
THE SNARKY MUSE: FORMS AND FUNCTIONS OF SATIRE

HUMOROUS WRITING (WRTG-33400)
TR: 9:25 AM to 10:40 AM

SPRING 2020
Smiddy 109

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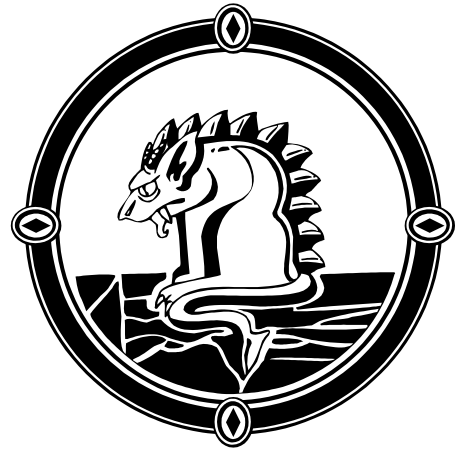
CLASS TEXTS

ANTHOLOGY

Satire: From Aesop to Buchwald. Ed. Frederick Kiley and J.M. Shuttleworth. (Macmillan, 1971)

WORKS

Austen, Jane. *Pride and Prejudice.* (Dover, 2000)
O'Connor, Flannery. *Wise Blood.* (Farrar, 2007)
Orwell, George. *Animal Farm.* (Signet, 1984)
Parker, Dorothy. *Portable Dorothy Parker.* (Penguin, 2006)
Voltaire. *Candide.* (Dover, 2000)
Vonnegut, Kurt. *Breakfast of Champions.* (Dell, 1991)
Waugh, Evelyn. *A Handful of Dust.* (Little, 1977)
West, Nathaniel. *Miss Lonelyhearts and Day of the Locust.*
(New Directions, 1962)



GRAFFITI FOR EVERY SATIRIST'S WALL

“The bitter laugh is the ethical laugh.”

~ Samuel Beckett, *Molloy*

“Whoever first hurled a curse, instead of spear, founded civilization.”

~ Sigmund Freud, *Wit and Its Relationship to the Unconscious.*

“*Difficile est saturam non scribere.* It's difficult *not* to write satire.”

~ Juvenal, *Satire 1.*

“For Satire as it was born out of Tragedy, so ought it to resemble its parentage, to strike high and aim dangerously at the most eminent vices among the greatest persons.”

~ John Milton, “On Satire.”

“Satire is a kind of knight-errant, that goes upon adventures to relieve the distressed damsel Virtue and redeem Honour out of enchanted castles, and oppressed Truth and Reason out of the captivity of giants and magicians.”

~ Samuel Butler, *Miscellaneous Observations*.

“Satire is a sort of glass, wherein beholders do generally discover everybody’s face but their own.”

~ Jonathan Swift, *The Battle of the Books*.

“Satire endeavors to enliven morality with wit, and wit with morality.”

~ Joseph Addison, *The Spectator* No. 10.

“Satire should, like a polished razor keen,/ Wound with a touch that's scarcely felt or seen.”

~ Lady Mary Wortley Montague, *To the Imitator of the First Satire of Horace*.

“The greater the Weight [of political oppression], the bitterer the Satire. The higher the Slavery, the more exquisite the Buffoonery.”

~ The Earl of Shaftesbury, “On Satire.”

“A satirist’s motto should be ‘*Écrasez l’infâme!*’ Crush the infamous!”

~ Voltaire, private letter.

“For what do we live but to make sport of by our neighbors, and to laugh at them in our turn?”

~ Jane Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*.

“Power, money, persuasion, supplication, persecution—these can lift a colossal humbug—push it a little—weaken it a little, century by century, but only laughter can blow it to rags and atoms at a blast. Against the assault of laughter nothing can stand.”

~ Mark Twain, *The Mysterious Stranger*.

“‘Is it good friend?’/‘It is bitter--bitter /But I like it/Because it is bitter,/And because it is my heart.’”

~ Stephen Crane, *The Black Riders*

“With the hard of hearing you shout, and for the almost-blind, you draw startling figures.”

~ Flannery O’Connor, *Mystery and Manners*.

“Wit has often been used as the sharpest arrow in the quiver of oppression; lack of wit is one of the things that keeps outsiders outside. Still, it must be remembered that the greatest wits were themselves outsiders; what's really threatening about wit is that it undermines the weepy notion of the underdog by leveling the battlefield. And that's not funny. If humor makes us laugh, wit makes us gasp. In that sense, satire is as humorous as a beheading. However, the guillotine is but one bad fate among many, and where comedy is concerned, sharp blades may be preferable to dull ones.”

~ Jesse Green, “When One Could Live by One’s Wit.”

OVERVIEW

Satire is possibly the oldest, and most controversial, form of humorous writing. Originating in prehistoric ceremonies of prophecy and malediction, satire in its earliest stage united raw street culture (the graffiti and hip hop of classical antiquity) with seasoned philosophy and sophisticated formal rhetoric to create an art dedicated to exposing and attacking hypocrisy, corruption, and stupidity. This bastard genre—a hybrid of creative writing and exposition, which steals from, and parodies, the forms and methods of journalism, history, and the social sciences to create fact-based fictions of social criticism—flourished in times of political oppression, cultural



breakdown, moral bankruptcy, and runaway greed. If this sounds remarkably like the United States at the dawn of the 21st century, then perhaps it is not surprising that satire is the comedy of choice for Millennials, you Baby Busters who slave at McJobs, endure the absurdities of virtual democracy and the hysteria of mass culture, and know in your bones that America is little more than a gigantic crumbling Wal-Mart stocked with pimps, pols, preachers, paramilitarists, pederasts, and profiteers. Anomie is in the very air you breathe, which probably explains that spotting on your lungs in your most recent x-ray (unless you've been getting it on with Joe Camel). By temperament and experience, you are natural satirists. If you have ever mooned a security camera, if you have ever asked for a soy burger at Wendy's, if you have ever used a xerox of a twenty dollar bill to extract quarters from a change machine, if you have ever exploded Molotov cocktails at your high school graduation, then you probably have enrolled in the right class.

