

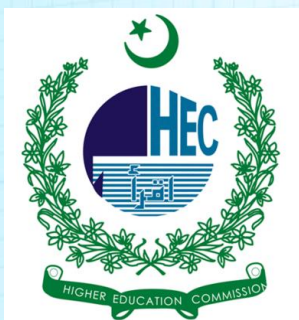
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**TRIVIAL PURSUITS AND EXPLOSIVE POLITICS: A READER
RESPONSE ANALYSIS OF THE TITLES THE RAPE OF THE LOCK
AND A CASE OF EXPLODING MANGOES**



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Abstract

Abstract:

Literary texts always have a margin to provide new dimensions, and Reader Response Criticism is one of the many ways to do this. Alexander Pope and Muhammad Hanif, both from different periods, produced such works that can be compared to make new interpretations. One of these aspects is a comparison between the titles of their works. Even after almost three centuries, the works of the Pope are still recognized and celebrated. His writing style in presenting characters and themes in his works are relatable to the contemporary themes and characters produced by writers such as Hanif. Both the titles of the works are aptly suitable for critiquing the aristocratic society and the explosive nature of politics. The rape of the lock is magnified, while Zainab's rape case in the novel is considered trivial. A fight is initiated on the cutting off of a lock, but the actions do not work when a blind girl is being gang raped. Rather, she is sentenced to stoning. Some readers from GoodReads find the titles of these works absurd, but several reviews and responses show an immediate positive response. The juxtapositions, humor, satire, and irony are some of the stylistic and literary devices that the writers implied in their works to bring excitement and comic effect to the works. Thus, this study is significant in relating the style and themes of the works of one writer with others and exploring the universal resonance.

Keywords: Reader Response, Trivialization, Politics, Explosive Power, Title Analysis

Introduction:

Any piece of literary text has as many perceptions and interpretations as there are interpreters or readers. Collecting personal responses to any text adds layers of different meanings to them. Reader Response Criticism has its roots in Germany and the United States in the 1960s. It was first introduced by an American academic and critic, Louise Rosenblatt, in 1938. He describes reading as a two-way process involving the readers and the text under specific times and circumstances. He uses the word transaction to emphasize both the text and the reader. Other scholars like Wolfgang Iser and N. J. Karolides also underline the participation of readers in filling the gaps and providing the text with their understanding. They even claim that the text can only come into existence with its reader. The text comes into existence due to the meaning given by its reader. Iser provides the notion of implied reader that includes the responses of a reader before reading and his reactions after finishing the reading. The reader briefs about the expectations he had in mind before reading and the conclusions he drew after reading the work through history, culture, and other situations.

In the present research, the researcher has taken the titles of two literary works to provide different responses to them. The first includes an epic mock poem, *The Rape of the Lock*, by Alexander Pope, and the second is Muhammad Hanif's novel *A Case of Exploding Mangoes*. The poem, originally published in 1712, still can welcome different interpretations. Hanif's novel was originally published in 2008. The gap between the two works is almost two hundred ninety-six years or nearly three centuries. It is interesting to note the differences and similarities between the two writers and compare their works. A comparative analysis has been drawn to provide different responses on the titles. Both Pope and Hanif titled their works most appropriately. The initial response does not record the seriousness behind the titles, but after reading the whole literary work, readers record the serious themes behind the

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artistic style. The authors have skillfully used different stylistic devices like irony, satire, and humor in their titles. The titles are justified through the themes and different characters in these two literary works. The titles also catch readers' attention from different classes with different tastes, but every reader has their own perception and interpretation.

Research Questions:

The present research has the following problems to address:

1. How do readers respond to the critique of society's concern for trivial matters and the explosive nature of politics through *The Rape of the Lock* and *A Case of Exploding Mangoes*?
2. What comparisons can be drawn to interpret the titles of *The Rape of the Lock* and *A Case of Exploding Mangoes*?

