

## **AFRICAN FILM AND LITERATURE 2021 - ON SATIRE & XALA:**

- Example of political satire to play at the beginning:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Pwom49awRKg>
- So, we've looked at various forms and genres of films, from historical fiction with Yeelen to political drama musical with Sarafina, to biopic with Lumumba. With Xala we will now explore satire, political satire, to be precise.
- As we looked at with biopic, certain genre issues and debates of the form will necessarily dictate and influence the artistic decisions made by the director, cinematographer, location scout, and costume department.
- They have to consider things more closely than they would have to in fiction - specifically how setting, casting, performance, and been period and costuming will look and feel.
- This is evident in Lumumba, where issues and debates concerning the biopic's fidelity to the real historical events it fictionalizes is a presiding and important question.
- Satire equally is a genre of film that is common with the medium, specifically politically engaged film of film that deals with complex, controversial, or otherwise challenging or difficult content - whether than be politics, economics, religion, race, gender, or ecology. It is therefore no surprise that much of the form/genre of satire is built on humour and comedy.
- It's like the famous novelist, essayist, political prisoner, and poet Oscar Wilde said in his famous text *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, "If you want to tell people the truth, make them laugh, otherwise they'll kill you." When thinking about satire, let us think about how it engages with hard topics. Moreover, how does it use humour to achieve its effects?

### **Brief Synopsis of *Xala*:**

- Xala (a Wolof word for 'temporary sexual impotence') is the title of Ousmane Sembene's 1975 adaptation of his same 1973 novel. In the narrative, Sembene offers a satirical examination of El Hadji, a Senegali businessman cursed with erectile dysfunction on the day of his marriage to his third wife, Ngone. Through the motif of erectile dysfunction, Sembene satirizes corruption in African post-independence governments whereby El Hadji's impotence is a satirical metaphor for the failure of such governments, their

business acumen, and their sense of postcolonial unity.

***Satire in more detail:***

- According to the poet and satirist Jonathan Swift: "The best satire does not seek to do harm or damage by its ridicule...but rather it seeks to create a shock of recognition and to make vice repulsive so that the vice will be expunged from the person or society intended to benefit by the attack. Whenever possible, this shock of recognition is to be conveyed through laughter or wit" (Swift).
- According to the dictionary, satire may be defined as: "the use of irony, sarcasm, ridicule, or the like, in exposing, denouncing, or deriding vice or folly" ; and/or "a literary composition, in verse or prose, in which human folly and vice are held up to scorn, derision, or ridicule"
- The best satire doesn't seek to cause damage or damage alone with its ridicule. The directed target of the best satire is always to damage the structures of vice it sees as necessary targets of satire, as opposed to damage without aim.
- In this sense, there is something often didactic about good satire - it tries to teach and raise awareness about an issue or debate within society.
- The best satire in this way seeks to create a shock of recognition and to make vice repulsive so that the vice will be expunged from the person or society under attack or from the person or society intended to benefit by the attack (regardless of who is the immediate object of attack)
- Whenever possible this shock of recognition is to be conveyed through laughter or wit: the formula for satire is one of honey and medicine. Far from being simply destructive, satire is implicitly constructive.
- Many controversial stand-up comedians/on-screen comedians would consider themselves to be satirists e.g Sacha Baron Cohen, who has built his entire career on satire (Ali G - satire of conservative British misunderstanding of black populations and cultures/ Bruno - homophobia / Borat - anti-semitism and Western exceptionalism)

### ***The Five Basic Elements of Satire:***

1. ***Attack/Aggression***: Satire is an attack, but usually ironic rather than direct. Direct attack, such as ridicule and sarcasm, are seldom part of effective satire. The aggression in satire is one of the reasons that it is sometimes misunderstood and rejected by readers.
2. ***Judgment***: once a writer decides that something or someone is annoying or ridiculous, then the writer has judged that person or thing to be less than the ideal and to be worthy of satire. In other words, a satirist has already passed judgment on something when the writer begins to write. Judgments are often based on one's ideology (their belief system), ethics (how we treat each other), morality (right and wrong).
3. ***Play (Wit)***: Wit is the ability to play with words in a creative, often sharp yet funny way. To combine aggression and play is paradoxical, but the two permeate satire as they do games, movies and TV programs. Elements of play animate satire and are evident in its imagery and word choice (diction).
4. ***Laughter (Humor)***: Driven by the writer's desire to bring about change, satire may not produce laughter as often as farce, slapstick or comedy. Irony, word play, parody and other satiric devices may prompt laughter, but sometimes the serious purpose of satire or its shocking images may not be conducive to laughter.
5. ***Desire to Instigate Reform (Intent)***: What truly separates sarcasm from satire is intent. While the quick sarcastic remark might be witty and garner laughter, it may not be satirical unless the intent of the speaker is to change something that is wrong with society. In essence, the satirist does not like the way things are going and uses satire to address the issue in an indirect yet impactful way. In order for a work to be a satire, there must be (stated) the desired goal and/or reform sought. This desired reform is traditionally expressed ironically as the opposite point of view of the speaker.

