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THE SATIRIST'S ETHOS

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ABSTRACT

The satirist presents himself as a man who wishes to correct the error or to punish or correct the wrongdoer. In fact, it is this intention of the satirist which differentiates him from most other writers. Satire always implies a system of values by which the follies of the world ought to be judged, attacked and castigated. Therefore the satirist must assume some kind of impersonal level from where he views the world with a pretended objectivity. He himself appears to be above and beyond all its follies.

When we think of satire of satire we do not usually think of a specific literary form as the satirical essay, the satirical play or the satirical poem, but of some quality which gives a work its special character. This quality may be called the "satirical spirit" as it was so called by the late Professor Walker, or the "satirical mood"¹ as James Sutherland chose to entitle it or even "a pattern of experience"² as Northrop Frye referred to it in his famous *Anatomy of Criticism*. Yet no matter what name we give to this quality we mean by it an attitude to life which is acutely conscious of the difference between how things are and how they ought to be. Consequently the satirist presents himself as a man who wishes to correct the error or to punish or correct the wrongdoer. In fact it is this intention of the satirist which differentiates him from most other writers. Although the writers of other literary modes also realize that this is not "the best of all possible worlds," they do not attack what they feel is wrong by taking a moral stand. The writer of satire, however, always implies a system of values by which the follies of the world ought to be judged, attacked and castigated. "After all," Shaw once wrote, "the salvation of the world depends on the men who will not take evil good-humouredly, and whose laughter destroys the fool instead of encouraging him."³ It is the writers of comedy, according to Shaw, who keep a "good-humoured" moral neutrality in the face of ugly facts. However there may be passa-

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ges, phrases, characters or incidents in all literary works which display a satiric outlook. When the assumed moral neutrality of a writer is loosened his work slips into satire.

In *The Canterbury Tales*, for example, the Wife of Bath is drawn as a comic character. Chaucer tells us of her worldliness and sensuality (character traits that are ordinarily condemned by the Medieval society) but because his attitude in describing her is tolerant, relaxed and good-humoured the reader in the end does not condemn her.

Hir coverchiefs ful fyne weren of ground;
 I dorste swere they weyeden ten pound
 That on a Sondag weren upon hir hed.
 Hir hosen weren of fyn scarlet reed,
 Ful streite yteyd, and shoes ful moyste and newe.
 Boold was hir face, and fair, and reed of hewe.
 She was a worthy womman al hir lyve :
 Housbondes at chirche dore she hadde fyve,
 Withouten oother compaignye in youthe, —
 But therof nedeth nat to speke as nowthe (General Prologue, II. 453-462).

Contrary to this comical presentation of the Wife of Bath the description of the Friar is definitely satirical. The friar uses the privileges of his post to serve his lust and material gain.

A Frere ther was, a wantowne and a merye,
 A lymytour, a ful solempne man.
 In alle the ordres foure is noon that kan
 So muchel of dallauce and fair langage.
 He hadde maad ful many a mariage
 Of yonge wommen at his owene cost.
 Unto his ordre he was a noble post (General Prologue. 11. 208-214).

The very last line underlines with scorn the difference between what he as a friar ought to do and what he does in actual life.

In short satire can be incorporated into any form of literature. It is distinguished from them, however, by its peculiar style. The characteristics of the satirist's style is inherent in the meaning of the original Latin word *satira* - "medley," "hotch-potch." Consequently the best satirists rearrange perspectives, scramble familiar objects into incongruous juxtaposition and are able to give an unfair but fresh and diverting vision of life. Such a style has a lot in common with rhetoric. Rhetoric is generally defined as the art of using language so as to persuade or influence others. The satirist, like the rhetorician, aims at making men to look at the facts as he sees them. Unlike the other artists who wish to represent what is real the satirist wants to illustrate what seems to be real but is not.⁴ Therefore the success of a satirist depends on the control he has over his audience. He is the advocate pleading a cause and to secure the agreement of his readers he is prepared to ignore much of the evidence and exaggerate the rest. The satirist, then, characteristically proceeds by drastic simplification, by ruthlessly narrowing the area of vision, by leaving out of account the