Research Objectives:

The research has the following aims and objectives:

- 1) It aims to respond to the critique presented by Pope and Hanif in their works.
- 2) It seeks to draw stylistic comparisons by interpreting the titles of the two mentioned works.

Significance:

The present research highlights and signifies the relationship between literary work or text and the reader. It helps the reader in creating different interpretations and meanings. It also helps to add diverse perspectives to a piece of writing. The reader's subjective approach in analyzing the writer's style in criticizing and hinting towards different issues provides examination and exploration to understand background, cultural, political, and social conditions. The author's intentions, relevant themes, and other stylistic devices can also be analyzed by studying titles. This study's findings should aid in advancing the Reader Response approach. It may also guide later researchers who wish to study the same topic and object.

Literature Review:

A literature review helps researchers to justify the proposed studies and to convey the knowledge and ideas established on a topic. In this part of the research, the researcher has provided the stance on the Reader Response Criticism and the titles of different works. Researchers choose this framework to show readers' interest and eagerness to read a literary work. It is, therefore, based on the responses of readers. Alexander Pope, born in 1688, was an English poet, translator, satirist, and wit during the Age of Restoration. His opponents used to call and mock him a "hump-backed toad" due to his physical appearance, but his production of different masterpieces in English literature was a slap to them. His mastery of wit, satire, and humor reflects his literary triumph. It is thus that his works still receive appreciation and recognition. Apart from *The Rape of the Lock*, his works also include *Ode to Solitude*, *The Dunciad*, *Moral Essays*, *An Essay on Criticism*, and many others. Muhammad Hanif is a Pakistani-born British writer. He is known for his journalism and screenplays as well. He has received awards like the Corine Literature Prize and Commonwealth Writer's Prize. His acclaimed works include *A Case of Exploding Mangoes*, *Our Lady of Alice Bhatti*, and *Red Birds*.

Pope and Hanif are masters in presenting an accurate picture of society or essential issues. Pope's epic poem highlights the trivial pursuits of the aristocratic class in London in the eighteenth century. He has presented his critique so subtly that the reader finds himself both in awe and inspired. Similarly, Hanif has also pictured the political figure by comically wrapping the story. They titled their works to inspire and attract readers towards them and highlight human beings' gross living standards.

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Scholars explore history and interpret how the authors use their experiences and make them a part of their literary work by blending history, fiction, and reality.

Jeremiah Adam (2009) presented his research titled *A Comparative Reader-Response Analysis Between The Stranger And Crime And Punishment*. Jeremiah (2009) analyzed by comparing and contrasting Albert Camus' *The Stranger* with Fyodor Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment* from the viewpoint of a convict serving a 38-year sentence in the Illinois Department of Corrections. Jeremiah assessed that Camus failed to allow the main character, Meursault, to explore the idea of an absurd man. On the other hand, Dostoevsky's story creates a sense of consciousness in Raskolnikov through the realistic descriptions and incomplete ideas that readers carry with them after reading.

Unggul Widodo (2015) also researched *Between Fact and Fiction in Dan Brown's The Vinci Code: Reader Response Analysis*. The researcher used different reader response strategies to raise dominant issues in Brown's work and explore the reasons behind the issues raised. One of the most critical issues raised includes presenting facts and blending them with fiction in the story. Experiential Reader-Response Strategy, Psychological Reader-Response Strategy, Social Reader-Response Strategy, and Cultural Reader-Response Strategy are used by the researcher to fulfill the aims and objectives of the research.

Reader Response to Racism Harper Lee's Novel: To Kill a Mocking Bird is another work conducted by Nugraheni Fitrisari in 2016. The researcher uses Louise Rosenblatt's approach to Reader Response. She records different responses on Racism from the GoodReads website. The idea is basically to explore the interpretations of other readers and their perspectives on the issue of Racism presented by Lee. The researcher concludes with four aspects. Firstly, a total of eighteen responses are recorded on Racism at GoodReads. The second concerns the readers' backgrounds from different countries, ages, religions, and genders. Thirdly, the issue of Racism indirectly promotes more Racism. Finally, this issue of Racism is present at the very onset of the novel. Therefore, readers find it immediately and record their perspectives on the issue.

