Satire

Satire- a literary genre which is used to ridicule or make fun of human vice or weakness- often with intent of change

2. Purpose is to entertain and persuade, hold up a mirror, modify our ways.

3. Why does a satirist write?
   - moved by personal feelings
   - hatred or scorn
   - personal inferiority or frustration
   - social injustice
   - exclusion
   - love, the complexity and freedom of genre- the humor and wit
   - likes shock value

Characteristics of satire

1. Topical- referring to its time and place

2. It has realistic elements in content and/ or style of writing although it may be distorted or exaggerated.

3. Shocking at times- could be politically incorrect, gruesome, vulgar….

4. Informal at times in tone and manner.

5. It is humorous although the humor may be dark humor painful or grotesque.

Two main tones-


2. Juvenalian- satire - misanthropic- man is evil- satirist is cynical- comedy is bitter- sardonic.

Techniques of Satire

Irony- all three

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 and anti-climax**: 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.

**Taboo subjects**

**Diction**: Use of silly or inherently funny words like “newt” and “nostril” can enhance satire. Even bawdy language- **Oscenity, slang**.

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

- “A knave, a rascal, an eater of broken meats; a base, proud, shallow, beggarly, three-suited, hundred-pound, filthy worsted-stocking knave; a lily-livered, action-taking, whoreson, glass-gazing, superserviceable, finical rogue; one-trunk-inheriting slave; one that wouldst be a bawd in way of good service, and art nothing but the composition of a knave, beggar, coward, pander, and the son and heir to a mongrel [female dog]: one whom I will beat into clamorous whining if thou deni’st the least syllable of thy addition.” (William Shakespeare, *King Lear*)
- “I see. Well, of course, this is just the sort of blinkered philistine pig-ignorance I’ve come to expect from you non-creative garbage. You sit there on your loathsome spotty behinds squeezing blackheads, not caring a tinker’s cuss for the struggling artist. You excrement, you whining hypocritical toadies with your colour TV sets and your Tony Jacklin golf clubs and your bleeding Masonic secret handshakes.” (John Cleese in Monty Python’s “Architect Sketch”)

**Pun/ Paronomasia/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. 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 and paradox and antithesis** used satirically makes for a pointed emphasis on some contradiction in the target’s philosophy.

**Parable/ parody 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.

*Sarcasm* and verbal irony are often employed as tools of satire, as well.

Robert Harris says this of the techniques of satire:

“It is perhaps by now apparent that 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. The application of the ironic method of satire uses those techniques which most easily allow the presentation of irony: the 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.”

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**Student Activity—Satire**

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

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**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**
Writing about Satire
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? AKA Target
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? Weapons or tools.
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.