently enough, while working on his play *The Tempest*, Shakespeare remained thoroughly aware of this – something that can be illustrated, in

regards to the author's treatment of the idea of 'naive savage', embodied by the character of Caliban (Prospero's 'native' slave).

This character is first mentioned in the scene, where Prospero admits that, despite being a powerful magician, he nevertheless is utterly depended upon physical labor of his slave:

We cannot miss him (Caliban): he does make our fire,

Fetch in our wood and serves in offices

That profit us. What, ho! slave! Caliban!

Thou earth, thou! Speak (Shakespeare 15).

The satirical overtones of this Prospero's statement are quite clear. It is not only that the character's presumed omnipotence does not prevent him from being exposed to the elements – due to being perceptually arrogant; Prospero does not quite understand what accounts for the relationship between causes and effects.

This is exactly the reason why it never even occurred to him that referring to someone in terms of a lowly slave, while simultaneously admitting its own inability to survive without this person's services, is rather comical.

It is understood, of course, that the mentioned scene is highly allegorical, because it reveals what used to be the de facto state of affairs between European explorers/settlers and native 'barbarians', during the so-called Era of Exploration.

After all, it does not represent any secret that the self-proclaimed 'agents of progress' from the West tended to regard 'savages' as being not fully human. This is the reason why, while calling Caliban derogatory names, it never even occurred to Prospero that there was anything wrong with how he proceeded to treat his 'slave'.

This creates a strong satirical effect and consequently – prompts viewers to reassess the soundness of the assumption that there was much benefit to indigenous peoples from being exploited by Europeans.

Another notable aspect of Swift's satire, concerned with ridiculing the euro-centric outlook on 'naive savages', as people who could not possibly succeed in striving to liberate themselves from the colonial oppression, is that it prompts (European) viewers to realize that the dominance of the West in its colonies is temporary.

To exemplify the validity of this suggestion, we can refer to the episode, in which Prospero accuses Caliban of indecency:

Thou most lying slave,

Whom stripes may move, not kindness!

I have used thee,

Filth as thou art, with human care, and lodged thee

In mine own cell, till thou didst seek to violate

The honour of my child (Shakespeare 17).

This accusation is quite illustrative of how Westerners used to justify their colonial practices, throughout the history – in their view, the representatives of indigenous populations were simply not capable of addressing their own ‘moral wickedness’, without being helped by Whites.

Caliban's reply, however, implies that his current submission to Prospero is essentially incidental:

O ho, O ho! would't had been done!

Thou didst prevent me;

I had peopled else

This isle with Calibans (Shakespeare 17).

This humorous remark, on the part of Caliban, cannot be interpreted as anything else, but as the indication of Shakespeare's awareness that, despite not being quite as technologically advanced as Europeans, ‘naive savages’ were fertile enough to be capable of putting up an effective resistance against their oppressors.

By being exposed to *The Tempest*, people are also able to gain an insight into what was the main reason for indigenous peoples (represented by the character of Caliban) to end up being colonized by Whites with ease.

In order for us to prove that this indeed happened to be the case, we will need to refer to the play's scene, in which, after having had some alcohol, Caliban proclaims Stephano his God:

That's a brave god and bears celestial liquor.

I will kneel to him...

I'll swear upon that bottle to be thy (Stephano's) true subject;

For the liquor is not earthly (Shakespeare 42).

The satirical effect, triggered by this Caliban's statement, has to do with the fact that, as we are well aware of, alcohol-influenced people do tend to act rather foolishly. There is, however, even more to it – Shakespeare strived to present Caliban as an utterly gullible individual, who could be easily manipulated.

It is understood, of course, that the playwright's intention, in this respect, is best defined as somewhat stereotypical.

Moreover, it subtly implies that there is indeed a certain rationale for 'savages' to be patronized by the 'agents of civilization' from the West. At the same time, however, it is being suggestive of the sheer malevolence of the latter.

Nevertheless, it specifically the episode, in which drunken Caliban expresses his joy for having attained 'freedom' from Prospero, which contributes more than any other towards establishing him as a clearly satirical character:

No more dams I'll make for fish

Nor fetch in firing

At requiring;

Nor scrape trencher, nor wash dish

' Ban, ' Ban, Cacaliban

Has a new master: get a new man.

Freedom, hey-day! hey-day, freedom! freedom,

hey-day, freedom! (Shakespeare 45).

As it can be seen above, the humorous sounding of this joyful remark, on the part of Caliban, derives out of the sheer incompatibility between the notions of ' freedom' and ' servitude' – something of which the concerned character appears to have been utterly unaware.

This again exposes Caliban, as someone who fits perfectly well into the classical stereotype of ' naive savage' – a person who, despite possessing a plenty of existential vigor, is not very bright.

Yet, the same remark implies that, rather than having always remained the integral trait of his individuality, Caliban's naivety has been induced in him externally. Specifically, this development took place in the aftermath of the character's encounter with the ' celestial liquor'.