Sayı et al. (2018) assert that all texts have meanings in their proposed work *Meaning in the Text: Reader Response Theory of Criticism*. Most theories like Formalism, Structuralism, and New-Criticism address the problems of definitions and their understandings in a literary text. Bakhtir (2018) suggests that meaning in a particular text results from interaction among readers, texts, and authors. Although the reader takes a central stage in providing meaning to a text, the meaning will not be appropriate unless the reader is unaware of the literary movements, history, context, and other relevant information about the text. Thus, the meaning of the text is not solely based on individual interpretation. Rather, historical context linguistics and formal differences also play an important role in this phenomenon.

Hammond (2009) examines the interpretation and responses of twelfth-grade students to a graphic novel in his study *Graphic Novels and Multimodal Literacy: A Reader Response Study*. A total of twenty-three students read *American Born Chinese* twice. The study used qualitative approaches based on reader response theory. Data obtained from students includes oral and written responses, reading questionnaires, interviews between teacher and student, observational data, and student-created comics. This study suggests that including comic conventions and graphic novels in the curriculum might enhance multi-modal literacy abilities.

Mengal (2023) analyzed the work *The Case of Exploding Mangoes* by interpreting the text through the lens of New Historicism. She explores the social,

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political, economic, and cultural context of the novel. He artistically fuses wit, humor, and satire with historical incidents in the novel. Mengal (2023) praises Hanif's efficiency in shaping the text's cultural framework and enhancing its interpretation. The text's presentation of historical events provides readers with a clear context. Reading a work in its social and historical context enables readers to reflect on and assess past events. The research uses instances from the novel, including Zia's account of Bhutto's death, to demonstrate how reading the past requires reinterpreting the past.

Crehan (1977) presents the economy of trivial things in the poem *The Rape of the Lock*. The researcher explores the discursive remnants of political economy in *The Rape of the Lock*, highlighting not just themes but also characteristics of the poem's literary economy during a time when poetics and political economy shared many rhetorical and stylistic strategies. He labels the epic as an imperialist poem due to Marx's notion of commodity fetishism. In the poem, things are presented as heroes rather than human beings, or in other words, human beings are considered objects. It is argued that when relationships between people transform into relationships between objects, humans lose the ability to make conscious moral decisions. The political economy has brought a significant change in human relations. This is not only due to the social masks that humans use. Instead, the new economic and social order has changed the relationships.

The titles of the two works mentioned are analyzed in the present research. Various stylistic comparisons are drawn to compare the writing style and different techniques. The research collects responses to the critique of societal concerns among individuals. The central idea is to highlight that major issues like power and political corruption are being neglected by a society whose concern is about trivial matters.

Research Methodology:

The research is qualitative and descriptive in analyzing the content of the selected topic. The study deals with *Trivial Pursuits and Explosive Politics: A Reader Response Analysis of the Titles, The Rape of the Lock, and A Case of Exploding Mangoes*. The researcher uses the Reader Response theory as the present research framework. The data used in the research consists of two forms. The primary data has been taken from the epic poem *The Rape of the Lock* and the novel *A Case of Exploding Mangoes*. The secondary data comprises responses from websites, articles, magazines, and journals. These sources helped the researcher authenticate the present research and connect it with previous works. All the sources have been cited in the references section. It is formatted according to APA format.

