The purpose and method of satire

To say that satire does not need to include a moral lesson or didactic purpose is wrong because the very essence of satire is aggression or criticism, and thoughtful criticism has nearly always implied a reference to a systematic measure of good and bad. An object is criticized because it falls short of some standard which the critic desires that it should reach. Normally the standard is objective, though it can be subjective and personal to the satirist. Inseparable from any definition of satire is its corrective purpose, expressed through a critical mode which ridicules or otherwise attacks those conditions needing reformation. Criticizing, mocking, exaggerating, understating—all the satirist’s principal tools—imply a normative set of values. To expose someone or something because it “doesn’t measure up” clearly assumes reference to a measure. Thus, I believe there is no satire without a corrective purpose.

Accordingly, the best definitions of satire should be formulated from a combination of its corrective intent and its literary method of execution. A reasonable definition of satire, then, is “a literary manner which blends a critical attitude with humor and wit to the end that human institutions or humanity may be improved. The true satirist is conscious of the frailty of institutions of man’s devising and attempts through laughter not so much to tear them down as to inspire a remodeling” (Thrall, et al 436).

The best satire does not seek to do harm or damage by its ridicule, unless we speak of damage to the structure of vice, 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 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, and the satirists themselves, whom I trust concerning such matters, often depict themselves as such constructive critics. In his “Verses on the Death of Dr. Swift,” for example, Swift denies any malicious intent in his works, and affirms his purpose was correction:

As with a moral View design’d
To cure the Vices of Mankind:
His vein, ironically grave,
Expos’d the Fool, and lash’d the Knave.

Yet, Malice never was his Aim;
He lash’d the Vice but spar’d the Name.
No Individual could resent,
Where Thousands equally were meant.
His Satyr points at no Defect,
But what all Mortals may correct. . . .
(ll. 313-16, 459-64)

In the Intelligencer, Number III, Swift also disclaims malice as a motive, while again proclaiming the purpose of satire as the correction of vice and the reinstatement of virtue: “There are two Ends that Men propose in writing Satyr; one of them less noble than the other, as regarding nothing further than the private Satisfaction, and Pleasure of the Writer; but without any View towards personal Malice: The other is a public Spirit, prompting Men of Genius and Virtue, to mend the World as far as they are able. . . . But, if my Design be to make mankind better; then I think it is my Duty; at least, I am sure it is the Interest of those very Courts and Ministers, whose Follies or Vices I ridicule, to reward me for my good Intentions.”

It is important to note in the above quotation that Swift says the satirists aim “to mend the World as far as they are able” not that they hope for any kind of perfection or believe in the complete corrigibility of any man. Ideally, of course, the satirist would like to see a return to the practice of morality which he feels has been abandoned by society; but he is aware that not only to stop the decay of civilization but also to reverse the trend of decay and to move toward a true moral progress is almost a futile attempt, because it calls for a complete moral regeneration of man, and such a regeneration is virtually impossible. So the practical hope and aim of the satirist is that his barbs will be sufficiently irritating to stop or at least slow down the increase of evil, even though it cannot be reversed. In his “Apology” prefixed to a Tale of a Tub in 1710, Swift says in discussing his purpose and method of this “useful and diverting” satire, “Why should any Clergyman of our Church be angry to see the Follies of Fanaticism and Superstition exposed, tho’ in the most ridiculous manner? since that is perhaps the most probable way to cure them, or at least to hinder them from further spreading” (Pagliaro 332). Pope echoes this in a letter (which I will quote later at greater length) by saying of his satire, “I hope to deter, if not to reform.” Perhaps the very nature of
It may be objected here that not all satire is meant to be corrective, because satirists occasionally attack foibles or failings basic to man's nature which cannot be changed, or for which change is unlikely. But it can be argued in reply that such satire of inexpungible vices is still corrective, for it seeks to establish proper moral attitudes toward those vices. For example, if it be impossible to rid men of jealousy or egotism, the satirist will try to make men despise those feelings, resist them, and cease encouraging them. In cases where the satirist ridicules man because of the necessity for eating or elimination, or some other condition basic to man, he seeks to correct man's view of himself--to reduce mankind's pride by reminding him of his limitations and his humble human lot.

