

INSTRUCTIONS FOR ANALYZING FILM SATIRE

What is the overall “theme” of the film?

In other words, what do you think the point of the film is? Note that the point doesn't necessarily have to be serious, but for satire, at least some of it does.

What or who do you think is being satirized?

Be specific.

1. Is it a social and/or political commentary?
2. Something else? What?

How is/are the subject(s) being satirized?

For example, is the approach primarily Horatian or Juvenalian?

- **Horatian:** Satire in which the voice is indulgent, tolerant, amused, and witty. The speaker holds up to gentle ridicule the absurdities and follies of human beings, aiming at producing in the reader a wry smile (i.e., Woody Allen)
- **Juvenalian:** Formal satire in which the speaker attacks vice and error with contempt and indignation. Juvenalian satire in its realism and its harshness is in strong contrast to Horatian satire (i.e., Bill Maher).

What form or forms are utilized in the satire?

- **Burlesque:** characterized by ridiculous exaggeration and distortion. A serious subject may be treated frivolously or a frivolous subject seriously. That is, a style ordinarily dignified may be used for nonsensical matter, or a style very nonsensical may be used to ridicule a weighty subject (i.e. Weekend Update on *Saturday Night Live*).
- **Parody:** A composition that imitates the serious manner and characteristic features of a particular person or situation, and applies the imitation in order to point out the absurdities of the original reference. Often a parody is more powerful in its influence on affairs of current importance—politics for instance—than its original composition. For parody to be successful, the reader must know the original text that is being ridiculed. (i.e., movies such as *Vampires Suck*—a parody of the *Twilight* series; or the political parody of *Saturday Night Live*).
- **Travesty:** presents a serious (often religious) subject frivolously, reducing everything to its lowest level (i.e., movies like *Dogma* or *Life of Brian*); or *Late Night's* Stephen Colbert: “If this is going to be a Christian nation that doesn't help the poor, either we have to pretend that Jesus was just as selfish as we are, or we've got to acknowledge that He commanded us to love the poor and serve the needy without condition and then admit that we just don't want to do it.”
- **Farce:** Exciting laughter through exaggerated, improbable situations; usually contains low comedy: quarreling, fighting, coarseness, with, horseplay, noisy singing, boisterous conduct, trickery, clownishness, drunkenness, slap-stick (i.e., *The Hangover* series of movies)

What techniques are used to create the satire?

- **Reduced to absurdity:** The satirist seems to agree enthusiastically with the basic attitudes or assumptions being satirized and, by pushing them to a logically ridiculous extreme, exposes the foolishness of the original attitudes and assumptions (Stephen Colbert's work on the *Colbert Report* is a good example of this approach).
- **Caricature:** A style focusing on one characteristic, quality, or feature of a person or group of people, exaggerating it to a humorous level. Caricatures are most often and obvious in political cartoons (see any cartoon of Donald Trump).
- **Exaggeration:** To enlarge, increase, or represent something beyond normal bounds so that it becomes ridiculous and its faults can be seen (i.e., SNL's take on Donald Trump, or earlier, Sarah Palin).
- **Wit:** Verbal cleverness. Wit suggests intellectual brilliance and delight in its ability to entertain, and requires verbal skill beyond a simple knowledge of words. Wit is often used ironically, or even sarcastically, to ridicule or insult someone (i.e., Mark Twain's comment: "Suppose you were an idiot, and suppose you were a member of Congress. But I repeat myself.")
- **Incongruity:** To present things that are out of place or are absurd in relation to its surroundings. Particular techniques include oxymoron, reversal, and irony.
 - **Oxymoron:** Using contradiction in a manner that oddly makes sense on a deeper level. Simple or joking examples include such phrases as "jumbo shrimp," "sophisticated rednecks," and "military intelligence." The richest literary type seem to reveal a deeper truth through their contradictions—sometimes called paradoxes. Or, as in an old Army exclamation, "Fucking Army!" the response typically is (tongue-in-cheek), "You can't qualify a superlative." At least, it's grammar joke.
 - **Reversal:** To present the opposite of the normal order. Reversal can focus on the order of events, such as serving dessert before the main dish or having breakfast for dinner. Additionally, reversal can focus on hierarchical order—for instance, when a young child makes all the decisions for a family or when an administrative assistant dictates what the company president decides and does (i.e., Radar O'Reilly on M*A*S*H).
 - **Irony:**
 - **verbal:** A device where what is said is the opposite of what is meant. Sarcasm, a form of irony employed to insult or slight, in its crudest form. Irony may appear in several forms:
 - A figure of speech in which a single word is used in a sense directly opposite to its usual meaning, for example naming a giant "Tiny."
 - A *rhetorical understatement* by which something is referred to in terms less important than it really deserves, for example calling a fatal wound a scratch. Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* presents a scene in which Romeo's friend Mercutio has been wounded fighting in his defense. Romeo

notices he is hurt, and upon asking about the seriousness of the wound, Mercutio replies, “Yes, yes. It’s a scratch, just a scratch. But it’s enough.” He dies from his wounds

- Verbal irony where a speaker uses a form of simile to communicate the opposite of what they mean, for example “clear as mud.”
- **dramatic:** The audience knows more about a character’s situation than the character does, foreseeing an outcome contrary to the character’s expectations, and thus ascribing a sharply different sense to some of the character’s own statements. (This is often called tragic irony when in a tragedy. The novel *Catch 22* is an example of this form of irony.)
- **Invective:** Harsh, abusive language directed against a person or cause. Invective is a vehicle, a tool of anger. Invective is the bitterest of all satire. (i.e., Bill Maher)
- **Sarcasm:** A sharply mocking or contemptuous remark. (See pretty much anything on SNL, to any other late-night comedy show on TV.)
- **Malapropism:** A deliberate mispronunciation of a name or term with the intent of poking fun. (i.e., “Drumpf” for “Trump”).