CRITICAL INSIGHTS

Satire

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Toward a More Inclusive Theory of Satire

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It is the spring of 2004, and I am sitting at a large oak table in the oppressively silent but architecturally impressive John Hay Library at Brown University, blithely thumbing through stacks of World War II joke books, nineteenth century humor magazines, and oversized comic broadsides from the 1820s. I am here to see the Dorothy Parker collection for work on my master's thesis, but I also want to take advantage of the gold mine that is the Miller Collection of Wit and Humor, the largest collection of its kind in the world. I look through the World War II joke books first because they are in good shape, and there are a lot of them. The yellowed covers feature curvaceous women wearing red lipstick and red platform heels, so I am not surprised to find that the jokes are about dumb blondes, libidinous privates, and dim-witted sergeants. I turn next to copies of old humor magazines, hoping that the librarian doesn't notice that some of the frayed edges crumble in my hand as I turn the pages. Hours pass. I take notes, trying to record three centuries' worth of American humor before the library closes. After leafing through dozens of magazines, pamphlets, cartoons, and broadsides, I am struck by two things: here exists a vast collection of American culture that has been virtually untouched by scholars, a populist view of history told from its pundits and wits; and, sitting in a well-lit library reading joke books is a fine and noble way to spend an afternoon.

In his seminal book *Humor and Laughter: An Anthropological Approach,* Mahadev Apte states that humor is an ideal methodological framework with which to study society. Humor is a cultural barometer, a reflection of codes and hierarchies at work within a civilization. It didn't take me long to discover, however, that in the grand pantheon of American humorists, the women had somehow gone missing. Periodicals, books, anthologies, critical studies, and theoretical works on American humor represented only a narrow

body of the citizenry. Books with titles like *American Humor: A Study of the National Character* (1931), *The Comic Tradition in America: An Anthology* (1958), and *America's Humor from Poor Richard to Doonesbury* (1978) did not include any work by women. Even recent collections, like *Punchlines: The Violence in American Humor* (1990), ignore women's contributions. Darryl Cumber Dance wryly sums up the situation: "It's not too much of an exaggeration to play on a previous observation and argue that insofar as treatments of humor are concerned, all the Americans are male WASPs, all the women are white, and all the African Americans are male" (xxix).

During the 1970s and 1980s, feminist scholars began to correct the imbalance. Books like Kate Sanborn's *The Wit of Wisdom* (1885), Gloria Kaufman's *In Stitches: A Patchwork of Feminist Humor and Satire* (1980), Nancy A. Walker's *Redressing the Balance: American Women's Literary Humor from Colonial Times to the 1980s* (1988), and others were published. Still, when women writers are considered, they typically are spoken of as humorists and not satirists. While there have been at least five anthologies of American women's humor, there are no anthologies, no collection of essays, no monographs dealing with women's satire. Writing about this lack in critical scholarship, Brian Connery argues that "feminist critics have most often referred to the power of women's 'humor'—rather than satire—implying that satire is indeed gendered" (12).

Connery may have a point. Dance's anthology is of African American women's humor, Nancy A. Walker's books cover women's humor, Regina Barreca writes about women's strategic use of humor, and Linda Morris's collection of essays has "American women humorists" in its title. Even Kaufman's *Feminist Humor and Satire* does not treat satire specifically, and Kaufman conflates humor and satire in the introductory essay. Why are women ignored in this field? Women are funny enough, so why the discrepancy? In the course of my research on this topic, I learned that where literary satire was concerned, most theoretical texts and critical essays focus on England's so-called golden age of satire, the eighteenth century, when Alexander Pope and Jonathan Swift reigned supreme. This narrow focus yields narrow theories. According to this perspective,

satire is a hostile form of writing, filled with animus, scatology, dystopic societies, and the grotesque.