Derived by implication from this corrective purpose, the theme of satire must be the maintenance of standards, the reaffirmation of values, and the necessity of reform. According to Maynard Mack, "Satire . . . asserts the validity and necessity of norms, systematic values, and meanings that are contained by recognizable codes" (85). Satire is inescapably moral and didactic (in the best sense of that unfortunately slandered word) even when no definite, positive values are stated in the work as alternatives to the gross corruptions depicted by the attack. The satirist does not need to state specific moral alternatives to replace the villainy he attacks because the morality is either already present in the lip service his target pays to virtue, or it is apparent by implication. The satirist presupposes an educated readership which will easily be able to discover the implicit morality without any help other than a few ironic hints from the writer. (In at least on instance, however, the satirist produces a positive example by setting himself up as a "model of moral perception and behavior" [Waingrow 513].) Thus Pope can impute moral reform to Gulliver in spite of that traveler's blundering ignorance and blind bigotry:

You, like the Samian, visit Lands unknown,
And by their wiser Morals mend your own.
Thus Orpheus travell'd to reform his Kind,
 Came back, and tam'd the Brutes he left behind.
You went, you saw, you heard: With Virtue fraught,
Then spread those Morals which the Houyhnhnms taught.
(Pope, Verses ll. 17-22)

Satire is indeed so thoroughly concerned with justice, morality, and virtue, that it has a number of striking resemblances to the basic ethical viewpoint of Christianity. Both satire and Christianity believe strongly in the fallen nature of man, believe that right conduct is not possible for a man without a guide (cf. Tale of a Tub), believe that pride is the most pernicious vice (cf. Gulliver's Travels), and believe that reason itself is all right, but that when men pretend that reason can be the sole arbiter of all truth, moral disaster is imminent (Price xi-xiii). Edward and Lillian Bloom say that the satirist must love or at least care for mankind to take the trouble to attack and (hopefully) correct his wickedness (115-137). We could say that this is the satirist's practical application of Christ's injunction to love our enemies (Matthew 5:44, Luke 6:27-28), because genuine concern for another's welfare when it does not affect us personally is one of the basic indications of disinterested love.

Pope affirms in several of his poems that his concern for man and virtue is disinterested. He says of himself in "Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot" (ll. 342-43), "That not for Fame, but Virtue's better end,/ He stood the furious foe, the timid Friend. . . ." This is expanded upon in "Imitations of Horace, II.i":

Hear this, and tremble! you, who 'scape the Laws,
Yes, while I live, no rich or noble knave
Shall walk the World, in credit, to his grave.
TO VIRTUE ONLY and HER FRIENDS, A FRIEND
The World beside may murmur, or commend.

Envy must own, I live among the Great,
No Pimp of Pleasure, and no Spy of State,
With Eyes that pry not, Tongue that ne'er repeats,
Fond to spread Friendships, but to cover Heats,
To help who want, to forward who excel;
This, all who know me, know; who love me, tell. . . .
(II. 118-22, 133-38)

Without regard to where he finds it, Pope feels compelled to combat vice and work for the establishment of Truth and Virtue, out of concern for himself and for man in general; those in superior moral positions have a duty to be standard bearers for the race and to resist or reprove every unpropitious act which would tend to lead man farther down from his already poor state. The satirist does not selfishly attack anyone who disagrees with him (though there are exceptions); rather he undertakes to oppose evil because it is evil, without consideration of whose evil it is or against whom it was perpetrated:

And must no Egg in Japhet's Face be thrown,
Because the Deed he forg'd was not my own?
And such, I think is the moral stance behind all satire, or at least that of the Augustans. (It is conceivable that someone could satirize virtue or morality in an attempt to "correct" social behavior by instituting the values of free love, which values are present in the so-called counter culture, but generally speaking the satirist has always aligned himself with the timeless, traditional notions of virtue and morality.) Why the moral stance behind satire remains implicit so often is dictated by the satiric method, which in turn is necessitated by the structure and nature of social corruption. This use of implicit morality becomes more understandable in connection with the method of satire and the rationale behind it.