This course hopes to make you better satirists by exposing you to the different techniques and functions of satire, from classical times to the present. Together we will examine satire's oldest and commonest forms, and see how and why they remain so fresh and effective. To that end, we will draw parallels between readings from classic texts and examples from contemporary satire, comparing Aesop with Ren and Stimpy, Horace with late-night stand-up, Juvenal with Gangsta Rap, Petronius with slacker comedy, to name a few. In addition, we will use critical essays to discuss satire's ethical, political, and philosophical significance. Satire isn't simply about being snarky. It is a well-defined art form with a long tradition that requires discipline, intelligence, and taste. What seems like spontaneous bitching, more often than not, is actually a carefully constructed argument, an exercise in persuasion employing irony and rhetoric, motivated by passionate moral concern. To create an effective satiric persona, to be confident in one's purpose and attack, a young satirist must cultivate ethical and artistic integrity. Satire isn't about the mindless guffaw. It isn't about canned laughter and goosing the Niensens. It is thought-provoking laughter, thesis-driven comedy, social and cosmic protest. "Satire," says Lewis Lapham, "is humor sent on a moral errand." It is also, perhaps, as Alexander Pope argues, the form of humor most dedicated to promoting the social good and to preserving human freedom:

“O sacred Weapon! left for Truth’s defense,
Sole dread of Folly, Vice, and Insolence!
To all but Heaven-directed hands denied,
The Muse may give thee, but the Gods must guide.”
Epilogue to the Satires, “Dialogue II”



REQUIREMENTS

Junior or senior standing and one of the following prerequisites: WRTG-20500 (Personal Essay) or WRTG-23600 (Fiction I). WRTG-20100 (Persuasive Argument) would be a bonus, since satire is grounded in rhetorical persuasion.

Your final letter grade will be determined by the following:

CLASS PARTICIPATION (50%)

- 1) *Attendance:* Required and encouraged, since class lectures are all geared toward improving your writing. Active attendance includes fully participating in class discussion, presentations, and workshops. You are entitled to two unexcused absences without penalty, but any additional unexcused absence lowers your final grade by a third. **Writing Department policy states that any student missing 6 or more classes must withdraw or fail the course.** You are responsible for contacting classmates about missed work, as well as turning in assignments on time even if you can't be in class.

Please note the holidays listed in the Undergraduate Catalog's academic calendar. In accordance with New York State law, students who miss class due to their religious beliefs shall be excused from class or examinations on that day. Such students must notify their course instructors at least one week before any anticipated absence so that proper arrangements may be made to make up any missed work or examination without penalty.

- 2) *Readings:* Crucial to your class performance and written exercises. You are required to read all materials, both critical and creative. What's more, you are expected to take notes and to formulate questions and observations for class discussion. Schedule blocks of time for these readings. **Skim** the criticism for its main points (highlighting if necessary), **taste** classical texts for the gist of their content, technique, and style, and **scrutinize** modern texts for creative pointers. Although this is not a literature course, you still need to be exposed to this material to become better writers.
- 3) *Exercises:* Thirteen short writing assignments, usually 2-3, sometimes 4-5, pages long based on the major forms of satire: fable, dialogue, monologue, epigram, diatribe, parody, allegory, sermon, anatomy, caricature, travesty, mock heroic, dystopia, *conte philosophique*, and moral essay. You are allowed **one revision** for each exercise, which is due **within 2 weeks** after receiving your corrected first draft. Meet this deadline or forfeit your revision.

RESEARCH PAPER (15%)

An independent critical essay on a classical satire or satirist: 5-7 pages, 5 critical sources minimum. You may discuss one of the works or authors we study in class or explore new territory. I am open to almost any approach (literary, biographical, political, historical), but you must first clear your topic with me. The revision is due **within one week** after receiving your corrected draft.

FINAL PROJECT (35%)

A portfolio of five to six satires: fiction, poetry, drama, or creative non-fiction (25 to 30 pages). Revise and expand old exercises. Up to **two** pieces may be completely new. Your portfolio must have thematic unity and include a preface introducing the collection, defining your art, and defending your satiric platform

SALON RULES

This course hopes to be as fun and challenging, “the feast of reason and the flow of soul,” to quote Pope. But even the Algonquin Table at its wackiest had strict criteria:



- 1) *Pride*: Be professional. Keep your manuscripts neat and attractive and meet deadlines. Late papers will *not* be accepted.
- 2) *Honesty*: Argue from sincerely held beliefs and maintain artistic and critical integrity. Posing and plagiarism are both forbidden. The former will earn you the ridicule of your peers, the latter expulsion from this course.
- 3) *Respect*: Glorious satire has been written across the entire political spectrum. Tolerate others' beliefs, then, even when you challenge them. Distinguish between ferocious wit and gratuitous cruelty, social critique and self-justification. Be constructive in your criticism, civilized in your satire. I promise to show the same respect toward you. If you strongly disagree with an editorial comment, I will yield to your judgment. If any work or author seriously offends you, I will excuse you from class discussion.
- 4) *Humility*: Seek help, if you need it. Visit the Writing Center at Smiddy 107, where you can schedule appointments with student and faculty tutors to revise your drafts. If you have special needs, please document them with Academic Support Services (110 Towers Concourse) to receive reasonable accommodations.

Although the first half of this course is highly structured, the second is more open. As the semester progresses, I expect you to do more and more talking, bringing in outside reading and clips to stimulate class discussion and giving short informal presentations. ***Without your informed input, this course will not succeed.*** Motivate yourself, therefore, to claim and master this material. After all, the only way a great literary tradition can survive is if it is constantly updated and renewed. Satire needs you as much as you need it—so welcome to the Scriblerus Club!

INTRODUCTION

THE MARCH OF FOLLY: THE SUBJECT AND PURPOSE OF SATIRE

“Lord, what fools these mortals be!”

~William Shakespeare, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*



JAN 21: Handouts

- ◆ Colson Whitehead, “Visible Man” *New York Times* (April 24, 2008)
- ◆ Christopher Buckley, “Prologue” from *Thank You for Smoking*.
- ◆ T. Coraghessan Boyle, “Of Steak and Sin” from *The Road to Wellville*.

EXERCISE #1 (2 to 3 pages):

THE MARCH OF FOLLY

Satire is *polemical humor*. Grounded in a particular set of beliefs it argues a specific point and promotes a certain vision of a just and sane society. It targets the triple threat of fools, frauds, and fanatics who constantly undermine any civilization. To illustrate this threat, satirists often rely on a creative device called the *March of Folly*, an allegorical parade of personified stupidity and evil to entertain and appall the reader: Juvenal’s gathering of seedy clients before their pompous patrons in *Satire 3*, Alexander Pope’s procession of hacks and pinheads in Book 1 of *The Dunciad*, Nathanael West’s psychotic *paparazzi* and autograph hounds mobbing the Hollywood premiere in *The Day of the Locust*.

