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Ali Hamada Mgallad
Lecturer
College of Arts
University of Mosul

Satirizing Some Or All? A Comparative Study In J. D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye* And Kingsley Amis's *Lucky Jim*

A B S T R A C T

This paper deals with satire in two novels: *The Catcher in the Rye* and *Lucky Jim* by J. D. Salinger and Kingsley Amis, respectively. It aims at considering the elements encompassed in the process of satirizing in both works and each writer's manipulation of them, taking into consideration the differences.

Making use of characterization, style, humor, irony, ridicule and even fallacy as tools of satire, both writers intended to criticize, occasionally, all society under the title of social satire, and in other occasions, some certain aspects of society or certain establishments and enterprises. Through a synchronic perspective, the research is to underline, analyze and assess the use of satire in both works and how far each writer has come to his aims by means of it.

The conclusion at the end of the paper sums up each writer's use of satire. The results of the comparisons, analysis and assessment of the two novels show that the writers varied in their use of satire. J. D. Salinger tends to satirize all around him. As for Kingsley Amis, he satirizes the academics who betray and the milieu and motivations leading to make them as such.

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Introduction

The intent in this study is to consider the use of satire, to which end it is directed and how far it is working in two campus novels on a synchronic basis. The featured novels are J. D. Salinger's *The Catcher In The Rye* (1951) and Kingsley Amis's *Lucky Jim* (1954).

The significance of this synchronic-comparative study (comparative here is not in the mainstream influence-influenced sense) is to closely examine the use of satire, weigh its active tools in each one's context and to identify the satirized.

First of all, satire should be defined in order to set out properly. Considering satire, we can see that there is a wide range of definitions that vary in approaching it. Some critics see that it is "a preeminent form of humour." (1) Others suggest that, upon its principal function, satire is a vehicle to attack "the hypocrisy and corruption of those in power." (2)

While others argue that "it employs a Menippean cynicism to attack systems of reasoning and their social effects." (3) Towards a broader definition, some critics insist that "satire is a genre of literature whose goal is not only to point out a social vice but to make it clear that this vice is intolerable." (4) Yet, a comprehensive definition of satire is found in Yearling's. She explains that "Satire might be genial or harsh, tolerant or punitive, aimed at general social abuses or at the vices of specific individuals. It might aim to expose, to reform, to enlighten, or merely to amuse." (5)

In respect to academic novels, some critics hold that, in the academic novels "the authors provide interpretations that identify satire as a timely and effective genre for critically commenting on the state of academia because it reveals ethical dimensions that engage an ironic voice to negotiate issues of culture and identity." (6)

Out of the variety of definitions aforementioned we can sum up a simple and working unified definition of satire saying that it is a humorous language (humor includes all: irony, sarcasm, insult, etc....) whose major objective is to expose something criticizable for reform or other aims.

Secondly, the characteristics that bring the two novels to a common ground and make them apt to be considered should be summarized in order to enable a sound comparison the ultimate goal of which is to assess each writer's knots of strength and each's Achilles' heels. The main points that the two novels share are that they are of the campus or academic novel genre according to the definition provided by literary terms dictionaries which define campus novel as "a genre of a novel, usually comic or satiric, in which the action is set within the enclosed world of university (or similar seat of learning) and highlights the follies of academic life." (7) Other commons are synchronism, subject matter as well as satire. Besides, the main difference joints the two novels have are style, setting and other things.

It is essential to follow each novel's line of story in a certain selective way in order to substantiate for our discussion. This is only useful in identifying the elements the writer wants to satirize. In this way, the elements we are to select are characters and places along with their representations.

Tackling them chronologically, *The Catcher in the Rye* is the start. We put characters in the beginning because in this novel characterization interrelates and serves satire. It presents Holden Caulfield's story. He is a preparatory academy student who was flunked because of the poor results he got, and his reluctant journey back home.

It is evident that through Holden Caulfield, Salinger presents a 'projector' character that highlights all and sundry and that this 'all and sundry' is meant to be slammed. In terms of characters, Caulfield slams everyone around. To begin with, his roommates are all defected, according to him. One of them is wearing glasses; one with halitosis; one cheating on him by dating his protégée. Not to stop at this, he usually recalls the other ones with their defects like the one he recalls in the train as the woman next to him asked him about her son who studies in the same academy, Pencey. He describes the boy to the reader, not to his mother as follows: "Her son was doubtless the biggest bastard that ever went to Pencey, in the whole crumby history of the school." (8) Also, Caulfield recalls Dick Slagle, a roommate at Elkton Hills, describing him as "that had these very inexpensive suitcases." (9) The reason why he

criticizes Slagle is that: "I hate it when somebody has cheap suitcases." At last, he was forced to hide his suitcases under the bed "so that old Slagle wouldn't get a goddam inferiority complex about it."

