

# Elements of Satire



## Definition of Satire

- Definition: a form of humor, written in poetry or prose, which makes a subject or a person appear ridiculous. Its purpose is to point out prevailing vices or follies (through humor) which should be corrected. In other words, satire combines criticism with humor in order to change that which seems wrong.
- In general, satire has two moods:
  1. **GENTLE / SYMPATHETIC** -- where the humor is mild and the author sees the problem as more foolish than evil
  2. **BITING / ANGRY** --where the ridicule is savage and the author sees the problem as urgent and severe, possibly evil
- **Tone:** attitudes toward the subject and toward the audience implied in a literary work
- **Mood:** the feeling that a literary work evokes
- The primary techniques of satire are:
  - Irony
  - Hyperbole/Exaggeration



Jonathan Swift

## Forms of Satire

- Formal Proposal: prepare a highly serious, highly rational proposal for action on this problem, but make it totally unreasonable and exaggerated.
- Mock Heroic: take the realistic problem or dispute and turn it into a highly exaggerated epic battle.
- Fantasy: the setting of the satire is an imaginary world or time. It softens the criticism by removing it from reality. The idea behind it: people are more willing to consider criticism if the finger isn't pointing directly at them.
- Praise/Blame to Excess: take something that is bad and praise it without boundary, or take something good and cut it to shreds. Either way, the reader will appreciate the irony the author intends.

## Horatian/Juvenalian Satire

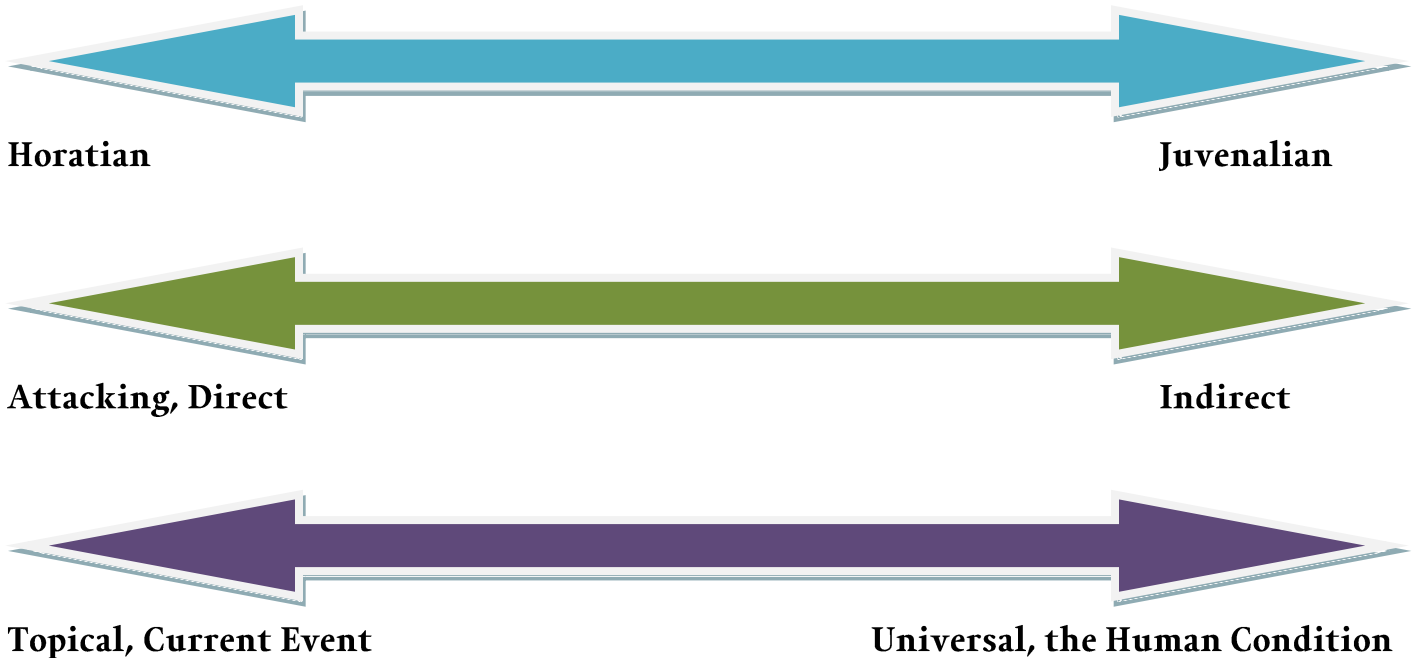
- Horatian Satire: Horatian satire is named after the poet Horace, and is characterized by a good-natured, tolerant sense of humor about human folly. It is often a general comment on the failing of mankind, and was known as "telling the truth with a smile."
- Juvenalian Satire: Juvenalian satire is named for the Roman poet Juvenal, and is characterized by biting sarcasm, bitter irony, moral indignation, pessimism, and an antagonistic tone. It emphasizes criticism more than humor.