The reason the satirist doesn't merely write moral tracts encouraging people to virtue, and the reason he feels justified in displaying anger and indignation at the common follies and vices of men is that the satirist's world is not one of basic good accidentally gone astray, in which every man would seek good if he know how or were shown the way, but rather it is one of unseeing fools and unsightly knaves who either claim to possess virtue already, or who have already rejected it, claiming that vice is (or is as good as) virtue. It is a world of hypocrisy, in which social standing, church membership, titles and degrees, peer praise, lip service to morals, and wealth are all used to hide evils of the first order. In such a world of hypocrites and pretenders, simple moral encouragement would be totally ineffectacious. The satirist, therefore, will display his critical attitude and implicit morality through irony ("Another Thing to be observed is, that there generally runs an Irony through the Thread of the whole Book. . . ." Swift on Tale of a Tub, quoted in Pagliaro 333), often by creating a narrator who appears to be as much a hypocrite as the target of the work, but who exposes himself and the target by his lack of true perception or inability to hide his hypocrisy. Examples of this kind of narrator are Gulliver, the Modest Proposer, and the narrator of Tale of a Tub. The satirist sneers at the knavish dissimulators through his irony both to expose them and to give them affront; irony serves to expose the villain so that the audience can shun him, and to make the villain squirm so that he may mend his actions.

But at the same time, this "ironic method" is necessitated by the hypocritical society the satirist wishes to attack and reform, because it is the only fruitful method: people pay no attention to moralizers. Since the hypocrisy demands this particular approach, it is not surprising that the satirist takes hypocrisy for granted in his works. The theory is, then, that for the satiric mode to be corrective, certain values must exist which people do not follow, but which values they claim to or want to follow. When the hypocrisy of their situation is drawn to attention publicly (for knaves) or privately (for fools) the targets should have a desire for reform. As Dr. Johnson said, "People need to be reminded more often than they need to be instructed."

It follows that general satire (aimed at large segments of people) must presuppose and approve of the morals in a widely spread value system. When these values are at odds with behavior, the satirist tries to bring them back in line again or at least prevent the gap from widening. If the lip service values no longer exist in the society, there is no hope for correction in the satiric mode--when the hypocrisy is gone and people are evil openly without opposition, the satirist must either cease writing or be content with merely a satiric record of his disapproval:

See, all our Nobles begging to be Slaves!  
See, all our Fools aspiring to be Knaves  
The Wit of Cheats, the Courage of a Whore,  
Are what ten thousand envy and adore.  
All, all look up, with reverential Awe,  
On crimes that scape, or triumph o'er the Law:  
While Truth, Worth, Wisdom, daily they decry--  
'Nothing is Sacred now but Villany.'  
Yet may this Verse (if such verse remain)  
Show there was one who held it in disdain.  
(Pope, "Epilogue" ll. 163-72)

Once we become a world of knaves, there will be no room for satire. Fortunately, every age including our own (so far) has been content merely to remain on the brink of complete knavery, total disaster, and absolute ruin, and the eighteenth century was no exception: Satire was therefore not only possible but also needful.

Since social pressure seems to be one of the few forces to which fools and knaves will bow, the satirist can more effectively operate by enlisting the readers of the satire to aid him in bringing behavior back in line with publicized values. The satirist by himself is virtually impotent to change the vicious behavior of any particular target, for the satirist as himself is just another small, opinionated prude, and is easily dismissed by any remark that might pass for wit. The target must correct himself when he discovers he is under attack, or he must be driven to correct his behavior when hundreds of his peers join the satirist in ridiculing him or by ostracizing him from their society (see Kinsley 137-55).

But social pressure cannot operate when the satire is aimed at widespread folly or vice, as when a whole country or class joins in a universal debauchery; in such cases the reader himself is the target. When the reader is aggressed, he must be moved to change or
This general satire, aimed at many, is more common and more important than specific attacks on single persons, since the satirist's ideal is the reformation or regeneration of a whole society. The general correction of vice is the primary aim because the satirist can live with a few very evil men more easily than he can with ten thousand somewhat less evil men who are pulling the world toward doom: A world with Satan alone would perhaps be more bearable than one with a legion of his followers all aspiring to his post. In addition, the less evil are more likely to be corrigeable than the totally corrupt.

It is for the above reason that specific targets in satire are often used to instruct and correct the general populace—the specific knave becomes a type which is to be rejected by the audience wherever those typical qualities are met. So, certain kinds of abusive satire, such as might be directed against Curll, Shadwell, or Bentley, are not aimed at correcting those men, who are viewed as incorrigible knaves by the satirist, but they are attacked in order to dissuade the public from patronizing, approving of, or associating with them; they and everyone possessing their vices are to be ostracized by the audience. When impaled by the satirist then, these individuals should serve as a detergent in general to the vices they have. Pope makes the use of the personal attack for this purpose clear in a letter to Dr. Arbuthnot:

I would indeed [manifest my disdain and abhorrence of vice in my writings] with more restrictions, and less personally; it is more agreeable to my nature, which those who know it not are greatly mistaken in: But General Satire in Times of General Vice has no force, and is no Punishment: People have ceas'd to be ashamed of it when so many are join'd with them; and 'tis only by hunting One or two from the Herd that any Examples can be made. If a man writ all his Life against the collective Body of Banditti, or against Lawyers, would it do the least Good, or lessen the Body? But if some are hung up, or pilloried, it may prevent others. And in my low Station, with no other Power than this, I hope to deter, if not to reform. (Pope to Arbuthnot, August 2, 1734)

The application of the satiric method can be quite broad because satire itself is more of an attitude or stance, than a genre or type of literature: "It is not bounded by form and structure but exists as an approach to a situation which can be present in any of the many literary forms" (Haas 2). There are several characteristics which distinguish satire, however; as I said above, it must be ironic in tone to cope with the hypocritical situation of the reprobates in the world, and for the same reason it tends to be hyperbolic in form to force recognition of vice upon the guilty. (Hyperbole or irony alone does not constitute satire: a critical element must be involved.)

Another characteristic of most satire is the use of wit to make the attack clever, or humor to make it funny. Satire, like all literature and poetry, must be intellectually rewarding, be reasonably well written, and especially must entertain in order to survive—and in the particular case of satire, in order to be received at all. The basic mood of attack and disapproval needs to be softened to some extent and made more palatable; wit and humor serve this end by making the criticism entertaining, and even attractive. In the words of that old philosopher, Swift, "As Wit is the noblest and most useful Gift of humane Nature, so Humor is the most agreeable, and where these two enter far into the Composition of any Work, they will render it always acceptable to the World" (quoted in Pagliaro 338).

Certain specific literary techniques and constructions lend themselves easily to satire because they can contain a measure both of wit and humor, and of the necessary irony or satiric association; among them are exaggeration, distortion, understatement, innuendo, paronomasia, zeugma, ambiguity, what I call "the list," simile, metaphor, oxymoron, parable, and allegory. A brief example of each of these will perhaps help illustrate the versatility of the satiric method, and the numerous ways the satirist can present his criticism. It is important that the satirist vary his critical approach with as many devices as possible, for people very soon grow weary of criticism of themselves.

Since irony is the overriding and guiding principle behind satire, and is everywhere apparent in it, no "examples" need be given. As I mentioned, irony informs the whole work because it is the necessary means of aggressing hypocrites. It is not therefore one of the "techniques" of satire, but, like the purpose of correction, is part of the essence.

Though not essential like irony, exaggeration is one of the most commonly used techniques in satire, since the depiction of an extreme or blatantly vicious case is one of the best ways to get the target to recognize or admit that a vice exists at all: recognition must precede correction. The satirist brings his description of a wrong to its logical extreme, or at least exaggerates by overemphasis in order to make the unseeing see, and the seeing-but-complacent oppose and expunge corruption. To say simply that men are evil will be wasting breath in an age of perversity, so the satirist turns up the volume: "He was perfectly astonished with the historical account I gave him of our affairs during the last century, protesting it was only an heap of conspiracies, rebellions, murders, massacres, revolutions, banishments; the very worst effects that avarice, faction, hypocrisy, perfidiousness, cruelty, rage, madness, hatred, envy, lust, malice, and ambition could produce" (Gulliver's Travels II.6). And the Brobdingnagian King's estimate of humankind seems to be slightly inflated also: "I cannot but conclude the bulk of your natives to be the most pernicious race of little odious vermin that nature ever suffered to crawl upon the surface of the earth" (G. T. II.6). By such overstatement, the reader is to understand that he has probably allowed a few too many failings in himself or other men to go by unnoticed, and henceforth he must adjure himself to pull in the reins a bit.

Akin to exaggeration is distortion—changing the perspective of a condition or event by isolation (separation from its ordinary surroundings), or by stressing some aspects and deemphasizing others. Gulliver's description of cannons and their decimating power (II.7) and his description of warfare (IV.5) are instances of distortion by isolation. When the machinations of war are removed from political and economic causes, or reasons of any kind, and even from the passions of the soldiers, the resultant mechanical bloodshed is horrifying indeed. Gulliver's description of "dying groans, limbs flying in the air, smoke, noise, confusion," and so forth is much like a Royal Society paper, cold and unemotional. The message of the heartlessness of war wagers who see battles as political expedients and men in mechanical terms, becomes shockingly clear when not masked or diluted by tempering concerns.
Understatement is the converse of exaggeration and is useful in cases where the evil is already so great that it can scarcely be exaggerated. The mention of the evil by understatement serves to call attention to its true degree. Thus the idea of insensitivity to brutality is well conveyed in a noted passage from Swift: “Last Week I saw a Woman flay’d, and you will hardly believe, how much it altered her Person for the worse” (*Tale of a Tub* IX). With 17,000 murders in the United States yearly, and abortions numbered in the millions, exaggeration of the statistics would probably prove ineffective. Understatement is a possible alternative.