Moving on to see about Caulfield's teachers we see only two of them. His teacher for history, Old Spencer, whom he respects much, and his English language teacher, Mr. Antolini. Caulfield criticizes everything about the history teacher; his way of living; the odours in his house; his blaming; and even 'when he chucks the (Caulfield's) test paper.' He tells us that he "just couldn't hang around there (at the teacher's house)." He continues saying that firstly, "we were on opposite sides of the pole," secondly, "the way he kept missing the bed whenever he chucked something at it," then thirdly, "his sad old bathrobe with his chest showing," and fourth, "that grippey smell of Vicks' Nose Drops all over the place." (10)

As for the English teacher, Mr. Antolini who is the only and the last hope for Caulfield in a world that is defected and incorrigible, he proves to be the worst. We see that Caulfield saves him for the last turn in the game and we also know from Caulfield that Mr. Antolini welcomes Caulfield home and lets him sleep at the couch. To his shock, he awakens horrified before dawn to find Mr. Antolini patting his hair in a way he considers 'flitty.' He relates: "I woke up. I felt something on my head, some guy's hand..... it was Mr. Antolini's hand..... 'What the hellyya doing?' I said. Nothing! I'm simply sitting here, admiring -' I know more damn perverts..... and they're always being pervery when *I'm* around."(11) He categorizes his teacher as 'pervery,' a characteristic that fits in to the big criticizable picture he formulates in his mind. Then he sets out silently to roam the streets early in the morning.

Moreover, as one examines Caulfield's dealing with the others, one sees that the same defect-pluck inclination is repeated with almost everyone that comes in his range. After he gets to New York, for instance, he checks in the Edmont hotel where he spends the evening dancing with one of three tourists in the lounge of the hotel. But he feels dejected as to his inability to converse ordinarily with them and so he leaves to show up in a nightclub where he meets a prostitute. He takes her to his room. Just then, he changes his mind about her and tells her that he

wants just to talk. She gets upset and leaves angrily, though he pays her as agreed upon. Unfortunately for Caulfield, the prostitute showed back again but with her pimp who bully and punch Caulfield letting the prostitute to take his money from the wallet. The importance of this last incident is that it shows how, even for those whom are supposed to give fun and entertainment, they turn, in his eyes, the other way around. Caulfield reveals: "... the truth... *she* (the prostitute) was depressing." (12) The girl he described earlier as "blonde..... Suave as hell." (13)

Another instance of the imbalanced dealing can be seen when Caulfield hires a taxicab. He tries to find composure and common ground by striking a conversation with the taxi driver. He asks the driver where do the ducks of the lake go when it freezes in winter, a question the driver deems silly and he finds himself embarrassed so he debarked the taxi.

Even for the other people who chance to come next to Caulfield, those who are not friends nor acquaintances and have absolutely nothing to do with him, they are herds of stupid people. One instance of this kind can be seen in the play's scene. When Caulfield goes to the play with his old acquaintance, Sally. They take a minute of relax in the break in the middle of the play. He satirizes the audience as follows:

"At the end of the first act we went out with all the other jerks for a cigarette. What a deal that was. You never saw so many phonies in all your life, everybody smoking their ears off and talking about the play so that everybody could hear and know how sharp they were."(14)

Not only that, in another instance, she classifies the people of New York into either the 'perverts,' 'morons,' and 'screwballs.' He whispers: "Which is really ironic. I didn't know then that the goddam hotel was full of perverts and morons. Screwballs all over the place." (15)

The only two types of people Caulfield seems to communicate properly with are the nuns he meets in the street and donates some money for thereupon. He tells us his last impression about them. He admits: "I said I'd enjoyed talking to them a lot, too. I meant it, too." (16)

Likewise his sister, Phoebe. Going short of money and feeling nostalgia for his family, he sneaks into his family's house. Being the only person he can communicate with, Caulfield shares with Phoebe a thought that turns in his mind. It is evoked by a song he overhears a little boy singing in the street. The thought is that he should be the guardian for the young guys. He articulates his wish:

"I have to catch everybody if they start to go over the cliff - I mean if they're running and they don't look where they're going I have to come out from somewhere and catch them. That's all I'd do all day. I'd just be the catcher in the rye and all." (17)

He imagined life as a field of rye and his duty is to catch the children walking in it aimlessly, as they come near the brink, thus, preventing their downfall.

We evidently can see that the above-mentioned examples are all to do with characterization and how it serves satire. Also, it should be stated that the second and the most important element that serves satire and achieves a more effectiveness is style. Style plays a major role in this novel. It relies heavily on slang and the colloquial. The choice of slang and the colloquial as medium is a successful one by Salinger. Street language is used for the advantage it allows, i. e. conveying insults, curses and other bad language like (Wuddayacallit, wudga say, goddam, Chrissake, helluva, sonuvabitch, shoot the old bull).

As for *Lucky Jim*, which is deemed a pioneering novel in the campus novel genre, (18) we can see a more, one may say, limited, standardized use of satire. To begin with, we do the same thing as we did with the first novel by having a look at characterization. Unlike Salinger, Amis is selective about the categories of people and things he wishes to satirize and the way he does so.