Data Analysis:

The current research seeks to analyze and compare the titles of two different works of two other genres written over a gap of almost three centuries. The titles of the works include *The Rape of the Lock* and *A Case of Exploding Mangoes*. The research used Reader Response Criticism as a theoretical framework to record data and observations. Pope's epic poem concerns the protagonist belonging to the aristocratic class, Belinda. The tale revolves around the lock of her hair cut by her suitor, Baron. Belinda makes a mountain of molehill and dramatizes it in a way that makes it a matter of life and death. Although she had been warned before about the impending danger, she did not take the warning seriously. Baron found the opportunity at a party and immediately cut off the lock from her hair. The overly dramatic response resulted in combat between the sexes, with Belinda valiantly striving to retrieve the lock. Ultimately, the lock of hair was lost. The poem humorously critiques the preference for trivial matters against serious issues.

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Hanif's tale revolves around Ali Shigri, a subordinate officer in the Pakistan Air Force who seeks revenge for his father's strange murder, which is thought to have been arranged by Zia's dictatorship. Ali sets up a plan to kill General Zia. The story also presents conspiracies, political maneuvering, injustice, power corruption, and the fate of a blind lady sentenced to death. Ultimately, the novel offers a critical reflection on the absurdity and corruption of authoritarian leadership. The narrative concludes with the mysterious and symbolic plane accident, with several ideas, including sabotage with a scheme of exploding mangoes.

This section of data analysis consists of two parts. The first part addresses the question of critique explored through different responses from the readers. The second part compares the author's writing style to interpret the titles. The second part, therefore, provides dimensions to answer the proposed problem in the research. Richard Beach (1993) offers different strategies for Reader-Response Criticism, including the textual reader-response strategy. The present study also involves the text and other responses to it.

In addressing the first question of this research, the researcher has collected different responses in the form of comments. The responses are taken from different websites, especially Good Reads. A literary text has uncountable readers, and their interpretations also vary. It is only due to readers that centuries-old works are still considered gems to read in the contemporary period as well. It is also because of the relevant issues that were the same in producing works in the old period. *The Rape of the Lock* is all about the critique of the trivial pursuits and trivial concerns of people living in a society. On the other hand, *A Case of Exploding Mangoes* is a critique of the explosive nature of politics and aristocracy. The readers, through the years, from the first day of the publication of these works, have different perspectives and ideas related to them.

GoodReads author Sreena (2023) provides the idea through her response that it is not only a critique in which society shows concern for trivial pursuits. Rather, it is also a critique of society aiming to pressure women. In this regard, Sreena has deconstructed the idea of trivial matters. He is much more concerned about the gender roles in the poem. Society demands beauty as well as submission from women. Women conform to beauty to keep themselves with society. It is not Belinda who is obsessed with her hair and its loss. Instead, it is the obsession provided by society. She (2023) asserts that it is a humorous critique of gender stereotypes and societal expectations for women. Pope's portrayal of Belinda's battle to protect her hair reveals the cultural pressure on women to meet beauty standards.

The writers often reflect the universal themes, ideas, characters, and symbols in their works. Pope's poem is also another example of presenting universal themes. It is human nature to transform or escalate petty concerns into serious conflicts, which in turn ruins the personal and social interaction among individuals living in a society. Thus, the idea of trivial pursuits can also be explored in the novel *A Case of Exploding Mangoes* by Hanif. Throughout the book, General Zia's actions revolve around trivial concerns. His diligent reading of newspapers to monitor his public perception, performing political ceremonies for the sake of show-off, and his extensive measures for personal safety raise questions about his duties and responsibilities. Hanif narrates the story by presenting Zia, monitoring signs of criticism and his value in the eyes of the media and the public instead of reforming and implementing policies to address public issues. The ceremonies he conducted to save his falling reign also show his trivial pursuits, as he is concerned about his reign and power. Still, in reality, these ceremonies were just hollow. Hanif (2011) asserts

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that the heads of the nation, especially the presidents, do not have time to sit back and relax and look at their imaginative accomplishments, which are reported by the media. However, General Zia ordered another cup of coffee to amuse himself with how the Pakistan Times presented him. The editor so much inspired him that he called the Information Minister to put The Pakistan Times editor up for a national literary prize.

