SATIRE'S CLOWN CAR: A THEORETICAL APPROACH TO COMIC INDIGNATION

by

STEVEN RAYMOND MURRAY

(Under the Direction of Celeste Condit)

ABSTRACT

The severity of our global picture may evoke a common refrain: this is no laughing matter. This dissertation respectfully disagrees. In a cultural context mired by the balkanization of information, moral righteousness, and ideological conviction, laughter offers tremendous rhetorical possibilities. This dissertation approaches pessimistic satire from a new vantage point, believing in the ability of pessimism to heal through wounding and persuade through denouncement. Pessimistic satire holds the potential to disentangle ideological commitments in adverse audiences, offering the possibility to reach those who might otherwise be closed off to criticism. I put this possibility to the test through two of the most controversial satiric performances in the Post-Trump Era: *Million Dollar Extreme Presents: World Peace* and *Saturday Night Live*'s caricature of Donald Trump by way of Alec Baldwin. These performances show the range of pessimistic satire in the modern era and considering their reception will shed light on the difficulty of complex satire to motivate the proper audience.

INDEX WORDS: Satire, Humor, Pessimism, Donald Trump, Persona, Tone

SATIRE'S CLOWN CAR: A THEORETICAL APPROACH TO COMIC INDIGNATION

by

STEVEN RAYMOND MURRAY

B.A., Trinity University, 2013

M.A., Baylor University, 2015

A Dissertation Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of The University of Georgia in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

ATHENS, GEORGIA

2021

SATIRE'S CLOWN CAR: A THEORETICAL APPROACH TO COMIC INDIGNATION

by

STEVEN RAYMOND MURRAY

Major Professor:	Celeste Condit
Committee:	Roger Stahl
	Thomas Lessl

Electronic Version Approved:

Ron Walcott
Vice Provost for Graduate Education and Dean of the Graduate School
The University of Georgia
August 2021

DEDICATION

To my loving parents, Chris and William, who never left us hungry for laughter or thirsty for affection. To my brilliant wife, Kathryn, for keeping me focused and never once wavering in support. To my sister, Samantha, who believed in me even when I could not.

Finally, this work is dedicated to everyone who ever told a funny joke only to have it ignored and then watch someone else repeat the joke louder to much fanfare. I saw you and I love you.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This work would not have been possible without the endless patience and guidance of my advisor, Dr. Celeste Condit. Celeste consistently went above and beyond even the most ambitious expectations for an advisor, and there is no chance I would have completed this project without her. In addition to Dr. Condit, I am indebted to Drs Roger Stahl and Tom Lessl for providing robust feedback and offering brilliant avenues for development. In addition to my advisory committee, I would like to acknowledge Dr. Ed Panetta for offering guidance throughout the doctoral process, and for weighing in more than a few times to keep me alive. Acknowledgement is also due to Drs. Scott Varda and Martin Medhurst, for providing mentorship even after I had left their program.

I am indebted to those who have come before me, doing the significant work of proving comedy is no laughing matter, and setting the groundwork for my own humble contribution. There are dozens of us!

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Page

CHAPTER 1

SATIRE: A CRITICAL RE-RE-INTRODUCTION

When you're surrounded by that kinda sadness, that much horse death, you gotta laugh!

- Bever Hopox and Chico Hands, *Comedy Bang Bang*

It is an unfortunate fact of the English language that there is no idiom to describe when one continues a tactic long after it has proven ineffective in achieving a desired goal. If such an idiom did exist, it might be profitably applied to several trends in the current cultural milieu. A few examples relevant to this project: Manichean discourse as a response to emboldened partisanship; totalizing and moralizing critique of the "enemy"; epistemic certainty in the superiority of one's convictions (especially when a key tenet of those convictions is self-reflexivity); and conflating confidence with moral righteousness. Indeed, were such an idiom to exist, one may be entitled to ask the best way to respond to such a sad and tragic situation. Here, the immortal words of the world's most famous *Horse Fightin' Promoters* may lend some solace: "You gotta laugh!"

Unfortunately, the contemporary political climate has not been particularly welcoming of comedy. After all, global warming threatens our collective future, racism persists manifestly at an ontological level, and immigrant children are being rounded up in cages at our nation's border. Our world, as it is currently manifest, is no laughing matter. …Or is it? Without a doubt, the material and existential threats of the status quo are Serious Business, but those threats are also backdrop to a Reality TV President, political movements driven by internet trolls, threatening clowns taking over our nation's suburbs[1], and even Tucker Carlson, so there is

certainly much to laugh about. Can we laugh responsibly? A common refrain in times of crisis is that "this is no laughing matter" - an idea that tacitly assumes all laughing matters guffaw in the same rhythm, but to laugh at Donald Trump is to cut at the power of authority, while to laugh at the suffering of the dispossessed is another matter altogether. Towards what end can we produce nuanced comedic tools to grapple with the details of distinct rhetorical situations? Let us briefly consider aspects of some of those rhetorical situations.

A couple of markers in our current cultural landscape have made it difficult to affect a targeted audience with traditional messaging techniques, but a touch of the comedic may help us. First, young political activists are often marked by staunch certainty in our moral, epistemic, and political commitments, and often this conviction shields us from fairly encountering oppositional arguments, therefore impoverishing the potential for rhetorical exchange in a robust social sphere. Can we dare to laugh at ourselves? A second problem: in the case of digital media, users view a curated feed that algorithmically hides discourse the user would find contemptable (after all, if Facebook does not show us what we like, we flip to the next feed). For a message to reach an audience, it is often the case that the audience must solicit that message directly, at least by typing a video name into a search bar or clicking a news headline. We occupy a time in history where we can freely, with little effort, completely ignore opposing voices through soundproof digital earmuffs. However, an entertaining surface may encapsulate unexpected messages. Thus, a splash of entertainment may go a long way to making our ideas more palatable, our disagreements more accessible, or at the very least enticing a broader range of views with honey than we would otherwise expect with vinegar.

Out of the whole wide world of comedy and rhetoric, this project focuses on satire specifically. Satire is not the most popular nor most prolific of comedic texts, but it is often the

most politically charged, and possibly, if you squint just right, the most historically significant comedic form. A genre of rhetoric so internally diverse that to define it exclusively is nearly impossible, satirists have spoken on subjects as delicate as bathroom etiquette and as universal as marital discord. Satirists are often empowered to publicly speak harsh truths when no one else is so permitted. Some of history's most significant moments have been enshrined in satires, and so too some of literature's greatest satires offer enriching engagements with social, political, and ethical dilemmas that remain evergreen. Consider Juvenal's treatise on Roman traffic: long before automobiles, Juvenal conjured images of noxious fumes, overcrowded streets, and wealthy chariots obliterating the poor with such force their bodies disappear. Here we see many characteristic features of satire: it is topical, it claims to be realistic (but is comically exaggerated), it shocks the audience, and despite its grotesque imagery, it is often funny. Alexander Pope's *The Dunciad,* written in the early 1700s, commits to themes of oligarchical ignorance, social decay, and the epistemic crisis of writers who produce ideas for pay rather than a search for higher meaning (thus setting the stage for a thorough critique of propaganda of the masses). In Pope, do we not see tracings of Trump, outrage culture, and fake news? Finally, Jonathan Swift's *Modest Proposal* is not only one of the most enduring satires written, it is perhaps *the* dominant cultural memory of Ireland in the 18th century. Much like the greatest utterances by Lincoln or Kennedy, satirists often address timely problems from a transcendent perspective, enabling their lessons and persuasive pulsions to be imparted throughout time.

This dissertation pushes forward our understanding of comedy generally, and satire specifically, by investigating the rhetorical possibilities of pessimistic satire. In these chapters I explore critical decorous constraints of the status quo on satiric performances, and I also expand the trajectory of scholarly approaches to satire in rhetorical studies by shining a light on the value

of pessimistic satire. While rhetorical scholars have done some tremendous work with satiric texts broadly, we have also tended to gravitate toward the optimistic. A divide traced back to Ancient Rome, optimistic and pessimistic satires (primarily championed by Horace and Juvenal, respectively) offered competing methods for wheedling audiences, condemning the immoral, and providing reprieve from dogma. However, when flipping through studies on satire in rhetoric, one finds that our objects are nearly always optimistic and positive: they tell the truth with a smile and attempt to sweet-talk audiences by showing them a better path. These satires lightly prod, they are relatively inoffensive, and they attempt to show how folly can be overcome. But there is another world of satire with rich rhetorical possibilities: darker, more hateful, and lacking a vision of a better tomorrow. In these times, there may be something to dark satire that has distinctive appeal.

Attending to the nuances of pessimistic satire may provide useful insights and persuasive tactics effective in the specific exigence of the status quo, as satire can lend unique qualities to argument that may sidestep (or even puncture) our natural defenses against confrontation. Comedy, in its transcendence, dwarfs the situation, lowering the stakes instead of raising them, giving us an outsider's view of our own perspectives, letting us view ourselves as equally mistaken as our perceived enemies. Satire may satisfy our need for political persuasion while also reminding ourselves of our own incompleteness. Offering a purely negative critique that lacks high moral alternatives, pessimistic satire my enable us to chastise and to goad without succumbing to the seductive ladder of language (a ladder which might otherwise push us to zealous extremes). Pessimistic satire may do all these things because it coats arguments in irony, pastiche, humor, and reversal, such that the very thought-matter of those arguments is set adrift on novel communicative channels outside the normative bounds of engaged political debate.