Because satire has been associated with this body of literature, the consensus is that it is an angry mode of writing used by those in power to maintain control through ridicule, invective, and mockery. Recognizing that such a limiting theory would not accommodate all satiric writing, I looked beyond Enlightenment literature and found that classical models were far more helpful. The Greeks considered satire a separate genre, situated between comedy and tragedy, taking on elements of both. Satire, then, is not comedy. It may have comic elements in it, but its purpose and conventions are markedly different. I like to think of things this way: comedy makes you laugh, tragedy makes you cry, and satire makes you think while you are possibly either laughing or crying. The classical satirists also understood that there was a broad spectrum of satiric tone and style, ranging from the buoyant and genial to the dark and bitter. Horace is known for his gentle wit, mild ridicule, and plain style; Juvenal's satire is filled with bitter wrath and a more grandiose style, while Persius was situated somewhere between the two extremes. As one critic puts it, satire runs from "the red of invective at one end to the violet of the most delicate irony at the other" (Connery 117).

The notion of satire as an angry form of writing, then, originates from a narrow body of scholarship that focuses on eighteenth century satire written by men and is informed by psychological approaches to humor, especially Freudian. Satire is much more fluid and generative than that model allows. While the classical view of satire helped me to see the variety within the genre and that it exists apart from tragedy and comedy, Northrop Frye's essay "The Mythos of Winter" helped me to devise a working definition of satire. Frye lists two requirements for satire: wit or humor founded on fantasy, the grotesque, or the absurd, and something under attack (224). I expand Frye's definition. Satire is a complex literary genre situated somewhere between comedy and tragedy that involves masking devices and something under attack. Masking devices may include wit, irony, invective, reversal, hyperbole, lampoon, parody, polyphony, and so on. Attack may be direct or indirect, so satire's

CRITICAL CONTEXTS

Shakespeare and Early Modern Satire on Drunks and Drunkenness

Jonathan D. Wright

It would be easy enough to show that drunks and drunkenness often appear in many of Shakespeare's plays and that his treatment both of over-drinking and of offensive drunkards is often severely satirical. But the reasons *why* drunkenness is such a recurring theme in Shakespeare's work are difficult to pinpoint. Albert H. Tolman, in an article published just days after ratification of the eighteenth amendment, which established Prohibition, proposed that the playwright not only tolerated drunkards, but, in the case of Sir John Falstaff and Sir Toby Belch, actually "enjoyed them" (82). Stephen Greenblatt expressed the same sentiment in *Will in the World*, his influential biography, saying that Shakespeare depicts "heavy drinkers from close up [. . .] with an unusual current of understanding, delight, even love" (70). Tolman and Greenblatt also agree that when Shakespeare writes about drinking, he is writing about the familiar. According to Tolman, the realistic, detailed portrayal of "tavern-life of the Falstaff plays" indicates that The Bard "knew this life well" (82). But Greenblatt posits that Shakespeare didn't have to go to a tavern to see a man deep in his cups. The biographer wonders whether Shakespeare's own father, John Shakespeare, drank himself into "deep personal trouble" (67) and imagines William, as a boy, looking on with admiration at his father's drinking: "John Shakespeare may have never seemed more like a nobleman to his observant, imaginative child than when he was in his cups, his cheeks burning" (68). Finally, Tolman and Greenblatt say that Shakespeare's representation of drunkards strikes a personal note. Greenblatt supposes that William, feeling "dazed by his recent transmutation" from country to city-dweller, wrote about familiar people, places, and personal experiences, such as exposure to drunkenness and financial woes, "to remind himself of who he was—old John Shakespeare's son of Stratford" (68–69). Tolman,

implying that Shakespeare knew his own failings all too well, even suggests that the playwright used the remorseful drunk Cassio to express his own shame and personal thoughts about drunkenness (87). Like Tolman, Harold Bloom argues that Shakespeare expresses and reveals himself through a drunken character. But Bloom thinks the unabashed drunkard Falstaff emerges when Shakespeare figuratively gives birth to a drunkard bearing his likeness (273). Bloom thinks Falstaff, besides possessing Shakespeare's wit, also displays his mind "in the largest sense" (282) and exhibits "more of Shakespeare's own genius than any other character save Hamlet" (284).

