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Ms. Small

Humanities

11 December 2021

### Elon Musk: Luminary or Sociopath?

On September 28<sup>th</sup>, 2021, Elon Musk was declared the richest person in the world. His ambition and celebrity status have rapidly propelled him into the upper echelon of society. However, his financial and communal success has not been met with acceptance on all sides. Although his devotees insist that Musk has done nothing wrong and is a luminary for the next generation, critics argue that Musk's background and abuse of power have paved the way for his achievements. In chronicling this dilemma, two writers took different approaches to explaining Musk's vices. In "Elon Musk Admits He Wants to Travel to Mars Because No One Hates Him There Yet," Jeremy Kaplowitz, a satire writer for the Hard Drive, uses Generation Z style humor to depict Elon Musk as a feeble-minded ignoramus who longs to travel away to be free from his burdens. Although this piece and many other of Kaplowitz's works, have the appearance of inconsequential wisecracks, many have philosophical undertones that provoke the reader to reevaluate their thoughts of contemporary issues. On the opposite end of the spectrum, is the news article, "5 reasons some Austinites love to hate Elon Musk" which discusses five reasons many disapprove of the billionaire. Despite the fact this article is modern and simple, its structure and analytical approach models a professional publication, moreover than a satirical piece. Although Freer's article appeals to a wider audience using informal diction and appeals to logos, Kaplowitz's article more effectively convinces its readers to change their views on the

tech mogul by creating a caricature of the entrepreneur and emphasizing the follies of his fans, such as naivety and hypocrisy.

Although the satirical article emphasizes a message that resonates with a smaller demographic, the serious article more effectively conveys Musk's vices to a much wider audience through use of an informal diction and appeals to logos. The satirical article was written by a senior journalist who organized the content in a point-by-point structure. Even though the article is trendy and aimed at millennials, the simple, colloquial language used makes it easy and appropriate to read for all ages. An example of this simplicity can be found in the introduction where rather than construct a complex thesis statement, the article directly introduces the topic with the statement, "Here are five reasons why some Austinites love to hate him" (Freer). The satirical article, on the other hand, was catered to a much narrower demographic of teenagers and young adults who are primarily the ones supporting the multi-billionaire. For this reason, the article is difficult to follow and uses a lot of slang diction such as "hilonklious" and "yeet" which most readers of all ages would not understand. In addition to the confusing diction, the majority of the article focuses on pointing out different controversies surrounding Musk. An example can be found in this statement, "I tried building a little Fortress of Solitude for myself ... but I quickly angered a group of penguins after I called one a pedophile because he stole a fish I wanted to eat" (Kaplowitz). This ridiculous statement sounds as mere hyperbole and caricature, but it is referring to Elon Musk calling a British diver a "pedophile" with unfounded claims. By expecting the reader to already know a plethora of facts about Elon Musk, the satirical article does not assert points that would dissuade most readers from renouncing the tycoon. In contrast to this rhetorical choice, Freer uses many quotes and statistics to back up her claims. A tweet by Elon Musk follows every point, and citations were used to explain the gravity behind important

topics. For instance, Freer uses the fact that many Americans pay 6.73% more in federal income tax to reason that people have a valid reason to be upset with Musk as a billionaire, notwithstanding his flaws. While the satirical article conveys a message to a more relevant audience, Freer's news article more effectively discusses a famous tech mogul who has been at the epicenter of the world's technological and financial news.

By creating an oblivious, and imbecilic caricature, the satirical article more cogently persuades the reader to reconsider their views of Musk, as opposed to simply listing out flaws. Although Musk has been known to be a brilliant entrepreneur with financial and technological prowess, Kaplowitz creates the character of a dimwit who is too self-absorbed to realize what is going on around him. An example of this denseness can be found when Elon proclaims, "I thought that if I just kept making money, I could become epic... turns out I'm not as epic as I thought I was" (Kaplowitz). Through these childish monologues, Kaplowitz delves into the psyche of Musk to explain the root cause of his erratic behaviors. The disparity between the serious undertones and the infantile parody is quite jarring, but it's effective because it puts Musk's vices into perspective. By satirizing Musk's thought process and the controversies surrounding him, it forces the reader to look at him from a hypothetical angle and evaluate if they would support the businessman if he was devoid of astuteness. Leading off that thought-provoking rationale, Kaplowitz points out that modern youth is so infatuated by the man that we are blind to who he is becoming. The news article, on the other hand, attempts to convey the same message, but does not assert a compelling claim. Although the point-by-point by structure is coherent and straightforward, it is difficult to understand the author's stance and whether she is trying to actively persuade or dissuade readers from supporting Elon Musk. In addition to this obscurity, the author ends the article with the statement, "Love him or hate him, Musk provokes

a strong response—and seems poised for success regardless” (Freer). This point is valid, but by presenting this tangent, the author invalidates the main point of her article and feebly claims that Musk shouldn’t be held responsible for his actions. Although Freer’s article is a straightforward read, Kaplowitz’s article asserts a riveting message, while also posing thought-provoking questions that compel the reader to take action against Musk.