Pessimistic satire is not a cure-all for our current rhetorical predicaments, but it does offer a different slant of tactics that may not be available in optimistic satire, nor out-and-out dramatic, fearmongering, or rage-inducing rhetorics. In our current climate, we may find value in the tactics of pessimistic satire to address a tonal paradox born of increasing zealotry and epistemic certainty. As it stands, the public vocabulary is densely populated with acidic tones and confrontational messages. Consequently, effective persuasion requires acceding to that tone on some level to reach mass appeal, yet that very tone is more likely to moralize our in-groups than sway our opposition *and maybe we all already know that*. Addressing the paradox of tone is itself a precursor to those rhetorical strategies that move beyond energizing one's own base towards something like reconciliation or even empathy. So how might we "reach across the aisle" and convince others to join our position? Pessimistic satire, through cynicism and irony, can disguise cooperative messages in acidic robes, appealing to a desire for polemic discourse while subtly undermining ideological assumptions. Satire operates by decentering and deconstructing taken-for-granted truths without re-centering alternatives, and this function is particularly valuable for rhetorical scholars interested in responding to molar structures of power.

The social and political power of satire to work against hegemonic thought is well documented in rhetorical studies. The chief macro-political function of satire occurs most prominently in the ability of satire to challenge the entrenched. As Robert Hariman argues, political humor like satire exposes the limits of public speech and circulates rhetorical education for engaged spectatorship, therefore making satire (and other political humor) "essential for an engaged, sustainable, democratic public culture."[2] Megan Hill similarly argues that "satire is capable of intervening in social conditioning and enlivening democracy with the plurality of perspectives it has always advocated but never fully achieved."[3] Anderson and Kincaid posit

satire as a corrective to state-influenced media propaganda, as satire has "dis-configured components of dominant ideology presenting mainstream frames and narratives not as unassailable, but as subject to contestation, oppositional understanding, and critical appraisal."[4] Satire strikes at what Hill deems “master narratives” and Christopher J. Gilbert describes as “ideological anchors.”[5] The function is similar in both cases: satire reveals assumptions, upends the taken-for-granted through cynical juxtaposition, and contests what Hill describes as “the singularity of perspective engendered by the internalization of dominant discourse.”[6] Amber Day notes that this function is dispersed throughout the social: it provides opportunities for “drawing scrutiny to an issue; shifting the existing conversation… and providing an accessible object of identification for those already sympathetic to the critique.”[7] For these scholars, satire resists ideological conformity through an engaged assault on epistemic certainty.

This project argues that pessimistic satire offers further tools for decentering hegemonic thought in the context of highly polemic social-political contexts. Extant work on satire has shown, generally, how the genre is useful in combatting entrenchment, and this project enlarges the scope and depth of our knowledge of satire by attending to variations and nuances in diverse satiric forms to open up the use of more effective satire in recurring rhetorical situations. I am not arguing that the objects of analysis occupying later chapters are themselves emblematic of unique types of rhetoric. Rather, I am suggesting that the careful analysis of these texts uncovers tactics and strategies generally available for pessimistic satire. Better understanding of these strategies and tactics will explain why recent specific satiric efforts have seemed prone to misfire with audiences – especially in the Trump Era. Satiric rhetoric has much to offer in the way of counter-hegemonic tactics, but not all satire is the same and differences in tone and persona across various types of satire may have substantively different impacts. At bottom, this project

enhances our ability to ponder how *this* comedy, *this specific satire*, may succeed or fail in a given context. Towards that end, the later chapters of this dissertation apply the tools of pessimistic satire to both illuminate and judge the rhetorical strategies of two recent performances: *Million Dollar Extreme Presents: World Peace* and *Saturday Night Live*'s depiction of Donald Trump. There, I will show how robust understanding of pessimistic form enriches our understanding of the rhetorical workings of a satire. I will also illuminate the potential effectiveness of, and constraints upon, pessimistic techniques in highly polemic social-political contexts.

The remainder of this chapter will focus on two grounding questions for the study of satire that are nested within each other: (1) What *is* satire? And, (2) What have rhetorical scholars *done* with satire? Before we can interrogate the nuances of distinct satiric forms, it may behoove us to agree on what we mean by "satire" in the first place. Satire resists our attempts at definition by its very nature: one is never entirely sure what is going on in a satiric text because it tends to obfuscate its content through intertextual play. The process of uncovering distinctions in the genre will therefore require a variety of inductive and deductive methods, working from the collection of texts that call themselves satire as well as the theoretical lines that trace across multiple satires. For that purpose, I have produced an overview of how comedy and satire have been put to use in rhetorical studies. By working through how satire has been treated in the past, we see possibilities, and by strategically grouping and analyzing treatments of satire, we may begin to see the limitations of optimistic satire.

Defining Satire

Whether satire is defined inductively, by specific combinations of literary elements, by its goals, by its attitude, or by some other set of criteria, it is unlikely to be clearly delimited. Perhaps this uncertainty is inherent to the rhetorical nature of satire as a mode of criticism: the satiric text contains complex layers of meaning, and while the relationship between those meanings is intended to be explored by the audience, the "true meaning" of a text is rarely clearly enunciated. Or perhaps exclusive taxonomy is difficult because satire typically fits the situation from which it is called forth – it changes to suit the needs of the satirist, and the exigence of the time. Yet, to speak of satire at all is to speak of some recurring sets of literary functions, rhetorical techniques, and persuasive functions, so while generic classification may inevitably fall short of perfect precision and stability, the attempt towards delineating satire may illuminate otherwise unclear rhetorical features recurring in satiric texts. I take the following route to trace satire's paddock: first through induction, then after discussing some of the limitations of induction and object-based studies, I attempt to understand satire through its function and use value.

Examining the complexities involved in defining satire might well begin with inductive analysis to ground an empirical account of what ingredients satire might contain. In Gilbert Highet's landmark work *The Anatomy of Satire,* satire is defined inductively by "first, collect[ing] as many examples of a given phenomenon as possible," and then "observing the resemblances and differences and contrasts and alliances" so that he may "extract from these particulars a few general descriptive principles."[8] Following this method, Highet's book looks at dozens of satires across literary history and makes substantial insights into the common tropes and shapes of satire, but he is never quite able to externally define satire. This is likely because it

is quite difficult to put a floor and ceiling on satiric classification through induction alone. By floor, I mean some set of formal features that must be present, for to lack even one definitional characteristic putatively negates satiric classification. A ceiling is lacking in that there is also no agreed-upon set of formal features that signify the "upper limits" of what is housed under the satire banner such to say "once a satire adds Y, it is no longer a satire." Thus, while we have many ideas of what a satire may contain, the inverse is not yet available: we cannot say what a satire must and must not contain.

According to Highet, satire usually takes one of three main shapes, the most recognizable in modern times likely being parody. The first common shape is monologue, where a single orator identifies problems, pillories opponents, and "endeavors to impose his view upon the public."[9] Much early Roman satire took this form, such as Juvenal's take down of traffic in the big city. The second main shape is narrative, wherein the satirist does not appear and instead these satires unfold as stories or dramas. *Gulliver's Travels, Candide*, and most of Aristophanes plays follow this form, using fable and metaphor to characterize the target of scorn. The third and final main shape is parody, in which the satirist "takes an existing work of literature which was created with a serious purpose" and then "makes the work, or the form, look ridiculous, by infusing it with incongruous ideas, or exaggerating its aesthetic devices."[10] Contemporary audiences should be familiar with this form, having appeared in popular programs like *The Daily Show* and *The Colbert Report* – news programs which appear official at first glance but instead reveal the failings and limitations of the news media through parodic exaggeration and humorous juxtapositions.

While parody is perhaps the most recognizable aspect of satire, not all parodies are satiric, and this distinction sheds further light on our current taxonomical difficulty. Zoe Druick,

among others, argues that parody alone is a commentary on the thing parodied, while satire uses parody to make broader claims:

> Parody is a double-voiced discourse and, as such, addresses a sophisticated reader or viewer expected to decode multiple texts in dialogic relation. Parody is then, by nature, a self-reflexive textual maneuver. Satire, by contrast, is a commentary not on a text, but on the social world. Where parody is a discourse on texts, satire is a discourse on things.[11]

In this formulation, parody may be best understood as a discourse that follows the rules and forms of its target to comment on the target itself. A reader experiences a parody in relation to the original, and that is where the articulation concludes. For example, when popular recording artist Weird Al creates a song parody, he is most expressly playing with the melody, lyrical content, and other qualities of the original song, but no larger issue need be at stake. However, where a parody is limited in its critique to the particular object it lampoons, satire uses parody to mobilize a broader critical message. Druick argues that parody is a useful tool for satirists, and thus "satires often use texts as metonyms of the aspects of the social world most deserving of comment."[12]

Druick is not alone in reading satire as a combination of parody and critique: Linda Hutcheon further defines the relationship between parody and satire by arguing that "satirists choose to use parodies of the most familiar of texts as the vehicle for their satire in order to add to the initial impact and to reinforce the ironic contrast."[13] Like Druick, Amber Day and Ethan Thompson most clearly distinguish satire from other parodic content by the inclusion of "explicit critical statements about the media or the political landscape as a whole."[14] One may question the "explicit" nature of "critical statements" in Day and Thompson's read, as Highet makes clear that there is little in satire that can be considered explicit, as even the most straightforward

diatribes are discounted by the mask of satire as genre. Thus, while parody may clue us in on a text's satiric nature, audiences must be attentive to the interplay of form and content for a message to be considered explicitly critical.