# Elements of Satire



## Satire Continuum

Satire cannot be neatly placed in one category or another; it exists in a continuum. Some of the ways to visualize satire are listed below:



## Weapons of Satire

- a) **Invective:** violent abuse or accusation; harsh or bitter utterance. It uses wit mechanism to circumvent man's prejudice against rage.
- b) **Inversion:** to turn upside down, outside in, or inside out; to reverse, as in order to change around to the reverse order, sense, condition.
- c) **Burlesque:** literary, dramatic, or other imitation which purposely makes ridiculous that which it imitates. It usually makes a subject appear ridiculous by treating it with incongruity.
- d) **Irony:** joining of words in which the intended implication is the opposite of the literal sense of the words.
- e) **Caricature:** exaggeration of distortion of parts or features in order to produce a ridiculous effect, as in a cartoon.
- f) **Sarcasm:** bitterness or taunting reproachful; it may or may not be ironical, but it is always cutting or ill-natured.
- g) **Parody:** imitates the characteristic style of an author for comic effect or ridicule. It is imitation through distortion and exaggeration; it evokes amusement, derision, and scorn.

## Definitions and Examples

### What is Satire?

**Satire:** The use of mockery, irony, humor, and/or wit to attack or ridicule something, such as a person, habit, idea, institution, society, or custom that is, or is considered to be, foolish, flawed, or wrong. The aim of satire is, or should be, to improve human institutions and/or humanity. Satire attempts through humor and laughter to inspire individuals, institutions, and humankind to improve or to encourage its readers to put pressure on individuals and institutions so that they may be improved for the benefit of all.

“The best satire does not seek to do harm or damage by its ridicule, unless we speak of damage to the structure of vice, 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 (regardless of who is the immediate object of 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 themselves, whom I trust concerning such matters, 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 aggressed, 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 (as opposed to the forceful change of the knave).

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.” *VirtualSalt*. 17 Nov. 1997. <http://www.virtualsalt.com/evalu8it.htm>)

## 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** is 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.

**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.

### *Examples of Invective*

“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”)

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. So even the **pun** can be used satirically.

**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.

**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. “

## Vices and Follies

### *The Seven Deadly Sins*

Pride/arrogance/*hubris*

Avarice (greed)

Wrath (anger, violence, sullenness/sulking)

Sloth (laziness, indolence, slovenliness, sloppiness)

Lust

Envy

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

### *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

## EXAMPLE ONE ~

### HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS DEMAND WARS IN EASIER-TO-FIND COUNTRIES

"How Come No One Fights in Big Famous Nations Anymore?" They Ask

**Washington, D.C. (SatireWire.com)** — A delegation of American high school students today demanded the United States stop waging war in obscure nations such as Afghanistan, Kuwait, and Bosnia-Herzegovina, and instead attack places they've actually heard of, such as France, Australia, and Austria, unless, they said, those last two are the same country.

"People claim we don't know as much geography as our parents and grandparents, but it's so not our fault," Josh Beldoni, a senior at Fischer High School in Los Angeles, told the Senate Armed Services Committee. "Back then they only had wars in, like, Germany and England, but we're supposed to know about places like Somalia and Massachusetts."

"Macedonia," corrected committee Chairman Carl Levin of Michigan.

"See?" said Beldoni.

Beldoni's frustration was shared by nearly three dozen students at the hearing, who blamed the U.S. military for making them look bad.

"I totally support our soldiers and all that, but I am seriously failing both geography and social studies because I keep getting asked to find Croatia or Yemvrekia, or whatever bizarre-o country we send troops to," said Amelia Nash, a junior at Clark High School in Orlando, Fla. "Can't we fight in, like, Italy? It's boot-shaped."

Chairman Levin however, explained that Italy was a U.S. ally, and that intervention is usually in response to a specific threat.

"OK, what about Arulco?" interrupted Tyler Boone, a senior at Bellevue High School in Wisconsin. "That's a country in *Jagged Alliance 2* run by the evil Queen Deidranna. I'm totally familiar with that place. She's a major threat."

"Jagged...?" said Levin.

"Alliance. It's a computer game."

"Well, no," Levin answered. "We can't attack a fictional country."

"Yeah right," Boone mumbled. "Like Grenada was real."

The students' testimony was supported by a cross-section of high school geography teachers, who urged the committee to help lay a solid foundation for America's young people by curtailing any intervention abroad.

"Since the anti-terror war began, most of my students can now point to Afghanistan on a map, which is fine, but those same kids still don't know the capitals of Nevada and Ohio," said Richard Gerber, who teaches at Rhymony High School in Atlanta. "I think we need to cut back on our activities overseas and take care of business at home, and if that means invading Tallahassee (Fla.) or Trenton (N.J.) so that students learn where they are, so be it."