greater part of what must be taken into consideration if one is to realize the totality of a situation or a character.⁵ In its extremist form this process is one of caricature. Nevertheless, unlike the caricaturist it is part of the satirist's art to conceal from his readers that this simplification is taking place. Dryden, in his *Discourse Concerning Satire* writes, "How easy it is to call (a man) rogue and villain, and that wittily! But how hard to make a man appear a fool, a blockhead, or a knave, without using any of those opprobrious terms!"⁶ It is fatal to satire if the reader or spectator should reflect that much might be said on both sides, or that if we knew all we might forgive all. Therefore the satirist must assume some kind of impersonal level from where he views the world with a pretended objectivity. He himself appears to be above and beyond all its follies.

Works which are primarily satires rarely offer original ideas. They are essentially concerned not with the thing in itself but with man's attitude to that thing. Therefore anything can be a subject of satire. But whatever the satirist chooses to satirize he must convince his readers that his subject is worthwhile. An ingenious artist can generalize the absurdity of any trivial event to make it look like a trait of the whole society. Alexander Pope, for example, wrote a very successful satirical poem on the trifling occasion of a lock of hair being cut off from a lady and the enmity that this led to between two prominent families. He told the story in a heroic setting making the incident look even more petty and ridiculous; then, he generalized the absurdity of the lady's reaction to encompass all such absurd emotions, preoccupations and moral concerns of the English middle and upper classes. In Canto II of *The Rape of the Lock* the heroine Belinda's protecting slyph is worried about the threat to her from

Some dire Disaster, or by Force, or Slight,
But what, or where, the Fates have wrapt in Night.
Whether the Nymph shall break Diana's Law,
Or some frail China Jar receive a flaw;
Or stain her Honour, or her new Brocade;
Forget her Pray'rs or miss a Masquerade

(Canto II, 11. 103-8).

Without distinction of importance the loss of chastity is placed beside the cracking of an ornament and the staining of a dress. In one line a whole society's distorted values are exposed.⁷

Later on in Canto III Pope pretends that the superficialities of aristocratic society are of surpassing importance.

Hither the Heros and the Nymphs resort,
To taste awhile the Pleasures of a Court;
In various Talk th'instructive hours they past,
Who gave the Ball, or paid the Visit last (Canto III, 11, 9-12).

The silly and fruitless occupations of the ladies and gentlemen are accentuated much more forcefully by the previous use of the word "instructive". Moreover the word

"rape" in the title stresses the ridiculous exaggeration of the incident along with reminding us of social matters far more important but about which there is no outcry.

Many years later T.S. Eliot in "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" uses a similar technique in satirizing the middle class morality and conduct.

In the room the women come and go
Talking of Michelangelo
And indeed there will be time
To wonder, "Do I dare?" and "Do I dare?"
Time to turn back and descend the stair,
With a bald spot in the middle of my hair -
(They will say: "How his hair is growing thin!") (11. 35-44).

In both works the artists employ their wit to wound the objects of their attack with neat and unexpected strokes. The English middle and upper classes are shocked to an awareness of the narrowness of their vision, the pettiness of their occupations and the resulting absurdity of their lives. The reader, on the other hand, is surprised by the unexpected collocation of ideas, laughs at those types whom the poets attack and following their logic accepts the truth they wish to convey.

Skilful satirists like Pope and Dryden could even write lampoons which did not aim at reforming or castigating the wrong-doers. Dryden's "Mac Flecknoe," "Absalom and Achitophel" and "The Medal" are among the well-known lampoons of the period.