As a young satirist, you too have an agenda. In a brief montage suggest your satirical program and the social values on which it is based. Be playful but serious. Identify the forces you think most threaten the public good (corporate greed heads, sleazy politicians, mad scientists, cheerless moral crusaders) and ridicule them in your own March of Folly. A perfect way to introduce yourself to your colleagues.

PROTO-SATIRE

HOWLING AND THINKING: ANIMAL FABLE AND CYNIC DIALOGUE

“WE BITE.” Warning Notice, Burnet Park Petting Zoo.

“If you want to keep you fellow creatures wise, you must always gild the philosophic pill.”

~William S. Gilbert, *The Yeoman of the Guard*.

JAN 23: Kiley and Shuttleworth, *Satire: From Aesop to Buchwald*:

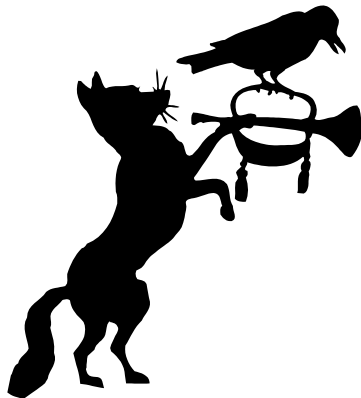
- ◆ “Introduction,” 1-5.

FABLE: Kiley and Shuttleworth, *Satire: From Aesop to Buchwald*

- ◆ Aesop and Babrius, “Two Fables,” 7.
- ◆ Anatole France, “Penguin Island,” 317-21.
- ◆ Robert Frost, “Departmental,” 341-42.

Handouts

- ◆ Aesop, “Assorted Fables.”
- ◆ James Thurber, “Oliver and the Other Ostriches.”
- ◆ John Dryden, “The Fable of the Sparrows.”



DIALOGUE: Kiley & Shuttleworth, *Satire: From Aesop to Buchwald*

- ◆ Lucian, “Dialogues,” 9-22.
- ◆ Frank Sullivan, “The Cliché Expert on the Atom,” 408-14.
- ◆ Jules Feiffer, “Introduction to Feiffer’s Album,” 441-46.
- ◆ Arthur Hoppe, “Two Columns,” 467-70.

Handouts

- ◆ Erasmus, “Julius Excluded from Heaven.”
- ◆ John Updike, “Print: A Dialogue.”

EXERCISE #2 (2 to 3 pages):

ANIMAL FABLE OR SATIRIC DIALOGUE

Before flowering in Republican Rome, the seeds of formal satire were sown first in Ancient Greece in two completely different fields: Aesop’s folksy *animal fables*, which were based on concrete problems and popular proverbs, and the comic *dialogues* of the Cynic philosophers Diogenes and Mennipus, which played with abstract ideas and mocked the gods and heroes of antiquity. Choose one of these two forms for your second exercise.

If you write an animal fable, follow Aesop’s method—criticize human behavior while simultaneously creating believable animals in fantastic situations. We enjoy Warner Brothers cartoons because Bugs Bunny acts both like a wise guy from the Bronx and an actual rabbit. Your approach may be simple and straightforward, as in James Thurber’s “Oscar and the Other Ostriches,” or more complicated and indirect, as in John Dryden’s “The Fable of the Swallows,” Anatole France’s *Penguin Island*, and George Orwell’s *Animal Farm*, which respectively satirize English anti-Catholic persecution, French Utopianism, and Stalinism. Either way, your fable should have an explicit or implicit moral.

If you write a satirical dialogue, follow Lucian’s method—lampoon famous figures from history, myth, or legend. You can get the best results by carefully choosing your topic and cleverly pairing your participants. Erasmus’ famous dialogue, “Julius at the Pearly Gates,” features a corrupt Renaissance Pope being barred from heaven by a rather lowbrow St. Peter. The two debate the meaning of the

Papacy and Christianity. Take a similar approach. Imagine Richard III and Richard Nixon talking politics, Lady Godiva and Gloria Steinem discussing feminism, Elvis and Orpheus competing in a singing contest, or Carson Kressley and Oscar Wilde swapping gay fashion secrets. A dialogue should be an ironic and surreal forensic tournament. The more mismatched the debaters, the funnier the dialogue.

ROMAN SATIRE

“*Saturam quidem nostra est.* Satire is entirely our thing.”
~Quintilian, *Institutiones Oratoriae* 10.1.

“*Auriculas asini quis non habet?* Who *doesn't* have ass's ears?”
~Persius, *Satire* 1.



I. MONOLOGUE: CLOSE UP, SOLO

JAN 28: EXERCISE #1 DUE.

Kiley and Shuttleworth, *Satire: From Aesop to Buchwald*:

- ◆ Horace, “Book I, Satire IV,” 23-27.
- ◆ Joseph Addison, “Satire,” 133-36 and “Dissecting of a Beau’s Head,” 141-43.

Handouts

- ◆ Michael Scherer, “The Truthiness Hurts: Stephen Colbert and the Power of Irony.”
- ◆ Anthony Di Renzo, “Aperitif.”
- ◆ Suzanne Britt, “That Lean and Hungry Look.”
- ◆ Judy Syfers, “I Want a Wife.”
- ◆ David Sedaris, “Author, Author”
- ◆ Ben Greenman, “My Holocaust Memoir.”

EXERCISE #3 (2 to 3 pages):

SATIRIC MONOLOGUE

Whether taking the form of the syndicated column or the stand-up routine, *the satiric monologue* owes a debt to Horace, perhaps Rome’s greatest satirist. Self-deprecating and urbane, Horace was the Johnny Carson of his day, the elegant late-night host who treated his audience to a sideshow of human folly without being too vicious or superior. Horace’s seemingly informal riffs on trivial subjects—dodging a bore on the way to an important appointment, pretending to be a scarecrow in a neighbor’s field, describing a pretentious dinner party that ends disastrously, extolling the simple virtues (tongue in cheek) of his famous Sabine farm—are actually carefully calculated statements with an ethical or political subtext. Horace’s influence is evident in the sophisticated satire of such classic New Yorker humorists as E.B. White and James Thurber and, more recently, in the wry observations of feminist

humorists and social critics like Judy Syfers and Suzanne Britt.