Highet, having foreseen the inexactness of his trichotomy, readily admits that satire may slip between shapes or exceed them entirely. Furthermore, satire often tricks its audience in its endless nesting dolls of irony, parody, and comedy. Even modern-day audiences sometimes mistake *The Onion* and its kind as legitimate news sources, so we can understand that identifying something *as* satiric is not always so straightforward. Parody especially exacerbates this dilemma, for when "a satirist writes a parody which closely and delicately reproduces the manner of his victim…then he may easily be mistaken for a dispassionate commentator" or even worse, a "genuine admirer of the stuff he parodies."[15] How, then, can the audience be clued into what is going on without the satirist abandoning parodic form? Highet notes that while it is not so easy to say what constitutes a satire, his inductive approach has gleamed a "number of reliable tests" to tell if something is *likely* to be a satire.[16]

Even reliable tests of satire are not foolproof, but when some, or most, of the following rules apply to a text, it is likely to be a satire. (1) Generic definition given by the author, such as when Juvenal proclaims "It is difficult *not* to write a satire." This rule applies strongly to monologues but recurs rarely in parody and narrative forms. (2) Pedigree, wherein the author clearly states (endogenously) that their criticism is justified by past satires, the satirist "is proclaiming that one line of its descent comes from the classical satirists."[17] (3) Repeating the choice of a theme or method used by earlier satirists, whether analogously or through allusion. When Boileau writes of a beggar that must leave the city forever or risk corruption, astute readers know this to be a reference to Juvenal even without announcing his name. Any treatise

framed as a “modest proposal” should automatically flag as an obvious satire given the ubiquity of that phrase in relation to the genre. (4) Finally, direct quotation of distinguished satirists weaves the authority of their lineage into the present text. When Byron adapts well-known phrases from Juvenal or Peacock quotes Samuel Butler, highly literate audiences are told to expect a satire at least in spirit, even if some of the form is meaningfully distinct from the quoted work. These rules offer a sufficient but not complete “floor” for establishing satire in that the presence of these elements points towards a text being satiric, but the absence of these rules does not automatically disqualify classification. What other feature might then be relevant?

Notably, subject-matter is generally not helpful in assuming the presence of satire. Nor can most formal elements or classical devices in literature assist because satire as a genre of texts transcends any given literary archetype. Satires can take the form of Westerns, Romances, Comedies, and even deadpan Dramas. Hence Highet’s insistence on the inductive model, whereby literary scholars can draw lines across a history of texts to evaluate on an individual basis whether something constitutes a satire.

As it is with Highet and literary criticism, satire studies in rhetoric has largely been content with a systematic inductive approach to classification.[18] This approach is quite valuable in collecting/classifying objects and making great insights into the function of specific performances. However, relying on induction alone yields complications in future object selection and theoretical insight. The inductive process can be problematic in its tendency to push scholars towards a narrow well of satiric objects. A recent example: after the great boon that was Jon Stewart and Stephen Colbert, satire (and satire-adjacent) research in rhetoric has tended to gravitate around similar objects at the expense of other satiric texts, giving us great insight into the workings of parody news programming, but more sparse insight into the

persuasive functions of satire that can be applied to dissimilar situations. Induction is typically object-oriented, which means highly popular, influential, and trending objects take precedence by virtue of being relatively more newsworthy. Thus, we tend to encounter only the most well-known and mainstream texts, as those objects carry enough cache to warrant taking space in highly competitive journals. Since the early 2000's, these objects tend to be fake news outlets or other major television and film productions. We may see essays that justify themselves based on the recurrence of similar objects rather than their rhetorical significance – e.g. since *The Daily Show* matters, one may write about Stephen Colbert, *Saturday Night Live's* Weekend Update, or various news parodies from around the world because we have deemed "news parody" itself to be worthy of study. Paradigmatically, this method of object selection risks trading the study of satire for the study of fake news, or the study of politicized cartoon programs, etc. Unfortunately, the reliance on the popularity of the object to justify most satire studies diminishes the chance to highlight key radical potentials of satire as a speech genre.

Responding to the popularity of object-driven satire studies, Megan Hill set out to elevate theoretical knowledge of satire by attempting to establish the "stable foundation from which assessments of satire can be productively debated."[19] Put simply, Hill questions how we can evaluate a satire as more or less good by way of more unifying theories on how satire functions. More specifically, her survey of the field encompasses a litany of commentary on *The Daily Show* and *The Colbert Report* among other similar faux news shows, noting how difficult it can be to put these studies in scholarly conversation with one another. Hill reads the current field of satire studies as "lacking any established criteria by which to evaluate satire," and thus "scholars' rival arguments have been judged on their own merits, with no means of assessing the validity of competing claims."[20] Of note, Megan Hill makes a similar move to Holbert by recognizing that

debates surrounding satirical programs have been stoked by "different theoretical assumptions" and "competing (if often unstated) conceptions regarding the function and purpose of satire."[21]

Hill establishes a few guiding principles for evaluating satire's niche and purpose across the axes of attitude, tone, and function that remain useful for understanding how satire operates in relation to an audience. Through an attitudinal approach, Hill defines satire as that which "uses laughter as a weapon to diminish or derogate a subject and evoke toward it attitudes of amusement, disdain, ridicule, or indignation."[22] Thus one key concern for the possible use of satire would center on how a performance fares as a weapon against its targeted foe. Tonally, satire functions as a "playfully critical distortion of the familiar" and "the means by which an unorthodox opinion is advanced, a vulgar error exposed, or thought stimulated via rhetorical ingenuity."[23] Satires can therefore be judged by how well they make the unorthodox palatable (are you disappearing an Elephant or hiding a rabbit in your hat?). Altogether, satire, for Hill, is defined by its balance of aggression and light-heartedness and its ability to pass judgments in a playful and entertaining way, suggesting that satire takes form most acutely through a specific interplay of ingredients. This internal dynamic may not always hold narrowly for every satire, but it serves as a meaningful standard when evaluating rhetorical efficacy.

Broadening Hill's insights, we can begin to approach the satiric genre by watching how the literary elements interact with exigence: satire uses strategic ambiguity, most often in comedic stylings, to smuggle messages to audiences that might otherwise be hostile to a message's content. Strategically, satire often aims to unsettle the settled, de-center the hidden center, and question orthodoxy. It does not so much build as demolish, but in demolition it provides new opportunities by revealing the limitations of social systems, institutions, and even epistemologies. Stylistically, satire makes use of irony, ridicule, pastiche, obfuscation, and

misdirection among other techniques to masquerade critique as entertainment. If we accept that satire uses strategic stylistic cues to unsettle or decenter established beliefs, we can infer that the situations that call for satire will sometimes be situations where a straightforward appeal may fail or even backfire. In these cases, satire's stylistic garb helps to dress arguments in ways that audiences may be more receptive to, or at least attempts to wed entertainment with argument to entice audience attention. Satire is likely to appear in situational dynamics where entertainment is necessary to draw attention, accelerate a message's circulation, or generate broader appeal, without front-loading controversy or argument.

Unpacking the persuasive appeal of satire reveals the motivation of its ornamental qualities: pastiche, irony, deflection, juxtaposition, and other formal techniques are used strategically to bind critique and entertainment in ways that require the audience to "work through" the entertainment to process the performance's argument.[24] For this reason, robust rhetorical understanding of satire recognizes the co-constitutive nature of comedy and criticism. While it may be possible, through something like author interviews, to mostly uncover the secret workings of a given satiric text (and even then, there is much debate), the text itself is born genetically constituted by the double helix of entertainment and argument such that neither can be understood without reference to the other. In satire one may lose track of whether laughter is the sugar or the medicine; if entertainment is the purpose or the form. It is true that other genres of speech might choose to mask their arguments through elaborate metaphor or clever construction (a proposition that is probably the foundation of rhetorical studies). However, satire is unique in that the gap between appearance and meaning is *baked-in*: it is essential for a successful performance. In satire, there is no unmolested center being masked by irony etc. that can be cleanly disentangled from the formal elements of a performance such that we can

discount ornaments to find a pristine Douglass Fir. To read the center is to read *through* the mask, to recognize that center and mask are consubstantial, integral, and therefore that center will always be fuzzy. So too, the mask is implicated by its center, the topography of critique just barely visible in the shapes and contours of the satiric visage. Consider: the easier it is to get the center of a satire, the closer it comes to resembling "straight" rhetoric, such that even if satire eventually “reveals” the whole of its argument (through the performance or later through further analysis by the audience), the art of the reveal is intrinsic to the satiric style. The mere existence of both argument and comedy is not enough. Politicians are sometimes great at using humor, so the distinction between Juvenal and Barrack Obama isn't in making us laugh, but in the rhetorical fusion of criticism and the strategy for unveiling criticism and for encouraging an audience to “work through” the performance.

