



SATIRICAL METHODS IN THE WORKS OF FOUR CONTEMPORARIES OF EVELYN WAUGH

Murodova Mukadas Ikromovna

Teacher, Kattakurgan branch of Samarkand State University

ANNOTATION

Before analyzing Evelyn Waugh's satirical works it should be mentioned that Evelyn Waugh was not alone in satirizing the period between the two World Wars. For examining it we focus on his four contemporaries' works. Thus, we take into consideration Ronald Firbank, Aldous Huxley, Norman Douglas, Nancy Mitford's works and make a comparison with Evelyn Waugh's works. To begin with Ronald Firbank, being born in Britain on 17 January, 1886, he was the son of MP Sir Thomas Firbank and Lady Firbank. At the age of ten he went to Uppingham School for two years and then on to Trinity Hall, Cambridge. His first story, "Odette d'Antrevernes" was published in 1905, before going up to Cambridge.

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He then produced a series of novels, such as *The Artificial Princess* (written in 1915, published in 1934) and *Vainglory* (1915, his longest work) *Concerning the Eccentricities of Cardinal Pirelli* (1926). Most critics describe this writer as "butterfly". Some utilize it to praise, the others to damn. According to Sir Osbert Sitwell (English writer) "he must attempt to pin down upon a sheet of paper that unrivalled butterfly..." [1;68].

Yet Hugh l'A Fausset (the author of *Between the Tides*) writes that "Doubtless we will be accused of breaking a butterfly on the wheel of criticism"[2;42].

Another critic says, "His personal legend is slender, and on its score he might only have fallen into the ranks of the minor eccentrics, something between a wit and a dandy, a butterfly whose life need not be further inquired into once it had flown past" [3;824].

Finally, Professor E. M. Forster claims in his essay: "To break a butterfly or even a beetle, upon a wheel is a delicate task"[4]. Throughout the essay he retains this figure as representative of Firbank. As a matter of fact, many critics have urged against him a frivolity and pointlessness. Other critics are re-evaluating him nowadays, therefore, most of them admit that his novels have a significance, but not all critics have changed their opinions, for instance, R.D.Charques (English literary critic): "I have never in the past been able to read him with any very great pleasure, since his fanciful and impudent triviality seemed to me to have not merely too little reference to human affairs put too little formal or stylistic virtue" [5;902].

Edmund Wilson (American literary critic) considers that "Ronald Firbank is dealing with a later and less lusty phase of the same society as Congreve" [6]. In his

article Cyril Connolly writes that "Firbank recognized frivolity as the most insolent refinement of satire" [7;45].

Mocking at the people of his time Ronald Firbank used most frequently the method of the light touch, mannerisms, "incessant titterings" and "flickering inanities" to some of them [8;42], and an apparent aimlessness to others. Waugh satirizes at aimlessness of young generation. Here, one can notice some similarities between Ronald Firbank's and Evelyn Waugh's writing. In addition Waugh comments on R.Firbank's writing style: "His art is purely selective. From the fashionable chatter of his period, vapid and interminable, he has plucked, like tiny brilliant feathers from the breast of a bird, the particles of his design... The talk goes on, delicate, chic, exquisitely humorous, and seemingly without point or plan. Then, quite gradually, the reader is aware that a casual reference on one page links up with some particular inflexion of phrase on another until there emerges a plot; usually a plot so outrageous that he distrusts his own inferences"[24;96]. Therefore, Evelyn Waugh proves his ideas by showing an example from R.Firbank's work *The Flower Beneath the Foot*. So, he demonstrates very essential and concrete points of his view. Furthermore, he adds that it is typical of Firbank method: "The case of the Ritz Hotel v. Lady Something in *The Flower Beneath the Foot* is typical of the Firbank method. The King at a dinner-party employs the expression: "I could not be more astonished if you told me there were fleas at the Ritz," a part of which assertion Lady Something, who was blandly listening, imperfectly chanced to hear. "Who would credit it... It is too appalling...Fleas have been found at the Ritz." [9;196].

When Firbank describes lacking of importance and aimless, there is a seriousness, and also a sadness, in most of his novels. The primary themes in his novels are



disappointed love and distressing humiliations. E. Wilson comments on it: "when he illustrates these themes--along with his extravagant repertory vices--with characters which are burlesque without taking actual body, what emerges is unimaginative nonsense and the ugliness of a joke"[10;100].

According to *The Times* reviewer: "His characters are unaware of the meshes ambition has prepared for them, and their epicurean tastes slip them easily from innocence to subterfuge and fatality"[11;113]. While analyzing Firbank's works reviewer feels that the works might have undone him, for though he was moving "toward a subdued tragic feeling... his was not the genius to bear the full interpretation of the human tragedy"[12;804].

One of the critics of that time, W. H. Auden is one of the few who fail to remark upon the underlying sadness in Firbank's novels: "*Firbank's extraordinary achievement was to draw a picture, the finest, I believe, ever drawn by anyone, of the Earthly Paradise, not, of course, as it really is, but as, in our fallen state, we imagine it to be, as the place, that is, where, without having to change our desires and behavior in any way, we suffer neither frustration nor guilt... Everyone is welcome to this Eden*"[13;5].

If what Auden says is true, one should admit that the Eden of Firbank excluded the greater number of his characters.