For your third exercise, write a satiric monologue on any subject. Turn personal experience into subtle social commentary; and don't be afraid to poke fun of yourself, or to qualify your own position through playful irony. The material is less important than your presentation. Create an engaging *persona* for yourself, an alter ego that both is and isn't you, and never forget that this is a performance piece. You may strictly sing solo, or, as Horace sometimes does, interrupt yourself with heckling comments from the peanut gallery, but impress the reader with your virtuosity and sarcastic coloratura. Keep it light and easy, but thoughtful. Horace's advice in Satire 1.10 still applies: "Be brief so your thoughts can move quickly, season your humor with serious observation, and vary your tone: now playful, now grave, now chatty, now poetic."

II. EPIGRAM: CENSORSHIP AND SOUND BITES

JAN 30: EXERCISE #2 DUE.

Kiley and Shuttleworth, *Satire: From Aesop to Buchwald*:

- ◆ Martial, "Epigrams," 8.
- ◆ La Rochefoucauld, "Maxims," 106-07.
- ◆ Oscar Wilde, "Epigrams," 289-90.
- ◆ Stephen Crane, "Seven Poems," 298-301.
- ◆ Thomas Hardy, "Are You Scratching on My Grave?" 302-03.
- ◆ Ambrose Bierce, "The Devil's Dictionary," 310-12.



Handouts

- ◆ Martial, "Epigrams."
- ◆ Ben Jonson, "Epigrams."

EXERCISE #4 (2 to 4 pages):

EPIGRAM COLLECTION

Inspired by tombstones, placards, and public inscriptions, Martial perfected the *epigram*, the basic building block of satire—a snappy one-liner (sometimes longer) that often takes the form of a snide retort, a cynical maxim, a concise character assassination, or a sharp snapshot of a scene or object. Martial's spirit can be seen in bathroom graffiti, billboards and advertising slogans, bumper stickers and vanity plates, snide greeting cards, even answering machine messages. People seem to enjoy these sarcastic haikus.

Using the class readings as models, create your own epigram collection. Form and content are open, but your collection should have thematic unity. This exercise evaluates how vividly and precisely you can use language, so let every word count. As John Dryden once commented, a good epigram should be like a wasp—with a sleek head, a delicate thorax, and a wicked sting.

III. DIATRIBE: LONG SHOT, CHORUS

FEB 04: EXERCISE #3 DUE.

Kiley and Shuttleworth, *Satire: From Aesop to Buchwald*:

- ◆ Juvenal, “Satire VI: On Wives,” 28-
- ◆ Philip Wylie, “Common Women,” 386-90.

Handouts

- ◆ Charles Dickens, “In Chancery” from *Bleak House*.
- ◆ Joan Didion, “Some Dreamers of the Golden Dream.”
- ◆ Hattie Gossett, “Mins Movement??? A Page Drama.”
- ◆ Tom Wolfe, “Mutt on Fire” from *Bonfire of the Vanities*.



EXERCISE #5 (2 to 3 pages)

SATIRIC SETTING

If the tart Horace is master of the close-up and satiric solo, the caustic Juvenal is master of the long shot and choral cacophony. Less pleasant than Horace, partly because of his misanthropy, partly because he denounces social injustice (he sounds like an angry rap artist), Juvenal still beguiles us through cinematic wizardry, constructing his satires through precise imagery and montage. Who can forget his vivid cityscapes of crumbling buildings, packed streets, overcrowded stadiums, jostling fish markets in which imperial gourmands pay a fortune for a giant turbot, and blood-spattered forums, where the bronze statue of deposed dictators are melted down into chamber pots? Juvenal excels at setting, and the theme of his *diatribes*, his denunciations of social evil, are often embedded in physical scenery.

For your fifth exercise, *create your own satiric setting*: a mall, a supermarket, an office complex, whatever. Your description should be not only accurate and detailed but rhetorically functional. The opening to Charles Dickens’ *Bleak House*, which we read in class, is both a panorama of Victorian London enshrouded in fog and a commentary on the legal pettifogging in Chancery. In fact, Dickens draws our attention to this parallel in a clear thesis. You needn’t be so blatant, but your own satiric setting also should have thematic implications. For instance, how can the description of a traffic jam on the Washington Beltway slyly allude to the gridlock on Capitol Hill? How can a high pressure aerobics class symbolize our culture’s self-defeating obsession with attaining the perfect body? See how well you can imply a subjective position or attitude through objective description.

IV. PICARESQUE STRATEGIES: PARODY AND BURLESQUE

FEB 06: EXERCISE #4 DUE.

Kiley and Shuttleworth, *Satire: From Aesop to Buchwald*:

- ◆ A.E. Houseman, "Fragment of a Greek Tragedy," 313-16.
- ◆ Robert Benchley, "Opera Synopsis," 350-52.
- ◆ Ira Wallach, "The Keeper of the Gelded Unicorn," 401-07.
- ◆ Harvard Lampoon, "Bored of the Rings," 460-66.



Handouts

- ◆ Tama Janowitz, "Modern Saint #271" from *Slaves of New York*.
- ◆ Doug Coupland, "I Am Not a Target Market" and "Quit Your Job" from *Generation X*.

EXERCISE #6 (3 to 4 pages):

PARODY OR PICARESQUE SATIRE

Even at its lowliest and grossest, *The Satyricon*, the West's first satirical novel, attracts us because of its fascinating characters and rich language. A stylistic tour de force, the work is both an amoral road story of three unscrupulous slackers and a raunchy spoof on Homer's *The Odyssey*. Petronius employs picaresque strategies (an episodic plot, young down-at-heel protagonists on the make, plenty of inventive and outrageous talk about current events) to criticize the moral bankruptcy of Nero's Rome. He also skewers defunct social and literary conventions by parodying classical rhetoric and epic. If all of this seems terribly familiar, perhaps it's because Petronius's technique appears in some of your favorite Generation X films, *Slackers*, *Clerks*, and *Reality Bites*.