Putting it all together, we can understand satire from a rhetorical perspective through a combination of induction, theoretical function, defining satire in part by the formal features of those texts we believe to be satiric, as well as a shared rhetorical mode in which satires tend to smuggle criticism through strategic ambiguity. In this way we are looking at both formal qualities as well as a more widely shared evaluative heuristic that is theoretically consistent across different formal variations. We can say that satire often involves parody but that it uses parody as a vehicle to criticize an external *thing*. Further, we expect a satire to attempt to pass judgement in a way the audience finds approachable, and thus the chief persuasive appeal of satire is often to smuggle ideas beyond epistemic deflectors. Satires can be judged, at least partly, by how well they expand the acceptable range of political thought, or otherwise could potentially broaden the attention paid to liminal concepts (assuming an audience can be found). Crucially, the relationship between entertainment and critique in satire is not accidental but rather the

essential characteristic of the genre. Whatever an audience makes to be the "true" argument in a satire, that truth is shaded through, and simultaneously accounted and discounted by, the lens of entertainment.

Finally, because we can recognize variations among satires – but also similarities among those variations – additional modes of classification beyond simply "Satire" are necessary. Broadly, this project makes a division between optimistic and pessimistic satires, but within the context of rhetorical studies further divisions need to be recognized because so many of our studies belong in the optimistic camp. My motivation here is to bring forward the lessons and insights of extant satire scholarship in rhetorical studies, and therefore the groupings I offer below are not based on essences but on themes and commonalities that may yield a richer vision of our intellectual discoveries. Looking through a recent history of comedy and satire in rhetoric and communication journals, major foci seem to have included political speeches, activism and identity politics, Burke's Comic Frame and studies in Faux News. I shall therefore treat these provisionally as meaningful categories of the study of satire in rhetoric. By strategically grouping studies of satire in this way, I aim to reveal the unifying strategic and theoretical insights of like-objects. Techniques available to Fake News are not necessarily replicable in the activism of the dispossessed, so by attending to these sub-sets rather than questioning the value of optimistic satire generally we can get closer to specific contexts and rhetorical situations. In the following section, I provide a brief overview of the theoretical insights offered within these categories of satire studies. While this overview is far from a comprehensive rhetorical history of comedy in the field, it should make clear the key theoretical lessons generated over the last few decades.

History of the Rhetorical Study of Satire

The major foci of studies on comedy and satire reflect broader lines of interest in recent rhetorical studies. Political speech has long been a major focus of rhetorical studies, and the first category refers to times that satire has influenced political speech (for studies on the use of satire by politicians are quite rare). Recent scholarship in rhetorical studies has attended increasingly to issues of the rhetoric of the less empowered, and this is reflected in satire studies that examine how the disempowered have used satire to rally support, draw attention to issues, and attempted persuasive appeals. Rhetorical studies at the turn of the century has increasingly attended to popular studies and been increasingly overt about its ideological agendas, and the bloom of studies in Fake News reflect that trend especially in light of the growing popularity of such programs in the mid-2000s. Finally, Burkean analysis has had substantial play in rhetorical studies and the comfortable alignment of its multi-faced method with the workings of comedy (and tragedy) on audience's perception of the world has led to another substantial group of studies related to satire.

A final note: satire studies are arguably underpopulated in rhetorical studies, and there has been a lack of a clear division between comedies generally and satire specifically. For that reason, I have included relevant essays on humor and comedy as well as out-and-out satires. However, I look only at those aspects of comedic texts that share the same bounding internal dynamic as satire: namely, to bind criticism with entertainment, and so to push audiences outside of their normal modes of heuristic processing. Thus, where an argument might arise that such and such program or object is not "really" satire, we can discount that objection by focusing on an objects' satiric aspects specifically.

Political Speeches, Presidential Remarks, and Campaigning

The most obvious place to consider comedy in rhetorical studies is to look for comedy in places we already accept as rhetorical: political speeches, the remarks of politicians (in the news or in debates), and campaign strategies. Essays in this category generally aim to generate insights into effective political speech, not effective comedy, occasionally focusing on how politicians use humor in speeches and more often focusing on how politicians react to comedic barbs. Thus, for these studies, comedy (including satire, and irony, and parody) is second fiddle to the specific context in which it is deployed. We should not be surprised that politicians rarely use robust or lengthy satire to advance their agenda given the litany of studies that suggest satire is neither clear to audiences nor effective at garnering their support in a timely and direct fashion.[25] While rarely generating insights into satire at a theoretical level, these studies view humor in an important context and give insight into the commonplace of comedy. If a president or senator uses humor, it is done so strategically, with the intent to persuade. Inversely, where satire inspires a response by a politician, they must be cautious to maintain a balanced ethos that simultaneously accepts comic criticism while reiterating the seriousness of their cause.

Politicians employ humor for a number of reasons: to make themselves appear more likable to the general public, to lambast an opponent without having to dig into details of substance, and even to deflect difficult questions. Jason T. Peifer and R. Lance Holbert argue that politicians use humor to both influence "individual-level processing" and shade public memory of key moments in politics.[26] They argue that quips are more memorable than other types of political rhetoric: "zingers" replay over and over on network television, get circulated in online channels, and are more salient in the mind of viewers. Furthermore, humor acts as an "understanding" device for politicians to relate complex (or underdeveloped) policy positions to

average citizens. Finally, when politicians use humor it generally does not aim to offend their audiences, but to broaden a politician's appeal to voters.

Interestingly, there are more essays dedicated to how politicians fight back against satire than essays on how to utilize satire for macro-political gain. The challenge for politicians is one of persona: the lay public (perhaps subconsciously) may flatten the "real" candidate (itself a fiction) with "fictional" depictions in places like *Saturday Night Live* and *The Onion*. A few examples of caricature bleeding into political reality have received extended treatments in communication studies. Consider the case of Al Gore, who worked tirelessly in his 2000 presidential campaign to grapple with his *SNL* impersonation. According to Chris Smith and Ben Voth, Gore was compelled to reverse a completely fictitious image that was, nonetheless, taken rather seriously by the voting public as an accurate representation of the candidate.[27] Or consider how Tina Fey's impersonation of Sarah Palin was so accurate that Fey was often mistaken for Palin in public. The Palin-Fey effect, as it came to be known, described a moment in political discourse where Sarah Palin and her SNL counterpart Tina Fey appeared to meld together in American consciousness, with some scholars suggesting that the two were interchangeable to many potential voters. Jason T. Peifer's study of Fey and Palin argues that "political parody in the form of parodying political figures can shape, organize, and create meaning in America's political landscape," meaning politicians are often at the mercy of well-executed caricature *even when* the audience recognizes the satire for what it is.[28] Peifer suggests that political parody can reflect, refract, and create political realities, directly influencing public opinion on likability, competence, and overall qualification. Don Waisanen and Amy Becker go a step further, arguing that the modern politician negotiates several circulating personae at once, collapsing the gap between fiction and reality. For example:

> When one thinks about Biden, the differences between fact and fiction become less significant than the many associations comic and other discourses may bring to mind automatically. Surplus personae connote that the stable, discrete boundaries assumed by first, second, third, or fourth personae hold the potential to destabilize at any moment amidst an excess supply of circulating media representations.[29]

Collectively, these essays on political persona show the indirect power of parody to influence political outcome. The line between parody and satire blurs in these performances, where robust criticism of Palin, Biden, and Gore is so sharply discounted by the context of obvious entertainment. Even a staunch supporter of Al Gore can laugh at an SNL parody of him, because the supporter understands that there is (often) no serious critique here: no meaningful commitments will be challenged or put at stake.

Activism and Identity Politics

Many scholars have championed satire generically as an expressly democratic mode of discourse for its ability to empower the dispossessed against the entrenched and powerful.[30] However, others have identified severe limitations for satire as a political strategy. Ironically, while satire might theoretically empower groups at certain stages of activism (message spreading, generating interest, passive support, shaping conversations), reliance on humor can also be counterproductive to broad material aims. Humor – and satire especially – can break through epistemic blockers and smuggle controversial messages, but it is also the case that the decorous constraints of humor can cause it to backfire.

Satire is considered democratic in its ability to empower speech, encourage public critique, and admonish the powerful while avoiding repercussion. Hariman argues that parody and political humor sustain democratic public culture by

> exposing the limits of free speech, transforming discursive demands into virtual images, setting those images before a carnivalesque audience, and celebrating social leveling while decentering all discourses within the 'immense novel' of the public address system.[31]

Political humor can create vivid images of injustice, aiming citizen attention towards corruption and vice, all without necessarily empowering one voice or perspective against all others. Satire is specifically useful in this regard by hiding criticism from censoring eyes but also by preempting the empowerment of the satirist (most often through self-effacement as a key part of the satirists' performance). Megan Hill notes that satire challenges the idea of inevitability often attributed to our positions within power continuums (citizen-voter and politician, poor and rich, proletariat and bourgeoisie), creating the conditions of possibility to demand social restructuring. More specifically, Hill claims that satire attempts to "disrupt and distort" the "set of constellation of positions that produces a sense of normality between individuals and social institutions."[32]Thus, by unsettling the "given" nature of our relationship to power, audiences can be encouraged to demand more from those they perceive to be in power. Importantly, the subversive nature of satire is recognized across many cultures and time periods, from Renaissance Rome to 20th century Denmark to modern day Afghanistan.[33]

However valuable satire *might be* from a theoretical level, scholars have amply documented that in practice it is not an equally accessible political discourse. For example, scholarship has shown how satire has been effective at bridging racial divides and empowering Queer communities, but it has not been so kind to women or people with disabilities.