Innuendo is a valuable tool for the satirist because it allows him to implicate a target by a completely indirect attack. This is especially useful when the target is dangerous, for it is often possible to deny the insinuation. Pope’s “Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot” contains an example:

I was not born for Courts or great Affairs,
I pay my Debts, believe, and say my pray’rs,
Can sleep without a Poem in my head,
Nor know, if Dennis be alive or dead.
(ll. 267-70)

If called to account, Pope could always claim that the last three lines only seem to be connected to the first line by an unhappy poetic mistake. The first line doesn’t end in a colon, so any connection or criticism must be in the mind of the reader.

Ambiguity is likewise useful because the intention can always be denied, but it also serves to make the satiric comparison more pointed, by making difficult any distinction between the target and the object to which it is compared. For example, insanity is a common charge of the satirist (see Thorpe 87), who often sees the madness of “free” men equaling or surpassing that of confined lunatics. Swift makes this point aptly in *Tale of a Tub* when the narrator is touring Bedlam (sect. IX): “Is any Student tearing his Straw in piece-meal, Swearing and Blaspheming, biting his Grate, foaming at the mouth, and emptying his Pispot in the Spectator’s Faces? Let the Right Worshipful, the Commissioners of Inspection, give him a Regiment of Dragoons, and send him into Flanders among the Rest.” The phrase “among the Rest” is conveniently vague so that we wonder if “the Rest” is supposed to refer to the rest of the generals or the rest of the madmen. The “Men of Tast,” of course, soon realize that there is no difference between the two in the satirist’s mind, so that his ambiguity is really a rather clear accusation.

Any construction capable of conveying a double meaning is likely to be employed in satire, since multiple meanings form the basis of much of satire. So even the pun can be used satirically, and surely has been, though in my limited reading I have been unable to locate an Augustan example. I therefore offer a modern example by an anonymous poet, from a poem “In Praise of the Whole Generation of Modern Authors.” The pun in this case (raze/raise) works better aurally than in text, but it will serve I hope:

Oh Joy! to know that now the future stands
In such o'erreaching and all grasping hands!
To them we firmly pledge the public good,
That they may raze through Space, what Time withstood.

Zeugma (or, as in the following example, syllepsis) has satiric worth because of its structural equating of things of greatly differing value. Note how effective it is in the third and fifth lines of this quote from “Rape of the Lock: Canto II”:

Whether the Nymph shall break Diana's Law,
Or some frail China Jar receive a Flaw,
Or stain her Honour, or her new Brocade
Forget her Pray'rs, or miss a Masquerade,
Or lose her Heart, or Necklace, at a Ball;
Or whether Heav'n has doom'd that Shock must fall.
(ll. 105-10)

The purpose of Pope’s zeugma here is to show that “modern” girls think losing one's honor and soiling one's dress are disasters of exactly equal import: conveyed thus cleverly, the message is much more powerful than whole pages of proofs.

One often used satiric technique which apparently has no name, I call “the list”: it is a list of items, people, or ideas generally similar, except for one or two incongruous items, which the satirist is aggressing. The attack is thus quite similar to that in zeugma, for the satirist claims that the incongruous elements belong in the list as they are considered of the same value either by his target or by himself. Again satirizing modern girls, Pope uses the list to show their attitude toward religion and the Bible; and the two-line list seems to say more than a good deal of prose explanation:

And now, unveil'd, the Toilet stands display'd,
Each Silver Vase in mystic Order laid.