Although these explanations for Shakespeare's fixation on drunkenness vary, they have a common strand: all imply that Shakespeare is bound to drunkards by admiration, affection, or, even stronger, love. According to this view, Shakespeare loves and identifies with drunkards and drunkenness so much that he not only immortalizes them and their haunts but also identifies with drunken characters like Cassio or Falstaff. However, the playwright's frequently harsh, satiric treatment of drunkards undermines this claim. If Shakespeare tolerantly spares Barnardine, the drunken prisoner in *Measure for Measure* (*MM*) at "the very brink of the grave" (Tolman 83), he intolerantly ensures that the drunken thief Bardolph is hanged in *Henry V* (*H5*).[1] In *The Tempest*, Prospero conditionally forgives that play's drunkards—they exit with orders to "trim" Prospero's cell "handsomely" if they hope to escape punishment (5.1.295–97)— but he certainly does not love them. The nobleman in *The Taming of the Shrew* tolerates Sly, treating him to a comfortable bed and ample food and drink, not out of love but to make a joke. Although Sly is oblivious to the nobleman's satiric motives, Falstaff senses that he is neither tolerated nor loved when Prince Henry, acting the part of his father in *1 Henry IV*, refers to him as "that old white-bearded Satan" (2.5.468). Falstaff receives an even greater blow after the prince is crowned king in *2 Henry IV*. Henry is not "sick for" Falstaff, as the old knight earlier imagines (5.3.134), nor does he delight in or reciprocate Falstaff's affection.

Rather, Henry notoriously ridicules and banishes the old drunkard (5.4.47–51, 60–65).

Admittedly, Tolman and Greenblatt do recognize that Shakespeare's treatment of drunkards is sometimes severe. Tolman cautions that Shakespeare's sternness with drunkards "must not be overlooked" (83). Similarly, Greenblatt also notes that Shakespeare is not wholly sympathetic toward drunks (70). Harold Bloom likewise thinks Shakespeare capable of creating a character who behaves atrociously toward heavy drinkers. He condemns Henry's allegedly Machiavellian treatment of Falstaff (276) and likens Henry's "cruel speech of rejection" to a death sentence (277). However, unlike Tolman and Greenblatt, Bloom differentiates between Shakespeare's personal treatment of drunkards and his *characters'* treatment of them, especially when analyzing Falstaff. Believing that "Shakespeare himself was more Falstaffian than Henrican" (277–78), Bloom argues that it "strains pragmatic sense to believe that Shakespeare shared the Henrican attitude toward Falstaff" (282). He also contends that Shakespeare, rather than judging Falstaff, leaves that task to the audience (281).

Tolman, Greenblatt, and Bloom thus demonstrate at least two ways that critics try to reconcile Shakespeare's alleged love for drunkards with his harsh treatment of them. They either find that treatment inconsistent, fickle or Janus-faced (he loves them; he loves them not), or they claim to know Shakespeare's thoughts and feelings about a particular drunkard without considering all he has to say about drunkards and drunkenness. I am reluctant to follow either path. Instead, I am convinced that Shakespeare, far from admiring drunks and drunkenness, shared his culture's anxiety about over-drinking and its satiric disdain for drunkards. Drunkards, I will show, had long aroused anxiety in England, but by Shakespeare's day they had become an anathema to many persons, religious and secular alike. This explanation makes sense of Shakespeare's harsh treatment of drunkards and is buttressed, not undermined, by Falstaff's banishment.[2]

Some scholars might reject any claim that Shakespeare himself could or would condemn drunkards, as Henry V does Falstaff. His

CRITICAL READINGS

The Satirist as Troll in Early Modern England___

Matthew Steggle

This essay argues that satire of the early modern period can usefully and provocatively be thought of in the vocabulary that is currently used to describe trolling: the practice, in computer-mediated communication, of bad-faith users looking to disrupt and upset online social networks. This is, of course, a very anachronistic comparison, nor does it fit perfectly at all points, but precisely in that anachronism and bad fit lies its value. What strategies do early modern satirists use around ideas of community, deception, and communication? Why is satire of all hues so amenable to being described in the language we now use for bad-faith interaction in the public sphere? And what are the networks and communities that early modern satire looks to disrupt?

The argument being made here is, in effect, the third side of a triangle whose other two sides are now quite established. Jürgen Habermas, writing about eighteenth-century Europe, described the emergence there of a "public sphere," an imaginary space in which conversation and debate could happen, and his terminology for that imaginary space has since been developed and refined by others. On the one hand, writers on computer-mediated communication have found this terminology very useful for describing, not eighteenth-century Europe, but online networks, particularly with regard to trolling (Dahlberg 2001; Poor 2005). On the other hand, historians of the early modern period have fallen eagerly on the same terminology of the public sphere, arguing that, in fact, it meaningfully starts not in the eighteenth century but in the post-Reformation period (see Lake and Pincus 2006, with further references). In a sense, arguing that early modern satirists are trolls is simply connecting together these two independent developments of the idea of the Habermasian public sphere.