With regard to race, John Hatch argues that comic approaches to racial reconciliation are effective at negotiating a balance between criticism and blame, retribution and recovery, as

comedy allows individual transcendence from their embodied social position to more fully recognize the systematic nature of racism.[34] David Timmerman et al. similarly agree that race-based satire such as *The Boondocks* "presents and critiques a range of perspectives and practices to be laudable" and "encourages productive reflection" by evenhandedly taking on negative aspects of white and black culture (which is possible in comedy because the severity of any insult is automatically discounted by the rhetorical form).[35] Satire is unique in this function because it requires the auditor to reach the critical center on their own – that is, the audience must heuristically process the satirists' message to unveil political or moral directives, creating a breathing room between critique and reception that may prevent reactionary disagreement founded in ideology.

With regard to homophobia, Christiansen and Hanson claim that the comedic/satiric performances of ACT UP were essential to change society's perceptions of gay identities and the AIDS virus. Through campy, over-the-top comedic performances and public pastiche, ACT UP shocked the public but also educated and opened space for dialogue. ACT UP satirized traditional protest by combining serious discussion of queer life with a carnivalesque environment that served to de-center the tragic tones otherwise surrounding queer existence. Here, ACT UP did not satirize queer life, instead satirizing homophobic beliefs and media portrayals of queer individuals. How much – if any – of ACT UP was taken seriously by audiences was a secondary concern to creating the space necessary to advance dialogue at all.

In the cases of race and sexual identity, the core theoretical move of the comedic was to bridge relationality. Satire, here, exaggerates stereotypes to reveal their underlying emptiness (they are inaccurate and unfair). Further, satire enables us to "expose" our arguments and ourselves to one another and do away with insecurity brought along by vulnerability. The satirist

is protected from attack by the gap between what is said and what is inferred, between lively entertainment and threatening critique. The comedic aspect of satire is empowering in these cases by showing audiences that commonalities override differences, that shared humanity (and shared mistakenness) can trump the will to discord. When participants of ACT UP or observers of *The Boondocks* laugh at unfair caricatures or the juxtaposition of pessimism and hope, those audiences experience a growing affiliation toward identity groups they may otherwise disparage.

Comedic empowerment, while theoretically neutral, is not necessarily universally accessible due to entrenched power imbalances and identitarian constraints. Jennifer Heusel notes that satire, even when even-handed in form, is not even-handed in outcome. Her example: *The Boondocks* "provides an insulting narrative so that MLK's militant heresies can be useful again," but it is unclear if the psychological damage of desecrating Martin Luther King's memory is worth resurrecting his ideals in the marketplace of public discourse.[36] When racial satire "attacks" the disempowered in an effort to appear fair and balanced, the damage is magnified by the order of social hierarchy. It may be far less damaging to mock George Bush than to mock Trayvon Martin because the imbalance of power is so significant.

Identity matters greatly to comedy, which is most effective when the audience finds themselves consubstantial with the orator. At bottom, this means the disempowered are often the ones tasked with casting off their difference to gravitate towards a dominant identity category (straight white middle class male) if reconciliation is to be made possible. In the case of optimistic satires which envision inclusion and accommodation, a burden falls on the satirist to depict how the excluded group can be woven into an extant social fabric. A. Cheree Carlson notes this limitation was especially problematic for women orators struggling to create identification with a masculine public in the 19th century due to widespread belief that men and

women were “essentially different.”[37] Carlson argues that a lack of “common ground for the sexes” made inevitable “the slide into satire with its clear delineation of men as the enemy.”[38] Identity differences between satirist and orator magnifies the risk of audience hostility, generally decreasing the chance that an oppositional audience will even hear out the satirist in the first place. Even worse, the identitarian hostility enables comedy to often be an effective tool of the empowered to subtly cast down rising identity groups – in addition to offensive Halloween costumes and your old boss’s racist jokes, seemingly innocuous jokes like “that’s what she said” can subtly contribute to disempowerment by normalizing power imbalances across identity categories.[39]

Interestingly, disability seems to be the identity category about which there is the most intense conflict, with some arguing that comedy is effective in humanizing and making relatable disability (and thus universalizing a broad spectrum of physical and mental disability),[40] while others argue that negative portrayals of the disabled risk harm even when the satirist’s intent is to bring awareness, as the negative dimensions of the representation may more accurately match the audiences’ preconceived notions of the disabled.[41] Tom Coogan argues that satire sometimes "highlights the limits of the tolerant subject position"[42] but if the audience does not adequately work through the layers of irony (a possibility strongly suggested by Wayne Booth[43]), then the mocking caricature is reinforced and normalized as a subject of ridicule. Alternatively, the *reductio ad absurdum* of disability satire can bring attention and support to moderate demands – further evidence that satire which seems extreme on the surface may not actually be working towards extreme ends. Coogan's example is a satirical news article claiming Christopher Reeves would be enshrined at the top of the Washington monument - the heightened absurdity of the

claim opens space to encounter the objectification of popular disability activists and shed light on the day to day issues faced by disabled people.[44]

One might caution against a wholly optimistic read of satire, not only because the performative architecture can fail in certain conditions, but also because the techniques used in satire are not limited to the dispossessed. Political orientation does not confer additional potency to satire, as its intrinsic rhetorical tools are not explicitly aligned with partisan goals. Finding "Little evidence for partisan differences" in conservative and liberal satire, Britta C. Brugman et al. suggest that the rhetorical tropes of satire are not limited by ideology.[45] Historically, those in power have made use of satire to concentrate power, maintain status, and counter dissent. Blackface is now culturally verboten, but clearly has roots in caricature designed to satirize a disenfranchised population. *Charlie Hebdo,* a French satire magazine, received significant criticism for routinely mocking Islam while Muslims were a minority in France (Hebdo's office would eventually be violently assaulted for that mockery). Even in conversational spaces, satire is often used to excuse out-and-out racist, sexist, or otherwise problematic language under the banner of irony or meta-commentary.[46] Furthermore, the privileged perspective of time may allow one to reconsider satires in a new context. For example, from the perspective of 21st century leftists, Orwell's *Animal Farm* could be considered conservative and potentially dangerous satire. Considering that Animal Farm is often taught in middle schools, an argument could be made that the text serves as satiric propaganda designed to inoculate against socialist ideas (others might read it as a satire of totalitarianism masquerading as socialism, but the first reading is at least plausible).

In other instances, state apparatuses have employed satire to leverage power against perceived enemies. The United States employed satirists to produce anti-Japanese propaganda

during World War II, with no less than Dr. Seuss himself contributing cartoons suggesting that internment was necessary to stop Japanese Americans from attacking the United States from within.[47] Patrick Merziger argues that, while it was largely unpersuasive to the general public, "satire was the only form of comedy which the National Socialist Party had developed by 1933," and that satire sought to mock the opposition, to ridicule it, and in doing so destroy it."[48] Krokodile is a state-sanctioned Russian satire magazine and "During the Soviet period its humour was chiefly directed against what it termed Western imperialism and bourgeois ideology, but it also assailed 'undesirable elements' in Russian society."[49]

In sum: satire may strengthen political dissent and subversion by unsettling established power relations, but in practice there are often times where access to that effect is unevenly distributed to different identities. While we have seen some success from satire as a generalized force against material and epistemic hegemonies, a clear understanding of the power relations generated through identity categories is necessary to reduce blowback, disengagement, and negative representations. Specifically, a key crux is the nature of relatability, and what tactics are available to an orator to extend relatability and consubstantiality without sacrificing their own sense of self or embodied social position.

Fake News (Before it was Cool)

From the vantage point of 2019 the term “Fake News” means something quite different than it did in the mid-2000s. While now “fake news” is a derogatory term slung with ideological conviction at CNN, MSNBC, Fox News (and whatever other news source you either love or hate), for some time in rhetorical studies at least “fake news” referred to such parody news programs as *The Daily Show*, *Weekend Update,* and *The Colbert Report*. Fake News programs satirize the nightly news copying its formal elements (anchor, desk, story segments, graphics)

but replacing so-called objective journalism with nakedly interested takes on hot button issues, delivering poignant and entertaining commentary that transcends the limitations of traditional reporting. Proponents of Fake News have suggested that such programs offer a corrective to problematic journalistic trends, enable heightened criticism of those in power, and reinvigorate the public sphere by encouraging robust civic engagement. Detractors question the efficacy of these programs to convert views to praxis. Independent of those claims, further studies on the unique satiric stylings of Stephen Colbert yield insights to the nature of satiric persona as a tool to induce critical processing in audiences.