Whereas, Shakespeare's 'naive savage'-related satire is primarily concerned with encouraging people to think of indigenous peoples as somewhat brutish, but thoroughly resourceful individuals, the one of Denis Diderot has a different quality.

Essentially, it is about encouraging readers to contemplate the possibility for the existential mode of 'savages' to be superior to that of Europeans. In this respect, the Chapter 3 (The Conversation between the Chaplain and Orou) in Diderot's essay is particularly illustrative.

In it, the Chaplain (representing Westerners) and Orou (representing Tahitian 'savages') indulge in the discussion about what should be considered the best way for the society to function.

The conversation between the two starts when, while wishing to express his gratitude to the Chaplain, Orou offers him to have sex with either his wife or one of his daughters.

Being appalled by such a proposition, the Chaplain tries to explain to Orou that he could not possibly accept his offer, because it was inconsistent with the conventions of Christianity ('holy orders').

To this, Orou replies: "I don't know what you mean by 'holy orders', but your first duty is to be a man and to show gratitude" (Diderot 47).

The satirical effect, in this respect, is being achieved by the means of exposing readers to the situation when, while referring to the same subject matter, the Chaplain and Orou have in mind something different.

Whereas, for the Chaplain to have sex means to commit adultery and to be consequently punished for it by God, for Orou sex is nothing but the most natural activity that people can think of. As Orou referred to it: “ An innocent pleasure to which Nature, that sovereign mistress, invites every person” (Diderot 47).

In the formal sense of this word, it does establish Orou as a ‘ child of nature’ – someone, whose existence has the animalistic quality to it.

Nevertheless, it also presents Orou, as a person who does not only have its own unique perspective on things, but whose perception of the surrounding reality happened to be much more scientifically and ethically sound, as compared to that of the Chaplain.

To show that this indeed happen to be the case, we can refer to the numerous instances of Orou proving himself capable of revealing the sheer fallaciousness of many of the Chaplain’s religion-based assumptions.

For example, while trying to convince Orou that the Christian God is indeed omnipotent, the Chaplain mentions to this ‘ savage’ that the creator (craftsman) of the universe is everywhere, and that due to being essentially metaphysical, God does not have any material body.

In return, Orou aptly points out to the contradictory sounding of many of the Chaplain’s insinuations about the nature of divinity, which in turn contributes rather substantially towards increasing the satirical value of Diderot’s essay.

According to Orou, the Christian God is: “ The old craftsman who, without a head, hand or tools has made everything; and who is everywhere but nowhere to be seen... who commands and is not obeyed; who does not prevent occurrences which it is in his power to stop” (Diderot 50).

Thus, Diderot implies that ‘ naive savage’ is not quite as naïve, as it is being commonly assumed.

Quite on the contrary – unlike what it appears to be the case with the Chaplain, Orou is being represented as a practically minded individual, thoroughly capable of understanding the dialectical nature of the relationship between causes and effects.

The quoted remark, of the part of Orou, suggests yet another aspect of how the author proceeded to endow his essay with the clearly defined satirical sounding.

Apparently, Diderot wanted to emphasize that this character was naturally inclined to assess things from the strictly utilitarian perspective – something that did not quite correlate with the Chaplain’s tendency to refer to the utterly abstract notions, while defending his argumentative stance on the issues of importance.

Along with being highly humorous, as a ‘ thing in itself’, this discrepancy provides an additional dimension to the popular image of ‘ naive savage’, as someone solely concerned with the down-to-earth affairs.

After all, Orou's sarcastic suggestion implies that he was tempted to perceive things in terms of what appeared to be the measure of their practical usefulness, with very little regard being given to whether the application of this approach was fully justified or not.

In this respect, we can draw a certain parallel between Orou, on one hand, and the character of Sancho Panza from Cervantes's *Don Quixote*, on the other. The logic behind this suggestion is that, just as it used to be the case with the latter; Orou appears to have been well aware of the fact that metaphysical notions, associated with the Western way of living, have a counterproductive effect on the affiliated individuals' personal well-being.

This is exactly the reason why, despite being 'primitive', Orou is shown as someone fully capable of enjoying its life to the fullest – something that the Chaplain was clearly unable to do. The satirical value of the discrepancy in question is quite apparent.

Thus, it will be fully appropriate to suggest that Diderot's satire, concerned with the notion of 'naive savage', is strongly humanistic.

By introducing readers to Orou's philosophy of life, the author aimed to reveal the religion of Christianity (and the influence that it exerts upon the society), as a major obstacle on the way of humanity's continual betterment.

As Orou noted: "I've no understanding of your great craftsman (God), but I rejoice in his never having addressed our forefathers, and I hope he will

never speak to our children; for he might by chance tell them the same nonsense, and they might commit the folly of believing him” (Diderot 51).

In the aftermath of having realized the actual significance of Orou’s intellectually honest and yet humorously sounding remarks, readers will be more likely to reconsider the legitimacy of the religion-based outlook on life, and on what can be deemed the most effective way of addressing its challenges.