And to take this tack is helpful because it decentres the figure of the satirist himself. For Alvin B. Kernan, for instance, in what was

long the landmark study of Elizabethan satire, the heart of satire lay in the figure of the satirist and the way that this character could be played or developed (Kernan 1959). Analogies from trolling, though, invite focus instead on the community, or imagined community, within which the satirist sits uneasily and whose internal tensions he (for in this context it almost always is a he) seeks to exploit.

This essay will pursue these themes with references to three particular late-Elizabethan satirists: Martin Marprelate, John Marston, and the fictional Jaques in Shakespeare's *As You Like It.* It also hopes to suggest that beyond them the model might be profitably applicable to any early modern satirist, broadly defined. In their misuse of the usual shared conventions of group communication, all early modern satirists are, more or less, trolls.

Martin Marprelate, Gentletroll

Between 1589 and 1590, a writer usually referred to as Martin Marprelate published seven polemical pamphlets attacking the Church of England. In particular, he did so using the methods of satire: sarcasm, fantastical language in a kaleidoscope of different registers, and personal mockery of named bishops. As a sample of his urbanely irreverent satire, here is a moment where he pauses to describe the physical qualities of the book of one of his enemies:

> The whole volume of M. Deanes / containeth in it / 16 bookes besides a large preface / and an Epistle to the Reader: The Epistle & the preface / are not aboue 8. sheets of paper and very little vnder 7. You may see when men haue a gift in writing / howe easie it is for them to daube paper. The compleat worke (very briefly comprehended in a portable booke / if your horse be not too weake / of an hundred threescore and twelue sheets / of good Demie paper) is a confutation of *The learned discourse of Ecclesiasticall gouernement.*
>
> <div align="right">(Marprelate, 1588b, B1r)</div>

The fact that these pamphlets were satirical was recognized from the start. Indeed, Francis Bacon described Marprelate's project as to "turn religion into a comedy or satire: to search and rip up wounds with a laughing countenance; to intermix Scripture and scurrility

sometime in one sentence" (qtd. in Black 1997, 722). So Marprelate is a polemicist, with a particular politico-religious agenda, but he is also, by common consent, a satirist.

Marprelate's driving belief is that the Church, the most powerful institution in early modern England, is corrupt. In Marprelate's eyes, the separation from Rome has not created a genuinely reformed church, but rather a miniature replica of the hated Catholic one. Bishops remain too powerful and wealthy, and too willing to persecute the genuinely godly by whom their power is threatened. In his repeated mantra, "all the [bishops] in England / Wales / and Ireland/ are pettie popes / & pettie Antichristes" (Marprelate 1588a, A3v). Marprelate was not the first writer to argue for more radical reform of the Church of England. But it was a difficult and personally risky thing to do, particularly in print, given that the English printing industry was so small and so tightly controlled by the bishops. Those few tracts that had made it into print in the years before Marprelate's arrival were mostly anonymous, and generally printed clandestinely or overseas (see Pierce 1909). Some of these tracts even used misdirection to help them spread themselves. Take, for instance, the anonymous pamphlet from 1586, *A Commission sente to the Pope, Cardynales, Bishops, Friers, Monkes. . . by the highe and mighty Prince, and King Sathanas*, which posed as an anti-Catholic pamphlet to conceal its real payload, an attack upon episcopacy. As John Dover Wilson comments, "The keen eye of [Archbishop] Whitgift at once detected its real object, and arrested its progress so effectually that, had he not himself preserved a copy of it in his library at Lambeth, we might never have heard of it" (Dover Wilson 1932, 376). This camouflage reflects, obviously, the censorship conditions under which radical Protestants are writing.

And in this respect, Martin Marprelate, too, makes use of deception in order to get his message out. He behaves, in fact, very much like an internet troll. In the definition of Claire Hardaker, "A troller is a CMC [computer-mediated-communication] user who uses aggression, deception, manipulation, or a mixture of these to create a context that is conducive to triggering, or aggravating conflict. . . . Trolling may be carried out more or less covertly, but