Whether it is plausible to consider these lampoons as a form of satire has been long debated. Dr. Johnson in his **Dictionary** differentiated them from proper satire saying "Proper Satire is distinguished by the generality of the reflections from a lampoon which is aimed at a particular person." But Pope disagreed with Johnson. In a letter to Arbuthnot written on August 2, 1734 he wrote: "But general satire In Times of General Vice has no force, and is no Punishment: People have ceased to be ashamed of it when so many are join'd with them; and 'tis only by hunting one or two from the Herd that any Examples can be made." There is now a general consensus among critics in taking lampoons as a form of satire. They claim that lampoons can have more than a personal application, and their success is correlative with their writer's genius. Dryden's "MacFlecknoe," for example, is a successful lampoon. It begins on the note of moralistic satire:

All human things are subject to decay,
And when fate summons, monarchs must obey (11. 1-2).

Then the description of Flecknoe is given:

This aged prince, now flourishing in peace,
And blessed with issue of a large increase;
Worn out with bussiness, did at length debate
To settle the succession of the state (11. 7-10).

If the reader did not know that this "aged prince" was Flecknoe, king of dunces, this statement would be acceptable as elevated. Further on however Dryden strikes home the satire in mock-praise, especially in Flecknoe's choice of Shadwell as his successor.

Shadwell alone my perfect image bears,
Mature in dulness, from his tender years :
Shadwell alone, of all my sons, is he,
Who stands confirmed in full stupidity (11. 15-18).

The subject of the poem is insignificant. It is an attack on the Whig poet Shadwell, but it also gives Dryden scope to introduce and attack most of the bad writers of his time. Pope's "Dunciad" is another successful lampoon. It attacks many of the Grub-Street writers. And Pope says of this lampoon that "The poem was not made for these authors, but these Authors for the Poem." Nevertheless most personal satire faces the danger of losing its point in time. Its pure topicality may even obscure or cancel its universality. In time the values of the societies change and what may seem criminal to people living in the eighteenth century England may not be so considered by those living in the twentieth century England—the act of writing badly, for example, is not for us so great a crime as it was for Pope and his contemporaries. Consequently the twentieth century readers do not consider "Dunciad" as humorous and as biting a satire as the readers of the eighteenth century England must have done.

In short the subject matter of the satirist, that which he repudiates, and the universality of the moral stand he assumes are as important as the satirist's art in producing a lasting work. If the satirist attacks the archetypal vices in human nature such as envy, affectation, hypocrisy, selfishness and greed the moral stand he assumes is sound and his appeal can be universal and timeless. Johnson's "The Vanity of Human Wishes," which renounces exactly these, however, is not widely read in our century. In that poem Johnson's images, though perceptive, are usually kept at the general, abstract level, and, like Pope too had pointed out, general ideas do not hit home as fast and as clearly as do particular examples. Furthermore in "The Vanity of Human Wishes" Johnson attacks evil not implicitly but explicitly, causing the tone of his poem to be quite didactic. At the beginning of the poem we are told that people are busy working to get what they deem worthy. "Gold" we find has the first place in the itemized list. We read :

For Gold his sword the hireling ruffian draws
For gold the hireling Judge distorts the laws;
Wealth heap'd on wealth, nor truth nor safety buys,
The dangers gather as the treasures rise (11. 25-28).

All the evils arising from the wish to possess gold, and the desire to keep it are stated in these four lines, but because we are not shown the results of these evils working on particular individuals, they remain less dramatic than they are in, for example, Ben Jonson's *Volpone*.

