

The Cambridge Introduction to Satire

In satire, evil, folly, and weakness are held up to ridicule – to the delight of some and the outrage of others. Satire may claim the higher purpose of social critique or moral reform, or it may simply revel in its own transgressive laughter. It exposes frauds, debunks ideals, binds communities, starts arguments, and evokes unconscious fantasies. It has been a central literary genre since ancient times, and has become especially popular and provocative in recent decades. This new introduction to satire takes a historically expansive and theoretically eclectic approach, addressing a range of satirical forms from classical, Renaissance, and Enlightenment texts through contemporary literary fiction, film, television, and digital media. The beginner in need of a clear, readable overview and the scholar seeking to broaden and deepen existing knowledge will both find this a lively, engaging, and reliable guide to satire, its history, and its continuing relevance in the world.

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The Cambridge Introduction to Satire

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For Megan

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Abbreviations

For scholarly works from which I quote frequently, I cite the following editions parenthetically using abbreviations and page numbers.

For primary works from which I quote frequently, I use parenthetical references. In most of these cases, parenthetical references indicate page numbers; in other cases, I specify whether they refer to volumes, chapters, cantos, or lines. A list of frequently cited primary works can be found at the back of the book along with a list of films cited.

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|-----|--|
| AC | Frye, Northrop. <i>Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays</i> . Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1957. |
| AS | Highet, Gilbert. <i>The Anatomy of Satire</i> . Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1962. |
| CS | Quintero, Ruben, ed. <i>A Companion to Satire: Ancient and Modern</i> . Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2007. |
| DI | Bakhtin, Mikhail. <i>The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays</i> . Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist, trans. Austin, University of Texas Press, 1981. |
| DSM | Fredric V. Bogel, <i>The Difference Satire Makes: Rhetoric and Reading from Jonson to Byron</i> . Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 2001. |
| FS | Paulson, Ronald. <i>The Fictions of Satire</i> . Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1967. |
| LS | Knight, Charles. <i>The Literature of Satire</i> . New York, Cambridge University Press, 2004. |
| PDP | Bakhtin, Mikhail. <i>Problems in Dostoevsky's Poetics</i> . Caryl Emerson, trans. Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1984. |
| PS | Elliott, Robert C. <i>The Power of Satire: Magic, Ritual, Art</i> . Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1962. |
| PSE | Ashley Marshall. <i>The Practice of Satire in England, 1658–1770</i> . Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 2013. |

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| <i>RHW</i> | Bakhtin, Mikhail. <i>Rabelais and His World</i> . Helene Iswolsky trans. Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1984. |
| <i>SCR</i> | Griffin, Dustin. <i>Satire: A Critical Reintroduction</i> . Lexington, University of Kentucky Press, 1994. |
| <i>SI</i> | Seidel, Michael. <i>Satiric Inheritance: Rabelais to Sterne</i> . Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1979. |
| <i>SNEE</i> | Paulson, Ronald. <i>Satire and the Novel in Eighteenth-Century England</i> . New Haven, Yale University Press, 1967. |
| <i>SSA</i> | Test, George. <i>Satire: Spirit and Art</i> . Tampa, University of South Florida Press, 1991. |
| <i>STG</i> | Guilhamet, Leon. <i>Satire and the Transformation of Genre</i> . Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1987. |

The Structure of this Book

This effort at introducing the topic of satire is organized into three large sections. Part I has two chapters. Chapter 1 lays out some basic ideas of what satire is, how it works, and how the understanding of satire among literary critics has evolved. Chapter 2 discusses related terminology in an attempt to familiarize students with frequently used critical categories such as comedy, irony, and parody, and how they have been distinguished from satire. Together, these two chapters aim to offer a serviceable stand-alone introduction to the topic.