For your sixth exercise, play with parody and picaresque. Either mockingly imitate some author, genre, or work, or adapt Petronius's picaresque approach to satirize contemporary youth scene. A good parody, like a good parasite, preys on the style and idiosyncrasies of its Establishment host. Notice how A.E. Houseman, Robert Benchley, and Ira Wallach ridicule the respective conventions of Greek tragedy, Wagnerian opera, and medieval romance. With its endless loop of television reruns, slacker culture thrives on parody.

As Doug Coupland and Tama Janowitz demonstrate in their satires on dead-end jobs and graduate school sex, slacker culture is also the stuff of picaresque comedy. Perhaps you may want to show how Generation X amuses itself in the face of so much corruption and absurdity. Coping with the evils of Nero's regime, Petronius's slackers kill time by visiting monumentally tasteless dinner parties thrown by vulgar millionaires like Trimalchio. What do your slackers do in the twilight of the American Republic? Do they cruise the King of Prussia Mall and window-shop while commenting on a shipwrecked economy, wallow in suburban nostalgia and French kiss while slurping slush puppies at a Seven Eleven, abuse uptight waitresses at Denny's while pretending to be on a "normal" family outing? A slice of life on wry, with plenty of horseradish.

MEDIEVAL AND RENAISSANCE SATIRE

“*Vanitas, vanitas.*”

~Ecclesiastes, 1.1.

“Unless the Destin’s adamantine band/ Should tye my teeth, I cannot chuse but bite.”

~John Marston, *The Scourge of Villanie.*



I. LITURGY: SERMON AND ALLEGORY

FEB 11: EXERCISE #5 DUE.

SERMON: Kiley and Shuttleworth, *Satire: From Aesop to Buchwald*

- ◆ Geoffrey Chaucer, “The Pardoner’s Prologue and Tale,” 39-52.
- ◆ Don Marquis, “Men Are Not Dessended Off of Monkeys,” 322-25.
- ◆ John Betjeman, “In Westminster Abbey,” 367-68.
- ◆ J.F. Powers, “The Valiant Woman,” 391-400.

Handouts

- ◆ Paul Rudnick, “Amen, Brother.”
- ◆ David Owen, “The Afterlife: Cutting Back.”
- ◆ Ron Suskind et al, “He’s Back!: Promoting the Second Coming.”

EXERCISE #7 (2 to 3 pages):

RELIGIOUS SATIRE (SERMON OR ALLEGORY)

“It’s not the parts of the Bible I don’t understand that upset me,” remarked Mark Twain. “It’s the parts I do.” Religion, which should encourage humility, charity, and wonder, too often promotes pride, hatred, and intolerance. Not surprisingly, then, organized religion has been an attractive target for satirists, both believers and unbelievers. Some writers take a *social* approach to religious satire, criticizing religion as a purely human institution reflecting warped cultural values. Geoffrey Chaucer’s and J.F. Powers’ attacks on venal clerics fall into this category, as does Ron Suskind’s account of the media blitz surrounding Christ’s Second Coming. Other writers, like Sebastian Brant, C.S. Lewis, and Flannery O’Connor, take a more *cosmic* approach, using the principles of true religion to attack religious hypocrisy and human frailty. Choose one of these two approaches for your seventh exercise.

Two techniques you may employ are *sermon* and *allegory*. The *sermon* borrows the trappings of religious oratory and liturgy for comic effects. Think of Erasmus’s Folly mounting the pulpit to praise human stupidity, or Don Marquis’ bar fly defending Genesis in a Bowery saloon. *Allegory* uses symbolic depictions of human character and appearance for thematic purposes, as in Dante’s *Inferno*, where the punishment of sinners emblematically fits their crime (adulterers blown round and round by a whirlwind, murderers forced to stand chin-deep in blood). For other examples of allegorical satire, study the gargoyles and grotesques that decorate the facade of European cathedrals and the fantastic creatures that people the paintings of Bosch and Brueghel.

II. CARNIVAL: ANATOMY AND CARICATURE

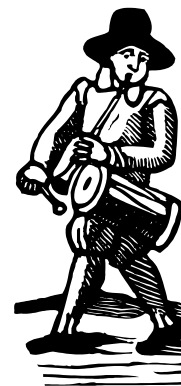
FEB 13: EXERCISE #6 DUE.

ANATOMY: Kiley and Shuttleworth, *Satire: From Aesop to Buchwald:*

- ◆ J. Robertson, “Postal System Input Buffer Device,” 423-26.
- ◆ Thomas Hornsby Ferrill, “Freud on Football,” 437-40.

Handouts

- ◆ Mikhail Bakhtin, “Medieval and Renaissance Folk Humor.”
- ◆ Francois Rabelais, “Introduction” and Chapters 24-26 from Book III of *Gargantua and Pantagruel*.
- ◆ Bruce McCall, “Read This First.”
- ◆ Frank Gannon and Woody Allen, “Aristotle and Nietzsche.”



CARICATURE: Kiley and Shuttleworth, *Satire: From Aesop to Buchwald*

- ◆ John Donne, “Epigrams” and “The Will,” 74-77.
- ◆ Sir Thomas Overbury and John Erle, “Characters,” 78-83.
- ◆ William Shakespeare, “Prince Hal to Falstaff,” 84.
- ◆ Thomas Meehan, “Early Morning of a Motion-Picture Executive,” 427-30.

EXERCISE #8 (2 to 3 pages):

ANATOMY OR CHARACTER STUDY

As Mikhail Bakhtin notes in *Rabelais and His World*, Renaissance Humanism diverted people’s attention from the sacred to the profane, from the interior of the cathedral to the exterior of the marketplace. Knowledge of this world, rather than the next, now mattered, and people preferred to study the lives of their neighbors, not the lives of the saints. Accordingly, two satirical forms developed at this time: the *anatomy*, an encyclopedic monologue in which prodigious book learning mocks all forms of authority, and the *character study*, an extravagantly abusive verbal portrait based on *caricature*, the graphic art that exaggerates and distorts a subject’s physical traits for comic effect. Choose one of these forms for your eighth exercise.

If you write an anatomy, use the jargon and theories of a sophisticated discipline to undermine that field itself, the way R.M. Koster uses the conventions of the dissertation to ridicule historical research, or to attack some other target, the way Thomas Hornsby Ferrill uses Freudian psychology to make sport of football’s homoerotic male bonding or the way Thomas Pynchon in *Gravity’s Rainbow* draws on physics, engineering, and calculus to satirize the dark side of American technology.

