

Satire

Satire Definition

Satire is a technique employed by writers to expose and criticize foolishness and corruption of an individual or a society, by using [humor](#), [irony](#), [exaggeration](#), or ridicule. It intends to improve humanity by criticizing its follies and foibles. A writer in a satire uses fictional characters, which stand for real people, to expose and condemn their corruption.

A writer may point a satire toward a person, a country, or even the entire world. Usually, a satire is a comical piece of writing which makes fun of an individual or a society, to expose its stupidity and shortcomings. In addition, he hopes that those he criticizes will improve their characters by overcoming their weaknesses.

Satire and Irony

Satire and irony are interlinked. Irony is the difference between what is said or done, and what is actually meant. Therefore, writers frequently employ satire to point at the dishonesty and silliness of individuals and society, and criticize them by ridiculing them.

Examples of Satire in Everyday Life

Most political cartoons we see every day in newspapers and magazines are examples of satire. These cartoons criticize some recent actions of political figures in a comical way.

Some shows on television are satire examples, such as *The Daily Show*, *The Colbert Report*, and *The Larry Sanders Show*. These shows [claim](#) to target what they think are stupid political and social viewpoints.

Let us see a sample of Stephen Colbert's social satire:

“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.”

Examples of Satire in Literature

Example #1: *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (By Mark Twain)

There are numerous examples of satire in Mark Twain’s *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. He uses satire as a tool to share his ideas and opinions on slavery, human nature, and many other issues that afflicted American society at that time.

Below are a few citations from the novel that demonstrate satire:

“What’s the use you learning to do right, when it’s troublesome to do right and isn’t no trouble to do wrong, and the wages is just the same?” (Ch. 16)

“There warn’t anybody at the church, except maybe a hog or two, for there warn’t any lock on the door, and hogs likes a puncheon floor in summer-time because it’s cool. If you notice, most folks don’t go to church only when they’ve got to; but a hog is different.” (Ch. 18)

“The pitifulest thing out is a mob; that’s what an army is – a mob; they don’t fight with courage that’s born in them, but with courage that’s borrowed from their mass, and from their officers. But a mob without any man at the head of it is beneath pitifulness.” (Ch. 22)

Example #2: *The Rape of the Lock* (By Alexander Pope)

Alexander Pope’s *The Rape of the Lock* is an example of poetic satire in which he has satirized the upper middle class of eighteenth century England. It exposes the vanity of young fashionable ladies and gentlemen, and the frivolity of their actions. For example, Pope says, about Belinda, after losing her lock of hair:

“Whether the nymph shall break Diana’s law,

Or stain her honor, or her new brocade...”

The line mocks the values of the fashionable class of that age. The trivial things were thought of as equal to significant things. For Belinda, the loss of her virtue becomes equal to a China jar being cracked.

Example #3: *Gulliver Travels* (By Jonathan Swift)

Jonathan Swift’s *Gulliver Travels* is one of the finest satirical works in English Literature. Swift relentlessly satirizes politics, religion, and Western culture. Criticizing party politics in England, Swift writes:

“...that for above seventy Moons past there have been two struggling Parties in this Empire, under the Names of Tramecksan and Slamecksan from the high and low Heels on their shoes, by which they distinguish themselves.”

During Swift’s times, two rival political parties, the Whigs and the Tories, dominated the English political scene. Similarly, “The Kingdom of Lilliput” is dominated by two parties distinguished by the size of the heels of their boots. By the trivial disputes between the two Lilliputian parties, Swift satirizes the minor disputes of the two English parties of his period.

Function of Satire

The role of satire is to ridicule or criticize those vices in society the writer considers to be a threat to civilization. The writer considers it his obligation to expose these vices for the betterment of humanity. Therefore, the function of satire is not to make others laugh at persons or ideas they make fun of. It intends to warn the public, and to change people’s opinions about the prevailing corruption and conditions in society.