First, he presents to us the character of James (Jim) Dixon, a debutante university professor who aspires to establish himself by having his bond renewed with the university. He is presented to us in a moderate way... "Dixon ... fair and round-faced, with an unusual breadth of shoulder that had never been accompanied by any special physical

strength or skill." (19) Dixon is made to symbolize inexperience in the novel all against experienced people around him for contrasting.

In the same way, there is no doubt that Amis has clear limited objectives to achieve by means of choosing, firstly the milieu, and secondly the situations harnessed. They are satire targets. Choosing the academy as a background is certainly not a randomly generated idea, and the situations as well. Back to the definition of satire presented by Bosco on the use of academic milieu as a subject matter for satire, we can see that the emphasis is laid on the 'ethical dimensions' revealed in the way of satirizing. He explains that the importance of these is that they envelope a voice of irony that expresses cultural and identity matters. Dixon is enmeshed in the tangle of his own romantic view of the way things are in the academia. His lack of experience is contrasted with the intrigues around him the which his naivety overcomes. To put it simple, the 'ironic voice' Bosco indicated earlier is an important point that we have to look at carefully. It can best be exemplified in the maxim of the difference between appearance and reality.

It is worthwhile to note that the novel narrative is built on a chain of situations that are not what they appear. An instance of this maxim, through a series of rackets, can be seen in the scene when Dixon, per chance reads the title of the article he already had presented to an editor in the academy to pass it for his bond renewal in an Italian journal. He discovers that the editor had translated the article into Italian and passed it for himself. Amis relates Dixon's story:

"Wandering alone in Goldsmith's office, his eye was caught by a title in the journal on his desk. he'd never learnt any Italian, but the name at the head of this article, L. S. Caton, presented no difficulty, nor, after a minute or two, did the general drift of the text, which was concerned with shipbuilding techniques in Western Europe in the later fifteenth century and their influence on something or

other. There could be no doubt about it; this article was either a close paraphrase or a translation of Dixon's own original article. At a loss for faces, he drew in his breath to swear, then cackled hysterically instead. So that was how people got chairs, was it? Chairs of that sort, anyway. Oh well, it didn't matter now. But what a cunning old ..." (20)

This is obviously one of the rackets and betrayals that the others around him orchestrate for him.

The same kind of betrayal -as Dixon names it- perpetrated by academics is illustrated and criticized in *Lucky Jim*. Dixon, whom is presented in the novel as a representative of 'innocence,' discovers at last that he is betrayed. Amis describes the moment when Dixon comes to know this fact. He narrates:

"There was nobody there. Dixon advanced to the desk, where a lot of insurance policies lie. He pondered for a moment; had he done anything to deserve Johns's two betrayals?" (21)

Surveying the story, we can shortlist the racket situations. First, Dixon is betrayed by Margaret, a colleague of his, who plays his girlfriend appealing to his sense of pity to compensate her last failure affair. Then, there is Bertrand, Welch's, the head of the department's son, who uses his girlfriend, Christine to reach her wealthy Scotch uncle to get a job with him. Margaret's betrayal was co-discovered by Dixon and her earlier boyfriend, Catchpole. Dixon was freed from that commitment. As for Bertrand, who was an obstacle in his way, that Dixon began to like Christine, Christine broke up with him as she discovered his relationship with the wife of one of Dixon's colleagues.

Since that critics unanimously agree that campus or academic novels share the interest of satirizing, then, what is the reason that makes them liable to satire? A good explication is presented by Padhi:

"All the campus novels, as the definitions require, have a university or a similar place of academics as its setting or background and consist of academics as principal characters. Most of the campus novels are critical of one or the other aspects of life and are usually comical or satirical. Satirical elements creep into the academic novels since the authors both consciously or unconsciously break the traditional idealistic notions of academicians and try to portray the insider's real experiences. They try to reflect the reality of the academic world and in this endeavour, the follies and foibles of the academic life get highlighted. Through ironic and satiric kinds of portrayals, the writers try to show that there is little hope for education. Education has become more and more business-like and materialistic desires have engulfed the minds of the academics." (22)

It is definitely true that education in the last decades has become a business and being so activates the win-lose competitiveness with what it incurs and thus, puts some ethical issues at test, a thing that makes them targets for satire.

Conclusion

To sum it up, satire prevails throughout the texture of *The Catcher in the Rye*. It seems that Salinger activates his 'projector' character, Caulfield to satirize all. Obviously, Caulfield's code of identifying people and things is characterized by blackish satiric bearing that prevails everything around him. In short, Salinger, through Caulfield satirizes all.

It is important not miss the unconscious pain that Caulfield experiences. It can be seen in the wish he expresses, i. e. to be the catcher in the rye. A boy himself, he sees that the youth need more attendance. It is, of course, the elderly's responsibility. His view extends to the 'ducks of the lake,' being weak. He kept thinking of and asking about them, and where do they go the lake freezes.

As for Amis, his selection of the academy, as setting, and the academics working in that academy, as subjects to be satirized, proves a leisurely consideration. Dixon criticizes only some of those who work with him and the academy, as an institution that produces those people, through a competitiveness that lacks in ethics.

Notes

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