If you write a character study, push your gift for colorful description and invective to the breaking point. Create cartoons who are carp-lipped, saucer-eyed, jug-eared. Imitate their verbal tics. Prince Hal doesn’t simply call Falstaff “fat” but “that swollen parcel of dropsies, that huge bombard of sack, that roasted Manningtree ox with the pudding in his belly.” “Caricature” is derived from the Italian verb *carricare*, to load luggage on a cart. Your character sketch should be as “loaded” as possible.

RESTORATION AND AUGUSTAN SATIRE

“Wit will shine/ Through the harsh cadence of a rugged line.”

~John Dryden, *To the Memory of Mr. Oldham*.

“The Life of a Wit is Warfare on Earth.”

~Alexander Pope, private letter.



I. THE KING'S PLEASURE: TRAVESTY, OBSCENITY, AND SCATOLOGY

FEB 18: EXERCISE #7 DUE.

Kiley and Shuttleworth, Satire: *From Aesop to Buchwald*:

- ◆ John Wilmot, Earl of Rochester, “Two Satires,” 98-105.
- ◆ John Dryden, “MackFlecknoe,” 116-24.

Handouts

- ◆ William Congreve, Two Scenes from *The Way of the World*.
- ◆ John Wilmot, “A Ramble in St. James’s Park,” “Mistress Knight’s Advice,” “Verses for Which He Was Banished,” and “Signor Dildo.”
- ◆ John Dryden, Excerpts from “Absalom and Achitophel.”
- ◆ Paul Rudnick “I’m Sorry” and “Confessions of a Pilgrim Shopaholic”
- ◆ Yoni Brenner, “More Apocryphal Stories of the Presidents.”

EXERCISE #9 (3 to 4 pages):

HISTORICAL TRAVESTY OR SEXUAL FARCE

Licentious and skeptical, the court of Charles II craved satire that was sexually explicit and intellectually provocative. Happy to oblige, Restoration wits created a polished brand of camp that openly and irreverently questioned traditional morality and knowledge (including the doctrine of absolute monarchy). Sometimes their humor took the form of *historical travesty*, burlesquing current political events by setting them in the historical past, such as John Dryden’s *Absalom and Achitophel*. Sometimes their satire expressed itself as *sexual farce*, such as the Earl of Rochester’s obscene lampoons or William Congreve’s bedroom comedies, which mocked spiritual love and advocated a biological explanation of human relationships.

Choose one of these two forms for your tenth exercise.

If you write a historical travesty, satirize a contemporary person or event through a fitting historical parallel. Dryden criticizes Charles II’s foolish indulgence toward his rebellious bastard son, the Duke of Monmouth, which nearly cost Charles his kingdom, through the Biblical story of King David and Absalom. A classic *Saturday Night Live* episode, a parody of *Glory*, recast the Stonewall Riots as a Civil War epic to mock machismo and homophobia during the culture wars of the 1990s. Like Paul Rudnick in “Confessions of a Pilgrim Shopaholic” and Yoni Brenner in “More Apocryphal Stories of the Presidents,” superimpose the topical on the historical to comment on current events.

If you write sexual farce, use the graphic and the obscene to attack conformity and hypocrisy. As Rochester and Congreve demonstrate, the rude anarchy of sexual desire levels political and social hierarchies and strips away human pride and illusion to reveal our animality. Often called immoral, sexual satire—like Steven Soderbergh’s *Sex, Lies, and Videotape*—is actually quite ethical, only its morality insists on giving the maddening paradoxes of human biology their due; hence its worldliness and tolerance. Two texts I recommend as models are Erica Jong’s *Fear of Flying* and Milan Kundera’s *Laughable Loves*.

FEB 20: EXERCISE #8 DUE.

Kiley and Shuttleworth, *Satire: From Aesop to Buchwald*:

- ◆ Jonathan Swift, “Four Satires,” 173-86.
- ◆ John M. Stuart, “A Modest Proposal for the Termination of the War in Vietnam,” 447-55.

Handouts

- ◆ Edward J. Corbett, “An Analysis of ‘A Modest Proposal.’”
- ◆ Swift, “A Description of the Morning,” “A City Shower,” “The Death of Dean Swift.”
- ◆ Swift, “The Yahoos” from Book IV of *Gulliver’s Travels*.
- ◆ Katha Pollit, “It Takes Two: A Modest Proposal for Bad Dads.”

EXERCISE #10 (3 to 4 pages) :

A MODEST PROPOSAL

Jonathan Swift’s “A Modest Proposal” is probably the best satirical essay ever written, according to Edward J. Corbett. Swift’s command of organization, imagery, and, above all, tone remain unsurpassed. Playing the part of the imperturbable Projector, Swift seems to advocate infanticide and cannibalism as reasonable solutions to 18th century Ireland’s economic problems. Actually, Swift attacks the cruelty and hypocrisy of the English government that have reduced Ireland to poverty and starvation.

Swift’s essay has inspired many imitations, such as John M. Stuart’s “A Modest Proposal for the Termination of War in Vietnam” and Katha Pollit’s “It Takes Two: A Modest Proposal for Bad Dads.” Following this tradition, *write your own modest proposal* denouncing what you consider a pernicious government policy or social convention. Perhaps it is cuts to student aid, the abolition of welfare, the evaporation of reproductive rights, or minority and immigrant quotas. Whatever evil you choose, show its vileness and absurdity by taking it to its logical extreme while seeming to promote it. Moral outrage is not enough. You must demonstrate artistic control. *Clever argument* and *deadpan irony* are essential.

II. TRIVIAL PURSUITS: THE MOCK HEROIC

FEB 25: EXERCISE #9 DUE.

Kiley and Shuttleworth, *Satire: From Aesop to Buchwald*:

- ◆ Alexander Pope, *The Rape of the Lock* and two satires, 144-72.

Handout: John McPhee, “The Search for Marvin Gardens.”



EXERCISE #11 (4 to 5 pages):

MOCK HEROIC (“The Games People Play”)

As Alexander Pope explains in *Peri Bathous*, the *mock heroic* trivializes the glorious, glorifies the trivial. “The Rape of the Lock” borrows conventions from classical epic to satirize shallow belles and brainless beaux in materialistic and artificial society. We laugh at their silly games—and at the gamesmanship of Pope’s wit.