As opposed to this piece of satire where the moral lesson is too overtly stated to sustain the interest of the readers for long, Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* stands as a profoundly moving satire which also has a universal appeal. *Gulliver's Travels* is a series of four satirical travel stories yoked together by their common hero or anti-hero, Gulliver. Here Swift, like Johnson, attacks the vices of man, along with the vices of the English society. Captain Gulliver, the naive, prejudiced, English commoner represents both the deformed qualities of most of his citizens and short-sighted mankind. His travels to the land of the Lilliputians and to the land of the Brobdingnags enable Swift to point out by way of comparison and contrast, the depravity of the English society and the ridiculousness of Gulliver in not realizing it. In Part II, Chapter Six the King of Brobdingnag speaks for Swift and reveals his satirical angle as he says to Gulliver: "But by what I have gathered from your own relation, and the answers I have with much pains wringed and extorted from you, I cannot but conclude that the bulk of your natives to be the most pernicious race of little odious vermin that nature ever suffered to crawl upon the surface of the earth."⁸

In the fourth story titled "A Voyage to the Houyhnhnms" Swift's satire is less national and much more cosmic. There not the vices of the English society, but the vices inherent in man's nature are satirized. The apish yahoos appear to represent the detestable aspects of man. Gulliver in scorning them comes to scorn himself and his race. But in this book Swift's depiction of mankind is so complex that Swift seems to shift his dominant mood from one of satire to that of irony. Samuel Hynes in *The Pattern of Hardy's Poetry* defines irony as

... a view of life which recognizes that experience is open to multiple interpretations, of which no one is simply right, and that the co-existence of incongruities is part of the structure of existence.⁹

Consequently ironic attitude is in its essence contrary to the satiric attitude to life. Although learned critics like Frye, Hight, and Pollard¹⁰ consider irony as an aspect of satire in their works they only refer to one narrow use of irony, that resulting from the difference between "meaning" and "being." But even in those cases when the ironic also contributes to the creation of the satiric effect there is a distinct difference in what each emphasizes. In "A Voyage to the Houyhnhnms," for example, Swift satirizes in the person of Gulliver man's ignorance of himself and his priding himself to be better than what he really is. This is done by exaggerating the beastly aspects of man's nature and by drawing an unfair caricature of him in the portrayal of the yahoos. Then by making Gulliver who is also a yahoo despise them, and consider himself superior to them, Swift also exaggerates Gulliver's self-ignorance. Consequently throughout the tale Swift aims at narrowing down his reader's vision to make him see and criticize just what he is attacking. However at the end of "The Voyage" Don Pedro, a compassionate, generous captain, walks into Gulliver's life. Gulliver who is still as blind as he was at the beginning of his travels cannot realize the difference between Don Pedro and the majority of wicked mankind. He is again fooled by appearance and takes Pedro for another yahoo. From the appearance of Don Pedro on, the mood of Swift's narrative shifts from one of satire to that of irony. Swift indicates to his readers through Don Pedro that although men in general are yahoos there are also a few Pedros, and they ought to be appreciated and taken as examples. Hence the reader is no longer aware of just one type of man but of

two or even of three - those who resemble the uninstructed Gulliver, detestable, blind and proud; those who resemble the long-travelled, (and instructed) Gulliver, humble, aware of the detestable aspects of most men yet still blind and, finally those like Pedro, tolerant, kind and giving. Consequently at the end of "The Voyage" satire against mankind turns into irony, and the reader's attention is directed from the surface "being" to the inner "meaning," from presentation to content.

Another satire of Swift's, **A Modest Proposal**, on the other hand, displays clearly how harsh and unredeeming Swift's style can be if he wishes to keep his narrative at the satirical level throughout.

I have been assured by a very knowing American of my acquaintance in London, that a young healthy child well nursed is at a year old a most delicious, nourishing, and wholesome food, whether stewed, roasted, baked, or boiled; and I make no doubt that it will equally serve in frikazi or a ragu. I do therefore humbly offer it to public consideration that of the 120,000 children already computed, 20,000 may be reserved for breed, whereof only one fourth part to be males... That the remaining 100,000 may, at a year old, be offered in sale to the persons of quality and fortune through the kingdom; always advising the mother to let them suck plentifully in the last month, so as to render them plump and fat for a good table.¹¹

In this essay Swift so shocks the reader by his wit that his complacent and conventional attitude to life is suspended and he begins seeing things through the author's eyes. The major premise that the Irish are treated no better than cattle by their English landlords hits home. The second premise based on this first one - that the landlords who have devoured most of the parents have the best title to the children and should use them in the most profitable way is such a strong attack on the British inhumanity that the reader cannot help but hate, despise and scorn them.