Further, according to officials, the news editors were given additional money to promote the news, as in the case of a political ceremony announced for widows. It is said that the President mingled with the widows, and their courage brought tears to his eyes. Thirdly, he did not want to die and took preventive measures. It is ironic, as well as being a military official that he should not be afraid of death, but it is his hypocrisy and sins that want him to save himself from death as long as possible.

Politics and political leaders should bring reform, but politicians and government officials mostly manipulate their power through politics. In the novel, Hanif presents the explosive side of politics and the corrupt use of political power. Zia-ul-Haq's regime is questioned for its authoritarian rule. He used his power to suppress the weak, make unjust decisions, and repressive actions like torture and imprisonment. The word Rape in the context of the discussion of the two works is significant to analyze. In the poem *The Rape of the Lock*, just a single lock of hair was cut off. The characters made a huge fuss about it. Cutting or stealing a strand of hair is a trivial matter. As Pope introduces his poem, "What mighty contests rise from trivial things... (Pope, 1712)" In the case of Hanif's novel, he introduces Zainab, a blind girl who was gang raped. Zia's regime sentenced her to stoning instead of providing her justice. This alludes to the actual incident during Zia's regime where Safia Bibi was being raped, but according to Hudood Ordinance, she had to provide witnesses. Therese (2018) reviews the novel on GoodReads. He praises Hanif's act of mocking the idiocy of the Hudood Ordinance that considers the victim as the guilty and the rapists as innocent. It is highly ironic that even though any proof of virginity would have been destroyed in an act of gang rape, the woman will have to prove that she was a virgin before this horrible crime was committed when she was unmarried (Therese, 2018). 18th-century aristocratic society considered the cutting of locks as rape and initiated combat between sexes just to get that strand of hair back from Baron. In the 20th century, political aristocrats sentenced stoning a blind woman who was innocent just to secure their fool laws and maintain their power politics. Thus, it is a dilemma for our society to consider trivial things as severe and trivial things. Writers present this notion of rape and their ideas in poems and in novels to mock the follies of society and politicians and to critique the aristocratic and political pursuits.

The second part of the data analysis addresses the second proposed question: the stylistic comparison of authors giving titles to their works. Titles possess a very significant position in literary criticism. Critics, scholars, writers, poets, and academics consider titles the most exciting and crucial task. Half of their literary success is usually the result of their mastery in giving the most suitable and apt titles to their works. Titles not only draw readers' attention towards them, but they also set the tone and mood of the work. They also reflect the main ideas, themes, or issues the writers want to reveal in their work. "The literary work often possesses its title essentially in that it could not be the same literary work without it... it often possesses many of its essential aesthetic properties that must necessarily be perceived if it is to be "appreciated" -as titles reveal them. (Wilshire, 1987)"

The chosen works in this research can only be appreciated by paying heed to their titles. The Reader Response framework in this research has provided aid in collecting the perspectives of different readers belonging to different ages, races,

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sexes, and regions. For Saveliy (2018), the title of the poem is gross before reading the poem. "I envisioned that it would be a gross romanication about actual rape where 'lock' is a euphemism based on the interpretation of the title. Judging it by its title was inaccurate because I was pleasantly surprised in the third canto. It is about a guy cutting off a woman's hair. The title 'Rape' refers to the dramatization." The title includes hyperbole, exaggeration, dramatic technique, and the essentials like mockery, satire, and irony.

On the other hand, apart from appreciation, some readers find the title of the poem absurd. Liz Oliver (2021) reviews the title of the poem on GoodReads, asserting the inability to get past the connotations of the title. She still wonders if Pope's choice of title was intended to satirize and mock her physical beauty rather than critique the rape victims, as the title suggested. She felt uncomfortable reading this through the feminist lens. The comedy focused on the woman's excessive reaction rather than the creepy fellow, which is why he would scheme to cut off this woman's hair without consent.