Canto 3 of “The Rape of the Lock” mocks the gender roles and courtship rituals of Pope’s society by depicting a game of Ombre between Belinda and her suitors. Pope not only dramatizes the card game in minute detail but incorporates its form and rules into his poem. This technique is common even in modern satire. John McPhee’s brilliant essay, “The Search for Marvin Gardens,” uses the board game Monopoly to discuss and analyze the history of Atlantic City, the cruelty of American capitalism, and the emptiness of the American Dream. Technically inventive, both pieces perfectly match form and content for the sake of social commentary.

Sticking with our theme, “The Games People Play,” *create your own mock heroic satire using a game or pastime that symbolizes some dysfunctional aspect of American culture*. Show the connection, say, between Trivial Pursuit and the emptiness of suburbia, poker and the grossness of male bonding, channel-surfing and postmodern fragmentation, Nintendo and the jingoism, techno-imperialism, and xenophobia of the Gulf War. Adapt the form and rules of your game for satirical effects and social commentary.

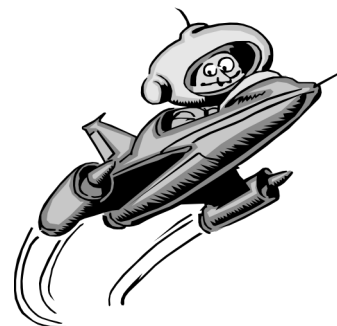
III. BRAVE NEW WORLDS: FANTASTIC VOYAGES AND DYSTOPIAS

FEB 27: EXERCISE #10.

FANTASTIC VOYAGE:

Kiley and Shuttleworth, *Satire: From Aesop to Buchwald*

- ◆ Montesquieu, “The Persian Letters,” 187-92.
- ◆ Oliver Goldsmith, “The Citizen of the World,” 193-96.



DYSTOPIA: Handouts

- ◆ Jonathan Swift, “The Grand Academy of Lagrado” from Book III of *Gulliver's Travels*.
- ◆ Aldous Huxley, “The Hatchery” from *Brave New World*.
- ◆ Neil Postman, “Future Schlock” from *Amusing Ourselves to Death*.
- ◆ Dave Barry, “Selected Web Sites: Proof that Civilization is Doomed.”
- ◆ Kurt Vonnegut, “Harrison Bergeron.”

EXERCISE #12 (4 to 5 pages) :

DYSTOPIA OR FANTASTIC VOYAGE

“...and Universal Darkness buries All.” The apocalyptic conclusion of *The Dunciad* shows a society imploding from stupidity and gimmickry. Alexander Pope feared that the fads and abuses accompanying the emerging technologies of the early 18th century would destroy his culture, a fear shared in the late 20th century by Neil Postman and Dave Barry. The destruction (and destructiveness) of civilization is one of satire’s perennial themes. To paraphrase Samuel Johnson, humans are ingenious at imagining new heavens—and of creating new hells in the process. Skeptical about human progress, wary of reformers and visionaries, satire counters our dreams about the perfect society, whether here or abroad, with two different comic nightmares: the *dystopia* and the *fantastic voyage*.

Dystopias demonstrate what can happen to a civilization when it commits itself fanatically to an abstract ideal, no matter how worthy. The societies in Aldous Huxley’s *Brave New World* and Kurt Vonnegut’s “Harrison Bergeron” are based respectively on the seemingly noble principles of happiness and equality but are actually totalitarian regimes, as ludicrous as they are horrifying. Dystopian humor tends to be political and sociological.

Fantastic voyages, in contrast, tend to be more anthropological and ethnographic. Satirists critique their culture by sending a representative member to another world, whether terrestrial or extraterrestrial, as an idiotic ambassador of conventional values (as Swift does in *Gulliver's Travels*), or by welcoming a bewildered traveler from another world, who comments naively on the absurdities and contradictions of the satirist’s culture (as Montesquieu and Oliver Goldsmith do in “The Persian Letters” and “The Citizen of the World”).

Choose one of these two forms for your penultimate exercise. For more contemporary models, see these films: Terry Gilliam’s *Brazil* and the Kids in the Hall’s *Brain Candy* (dystopias); John Sayles’ *The Brother from Another Planet*, Julien Temple’s *Earth Girls Are Easy*, and Jamie Uys’ *The Gods Must Be Crazy* (fantastic voyages).

IV. COFFEE-HOUSE PHILOSOPHY: CONTE PHILOSOPHIQUE AND MORAL ESSAY

MAR 03: EXERCISE #11 DUE.

MORAL ESSAY: Handouts

- ◆ Peter Marin, “An American Yearning.”
- ◆ Adam Gopnick, “Voltaire’s Garden.”

CONTE PHILOSOPHIQUE: Voltaire, *Candide*

Kiley and Shuttleworth, *Satire: From Aesop to Buchwald*:

- ◆ Russell Maloney, “Inflexible Logic,” 415-22.



EXERCISE #13 (4 to 5 pages):

CONTE PHILOSOPHIQUE OR MORAL ESSAY

Satire can be analytical as well as aggressive, meditative as well as mocking. The great *philosophes* (intellectuals) of the French and English Enlightenment, Diderot, Voltaire, Johnson, Pope, practiced a contemplative form of satire that explored ideas and examined social and cultural values. This coffee-house philosophy took two forms: the *conte philosophique* (or philosophical tale) and the *moral essay*. Choose one of these two for your final exercise.

The *conte philosophique*, a precursor of science fiction, borrows elements from fairy tale and folk tale, but its purpose is disenchantment rather than enchantment. Roger Pearson called this genre “the fable of reason.” A whimsical thought experiment, the *conte* treats narrative as scientific and philosophical inquiry and uses the fantastic to cultivate skepticism not wonder. However imaginative and outrageous, a good *conte* usually has a clear and serious purpose. Through cartoon characters and silent-movie slapstick, Voltaire’s *Candide* systematically dismantles Leibnitzism, the 18th-century German metaphysical philosophy that claimed this is “the best of all possible worlds.” Russell Maloney’s “Inflexible Logic” uses the mathematical paradox of the Five Monkeys to attack the probability theory and anthropocentrism. Your *conte* should have an explicit or implicit thesis but must still entertain. For pointers, read such modern *contes* as Milan Kundera’s *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting* and Italo Calvino’s *Mr. Palomar*.