Over a decade ago Geoffrey Baym praised *The Daily Show* as a poison pill to sloppy and biased news media, arguing that *The Daily Show* "contains much significance for the ongoing redefinition of news" and that "just beneath or perhaps imbricated within the laughter is a quite serious demand for fact, accountability, and reason in political discourse."[50] Baym argues that *The Daily Show* set the standard for news that "offers a lesson in the possible to which all students of journalism, political communication, and public discourse would be wise to pay attention."[51] Positioned at the intersection of news and entertainment, *The Daily Show* raised the standards for criticizing then President George Bush, questioned journalistic objectivity, and chided 24-hour news networks for purporting to be balanced while offering overtly ideological takes. That *The Daily Show* is billed as a comedy allows it to "engage in serious political criticism" as the label of "fake news" enables the show "to say that which the traditional journalist cannot" by granting "immunity from accusations that it violates journalistic standards."[52] The *Daily Show* simultaneously offered criticism of troubling journalistic practices while putatively embodying a democratic and dialogic alternative. As Baym explains,

> Use of parody unmasks the artifice in much contemporary news practices, while the interview segment endorses and enacts a deliberative model of democracy based on civility of exchange, complexity of argument, and the goal of mutual understanding.[53]

Baym and Jeffrey Jones revisit these arguments in similar fashion when they investigate a variety of foreign news parody programs, suggesting *The Daily Show* inspired satirical resistance broadly by offering a model of journalistic integrity that transcended the particular cultural context of the United States.[54]

Fake News programs such as *The Daily Show* and *The Colbert Report* not only offered a head-on challenge to the mainstream media, they also offered an alternative source of political insight for audiences weary of network news. Joseph Faina defends Stewart and Colbert's programs as a reversal of political malaise, generating a form of *public journalism* that reinvigorates a political youth and inspires resistance to conservatism. Faina defines public journalism as "a general orientation toward news that engages in matters not only of public importance but in ways that help a public make sense of them according to their own lived experience"[55] and notes that "Public journalism emerged as a way to better engage citizens so that they may increase participation and make more informed decisions."[56]

One key place where *The Daily Show* attempts to inform decisions is climate and environmental sciences. Paul Brewer argues that fake news programs "foster greater public attention to science by making the subject more accessible and entertaining" and that how "the program provides a forum for reasoned conversation about science and society could provide citizens with a model of deliberation about the relationships between the two."[57] In this way, *The Daily Show* offers both a set of informational material and a heuristic for how to work that information into praxis.

A lingering question in studies of *The Daily Show* et al. is whether or not these programs convert viewership to action. While James Anderson and Amie Kincaid ultimately find fake news programs net beneficial for provoking dissent, they note that these programs also "propagandize on behalf of powerful interests" (namely, their sponsors and producers) and thus are incentivized to maintain core elements of hegemonic power structures.[58] They argue that the humor of satire "effectively diverts attention from legitimate grievances and precludes the presence of other subversive satirizations at democracy's expense."[59] Anderson and Kincaid worry that satire makes so much a mockery of serious events that its consumers are laughing *at the expense of* direct political praxis. It is possible, they argue, that in laughing at the screen an audience is ultimately fulfilled and no longer requires material engagement to satisfy their civic duty. Other scholars have argued staunchly against quantitative measurements as the fulcrum upon which our opinion of satire rests. As Day notes, when it comes to political satire

> A favored angle is to ruminate on whether or not the piece of satire will have a tangible effect, which is almost invariably conceptualized as a direct impact on citizens' behavior in the voting booth, or as measurable influence on individual opinions.[60]

Day argues that the burden of "tangible effect" is a conservative tactic that effaces the potential of satire as "such a framework…assumes a one-to-one relationship between satiric text and action, as if one television episode, book, play, etc. is expected to spark a revolution."[61] This burden is an unduly high one, as, "there is almost nothing (satiric or otherwise) that has such a dramatic and immediate impact on people's opinions."[62] Ian Reilly similarly warns that "claims about satire's ability to single-handedly cause political change inherently miss the mark."[63] Instead, he argues, we should champion satire as "an appropriate and powerful vehicle for exploiting flaws in the institutional structure, organization, and [the] logic of mainstream news

media"[64] which can "call attention to various causes and sites of struggle and…create opportunities for dissenting perspectives to register with broader publics."[65] For scholars like Day and Reilly, the value of fake news is not in its numerical conversion of viewers to voters, but rather in the alternative visions of the future and deliberative models it offers.

While most Fake News programs[66] follow the same style as *The Daily Show* – a known comedy actor acts as anchor giving comedic commentary on popular press items – *The Colbert Report* is substantially different in that its lead anchor Stephen Colbert plays the character of an over-the-top conservative ideologue akin to Bill O'Reilly. Where Stewart, Bee, Oliver, Wilmore, and others are endogenously treated as actors reading a script, Colbert maintains his façade at all times, even maintaining the role during candid interviews. One could argue, then, that *The Colbert Report* offers a denser satire than other Fake News programs by virtue of Colbert's persona. Colbert embodies *reduction ad absurdum*, offering a punishing caricature of right-wing ideology that is indifferent towards economic disparity ("That's the free market, baby!"), literally cannot see race, and questions whether George W. Bush is a great president, or the greatest president.

By taking conservative ideas to an extreme, Colbert brings arguments to a heightened conclusion and in turn elucidates their potential harm. Jonathan Rossing shows this effect in Colbert's criticism of postracialism (what Rossing defines as "a belief that positions race as an irrelevant relic of the past with no viable place in contemporary thought").[67] According to Rossing, by taking postracialism literally and refusing any consideration of racial inequality, Colbert's character has an effect on audiences' perception of themselves and the immanent social world they inhabit by causing viewers to question their own postracial habits of thought.[68] Critical here is that Rossing argues the effect of *The Colbert Report* occurs immanently: auditors

must process Colbert's claim beyond the factual level to unlock the humor, creating space for audiences to encounter the substance of Colbert's claim on their own. Rossing suggests this may reduce resistance to controversial claims on race as audiences are not primed to reach for automatic responses.

Although Colbert's character is a satire of conservative talking heads, his performance does not, as Matthew Meier argues, necessarily condemn "the actions of others as crimes requiring punishment."[69]Meier argues three implications in defense of Colbert's persona; 1) the parody invites viewers to see his character as mistaken rather than evil, 2) by supplanting conservative villains with a fool, he urges audiences to see fools where they might see enemies, and 3) "His overblown parody cautions his audience to avoid the trappings of hyperbole and assume instead a posture of humility."[70] Colbert's satire is not so one dimensional as to suggest the mere opposite of whatever he says to be true. Where he takes up ideology he does so to play, rather than to dismiss, enacting a comic perspective of conservatism that does not insult the character of individual conservatives. Chiding zealotry and elitism, Colbert coaches audiences to resist the temptation towards entrenchment. Don Waisanen argues that Colbert does not replace one ideology with another, instead, through "polyglossic shifts, Colbert's parody gives his audiences an inoculating perspective against the incursions of trivial and private interests on the public's welfare."[71] Elsewhere, Waisanen argues that satiric news programs like Colbert that refuse to drop their façade "craft broader outlooks for understanding the systemic political issues and social terrain that we all inhabit" and as such "they generally help us conceive of public habits in alternative ways, offering society pedagogical insights."[72]

As gentle as Colbert may appear in theory, other scholars have questioned the validity of his pedagogical insights, charging that Colbert's approach to politics – and indeed Fake News in

general – does not provoke a comic rejoinder, but instead a malaise of cynicism that precludes cooperation.

Cynicism is a recurring attitudinal concern for Fake News scholarship. Roderick Hart readily admits that fake news programs invoke important conversations and may even draw awareness, but Hart also poses a serious question of then *Daily Show* anchor Jon Stewart: "Is he making cynicism so attractive that young people now have no option but to rally around their collective despair?"[73] Hart and Johanna Hartelius warn against the cynical nature of satire for its potential to disengage audiences from meta-level political spheres. Hart and Hartelius argue that Jon Stewart is leading his audience astray, that he "makes cynicism attractive" and urges his audience to "steer clear of conventional politics."[74] Hart and Hartelius are concerned that satire makes an audience feel like they have challenged the political order without actually accomplishing much of anything, or even worse that satiric news programs actively dissuade audiences from civic engagement. Hart claims that the cynicism produced through fake news undermines the spirit of good-faith cooperation, arguing that "cynicism lets people avoid the hard work of politics, with its endless negotiations and compromises."[75] Through cynicism, Hart and Hartelius argue, audiences are coached to accept only perfect politics, and to never compromise on their ideals.

Hart and Hartelius warn of the effects of an overly cynical generation on a well-functioning democracy, championing our extant political institutions because they "are founded by group effort, not by lone individuals."[76] Indeed, Hart and Hartelius are quick to espouse the virtues of our institutions as the central framing argument, for their claim is that "The United States is, after all, still the wonder of the world, the most successful mass democracy known to humankind."[77] To some extent, of course, Hart and Hartelius are correct that cynicism towards

any temporary political milieu should be balanced by optimism for our enduring institutions and the social goods they provide. Consider Hart and Hartelius's argument that the state is beneficial because it was responsible for "the Genome project, the Internet, the international space station, help with hurricanes and pestilence and AIDS."[78] Hart and Hartelius argue that "only governments" can solve the problems of poverty, disease, and environmental degradation, but one is left to wonder why those programs are so few and far between.[79] Where Hart and Hartelius see the best democracy currently known, cynical satire presses the issue further to ask why our democracy is not better: why has it historically underserved certain populations, why do we struggle so mightily to grapple with global warming, and why is our government no longer put in check by the mainstream media? Here, we reach an impasse: is it cynical to demand utopia, or optimistic to believe it possible?

