

“The satirist is to be regarded as our physician, not our enemy.” Henry Fielding (18th Century Writer)

Title: Brit. Lit.

Unit: Satire

Literary devices/Thematic Elements/Questions

Notes/Lecture:

1. How do you use humor as a weapon?

Quick write: Think of how often humor is used as a means to tease or ridicule a behavior or trait you dislike (in yourself and/or others). The use of sarcasm and satire permeate just about everything we do, from the very casual to the more formal. Consider the last time you used sarcasm. Describe the people involved and the trait or circumstances being teased or mocked. How did the use of sarcasm achieve the desired affect (if it did)? If the sarcasm was ineffective, discuss the reasons why it wasn't received or delivered well.

2. What is satire?

Satire is the literary technique in which behaviors or institutions are ridiculed for the purpose of improving society; it is set apart from other forms of political and social protest because of the humor (like exaggeration, irony, understatement, sarcasm) to underscore human faults.

3. Who first used satire and when did it become popular?

Satire began with the ancient Greeks but became popular in ancient Rome with the “fathers of satire”—Horace and Juvenal. Their names are used to refer to the two types of satire:

4. What are the two types of satire?

Horatian Satire: playful, amusing in efforts to correct a vice or behavior; gentle humor

Juvenalian Satire: dark laughter; often bitter; critical of corruption through scorn and outrage

5. Was satire popular in the Restoration?

Satire flourished in Europe in the second half of the 17th century and continued in through the 18th century (known as the Restoration)

6. Which authors used satire? What types of texts did the satirists use?

Authors like **Swift, Dryden, Pope, and Samuel Johnson** wrote various satirical texts—anything from prose, poetry, to drama

7. How did satirists see their roles in society?

Satirists often saw themselves as the “guardians” of culture and as valiant protectors of their society (a society experiencing the effects of government corruption, greed, hypocrisy, arrogance, poverty, vanity, and stupidity).

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8. When did the popularity of satire start to wane?

The **popularity of satire faded** in the 19th century with a few exceptions in England (Lord Byron) and America (Mark Twain).

9. What does 20th and 21st century satire focus on?

Satire in the 20th and 21st century focuses on complex social issues and political unrest; it is primarily Juvenalian and extreme; *George Orwell's Animal Farm* (1945) satirizes the political systems claiming to be democratic through animal fables and fantasy meant to show how oppressive these governing systems can be.

10. How is modern satire different from satire in the past?

Modern satire is often criticized for its lack of effective use of irony and exaggeration; yet, satire is evident in all forms of popular culture today—political cartoons, comic strips, magazine publications, television shows (sitcoms, variety shows, reality T.V.)

11. What forms of satire are popular today?

12. Define the different satirical devices.

Satirists employ **several devices** to get their point across:

- Caricature- an image, drawing, or description that exaggerates the peculiarities of a person or thing
- Hyperbole- exaggeration meant to emphasize
- Understatement- lessening the importance of something or someone; oversimplifying major defects or traits for emphasis
- Irony- when an unexpected outcome occurs giving the event or trait a significance
- Wit- amusing verbal cleverness
- Sarcasm- harsh or bitter words; usually ironic
- Allusion- relying on the readers'/viewers' familiarity with a certain significant event or person
- Juxtaposition- placing together or side by side for comparison or contrast

13. How does one interpret satire?

Strategies for viewing/reading and interpreting satire:

1. Determine the actual thing being criticized or teased; often satirists don't approve of the thing/behavior being laughed at.
2. Use your own knowledge of what is being criticized to infer what the satirist thinks may be right or "better."

Literary devices/Thematic Elements/Questions

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3. Determine the irony, exaggeration or sarcasm employed which points to the object of criticism.
4. Determine whether it is Horatian or Juvenalian.
5. Laugh. Enjoy. Pay attention to what exactly you are laughing at or why it is funny to others.

Summary:

Satire began with the *Greeks* and enjoyed popularity in the Roman Age and even more so in Europe in the 17th and 18th centuries. Satirists see themselves as moral commentators and often concern themselves with protecting society from falling prey to corruption and moral or ethical degeneration. Horatian satire is less harsh than the bitter Juvenalian satire often used today in modern satire. Modern satire comes in many forms—political cartoons, television shows, and comics. There are several devices satirists use to deliver their message—like irony, sarcasm, wit, hyperbole. When interpreting satire, one must determine what is being criticized and what the satirist is trying to emphasize about human behavior or social issues.