

Literary Elements of Satire

Satire is always topical. That is, it is about something that the author feels needs to be exposed or denounced. It is often a painful, absurd or foolish person, group or situation.

The author tries to produce the unexpected by using one or more of the following:

1. Irony (incongruity)
2. Paradox (dilemma or puzzle)
3. Antithesis (direct opposite)
4. Parody (caricature)
5. Obscenity (objectionable language)
6. Violence (brutality)
7. Vividness (Clarity or intensity)
8. Exaggeration (overstatement)

The emotion felt by the author is a blend of contempt and amusement. In some works one almost completely outweighs the other. However, it always contains some trace of laughter, however, bitter. Horror, hate and fear without amusement will not make a satire, but a diatribe, merely a denunciation. It is not possible to write an effective satire about Hitler, cancer, or real tragedies.

There are two kinds of satirists. One is an optimist who thinks people are blind and foolish and wishes to cure them. The other is a pessimist who hates people and wants to punish them.

Satire can take various forms:

Monologue – This is just one speaker, speaking directly to the audience, usually in the form of an essay. “A Modest Proposal” by Jonathan Swift is an example of this form.

Parody – This is an imitation which uses distortion and exaggeration to evoke amusement or derision. It groups extremes to make them absurd. Weird Al does parodies of popular songs.

Narrative - This is a story that leaves a bitter aftertaste with the reader, with the intended purpose of change. Satire wishes to expose, criticize and shame human life. This is often done by introducing a strange land or foreign world, or our own world at some future time. George Orwell’s novels *1984* and *Animal Farm*, as well as *Brave New World* by Aldous Huxley and *Fahrenheit 451* by Ray Bradbury are all examples of this form.

Visual Art – Political cartoons and caricatures are examples of this form. The subject is made to look ridiculous by emphasizing certain important or noticeable features.