Bennet defends *The Daily Show's* cynicism for painting a clearer vision of our contemporary political scene when he claims "the public is being deceived," arguing that Stewart's brand of commentary locates the truth hidden behind the "officially sanctioned news."[80] If Steward is cynical, it is because he has pulled back the curtain to reveal vested financial interests in foreign wars, powerful lobbying groups privileging corporations over citizens, and an increasingly inept – or worse, bought off – media. For Bennet, *The Daily Show* produces cynicism in its audience, but it is a cynicism that fuels the desire for political change. Bennet tells us that "cynicism seems to be part of a contemporary civic tool kit that tends to be used along with other tools, such as the daily news, to produce healthy levels of knowledgeable engagement with the political process."[81] Bennet argues that *The Daily Show* does not invoke cynicism as an end goal, but rather "as a playful way to offer the kinds of insights that are not permitted in more serious news formats that slavishly cling to official accounts of events."[82] This

line of thinking offers an alternative explanation of the relationship between satirist and audience.

For Bennet, the audience does not take cynicism on face nor internalize cynicism as a political endpoint – there is no one-to-one transfer of emotion because the comic nature of satiric news invites the audience to process beyond defeatist claims. Rather, cynicism is an ethos that encourages audiences to push the boundaries of what is possible within our democratic system by offering comic counterfactuals of what could be. Fake News programs, according to Don Waisanen, do not replace one truth with another, but rather the "comic modifier acts as a hook for the counterfactual, inviting citizens to expand their perspectives and choices by not getting caught in a single story about 'the way things are.'"[83] Cynicism directed at the press does not yield the conclusion that nothing can be done, as programs such as *The Daily Show* simultaneously offer alternative strategies for interviews and alternative modes of political commentary. Comic cynicism towards our system of government does not imply anarchy as the only solution; instead it presses the state to do more for its citizens. Finally, even if Hart and Hartelius are correct in their concern that comic cynicism does not produce much in the way of political change, we must wonder if the alternative is truly much better. After all, it may be profoundly more dangerous to remain optimistic about our collective futures when the evidence suggests those in power rarely have the masses' best interests at heart. The themes of this debate resonate throughout the following chapters of this dissertation, but alas we have exhausted the discussion within the context of fake news programs.

Burke's Comic and Tragic Frames

Kenneth Burke has been widely cited in rhetorical studies, but when it comes to the study of comedy his most significant contributions are his theories of Comic and Tragic Frames. These

Frames refer to lenses for evaluating social situations that offer competing perspectives on the significance of an action, the mistakenness of an actor, and the villainy (or heroism) of an act. Rhetorical studies has made great use of Burke's Comic and Tragic frames to cast light on such topics as women's anti-lynching strategies, economic downturn, queer representations, and sports mythology.[84] However, rather than work through particular case studies, I will focus on the theoretical underpinnings of Burke's contribution to the field. There is little in common between "Cyberpunk Futures" and Tim Tebow as rhetorical objects, and instead the significant connection between them is that both can be illuminated through Burke.[85] Further, Burke's frame analysis is not limited to a particular genre of literature nor speech, instead offering more transcendent insight into attitude, perspective, juxtaposition, and narrative beats. For those reasons, I begin with the underlying assumptions of frame analysis before elaborating the tragic and comic frames, and then detailing two distinct comedic stylings that are made possible through different balances of the tragicomic.

A core assumption of Burke's Comic Frame argues that humans draw from dramatic and literary forms to make sense of their experiences and to prepare themselves for navigating social disorder. Forms such as the epic, tragedy, and comedy construct symbolic "frames" that constitute "the more or less organized system of meanings by which a thinking man gauges the historical situation and adopts a role with relation to it."[86] Burke claims that humans draw from these forms to make sense of our relation towards others, and that "each of the great poetic forms stresses its own peculiar way of building the mental equipment (meanings, attitudes, character) by which one handles the significant factors of his time."[87] As Gary Selby explains, "These discursively constructed frames thus exert a profound influence upon human attitudes and behaviors."[88] In short, how humans interpret and digest the literary forms that surround them

guides our expectations and assumptions in novel situations. While some literary forms contribute to stabilizing and/or structuring symbolic frames, other forms offer a resource for destabilizing attitudes and behaviors. Comedic forms are fruitful, given this assumption, as Amber Day argues, because comedic literary forms (and especially the satiric) have "the potential…to push peripheral worldviews further into the mainstream, to contest the existing framing of particular issues, and to gradually change the associations that we collectively have of particular concepts/people/ideals, etc."[89]

Not all literary frames are built to maximize inclusion – and certainly not all comedic styles. Burke argues that the "tragic frame" recurs in narratives where the hero is magnified to take on an overwhelming challenge, and ultimately succeeds in vanquishing a similarly larger-than-life foe. Here, the audience is made to identify with said heroism, consubstantiating themselves with the victor, locating certainty and strength in their own decisions when juxtaposed to a villainous and vicious other who must be defeated.[90] We can see tracings of this frame in comedic styles that act as polemic cries against external enemies by making a single person or topic the punchline victim. Michael Butterworth warns that the tragic frame "inflates the importance of people, ideas, and events to the point of creating a world of absolutes, which commonly results in a language of sacrifice, victimage, and violence."[91] Furthermore, Butterworth argues that the tragic brings with it a "principle of perfection" that "inevitably constructs a hierarchy that reduces, rather than expands, the possibilities for identification and cooperation."[92] The tragic often predisposes audiences to negate the humanity of the Other, to place the villain in the bin of "lesser than" as their misdeeds overcode their personhood. As Burke explains, "the fatal accidents are felt to bear fully upon the act, while the act itself is felt to have summed up the character of the agent."[93] The tragic frame is one of reduction and

simplification for the villain, but elaboration and magnification for the hero; it thereby risks coaching audiences towards antagonism rather than recuperation.

In contrast with the tragic frame, Burke's comic frame "takes up the slack between the momentousness of the situation and the feebleness of those in the situation by *dwarfing the situation*" such that the audience identifies the scene as less threatening than originally perceived.[94] Where the tragic is marked with villains, viciousness, and evil, the comic is marked by ambivalence, mistakenness, and fools. Through studies on *South Park*, *Will and Grace*, *The Boondocks* and more, scholars have illustrated the efficacy of the comic frame in popular comedies and satires to advance social causes, challenge assumptions of personhood and identity, and hold audiences accountable for their foibles without the need for direct confrontation that may risk provoking defensiveness and backlash.[95] Kundai Chirindo and Ryan Neville-Shepard have shown how the comic frame can even be taken up at the level of policy as "a nominalist attitude that realizes the contingency and partiality of every vocabulary."[96] Further, Valerie Renegar and George Dionisopoulos have argued that the comic frame's ambivalence is often carried out through dialectical tension and "a multiplicity of perspectives" that enable audiences to work through cemented assumptions in favor of new social possibilities, an argument substantiated in Lacy Lowrey's examination of stand-up comedy.[97]

Tragic and comic frames, for Burke, rarely appear in purified form, and are theorized as absolutes or extremes only at the ends of the ranges of literary possibility. Burke was quick to point out that the tragic and comic are not mutually exclusive forms, but rather containers of elements, and those elements could appear in a multitude of discourses. For example, both the tragic and comic are, for Burke, "frames of acceptance," and even the most "comic ambivalence" recognizes the need to "take the bitter with the sweet."[98] C. Wesley Buerkle et al. note that "The

Burkean tradition in communication has been disposed to recognize Burke's poetic frames as existing in isolation of one another," however "social order can be constructed through the simultaneous examination of multiple, yet contradictory, frames."[99] Indeed, many critics have identified the ease by which one of Burke's poetic categories can slip into the other. Chirindo and Neville-Shepard have argued that taking up the comic frame as a political posture necessitates "the mutuality of both comedy and tragedy."[100] Borrowing from Celeste Condit and Thomas Farrell, Gregory Hatch advocates a tragicomic frame that is "more humane than a tragic frame and more realistic than a purely ironic one."[101]

By locating rhetorics that blend elements of the comic and tragic, rhetoricians have identified nuanced frames of acceptance that may recuperate the mistaken other without overlooking the risks of folly and mistakenness. Within the tragicomic frame we may recognize the other as mistaken (as we all sometimes are) and meet that mistakenness with offers for reconciliation that enable the recovery of the mistaken back into the fold while also enabling the possibility of critique. Although degrees of the tragic can be found in the comic, and vice versa, effective use of Burkean analysis should attune critics "to the point at which one of these ingredients becomes hypertrophied, with the corresponding atrophy of the other."[102] Therefore, it is the role of critics to point out places where the delicate balance of tragedy and comedy skews too far in one direction. What it means to "skew too far" is of course driven by context: there may be times when acidic, negative, comedy is necessary to stir an audience from complicity, and there may be times where optimism is crucial. One such style, where the comic takes on elements of the tragic, is the burlesque.