In addition to satirizing the billionaire, the satirical article outlines the follies of people surrounding Musk, which is a point not considered in Freer’s article. Since adolescents are quick to support Musk, Kaplowitz melodramatically caricaturizes Musk’s fans as devout followers who would “literally die for the Musk God,” for a chance to be his “blood boy.” This statement is hyperbolic and once again uses slang diction as the word “blood boy” is defined as a young person who provides billionaires with transfusions of blood. But looking past this informal rhetoric, the caricature implies that perhaps the billionaire isn’t the only problem; supporters who bat a blind eye to Musk’s faults are exacerbating the problem: his social acceptance. Kaplowitz doesn’t stop there, he also creates a caricature of his critics as well and portrays them as hypocrites who employ the same traits as Musk himself. This implied message is subtle but although Musk’s hater continually remark that the CEO should not be given the leeway to “cover up rampant greed, sh\*tty work environments, transphobic comments” with occasional tweets, Kaplowitz asserts that they themselves use the same type of edgy humor as Musk. Although the language used is quite harsh, in both scenarios, Kaplowitz proclaims to his intended audience that because of their naivety, they are incognizant of Musk’s true motivations. The article’s style remains Horatian, but in this regard, it utilizes aspects of Juvenalian satire by criticizing all parties involved. This juxtaposition of satirical styles doesn’t provide a clear solution, but it emphasizes the point that the social acceptance of Musk is a point to be reconsidered and the

issues lies in the people surrounding him, as opposed to just the man himself. In the news article, Freer does not make any attempt to offend the general audience, and appears to consistently use a neutral tone. Although Musk's decision to move his company's headquarters to Texas has been criticized as proof of his cost cutting measures, Freer uses a quote from a Texas writer to explain that is decision simply a proof of Musk's ambition. However, when talking about how people are quick to disapprove of Musk simply because he is richer than them, Freer says, "But perhaps Musk's greatest offense is his billionaire status." This sarcastic statement conflicts with the rest of the article and implies that the author believes that Musk's critics are to share part of the blame. This rhetorical choice is discordant with the points previously outlined and as a result it blurs the main focus of the news article. Unlike many of the other claims in this article, Freer doesn't use a quote to back this statement up meaning that this ideology is of her own belief, and isn't one that would necessarily align with a general audience. Although both articles offend a percentage of readers in some way, Kaplowitz's article uses the caricatures he composed to assert that part of the reason why Musk isn't ostracized for his actions is because of the naivety of young people.

Using satirical devices such as caricatures and explanations of follies of not only Elon Musk, but his audience as well, Kaplowitz's article more effectively persuades readers to take action against Elon Musk, as opposed to the analytical devices and structure used in Freer's article. Although Elon Musk is just one individual in this vast world, his juvenescent social acceptance shows that modern youth are becoming naïve towards the ambitions of people in power. Both articles discuss the same topic, but Kaplowitz continually warns his audience that we are quick to judge others, without realizing the nature of our own actions.

Works Cited

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## INFLUENCERS

## 5 reasons some Austinites love to hate Elon Musk

**Emma Freer** 15 July*(Laura Figi/Austonia)*

Many Austinites—including Texas Gov. Greg Abbott and members of the local Tesla Owners Club—welcomed the news of Elon Musk's arrival in town. But not everyone feels the same way.

The enigmatic billionaire stokes criticism seemingly everywhere he goes, whether it's on Saturday Night Live or space

## 1. California clique

Musk is perhaps the most extreme example of a commonly lamented trend: wealthy Californians moving to Austin for relatively affordable housing, driving up demand (and prices) for existing residents.

He followed his many business ventures to Texas, including Tesla, SpaceX and the Boring Company, which were drawn by tax breaks and other business-friendly policies.

"Musk, whose companies tend to depend on venture capital and government subsidies to survive, thrives on hype," Michael Agresta [wrote in Texas Monthly last December](#). "In that sense, he and Austin make a perfect match."

As some Austinites lamented the move, their Californian counterparts celebrated it. "Musk has become California's Frankenstein," [a Mercury News opinion columnist wrote](#) upon news of his departure, citing concerns about worker safety and anti-union efforts at Musk companies. "Our reporter has turned against us."