### ***Other Important Satire-related Terms:***

- ***Horatian satire (light satire)***--After the Roman satirist Horace: 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 not the anger of a Juvenal, but a wry smile.

- **Juvenalian satire (dark, heavy satire)**--After the Roman satirist Juvenal: 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. Often called invective satire.
- **Parody**--A composition that imitates the serious manner and characteristic features of a particular work, or the distinctive style of its maker, and applies the imitation to a lowly or comically inappropriate subject. Often a parody is more powerful in its influence on affairs of current importance--politics for instance--than its original composition. It is a variety of burlesque.
- **Exaggeration**--To enlarge, increase, or represent something beyond normal bounds so that it becomes ridiculous and its faults can be seen.
- **Irony**--Saying one thing and meaning another
- **Hyperbole**--To over exaggerate the situation beyond its normal bounds, so it becomes ridiculous. Example: "I'm starving. I could eat a horse."
- **Incongruity**--To present things that are out of place or absurd.
- **Reversal**--To present the opposite of the normal order and/or the order of events, hierarchical order. Example: Fiona saves Shrek (women are supposed to be damsels, not men).
- **Sarcasm**-- is stating the opposite of an intended meaning especially in order to sneeringly, slyly, jest or mock a person, situation or thing. Example: "That's cool." (when you actually hate it) or Talking about how much you think a candidate is doing a good job in a mocking tone or "I am not young enough to know everything."
- **Juxtaposition**-- an act or instance of placing close together or side by side, esp. for comparison or contrast. Example: Humanitarians—Brittney Spears and Mother Teresa

- **Double Entendre (pun)**--A play on words; a word or expression capable of two interpretations with one usually risqué Example: Iraqi Head Seeks Arms or Plane Too Close to Ground, Crash Probe Told.
- **Understatement**--Like hyperbole, this is a type of exaggeration. Can be used to make a situation or idea seem less important than it really is
- **Invective** – harsh, abusive language directed against a person or a cause.
- **Target** --Who (a person or group) or what (an institution or ideology) the satirist is satirizing or targeting.
- **Antithesis** – a figure of speech with strongly contrasting words or ideas.
- **Caricature** – a person's features may be caricatured. Caricature in art or in literature is an exaggerated representation of a character.
- **Vice** – an immoral or evil habit or practice; immoral conduct; depraved or degrading behavior: a life of vice; sexual immorality, especially prostitution; a bad habit.

***Detecting Satire: General Satire Questions You Should Ask Yourself:***

- What type of satirical text (TV, newspaper, essay, film) is being examined? What is the source of the satire?
- What is the title/heading? Is the title/heading meant to be ironic? A pun? Idiomatic? Explain.
- Summarize the piece—That is, describe and or paraphrase the article/show. (just the facts NO OPINION)
- Who is the (hopeful) audience of the satire
- Who is the intended target? (a person, a group of people, an organization, an idea)
- List at least five elements of satire found in the text (see above for list).
- What vice(s) are being exposed? (hint: vice(s)=7 deadly sins)
- Is the satire social or political? Why? Explain.
- What is the overall statement the satirist is making—That is, what does the satirist want reformed in society? Explain.
- Do you agree or disagree with the statement? Explain.
- Would you add or subtract anything from the satire to make it more affective? Explain.
- Potential Problems with Satire

- Misunderstanding: Audience may think the satirist is being serious
- Misuse: People hide behind the idea of satire to get away with saying really stupid and cruel things
- Missing the Point: Too much satire can distract the audience from the “real” message

***Think of the great English satirist Alexander Pope’s proverb here: “Praise undeserved, is satire in disguise”***

***Group Work From Tuesday's Class:***

***Part I:***

- In groups, I would like you to watch your assigned satirical video. First, ask yourselves and answer the following two questions: 1) What topic/genre/form/style is being satirized? 2) How effective is the satire at making its point? (provide textual evidence to support your points)

***Part II:***

Use the 5 features of satire as analytical lenses to further analyse your clips. The features are as follows:

1) Attack/Aggression: Satire is an attack, but usually ironic rather than direct. Direct attack, such as ridicule and sarcasm, are seldom part of effective satire. The aggression in satire is one of the reasons that it is sometimes misunderstood and rejected by readers.

2) Judgment: once a writer decides that something or someone is annoying or ridiculous, then the writer has judged that person or thing to be less than the ideal and to be worthy of satire. In other words, a satirist has already passed judgment on something when the writer begins to write. Judgments are often based on one's ideology (their belief system), ethics (how we treat each other), morality (right and wrong).

