

SATIRE

“The best satire does not seek to do harm or damage by its ridicule...but rather it seeks to create a shock of recognition and to make vice repulsive so that the vice will be expunged from the person or society under attack or from the person or society intended to benefit by the attack... Whenever possible this shock of recognition is to be conveyed through laughter or wit: the formula for satire is one of honey and medicine. Far from being simply destructive, satire is implicitly constructive, and the satirists...often depict themselves as such constructive critics.

"Since social pressure seems to be one of the few forces to which fools and knaves will bow, the satirist can more effectively operate by enlisting the readers of the satire to aid him in bringing behavior back in line with publicized values. The satirist by himself is virtually impotent to change the vicious behavior of any particular target, for the satirist as himself is just another small, opinionated prude, and is easily dismissed by any remark that might pass for wit. The target must correct himself when he discovers he is under attack, or he must be driven to correct his behavior when hundreds of his peers join the satirist in ridiculing him or by ostracizing him from their society...

“But social pressure cannot operate when the satire is aimed at widespread folly or vice, as when a whole country or class joins in a universal debauchery; in such cases the reader himself is the target. When the reader is addressed, he must be moved to change or correct himself by embarrassment for or shock at recognition of his guilt: his crimes must be presented in such a way that they appear truly odious to him, bringing about a willing change...

“This general satire, aimed at many, is more common and more important than specific attacks on single persons, since the satirist's ideal is the reformation or regeneration of a whole society. The general correction of vice is the primary aim because the satirist can live with a few very evil men more easily than he can with ten thousand somewhat less evil men who are pulling his world toward doom.”

Excerpt from an article by Robert Harris (Harris, Robert. “Evaluating Internet Research Sources.” Virtual Salt. 17 Nov. 1997. <http://www.virtualsalt.com/evalu8it.htm>)

TYPES OF SATIRE: Horatian or Juvenalian

Horace (b. 54 BC, d. 8 BC) followed Lucilius in using hexameters to ridicule folly and bad taste, and produced the ‘Sermones’ (30 BC), two books of discourse, conversational in style, humorous and urbane, dealing with a variety of subjects. These included incidents in the life of the poet, the follies and vices of mankind and his own poetical methods. Horace is particularly admired for his ability to “*ridentem dicere verum*” (to tell the truth with a smile), and his poems usually appear to pass gentle comment on the failings of mankind rather than dealing with these faults with malice.

Juvenal (b. 60-70 AD) published his 16 Satires in five books in the second and third decades of the 2nd century AD, during the reigns of Trajan and Hadrian. Although Juvenal claims Horace and Lucilius as his masters, his poetry has none of their gentle humor. His Satires are notable for their bitter ironical humor, power of invective, grim epigram, sympathy with the poor and narrow-minded pessimism, whist he attacks the rich and condemns the female sex. His linguistic register alternates violently between the elevated and the low.

Range of Satire Continuum

HORATIAN ----- JUVENALIAN

Gentle; Light-hearted; Intended for fun

Bitter; Angry; Attacking

ATTACK: Direct

ATTACK: Indirect

TARGET: Topical
(Short lived, Current)

TARGET: Universal
(Long lived)

Techniques of Satire

Exaggeration/Hyperbole: making a small blemish bigger or a hidden vice or folly larger in order to make it visible is one of the best ways to point out its existence to the audience or to the target itself. Some specific types of exaggeration include the outrageous suggestions and proposals which often characterize satirical pieces and the writer's exaggeration of the customary diction and syntax of an individual, an agency, a text, or a publication.

Distortion: twisting or emphasizing some aspect of a condition, individual, or event tends to highlight it. A type of distortion may include the juxtaposition of inappropriate or incongruous ideas or things.

Understatement: when the folly or evil is so great that further exaggeration is impossible, understatement shows its true extent.

Innuendo: a valuable tool for the satirist because it allows him to implicate a target by a completely indirect attack. This is especially useful when the target is dangerous, for it is often possible to deny the insinuation.

Diction: Use of silly or inherently funny words like "newt" and "nostril" can enhance satire.

Invective: a speech that criticizes someone or something fluently and at length. This technique may also be called a diatribe or rant.

Pun/ Malapropism: Any construction capable of conveying a double meaning is likely to be employed in satire, since multiple meanings form the basis of much of satire. EX: The list: something highly important or even sacred may be included in a long list of mundane and ordinary objects in order to highlight the fact that an individual, institution, or society has lost its sense of proportion.

Oxymoron used satirically makes for a pointed emphasis on some contradiction in the target's philosophy.

Parable and allegory have the same benefits as simile and metaphor, for they can conduct a prolonged discussion on two levels of meaning while at the same time inherently comparing and contrasting those levels without further comment. They also provide the author with some defense if the subject is dangerous, for the satirist can protest that he/she was writing only on the literal level. Famous examples of this technique are *Gulliver's Travels* by Jonathan Swift and *Animal Farm* by George Orwell.

Irony – the actual intent is expressed in words which carry the opposite meaning. It is lighter, less harsh in wording than sarcasm, though more cutting because of its directness. The ability to recognize irony is one of the surest tests of intelligence and sophistication. Irony speaks words of praise to imply blame and words of blame to imply praise. Writer is using a tongue-in-cheek style. Irony is achieved through such techniques as hyperbole and understatement.