Here Files of Pins extend their shining Rows,
Puffs, Powders, Patches, Bibles, Billet-doux.
(Pope, “Rape” I.121-22, 137-38)

The Bible not only shrinks in significance to the level of dressing table clutter, but it also seems almost buried in the midst of everything else: To the modern girl, it is probably not as useful as a Powder, nor as interesting as a Billet-doux, so it will be seldom avidly sought out.
Similes and metaphors are easily constructed as satiric weapons, especially when they are extended, because the satirist can describe a very fitting irony in detail, or draw out a comparison or contrast, allowing the audience to see how the thing aggressed is like a thing of which they disapprove or scorn. That is, similes and metaphors give the satirist freedom to yoke together entire concepts of totally different natures to produce a self-critical statement. In section VII of *Tale of a Tub* we find a fine example of simile: "Digressions in a Book, are like *Forein Troops* in a *State*, which argue the Nation to want a *Heart* and *Hands* of its own, and often, either *subdue the Natives*, or drive them into the most *unfruitful Corners*." And here I must insert my favorite simile, again from Swift: "I conceive therefore, as to the Business of being *Profound*, that it is with *Writers*, as with *Wells*; A Person with good Eyes may see to the Bottom of the deepest, provided any *Water* be there; and, that often, when there is nothing in the *World* at the Bottom, besides *Dryness* and *Dirt*, tho' it be but a Yard and half under Ground, it shall pass, however, for wondrous *Deep*, upon no wiser a Reason that because it is wondrous *Dark*. (Swift, *Tale* "The Conclusion")

A Meditation Upon a Broom-Stick" uses a prolonged metaphor comparing man with a broom for a dual satiric purpose: To parody Robert Boyle's *Meditations*, and to aggress some of mankind's pretensions. There is a shorter metaphor in *Tale of a Tub* (sect. XI), where the narrator is discussing the several "handles" by which a reader may be grasped: "*Curiosity* is one, and of all others, affords the firmest Grasp: *Curiosity*, that Spur in the side, that Bridle in the Mouth, that Ring in the nose, of a lazy, an impatient, and a grunting Reader."

Oxymoron used satirically makes for a pointed emphasis on some contradiction in the target's philosophy, such as a Modern Author's joy at leaving the idealism of the past behind: "No silly perfect visions plague us now" seems to indicate that the writer is a fool, since visions (ideals) cannot be silly and perfect at the same time. A better example comes from Dryden's "Absalom and Achitophel, Part I" (ll. 593-94): "The city, to reward his pious hate/ Against his master, chose him magistrate." Here the poet rejects the idea that hate can be put to good use, or is to be approved of. The fact that the words "pious" and "hate" don't fit together shows this.

Parable and allegory, the final elements I will include here, both have the same benefits as simile and metaphor, for they can conduct a prolonged discussion on two levels of meaning while at the same time inherently comparing and contrasting those levels without further comment. The parable of the fat man in the "Preface" to *Tale of a Tub* is a particularly effective example. And the comparison of prefatory material to fat, a carcass, and guts, is not only critically efficacious, but, to put it bluntly, often rather correct. The satiric message is more likely to be remembered in the parable because of the vehicle of the story and its use of physical realities (such as the meeting, the park, and people) to represent the concepts presented.

*Tale of a Tub* also offers a good example of allegory, that of the three brothers, their coats, and the will. The religious allegory is a long one, making up nearly a third of the tale, but it is well contrived, for it not only works on both levels (as any good allegory must) but it works satirically on both levels, too. Swift aggresses both the religious men who add ceremony to their faith (especially Roman Catholics) and the fops who insist on adding decorations to their clothes, and who are constantly changing fashions. With both tenor and vehicle under attack, the satirist gains twice the effect with half the effort.

It is perhaps by now apparent that almost all of these techniques have one element in common: each provides a way to say two or more things at one time, and to compare, equate, or contrast those things, usually with heavy irony. The application of the ironic method of satire uses those techniques which most easily allow the presentation of irony: the several techniques also provide variety, concision, and an opportunity for employing wit and humor. The essential meaning of a satire is seldom if ever consistent with a literal interpretation, yet the literal interpretation is extremely important for what it says about the essential meaning, and about the target or audience which can be reached only in an indirect way.

Men's vices are a threat to the civilization in which the satirist lives, and the satirist feels compelled to expose those vices for the society's good and his own, in a way that will allow the ones attacked to comprehend and remember the attack, and to see a direction they may take for correction. The satire must be presented in a manner which will bring action, and in a world of complacent hypocrites, irony, with its various means of presentation, is essential; the message cannot be delivered without it, if that message is to have any tangible effect. In a two word abstract, the purpose of satire is the correction or deterrence of vice, and its method is to attack hypocrisy through the ironic contrast between values and actions.

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