3) Play (Wit): Wit is the ability to play with words in a creative, often sharp yet funny way. To combine aggression and play is paradoxical, but the two permeate satire as they do games, movies and TV programs. Elements of play animate satire and are evident in its imagery and word choice (diction).

4) Laughter (Humor): Driven by the writer's desire to bring about change, satire may not produce laughter as often as farce, slapstick or comedy. Irony, word play, parody and other satiric devices may prompt laughter, but sometimes the serious purpose of satire or its shocking images may not be conducive to laughter.

5) Desire to Instigate Reform (Intent): What truly separates sarcasm from satire is intent. While the quick sarcastic remark might be witty and garner laughter, it may not be satirical unless the intent of the speaker is to change something that is wrong with society. In essence, the satirist does not like the way things are going and uses satire to address the issue in an indirect way yet impactful way. In order for a work to be a satire, there must be (stated) the desired goal and/or reform sought. This desired reform is traditionally expressed ironically as the opposite point of view of the speaker.

- **Group I:** "Are Violent Video Games Preparing Kids For The Apocalypse?":  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VTbYUd1jUc4>
- **Group II:** "Apple Introduces Revolutionary New Laptop With No Keyboard":  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9BnLbv6QYcA>
- **Group III:** "Bad Boy Fencing Star Implicated In Yet Another Jewel Heist":  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oZi-9zovNsw>
- **Group IV:** "Charlie Brooker's How to Report the News - Newswipe - BBC Four":  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aHun58mz3vI>

## RESOURCES

## ON

## SATIRE:

<https://www.readwritethink.org/classroom-resources/lesson-plans/exploring-satire-shrek#ResourceTabs4>

<https://www.coursehero.com/file/26452298/An-introduction-to-satire-Lesson-Plandocx/>

<https://s28543.pcdn.co/wp-content/uploads/sites/39/2020/10/Satire-lesson.pdf>

Satire and humour: <https://andrewunger.com/teaching-satire/what-makes-people-laugh/>

Definition of satire: <https://andrewunger.com/teaching-satire/what-is-satire/>

<https://www.masterclass.com/articles/what-is-satire-how-to-use-satire-in-literature-pop-culture-and-politics-plus-tips-on-using-satire-in-writing#tips-for-using-satire>

Difference between Satire and Fake News: <https://andrewunger.com/teaching-satire/what-is-fake-news/>

Detecting Satire: <https://andrewunger.com/teaching-satire/how-to-detect-satire/>

Caricature and Allusion: <https://study.com/academy/lesson/political-satire-definition-examples.html>

XALA CLOSE READING IDEAS (QUESTIONS TO ASK):  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=COimAotPgGo>

***Xala***

**notes:**

- Note the opening satire of how seemingly easy the process of decolonizing Africa is - just a matter of the removal of colonial symbols and iconography associated with the colonial era and practices - in this scene, the jackboot, the marble bust of a war goddess (might be the figure of Britannia, a symbol of British Imperialism and sea power, typically depicted helmeted like the Greek and roman goddesses Athena and Minerva, carrying a shield embossed with the Union Jack, and also wielding a trident), there's also the tricolour - employed on the flags of many former colonial powers including Germany, France, Italy, Belgium, Netherlands.
- Note the very solemn and serious voice-over narration about independence, sovereignty, brotherhood, and unity juxtaposed against the very humorous gang of leaders - who look like my uncles - shooing away the mustachioed white politicians out of the Chamber of Commerce (note how these issues and debates of independence dont take place in parliament or the supreme or high court. They take place in the central location of power, namely the chamber of commerce). Note how the independence government officials and ministers make the outgoing colonials take the symbols out themselves. And yet, outside, it is white commander who still has authority enough to dispatch and deploy troops.



- Notice the difference in attire between the local and foreign officials, the whites and the blacks, how the latter switch from traditional to black tie formal.
- Satire through juxtaposition and irony. On the one hand, the narrator calls for true socialism, African socialism, while these foreign white bankers deliver briefcases full of money for each and every one of this new government - all of the ministers, deputies and 'honorable' colleagues.
- Funny how the Revolution is discussed and debated in the Chamber of Commerce. A satirical suggestion that the father of the nation is essentially money.
- "Modernity must not let us lose our Africanicity" - Mr. President.
- Note how they literally have a red carpet rolled out for them after this so-called Revolutionary meeting. Each minister has his own Mercedes (notice how one stalls when trying to pull off - by accident or intentional satirical gesture of impotence) - all of this pageantry as a satirical commentary on the farce of opulence (the ministerial excesses and over-extravagance)
- The same with Ngone's mother - the wedding gifts as examples of excess and opulence - "a box of gold, a car, a television"
- Think of the hierarchy of wives - Adja having to go to the wedding ceremony of the 3rd wife. Think about how Oumi, the 2nd wife, refers to Adja as "a dried old fish - harpy" and vociferously, that means passionately, loudly, criticizing her for jealousy due to being older than she is.