The title of the novel suggests an intrigue and imagery. The mangoes in the title add flavor to the explosion that is dramatic and sudden. The use of case adds an element of mystery and investigative tone that is the heart of the tale presented by Hanif. The title wraps the political intrigue, comedy humor, and cultural insights in a way that captures the essence of the story. During Zia-ul-Haq's rule in Pakistan, politics became explosively controversial and violent as he enacted harsh Islamization measures and exercised autocratic power. His dictatorship used censorship, arrests, and torture to silence opposition, eroding political liberties and democratic institutions. The causes describe an unstable period in Pakistani history in which authoritarianism, religious dogma, and military power collided to produce a volatile, explosive, and combustible political environment. Shehroz (2016) considers the title's significance in bringing the authentic details of the work. It indeed reveals us the insides of agencies and their stories, which were difficult to dismiss or even believe in. It is a factual tale filled with thrill, mystery, humor, politics, and conspiracies. The title pulls the reader in and enhances the whole reading experience with a delightful sense of humor and layers of wit.

Another aspect of the title, *A Case of Exploding Mangoes*, is relevant to the theme of trivialization proposed by Pope, which can be considered a universal theme. Hanif's conspiracy regarding the death of Zia involving Mangoes shows how trivial things can cause sudden death. Zia was so alert that he imposed the Red Code, but still, in the end, it was mangoes that caused the explosion. "The mangoes are not just seasonal fruits; they are tokens of our love and a sign of our devotion" (Hanif, 2011). These mangoes were a sign of hatred towards General Zia from the community of Farmers of Pakistan. Thus, the trivial plays a significant role in any aspect. The lock of hair can transform into a mock epic, and the mangoes can expose and cause unexpected turns in the lives of politicians. Both titles use irony to convey literal and metaphorical meanings. Pope exaggeratedly entitled his poem by giving significance to a minor incident. On the other hand, Hanif utilizes an odd incident to reflect on the unpredictability and absurdity of political power in his novel's title.

In a nutshell, the researcher has compared and recorded different responses related to *The Rape of the Lock* and *A Case of Exploding Mangoes*. Their comparisons are drawn concerning their titles and the themes presented by the writers in their corresponding works. The magnification of triviality and the explosive and corrupt nature of politics are analyzed. Readers respond to different works, and the scholars record their interpretations, ideas, and perceptions. It is concluded that the writing

style of writers and poets and the themes they presented in their works resonate with the works of other writers as well. The way the writers entitled their works reflects the tone of the works and draws readers towards them.

Findings and conclusion:

In the present research work, the researcher has used the lens of Reader Response Criticism to analyze and compare the two mentioned works. Different responses from readers belonging to different regions, sex, age, and discipline are collected. The Textual Reader Response Strategy is used by the researcher. The texts are taken, and different responses are collected. The responses are mostly taken from the GoodReads website. This approach of criticism is significant in providing the work with new directions. Apart from writers, the readers play the most crucial role in making the work a milestone.

The two works have been analyzed through their titles. In any piece of writing, the first thing necessary for making a work recognized among the readers is the title. The initial impression, the tone, and mostly the core themes are fabricated and fused in the titles. The title of the poem, *The Rape of the Lock*, gives the initial feeling of something drastic and horrific in the poem, but the thorough reading makes the readers know about the mockery that Pope has reflected in his work. Pope's title's hidden themes also show its relevance to contemporary society. People give significance to trivial things in society, neglecting severe issues. Hanif's novel *A Case of Exploding Mangoes* immediately captures the attention of readers through the title. It is a comic tale reflecting the most serious concern and unveiling the explosive nature of politics and how trivial and sweet things can cause the downfall of entire rule and politics. Thus, the titles and the themes in the two concerned works signify the writer's artistic skills and efficiency in writing and depicting the most relatable issues in their works. They have used humor, irony, and satire to address various issues by giving them a comic touch.

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