- **Verbal Irony** – simply an inversion of meaning
 - **Sarcasm** – a sharply mocking or contemptuous remark. The term came from the Greek word "sarkazein" which means "to tear flesh."
- **Dramatic Irony** – when the words or acts of a character carry a meaning unperceived by himself but understood by the audience. The irony resides in the contrast between the meaning intended by the speaker and the added significance by others.
- **Socratic Irony** – Socrates pretended ignorance of a subject in order to draw knowledge out of his students by a questions and answer device. Socratic irony is feigning ignorance to achieve some advantage over an opponent.
- **Situational Irony** – Depends on a discrepancy between purpose and results. Example: a practical joke that backfires is situational irony.

Farce – exciting laughter through exaggerated, improbable situations. This usually contains low comedy: quarreling, fighting, coarse with, horseplay, noisy singing, boisterous conduct, trickery, clownishness, drunkenness, slap-stick.

Parody – a composition imitating or burlesquing another, usually serious, piece of work. Designed to ridicule in nonsensical fashion and original piece or work. Parody is in literature what the caricature and cartoon are in art.

Robert Harris says this of the techniques of satire:

“...almost all of these techniques have one element in common: each provides a way to say two or more things at one time, and to compare, equate, or contrast those things, usually with heavy irony...several techniques also provide variety, concision, and an opportunity for employing wit and humor. The essential meaning of a satire is seldom if ever consistent with a literal interpretation, yet the literal interpretation is extremely important for what it says about the essential meaning, and about the target or audience which can be reached only in an indirect way.

“Men's vices are a threat to the civilization in which the satirist lives, and the satirist feels compelled to expose those vices for the society's good and his own, in a way that will allow the ones attacked to comprehend and remember the attack, and to see a direction they may take for correction. The satire must be presented in a manner which will bring action, and in a world of complacent hypocrites, irony, with its various means of presentation, is essential; the message cannot be delivered without it, if that message is to have any tangible effect. In a two word abstract, the purpose of satire is the correction or deterrence of vice, and its method is to attack hypocrisy through the ironic contrast between values and actions.”

Vices and Follies

Vice (n): any kind of anti-social behavior from moral depravity and corruption (ex. prostitution) to a habitual and trivial defect or shortcoming (ex. nose-picking). Because it covers everything from outright wickedness to petty foibles, almost all humans suffer from some kind of vice; thus, the satirist is never at a loss for material.

Folly (n): a lack of common sense, prudence, and foresight. (ex. The folly of man is that he doesn't understand that history repeats). “Folly” and “fool” come from the same French medieval root, *fol*. The good satirist knows that everyone, even the satirist himself, in time will do something really stupid.

The Seven Deadly Sins

1. Pride/arrogance/hubris
2. Avarice (greed)
3. Wrath (anger, violence, sullenness/sulking)
4. Sloth (laziness, indolence, slovenliness, sloppiness)
5. Lust
6. Envy
7. Gluttony (excessive love of material comforts, food, drink, etc.)

Other Vices and Follies

Stupidity	Lack of self control	Vice	Prudery
Gullibility	Indecisiveness	Wastefulness	Crime
Poor decision making	Shallow flirtatiousness	Hypocrisy	Boorishness
Short-sightedness	Vanity/conceit/egoism	Careless spending	Rudeness
Narrow mindedness	Self-centeredness	Dishonesty	Gross conduct
Intolerance/prejudice	Apathy	Irresponsibility	Silliness
Pettiness	Callousness	Excess of any kind	Immaturity
Careless use of language	Selfishness	Willful ignorance	Stubbornness
	Corruption	Timidity	

In Politics and Government

Warmongering
Unnecessary taxation and spending
Nepotism/favoritism
Poor handling of crises and disasters
Misuse of power
Inappropriate or immoral conduct of leaders
Injustice
Human rights violations

In Institutions and Businesses

Inefficiency
Lack of effectiveness
Bad management
Poor workmanship
Mendacity (lying)
False advertising
Bad products
Inhumanity
Greed
Immorality
Exploitation of workers
Bad environmental impact

To analyze a satirical piece, employ the following questions:

1. What are the underlying assumptions or unwritten attitudes in the piece?
2. What foolish, flawed, or wrong human action or aspect of society is being lampooned?
3. What would the author's argument look like stripped of its humor?
4. What resources of language does the satirist use to skewer the target?
5. In what ways do these techniques disarm the intended target or sweeten the criticism to make it acceptable to its target?
6. What is the goal of the satirist? (i.e., how does the satirist wish society, the individual, the body politic, or an institution to change or amend itself?)
7. How effective are the methods of this particular satirist?

To write an analysis of a satirical piece, employ the following method:

Write an opening paragraph identifying the vice, folly, or flaw targeted by the author, naming the target of the piece, outlining the characteristics of the audience of the satire, and explaining what effect the writer hopes to bring about through his or her use of satirical techniques.

In your body paragraphs, address the specific techniques of language employed by the author to make the audience laugh (the honey) while criticizing something about an individual, an institution, or a society for the purpose of changing it for the better (the medicine).

In your conclusion, predict the probable effect of the satire on its audience and/or evaluate how effectively the author has used the techniques of satire to produce a needed change.