The next contemporary to Evelyn Waugh, Aldous Huxley, who is close to Ronald Firbank with his writing style. Being born in Godalming, England in 1894, he was the son of the writer and schoolmaster Leonard Huxley and his wife, Julia Arnold, who founded Prior's Field School. According to the information taken from wikipedia, "*Huxley's education began in his father's well-equipped botanical laboratory, after which he enrolled at Hillside School, Malvern. After Hillside, he went on to Eton College*"[14]. Huxley completed his first novel when he was at the age of 17, but this novel wasn't published. Then he began writing seriously and at his early 20's he became a successful writer and social satirist. His early novels were social satires, *Crome Yellow* (1921), *Antic Hay* (1923), *Those Barren Leaves* (1925), and *Point Counter Point* (1928).

Amos Niven Wilder (poet) depicts the author's world as: "*Aldous Huxley world is minute in its detail, and peopled with men and women who, having found out that nothing is worth doing, do not what to do next; there is no game worth their playing even if there were a candle to light the board. So they expend their energies, scientist and soldier, big brother and sweet philosopher, stenographer and misunderstood wife and aristocratic tart*"[15;163].

As a matter of fact, the critic also has an idea in terms of aimlessness of young generation which is depicted in Aldous Huxley's works. It should be taken into account that in R. Firbank's works one can come across such a topic. A. Wilder continues his assessment and says about A. Huxley's satirical skills: "*And it often seems as though the best of the post-war novelists had discarded form as we know it so that the line between their work and the critical essay, the satire the expanded character sketch is a faint one. This has been especially true of Virginia Woolf and of Aldous Huxley*"[16;162].

Louis Kronenberger, a professor of theater arts at Brandeis University, considers that "*it seemed once, most of all perhaps in his first novel, "Crome Yellow", that Aldous Huxley had in him, not only brilliant gifts of satire, wit, fantasy and style, but the makings of an important creative novelist*"[17;164]. Thus, this critic praises A. Huxley as a great satirist and a creative novelist. From the point of his view it seems that he admires A. Huxley's writing style used in his creative works.

Additionally, Connolly (English literary critic) writes about Firbank and Huxley as "*Firbank and the early Eliot seem to me the pure artists of the twenties, Lawrence and Huxley the philosopher-artists, the explainers*" [29;115]. This shows the difference between the two. While Firbank may expose men's vices but he does not stop to explain them, Huxley demonstrates them at length.

As Professor Savage points out, "*When human life is seen as intrinsically meaningless and evil, then the work of the novelist, whose task is to present a picture of that life in terms of its significance and value, is deprived of all justification*"[18;34]

Here we may notice the differences in the purposelessness of Huxley, Waugh, and Firbank. Huxley in his early novels presents life itself as intrinsically meaningless. Waugh describes people living meaningless lives but always with the declaration that this is contrary to the right order. Firbank depicts people living meaningless lives, but he doubts to say whether or not there is such a thing as the right order. Among other methods of Huxley's satire, is his use, like Waugh's and Firbank's, of odd but suitable burlesque names for his characters. For instance, Gumbriel, Bojanus, Boldero.

David Worcester (English critic) claims that "*of all present day satirists Huxley stands the best chance of survival*"[19;118]. According to Worcester the outstanding feature of his satire is his use of irony. Illustrating the devices of "*the most ingenious ironist of modern times,*" he says, "*Biological determination is impressed on us by descriptions of the involuntary workings of cells, kidneys, spermatazoa; the emotional content of music is contrasted with the mechanics of sound waves and the auditory system*" [10;122].

Considering Huxley as a preacher rather than a writer, Wilson gives both Waugh and Firbank better chances of survival. Very tellingly he points out that "*Huxley rejects the world because he doesn't know what is in it*" [31;212].

Thus, the method of his novels is concerned, Huxley is greatly dependent upon Norman Douglas, who himself is dependent upon Thomas Love Peacock. Norman Douglas was born in Thuringen, Austria in 1868. He was brought up mainly in Scotland. He got his education at Yarlet Hall and Uppingham School in England. His first book "*Unprofessional Tales*" (1901) was published under the pseudonym Normyx. He is famous for his "*South Wind*". He is also the author of travel books, including "*Siren Land*"(1911), "*Fountains in the Sand*" (1912), "*Old Calabria*" (1915) , "*Together*"(Austria) (1923), "*Alone*" (Italy) (1921).

According to Johnson's criticism of Douglas, namely, that his stature as a satirist is diminished by his desire to impress the reader with the "*delicate and civilized*



superiority of Norman Douglas” [20;502]. Above all else Douglas's method of satire relies upon his sophisticated superiority. Perhaps, his manner is too severely criticized by Johnson; but there is some truth in the assertion that Douglas “has no loyalty to truth, but only to his intellectual dandyism; he would reverse himself for a witticism” [21;505].

Paradox is a favorite device of Douglas in his novel, and it is Keith character of “*South Wind*”) who especially illustrates this in his dealings with the Bishop. We may not be as easily persuaded as the Bishop(character of “*South Wind*”) to believe all that Keith says, but the paradoxes are present.

“What can a person of that kind have in common with a mother of any kind?”

“Everything,’ said Mr. Heard(character of “*South Wind*”) enthusiastically.

“Nothing at all” [22;220] replied Keith.

In should be noted that in Evelyn Waugh’s novels we often come across his paradoxes. In Chapter III we will discuss E.Waugh’s paradoxes.

Another novelist, who as a satirist, Nancy Mitford, to whom Waugh dedicated “*The Loved One*”. Nancy Mitford was an English novelist who was born in 1904. Mitford has great importance as a novelist, though she has written two interesting books. She represents a new development in satirists; she is one who goes after Waugh for imitation. Reading her works one not only sees points of similarity to Waugh but also the road Waugh might have taken. Of course, he would never have written exactly like her. As Waugh does in his early novels, Miss Mitford assembles a light-headed characters who act everything in extremely unpredictable ways. Thus, we may say that we determine some similarities between the authors’ writing style.

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