Part II commences a historical survey of literary satire, looking at what might be called the traditional canon, though I have sought to expand this canon with texts rediscovered in the last few decades and to update understandings of it with the insights of recent scholarship. Since I view genres as subject to the forces of history, I use both period and genre as organizing principles in an account that is neither strictly chronological nor strictly genre-based. In each chapter I offer an overview followed by a series of readings. While intensive close-reading is not possible due to considerations of space, I do aim for what might be called a “middle-distance-reading” that covers a range of texts but with enough detail and nuance to help readers launch their own sustained analyses. Chapter 3 surveys classical satire, focusing on Athenian Old Comedy, Roman verse satire, and ancient Menippean satire. Chapter 4 examines the Renaissance and early modern period across genres, looking at prose, poetry, and drama. Chapter 5 looks at varieties of prose satire in the Enlightenment, while Chapter 6 covers verse satire in the same historical era, but extends its account through the Romantic era, and glances at some modern examples.

Part III focuses on satire roughly from the mid-eighteenth century to the present, satire that is too often ignored in introductory texts like this. A brief transition frames the critical issues surrounding satire and the novel, and satiric novels are the focus of Chapters 7, 8, and 9. Rather than offer a single chronology of novelistic satire, I identify three different kinds of satiric novel, and provide a historical account of each one. As in the earlier periods,

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I assume that formal or generic questions intersect with historical ones. Because introductory courses are likely to vary widely in the novels that they read, I generally treat a greater number of texts in these chapters through shorter readings. Chapter 10 then takes a broad look at satire in popular culture, analyzing satire in a wide variety of forms including journalism, cartoons, light verse, songs, cinema, and television. An epilogue examines the 2015 murders of the French satirists who worked at the magazine *Charlie Hebdo*, and the questions posed by their satire and the public discussion about it.

I should say a few words about my selection of texts. For the most part, I have limited my focus to the English-language tradition I know best. However, in the earlier periods a few key texts – *Gargantua and Pantagruel*, *Don Quixote*, *Candide*, and of course the seminal classical authors – are simply too important, and too much in conversation with Anglophone works, to ignore. In the later sections, I occasionally nod to well-known or otherwise significant non-English texts as appropriate. A book like this can always include more, and none of the generous colleagues who read drafts of this work failed to make valuable suggestions of material to add. I hope that as readers draw up their own lists of satires that deserve more critical attention, the analysis I offer here will be of some value.

Acknowledgments

Ray Ryan of Cambridge University Press first suggested that I undertake this book. I am grateful for his belief in me and in the book, for his advice and support, and for his willingness to allow this project the time it demanded. Nicholas Nace read the entire manuscript – much of it more than once – and offered brilliant and detailed commentary throughout, improving it immeasurably. I doubt there is a scholar of his generation as deeply or as widely read in the field of satire. Naomi Liebler provided crucial help on early modern satire and even more crucial pep-talks at various stages along the way. Many other friends and colleagues lent their expertise by reading and commenting on individual chapters: Joe Ansolabehere, Lee Behlman, David Galef, Keith Leslie Johnson, Naomi Liebler (again), David Sedley, Miranda Sherwin, Art Simon, and Robert Weisbuch. On certain specialized questions I consulted Oscar Alcantara, Jessica Burstein, Maria DiBattista, Jeff Gonzalez, David Greenberg, Judith Greenberg, Faye Hammill, Jeff Miller, and Adam Rzepka. And David Currell, Maria DiBattista (again), and Simon Dickie shared unpublished work that helped me to think through questions about satire and the epic, Anita Loos, and picaresque fiction. My graduate assistants Janine Butler and Dayna Arcurio helped with the initial proposal for this book; a few years later, the irreplaceable Giana Milazzo contributed smart, thorough, lucid research that must have saved me hundreds of hours of work. The New York Public Library provided research space and support; at Montclair State University, the entire staff of Sprague Library, particularly those helping with interlibrary loans, deserves special mention. A sabbatical granted by Montclair State University allowed me time to complete this book, and Dean Robert Friedman of the College of Humanities and Social Sciences provided assistance for some key expenses.

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