Local and state union officials were not happy when Tesla sought economic incentives from Travis County, which ultimately granted them, clinching the electric automaker's decision to build a new Gigafactory in Southeast Travis County.

United Auto Workers Vice President Cindy Estrada and Texas AFL-CIO President Rick Levy, among others, cited Tesla's "troubled history with taxpayer subsidies" in [a letter sent to commissioners last summer](#). They cited Musk's decision to open a California Tesla factory in defiance of state health officials' COVID-19 directors and reports of workplace injuries and other safety concerns.

Local elected officials also questioned the optics of subsidizing Tesla, given its close association with the billionaire. "I'm ... concerned about some of our small businesses struggling right now, and what kind of message is sent to them for government to help wealthy corporations," Travis County Attorney (and former District 2 Council Member) Delia Garza [told Austonia last June](#).

### 3. Bad COVID takes



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— Elon Musk (@Elon Musk) [1589042083.0](#)

Musk has drawn outrage far beyond Austin's city limits for [his pandemic stances](#), which include questioning the safety of COVID vaccines, telling the New York Times he wouldn't get vaccinated, threatening to sue a California county that shut down a Tesla assembly line due to the pandemic and insisting kids were immune to the virus despite evidence of the contrary.

#### 4. Crypto backlash

@BillyM2k <https://t.co/pODkFkWHfV>— Elon Musk (@Elon Musk) [1622779069.0](#)

The cryptocurrency community also has a bone to pick with Musk, whose tweets have driven the volatility of Dogecoin and other cryptocurrencies, leading some to accuse him of market manipulation.

Disdain for the Elon Musk Effect is so great that one group of fellow crypto connoisseurs created a new coin: [STOPELON](#).

## 5. Wealth gap woes



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But perhaps Musk's greatest offense is his billionaire status. He is the second richest person in the world, according to Forbes' 2021 index. So when his companies apply for property tax subsidies or other forms of corporate welfare it rubs many the wrong way.

"We simply cannot afford to give preferential tax treatment to our wealthiest corporate citizens, or prospective wealthy corporate citizens, under a 3.5% revenue cap," then-County Judge Sarah Eckhardt said last summer, as Tesla was applying for such treatment. "This is a 'like-to-have' that we simply can't afford under this new normal."

Musk also pays a far lower "true tax rate" than most Austinites—around 3.27% compared to the lowest federal income tax rate of 10%, according to [a report published by ProPublica in June](#).

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myth of the American tax system: that everyone pays their fair share and the richest Americans pay the most," the reporters wrote.

Love him or hate him, Musk provokes a strong response—and seems poised for success regardless.

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## POPULAR



# HARD DRIVE

## Elon Musk Admits He Wants to Travel to Mars Because No One Hates Him There Yet



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BY [JEREMY KAPLOWITZ](#) ON MARCH 28, 2021

**A**USTIN, Texas — Wiping tears from his eyes at a recent press conference, SpaceX CEO Elon Musk revealed that the reason he's so keen on traveling to Mars is not for the potential benefits to science, but because it's the one place he can think of where no one hates him yet.

"I thought that if I just kept making money, I could become epic... turns out I'm not as epic as I thought I was," Musk explained at the press conference. "Ever since I was bullied as a kid just because my dad owned a South African emerald mine during apartheid, I knew I wanted to get revenge by being the richest, coolest guy in the world. That's why I spend my time making cool jokes and being a stonk lord on the interwebs. But people still hate me! When I saw that hilonklious

meme about that blue guy on Mars, it gave me the idea to go myself. I'm tired of Earth. These people. Time to yeet myself to freaking Mars!"

"Because it's really tough to find a place where no one hates me," Musk continued. "I tried building a little Fortress of Solitude for myself in Antarctica — like a little someone named Superman, ever heard of him? — but I quickly angered a group of penguins after I called one a pedophile because he stole a fish I wanted to eat."

Fans have been split on the announcement, with those generally against Musk criticizing it and those who generally favor Musk praising it.

"You simply cannot cover up rampant greed, shitty work environments, transphobic comments, and a general online cruelty with the occasional meme," said an anti-Musk commenter. "Hell, he's just getting them from the same subreddits we use anyway, so it's not like it's particularly novel."

"I would literally die for the Musk God," said a pro-Musk commenter, on the other hand. "I would jump in front of a bullet for him. Even if he was the one who shot the gun, as he so often is. I would die for you, sir. Please let me be your blood boy!!!"

At press time, SpaceX announced they were changing course, however. According to a statement it released, the company is now working to send a spaceship to Jupiter instead of Mars, after Mars Perseverance rover sent a message to NASA of just a photo of Musk with infamous human trafficker Ghislaine Maxwell.

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7

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