In short satire is a very effective literary mode when used well. It becomes dull and monotonous when it lacks wit - that is the intelligence to give satire its color and strength. It lacks conviction when it does not uphold a strong moral ideal. But when a satirist combines in his works art and morality ingeniously he can be much more effective than any other artist in influencing man's ideas and in guiding his vision.

NOTES

- 1 James Sutherland, **English Satire** (Cambridge: At the University Press, 1967), p. 2.
- 2 Northrop Frye, **Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays** (rpt. 1957, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973), p. 223. A similar reference is made to satire by Gilbert Highet in **The Anatomy of Satire** (Princeton: University Press, 1962), p. 3.
- 3 Bernard Shaw, **The Quintessence of Ibsenism** (1929 ed), p. 186 quoted in Sutherland, p. 4.
- 4 Leonard Feinberg, **Introduction to Satire** (Iowa: Iowa State University Press, 1967), p. 1.
- 5 Sutherland, p. 16.

- 6 John Dryden, *A Discourse Concerning the Original and Progress of Satire* in *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, Vol. I (Norton, 1968), p. 1415.
- 7 Arthur Pollard, *Satire (The Critical Idiom)*, Methuen and Co. Ltd., 1970), p. 20.
- 8 Jonathan Swift, *Gulliver's Travels* (A Signet Classic, 1960), p. 148.
- 9 Samuel Hynes, *The Pattern of Hardy's Poetry* (Chapel Hill : North Carolina, 1961), pp. 41-2.
- 10 Frye, p. 223; Highet, p. 18; Pollard, pp. 66, 68.
- 11 Jonathan Swift, *A Modest Proposal* in *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, Vol. I, p. 1642.

HİCİV YAZARININ OTORİTE SORUNU

ÖZET

Hiciv yazarı eleştirdiği olayı veya kişiyi enine boyuna tartışmak istemez; tersine yermeyi amaçladığını abartarak, karikatürize ederek onu hoş görülmesi olanaksız bir duruma sokar. Bu yaklaşım hiciv yazarını diğer tür yazarlardan ayırır. Trajedi, komedi ve benzeri türlerde yazmayı yeğleyen yazarlar irdeledikleri konulara ve kişiliklere derinlik, çok yönlülük getirmeyi amaçlarlar. Okur onların yapıtlarında yapılan yanlışlardan dolayı hiç kimseyi veya hiçbir tavrı suçlayamaz. Hiciv yazarı ise yanlışları siyah beyaz olarak ortaya koyar ve kendi değer yargılarını okuruna sorgusuz benimsetmek ister. Doğruyu tek o bilir, olay ve kişi ancak onun ele aldığı biçimde görülebilir. Bu nedenle her eleştirel yaklaşım hicivcinin eleştirisi ile özdeşleştirilemez. Bazı yazarların "ironi"yi (irony) hiciv yazarının kullandığı bir yöntem olarak değerlendirmeleri yanıltıcı sonuçlar doğurabilir. Özellikle ondokuzuncu yüzyıldan beri "ironi" dünyada birbirine karşıt eş doğruların olduğunu ortaya koyan bir yazı biçimi olarak belirir. Hiciv yazarı ise yaklaşımında "ironi"ye kaydığı ölçüde hicivden uzaklaşır. İyi hiciv okurun gözlerini kendinin bile fark edemeyeceği bir biçimde bağlayan, eleştirilen bozukluğun kötülüklerini basite indirgeyerek ve abartarak vurgulayan ve eleştiri yolu ile onu değiştirmeyi ve ya yok etmeyi amaçlayan bir yazı türüdür.