The *moral essay*, as its name implies, satirically charts the morals and mores of a culture, using the compass and quadrant of the political and social sciences. Concerned with ethics and civics, moral essays are usually subtle and low-keyed, their humor meant to provoke thought more than laughter. Alexander Pope’s “Epistle II” of *The Essay on Man* and the “Epistle to Cobham” argue that sublimation is essential to civilization since it alone transforms selfish passions into social virtues. In contrast, Peter Marin’s “An American Yearning” laments how Baby Boomer narcissism and New Age hucksterism have all but destroyed the Enlightenment values upon which modern democracy depends. Your moral essay should also address an important cultural issue. Perhaps, like Pope in the “Epistle to Arbuthnot” and the “Epilogue to the Satires” or Lewis Lapham in “Painted Fire,” you might take this opportunity to discuss the satirist’s role in contemporary society.

MAR 05: EXERCISE #12 DUE.
Research Paper Conferences.

MAR 10: SPRING BREAK.
MAR 12: NO CLASS.

MODERN SATIRE

“Sarcasm has become the condition of modern truth.”
~Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*.

“This shit writes itself.”
~Hunter S. Thompson, *Generation of Swine*.

MAR 24: EXERCISE #13 DUE.
Austen, Pride and Prejudice.



I. THE AMERICAN GRAIN: MARK TWAIN

MAR 26: Kiley and Shuttleworth, *Satire: From Aesop to Buchwald*:
◆ Finley Peter Dunne, “Two Columns,” 293-97.
◆ Mark Twain, “Five Satires,” 217-66.

Handout

- ◆ Mark Twain, “The Damned Human Race.”

WORKSHOP: “*Monologues*.”

II. JAZZ AGE CARNIVAL: MENCKEN, LEWIS, AND PARKER

MAR 31: Kiley and Shuttleworth, *Satire: From Aesop to Buchwald*
◆ H. L. Mencken, “The Hills of Zion,” 326-33.
◆ Sinclair Lewis, “From *Babbitt*,” 353-64.

Handouts

- ◆ H. L. Mencken, “In Memoriam: W.J.B.”
- ◆ Scott Adams, “Business Communication” and “Great Lies of Management” from *The Dilbert Principle*

WORKSHOP: “*Business and the American Dream*.”

APR 02: RESEARCH PAPER DUE.

Dorothy Parker, *The Portable Dorothy Parker*:

- ◆ *Fiction*: “The Sexes” (24-28); “The Standard of Living” (29-34); “The Waltz” (47-51); “Here We Are” (125-34); “You Were Perfectly Fine” (151-54); “Too Bad” (170-81); “The Custard Heart” (319-27).
- ◆ *Poetry*: *Enough Rope* (74-118); *Sunset Gun* (211-40); *Death and Taxes* (295-318).
- ◆ *Articles and Reviews*: “Just Around Pooh Corner” (437-41); “The Professor Goes In for Sweetness and Light” (497-500); “Far From Well” (511-13); “From *Esquire*: Edmund Wilson, Edna Ferber, and Jack Kerouac,” (533-37); “Here Comes the Groom,” (576-82); “Not Enough,” (462-66); “In the Throes” (549-53); “The Function of the Writer” (566-68); “New York at 6:30 PM” (569-71); “Self-Portrait” (572-82).

WORKSHOP: “*Feminism and the Battle of the Sexes.*”

III. THE RADICAL THIRTIES: DOS PASSOS, FEARING, AND WEST

APR 07: NOT NECESSARILY THE NEWS (handouts)

- ◆ John Dos Passos, “Newsreel 1,” “Body of an American,” and “Adagio Dancer” from *USA*.
- ◆ Jessica Mitford, “The American Way of Death” and Joan Didion “On the Mall.”
- ◆ Hunter S. Thompson, “Fear and Loathing: ‘In the Bunker’ and ‘In Limbo.’”

WORKSHOP: “*News and Current Events.*”

APR 09: Kiley & Shuttleworth,
Satire: From Aesop to Buchwald:

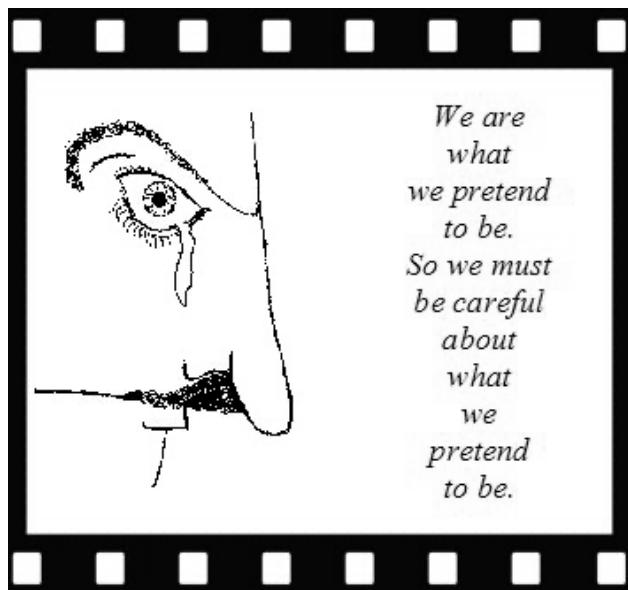
- ◆ Kenneth Fearing, “Dirge,” 371-72.

Nathanael West,
Miss Lonelyhearts and *The Day of the Locust*.

WORKSHOP: “*Pop Culture.*”



IV. POSTMODERN PROPHETS: WAUGH, ORWELL, O'CONNOR, AND VONNEGUT



APR 14: PORTFOLIO CONFERENCES.

APR 16: Evelyn Waugh, *A Handful of Dust*.
WORKSHOP: "Morals and Manners."

APR 21: George Orwell, *Animal Farm*.
♦ "Why I Write." (Handout)

WORKSHOP: "Politics and Dystopia."

APR 23: Flannery O'Connor, *Wise Blood*
WORKSHOP: "Myth and Religion."

APR 28: Kurt Vonnegut, *Breakfast of Champions*.
WORKSHOP: "Mind Games and Head Trips"

APR 30: PORTFOLIO WORKSHOP

MAY 05: PORTFOLIO DUE.
Class Evaluations.

THE FEAST OF WIT

MAY 07: FINAL CLASS.

Handouts

- ♦ Anthony Di Renzo, "Coffee-House Philosophy."
- ♦ Bertold Brecht, "Writing the Truth: Five Difficulties."

EXAM CLASS READING
WEEK TBA (Smiddy 109)