The hearing adjourned after six hours. An estimated 2,000 more students were expected to hold a march in the nation's capital, but forgot which city it was in.

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## EXAMPLE TWO ~

MiamiHerald.com 

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### The right to bear clubs

DAVE BARRY

*(This classic Dave Barry column was originally published May 24, 1998.)*

Every now and then somebody thinks up a new idea that is so totally revolutionary that it just totally revolutionizes everything.

For example, in 1905 Albert Einstein stunned the scientific community when he announced that "e" is equal to "mc squared." Until that point, scientists had no idea what "e" was equal to. Oh, sure, they had known since the days of the ancient Egyptians that "e" came after "i," except when both letters were preceded by a "c." But nobody had ever even considered the possibility that "e" might have anything to do with "m." We will never know what other amazing things would have been revealed about the alphabet if Einstein had lived longer. We do know that, just before he died, he told friends that he was working on "something really big involving 'k.'"

Albert is gone, but fortunately for humanity in general there are still great minds at work, coming up with breakthrough ideas that a normal person could never even imagine without ingesting fantastic quantities of gin. One such idea was brought to my attention recently by an alert reader named (really) Dwain Vanderhoof, who sent me a brochure for a new type of golf club, which I absolutely swear I am not making up, called the Ballistic Driver.

The Ballistic Driver is a "swing-less" golf club. You grip it as usual, and you position the head of the club next to the golf ball. But instead of swinging the club, you press an "Activator Button" on the grip; this detonates a small explosive charge inside the club head, which causes a metal plate to shoot out the side of the club a distance of 1.5 inches at a speed of 200 miles per hour. The plate hits the golf ball, which then, according to the brochure, goes "250 yards, every time . . . down the middle, exactly where you aimed it, drive after drive."

Is that a great idea, or what? Now you can play golf WITHOUT HAVING TO MANUALLY HIT THE BALL! Talk about a breakthrough! I mean, for me, the worst part of playing golf, by far, has always been hitting the ball. I love standing around on the golf course; I love driving the golf cart; I love saying the word "bogey." But I hate swinging the club at the stupid ball, and, on those rare occasions when I actually hit the ball, I hate watching it take off in some totally random direction and disappear, usually

forever, into a lake, or the woods, or the body of an innocent bystander. So I called the company that makes the Ballistic Driver, GPower, Inc. of Sunnyvale, Calif. I spoke with one of the partners, Elizabeth Poggi, a serious person who confirmed that the Ballistic Driver is a serious product aimed at people who, for various reasons, cannot swing golf clubs, as well as for people like me who would simply prefer not to.

Poggi stressed that the Ballistic Driver, which will sell for around \$800, has safety features that prevent it from going off accidentally, as well as (I am still not making this up) a silencer. These features are important: Just imagine what it would be like if golf clubs were randomly detonating with loud bangs on golf courses, not to mention in airports, hotel elevators, etc. It would be a lot of fun! But it would also be wrong, which is why I am urging everybody to remember this basic rule of golf: Always assume your club is loaded.

I think the Ballistic Driver could transform the game. Poggi told me that if the club were fitted with a titanium strike plate, "it could theoretically propel the ball 500 yards." This means that a pathetic schlump like me could propel the ball farther than Tiger Woods Inc. hits it on those rare occasions when he is not filming American Express commercials.

And who knows what lies down the road? I mean, if we can make a club that can hit the ball 500 yards, why not 1,000? Why not 1,500? Why not a mile? We have the technology, darn it! Maybe we will see the day, in our lifetimes, when golfers using a descendant of the Ballistic Driver, perhaps powered by a small quantity of plutonium, are stepping up to the tee and driving the ball into another time zone. Of course, we'll need to develop a technologically advanced golf ball that contained some kind of transmitter, so it could radio its position back to the golfer ("YOUR TEE SHOT LANDED 18 YARDS FROM THE HOLE. IN PAKISTAN.")

Wouldn't that be great? Of course, as with any technology, there's always the danger that it will fall into the wrong hands. You could have street gangs converting these clubs to Fully Automatic mode and driving in their low-rider carts to rival golf courses, where they'd spray out hundreds of balls per minute in vicious "drive-by" tee-offs. Or you could turn on the TV news one morning to see Saddam Hussein wearing lime-green pants and standing next to a golf club the size of the Washington Monument, threatening to hit a massive chemical and/or biological Golf Ball of Doom smack into the fairway of middle America.

So there will be those who will try to ban the Ballistic Driver. To them I say: Forget it. The U.S. Constitution guarantees us -- not in so many words, but the intent is clear -- the right to keep and bear golf clubs. This precious right was fought for in the Revolutionary War by our courageous foreparents, the Minutepersons, who stood up for it on the green at Lexington. Although they did bogey that particular hole.

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