There are many humanistic overtones to how Jonathan Swift went about utilizing the theme of ‘naive savage’ (as the instrument of satire) in his novel, as well.

One of the most illustrative examples of this statement’s validity, is undeniably the scene, in which Gulliver reacts to the Lilliputians’ request to punish those six of them, who continued to shoot arrows at him, despite being ordered to stop: “I took them all in my right hand, put five of them into my coat-pocket; and as to the sixth, I made a countenance as if I would eat him alive.

The poor man squalled terribly, and the colonel and his officers were in much pain” (Swift 22). As it is being revealed later, Gulliver never intended to eat any of his offenders. However, he could not help pretending that he was about to do it.

The reason for this is that, while understanding perfectly well that in the eyes of Lilliputians, he was nothing but a hugely sized 'savage', Gulliver felt obligated to act in the manner that everybody expected him to.

Apparently, it did not take this character too long to realize that, in terms of how they used to position themselves within the surrounding reality, the Lilliputians were the miniature copies of his own fellow citizens.

That is, they were just as tempted to assume that the naivety of a particular 'savage' goes hand in hand with his innate predisposition towards violence/cruelty.

After all, during the 18th century, this assumption did serve as a discursive premise for the British to form their attitudes towards indigenous peoples in the country's newly acquired colonies.

This helps to explain the actual significance of the mentioned satirical scene – Swift wanted to expose the counterproductive essence of the practice of 'naive savages' being treated by Europeans in the highly prejudiced manner.

In its turn, this is being accomplished by the mean of using satire to prompt readers to contemplate the idea that cannibalism may not be quite as natural for 'savages', as it used to be assumed at the time of the novel's creation.

Just as it is being the case in Shakespeare's play, many of this novel's satirical references to the motif of 'naive savage' appear subliminal of the

author's unconscious awareness of the sheer strength of the native people's existential vigor.

For example, the Article 1 of the Agreement that Gulliver was forced to sign with the Lilliputians, stated: " The man-mountain shall not depart from our dominions, without our license under our great seal" (Swift 34).

What is particularly amusing about it, is that the mentioned Article implies that, while fearing Gulliver (because of his size and his potential ability to wipe the kingdom of Lilliput off the face of the Earth, if he wished so), this kingdom's dwarfed citizens nevertheless believed that they had what it takes to keep him in submission.

Therefore, it will not be much of an exaggeration, on our part, to suggest that one of the reasons why Gulliver's Travels was able to become instantly popular with the reading audiences, is that the novel's satirical subtleties resonate well with what used to be the set of unconscious anxieties, experienced by Westerners in the presence of ' naive savages'.

One of these anxieties had to do with the Westerners' deep-seated fear of the unknown. It is understood, of course, that this adds even further to the overall spirit of progressiveness, emanated by Swift's approach to using satire as the instrument of endowing his novel with the political sounding.

Essentially the same line of argumentation can be applied, when it comes to discussing the significance of yet another famous satirical scene in Gulliver's Travels – namely, the one in which Gulliver extinguishes fire by urinating on

it: “ I... applied (urine) so well to the proper places, that in three minutes the fire was wholly extinguished, and the rest of that noble pile, which had cost so many ages in erecting, preserved from destruction” (Swift 46).

The reason for this is apparent – even though this Gulliver's deed was thoroughly justified and presented the Lilliputians with the additional proof of the character's childlike perceptual innocence (naivety), they nevertheless could not help taking it as a threat.

Hence, the sheer hilariousness of the Emperor's attempts to hide its fear of Gulliver from himself, by the mean of giving orders to the ‘ man-mountain’.

In light of the earlier deployed line of argumentation, regarding the subject matter at stake, it can be indeed confirmed that, just as it was suggested in the Introduction, the satirical sounding of the motif of ‘ naive savage’ in the analyzed play, essay and novel, does imply the intellectual progressiveness of the affiliated authors.

While utilizing this motif, as one of the main prerequisites of keeping the audiences thoroughly entertained, they simultaneously strived to enlighten people about the fact that there can be no excuse for dehumanizing native populations (the representatives of which used to be considered ‘ savages’) in remote parts of the world.

Therefore, there is nothing surprising about the fact that Shakespeare, Diderot and Swift are now being commonly referred to as ‘ literary geniuses’

– all three of them did possess a rare talent for being able to turn satire into the tool for making this world a better place to live.

This is the main reason why their literary legacy continues to be much appreciated – quite despite its presumed ‘out-datedness’. As it can be seen, this concluding statement is fully consistent with the paper’s initial thesis.

Diderot. Denis. “Supplement to the Voyage of Bougainville.” In *Political Writings*. Trans. John Hope Mason and Robert Wokler. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1992. 31-75. Print.

Shakespeare, William 1611. *The Tempest*. PDF file. Web.

Swift, Jonathan 1726. *Gulliver’s Travels*. PDF file. Web.