## **RAMA VS HADJI**

- El Hadji slapping Rama for accusing him of being dishonest because of being a polygamist - "take your revolution elsewhere - I'm master here - it was people like me that kicked out the colonizers - polygamy is part of our religious identity" - the irony in the tension between Western values and standards of morality and traditional continental practices - the incompatibility between traditional beliefs and progressive values.
- Characterization through satiric irony and conflict: think of how Oumi is introduced. She is introduced in conflict with Adja. Adja wears traditional clothing, sedate, relaxed,

graceful, firm, calm. Oumi, younger, truculent, excitable, passionate, firm in a combative way, yells at El Hadji - direct in her demands for what she wants. She insults Adja while Adja does not engage in insults.

- Think of the scene where El Hadji tosses coins to the poor gathered outside the wedding - a satire on the so-called brotherly love and charity promised in a postcolonial Africa. Where is the African unity here? El Hadji might as well be some colonialist throwing scraps of food to slaves. This scene also emphasizes the dog-eat-dog nature of the milieu as the soldier claims one of the coins he tosses. He uses his stature and authority to secure the coin for himself. Where is the idea of a free, decolonized unified sense of community?
- Irony of Oumi saying to Ngone's mother: "we women must stick together" after spending much of her introductory scene badmouthing Adja whom in this scene she refers to as her elder and example (Adja only complains about being demoted in the order of wives, a point on which she refuses to budge) - with her wealth transferred to El Hadji, her status as 1st wife protects her financially - irony of Oumi saying: "you'll see I'm not jealous" after going off about Adja.
- Adja telling Oumi to be patient like her wife - "patience doesn't kill, if it did I would be dead"
- El Hadji refusing to remove his tuxedo to wear his traditional kaftan and adhere to tradition by straddling the pestle and mortar is ironic as he yells at his own daughter for being non-traditional with regard to her attitude about polygamy. Ngone's mother retorts: "You're not a white man. You're nothing special" - satirizing the convenient, self-interested reference and enforcement of tradition.
- The wedding guests: "I can't go to Spain anymore [...] everywhere you look, there are negroes" - a satire on the outward show and rhetoric of unity and community versus the hyper-individualistic desire for personal gain, status, and uniqueness.
- The president, government minister, and El Hadji discussing sexual performance enhancers - El Hadji refuses the President's who claims that it has a period of onset of 5 minutes. The minister from Banjul claims his is instant. El Hadji only agrees to accept their tinctures, ironically, to satisfy THEM, not the intended recipient of their effects, namely, his wife.

- El Hadji unable to have/maintain an erection - “crumpled like wet paper” - Ngone’s mother and auntie remonstrating El Hadji as the couple laments. They blame him for not following tradition and straddling the pestle and mortar. As they inspect the bed for hymenal blood - a symbol of the ritual and ceremony of El Hadji’s patriarchal authority - which depends on his ability to perform and adhere to certain conventions as well - crumples like wet paper in the face of the condemnation of these women and his failure.
- In many ways, this is Sembene’s critique of bucking tradition, stubbornness, resulting in El Hadji’s loss of virility, his rejection of culture for a Eurocentric self-aggrandizement has consequences. Eurocentric exceptionalism, regardless of how well or closely it is mimicked, cannot make him a white man and free of the power of his own culture.
- The pickpocket stealing from the farmer in the red fez - everyone is out for themselves. The irony that getting rid of the colonizers didn’t somehow magically ensure that all Africans would suddenly be brothers.
- El Hadji complains to the president about the “human rubbish” begging outside his storefront. Seeking to be rid of them through extreme prejudice and deportation - an extremely classic attitude to your own countrymen, those you should be and claim to be serving?
- Note how the president speaks with El Hadji about his marabout - see how his so-called pride in their shared Africanity is treated with shame and secrecy.
- Ironical satire - the farmer who got robbed arrested along with the Kaddu salesman, who offered, selflessly in one of the only shows of true brotherhood in the film, along with all the beggars - are all arrested wholesale. A satire of police incompetence as well as a lack of precision and the overextension of the police state apparatus. Meanwhile the actual perpetrator goes free and gets not only a tidy sum, but a new suit out of it.
- Oumi and El Hadji at his business: “You’re too old to take on a young crick. A third wife doesn’t become you. Find a cure. You’re terribly thin. Go to see a doctor. The fun and games are over. I’m still your wife. It’s my turn. I’ll see you tonight. You know me...I’m always ready”

- All the shots of the disabled people - what imagery/symbolism do they hold, what function do they serve in terms of satire?

LOVE BREWED IN AN AFRICAN POT: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5y\\_JVOqYUA](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5y_JVOqYUA)