Edward Appel's significant work on the burlesque identifies that the comic and tragic frames can mix to varying degrees to produce unique frames of acceptance and rejection.[103]

Burke describes the burlesque as a purely "external" and superficial approach to characters wherein the author "merely described their *behavior*, without depth in imagining the state of their *minds*" to maintain the author's own comfort.[104] Recently, Todd V. Lewis and K Arianna Molloy have shown how elements of the comic and the burlesque frames can appear simultaneously within the same program, and are in fact often complimentary and overlapping. Light caricature, mockery, sarcasm: these humor devices, among many others, recur in both the purely comic and the mixed burlesque.[105] Appel explains these similarities occur because the "burlesque grows out of a situation where qualified comic acceptance appears no longer strong enough a mode of public censure, and yet where tragic destruction of an opponent is too strong."[106] Neither purely comic nor purely tragic, Appel argues that the "burlesque mediates tragedy and comedy, precisely because it allows the author and auditor to adopt a frame of acceptance and a frame of rejection *at the same time*."[107] Chris Smith and Ben Voth make a similar argument on how the comic can turn to the burlesque by reducing acceptance: “Action in the comic frame provides a platform to confront and correct problems while simultaneously laughing at faults instead of persecuting individuals for wrongs committed,” but “When acceptance of the ‘comic fool’ does not occur, the emphasis shifts to rejection and the dramaturgical frame becomes burlesque.”[108]

Appel argues the burlesque is chiefly composed of five narrative beats. First, a black/white or all/one schematization wherein transgressions of “categorical rules” by antagonists call for “a forceful, biting response.”[109] Second, a “chief actor” who is “full of himself, eager to flaunt his unanswerable reason why” steps in to identify the what and who of wrongdoing, as well as what must be done to “set things right.”[110] Third, the transgressor is made into a distorted and clownish opponent, simplified in caricature “to the exclusion of internal motivational complexities."[111] Joseph Rhodes elaborates that "Burlesque is used as a rhetorical

weapon because it reduces individuals, ideas, and practices to the level of farce.... the author speaks for the other by anticipating an opponent's discourse."[112] Gary Selby further argues that "The burlesque rhetor heartlessly seizes on the target's external behaviors and simplifies and distorts them in a way that exaggerates their absurdity," thereby necessitating the production of a skewed opponent that does not fairly reflect the fullness of one's humanity.[113] In Appel's diagnostic, the fourth beat brings limited scapegoating as "Burlesque builds a framework of limited exclusion, denying opponents a place in the fellowship of the righteous, but not denying them a place in the sun."[114] That is to say, while the transgressor is not eliminated from society altogether, the righteous "want them gone from the featured scene of activity."[115] Finally, burlesque turns towards the so-called "redemptive stage" wherein the righteous are "cocksure [and] unambivalent about the rectitude of their illiberal quest."[116] Jennifer Peeples et al. illuminate the distinct agency made available in the redemptive stage: "the burlesque frame retains capacity for human agency in contrast to the tragic frame; however, that action is one of rejection."[117] Or, as Selby concludes, "Burlesque thus invites not sympathy but scoffing dismissal."[118] At the conclusion of a burlesque narrative arc, the transgressing other has been welcomed back, but only as a junior partner, in a categorically lower status than the righteous who have allowed their return. This lesser-status is at least partially confirmed in the caricature process – a simplification that may be quite difficult to shake.

Burke considers satire to be similar to burlesque in that both are frames of rejection, but different in that satire aims to understand fully, and intimately, the standpoint of its subjects. In practice, the two may be easily conflated by virtue of their typical reliance on parody and taking on false personas. However, where the burlesque conjures a simplified caricature of its opponent that is constituted through magnification of external characteristics designed to distance the

target from society, Burke argues that in a well done satire the audience sees a reflection of the author as much as the target, and that "the satirist attacks *in others* the weaknesses and temptations that are really *within himself."*[119] Furthermore, Burke argues that satire "draws upon the imagery of the secret vice shared by both" the author and the target of scorn.[120] The satirist attacks herself as much as her target, and is "whipped with [her] own lash." In short, the satiric critique should turn back against itself, implicating both author and target as recognition that "*all* men are guilty."[121] As Burke identifies, satirists such as Swift "use[d] such thinking, not to *lift himself up,* but to put *all mankind down* (the author himself being caught in the general deflation.)"[122]

Tactically, the satirist is an expert in "strategic ambiguity" most noticeably deployed through use of irony and dialectical tension.[123] The satirist is torn between a hatred of "all nations, professions, and communities," but a love for individuals, for "John, Peter, Thomas, and so forth."[124] These tensions are commonly brought to light through the use of multiple persona, such that the audience is unclear who is hero and who villain, impeding the urge towards factionalism that so often accompanies the tragic frame. At bottom, the satirist offers a self-implicating critique, angling to cajole the audience into accepting their own responsibility in social ills. The irony at work in satire, for Burke, is "true irony, humble irony" that is "based upon a sense of fundamental kinship with the enemy, as one needs him, is indebted to him, is not merely outside him as an observer but contains within, being consubstantial with him."[125]

Both the burlesque and the satiric contain shades of the comic and the tragic. Both are considered frames of rejection, but of course as Burke famously argued, to reject A is to accept Not-A. That is to say that both forms enable critique that chastises wrongdoing but does not call for the full obliteration of the transgressor. However, where satirists chastise themselves as much

as opponents, the burlesquer combines tragic magnification with comic reduction, raising the self while lowering the status of the opponent.

From Burke we receive tools to explore the balance of comedy and tragedy in a rhetorical object. Rather than claim a text to be comic (and therefore good) or tragic (and therefore bad), my analysis of the tragicomic shows how nuanced approaches to comedic styles better inform the roles of transgressor, jury, and executioner. It may sometimes be the case that a burlesque frame is necessary, when a subject of scorn can only be safely returned to the community as a junior partner. There will be other times where comic indignation requires a closer and more empathetic vision of its subjects, in which case an object can be evaluated by how closely it follows Burke's models for recuperative satire. In all cases, the comic maintains shades of the tragic and vice versa, and this lesson will be profoundly significant in later chapters as we turn towards darker, less inviting satires. Through Burke, we may find the optimistic potential in what appears pessimistic, the comic angle in what appears tragic

Summary and Transition

In this chapter I have attempted to define satire rhetorically. Towards that end, I have outlined an inductive approach to understanding satire that seeks formal elements such as parody and pastiche. Welding an inductive literary approach to a deductive approach, I have argued that satire can be identified by its rhetorical function, wherein satire makes use of strategic ambiguity to constitute criticism in hostile contexts. Satire is not merely the draping of criticism in comedic robes; rather formal comedic elements are intrinsically woven with threads of critique, forming a relationship where the "truth" of a satire is always obscured within the "mask" of entertainment. Resultant ambiguity is a feature, not a bug, as satire aims first and foremost to distort,

destabilize, and unsettle our political and ethical imaginaries. Rather than replace one truth with another, much of satiric rhetoric opens space for audiences to contemplate the textures of their reality from new vantage points. A brief history of the rhetorical study of comedy and satire has shown satire's theoretical potential for displacing hegemony, inducing cooperation, and empowering the disposed. We have also seen the limitations of a generalized approach to satire, most acutely that a failure to attend to the contexts of orator identity and rhetorical constraints may cause a satire to outright fail, or even worse generate backlash against the speaker. Finally, I have also presented examples for how satire can be utilized by those in power to further marginalize the dispossessed and stir populations against foreign enemies.

By and large, the satiric objects reviewed by past studies on satiric rhetoric have been essentially optimistic – even those satires which attempt to erase the Other hold an optimistic promise of a better world (if only the scapegoat can be erased). These studies have most often taught us much about gentle, goading satires – the kind which does not take the intended audience as the simultaneous object of scorn, or if they do, offer clear paths for redemption. In optimistic satire, even when the audience is coached to see their own flaws, the text accomplishes this through external moralizing, using allegory and example to shine a spotlight on the problematic while maintaining the possibility of enfolding the object of scorn back into the flock. Even Colbert's conservative caricature resists an out-and-out condemnation of the political right wing through comic distancing. Literary studies refer to these satires as following in the Horatian tradition – to goad with a smile. What might we find, then, in Horace's foil, the pessimistic satires of the Juvenalian tradition?

Pessimistic satire abounds, and generating insights will require a unique set of theoretical tools. Thankfully, scholars in classics and literary studies have amassed a robust understanding

of the goals, effects, and formal techniques of pessimistic satire. Chapter 2 explores many of these insights, aiming to show how they can be useful to rhetorical scholars. There, I will argue that pessimistic techniques do not automatically produce pessimistic outlooks, that direct confrontation greatly complicates the role of the audience (and their attendant heuristic processing), and further that the textual interplay of pessimism and comedy offers a type of *Anti-Clarity* that works at a performative and epistemic level to clear space for alternative perspectives. The last chapters of this dissertation apply the lessons of optimistic and pessimistic satire to two significant, recent, satiric programs: *Million Dollar Extreme Presents: World Peace,* and *Saturday Night Live*'s depiction of President Donald Trump. In the first, a clever and biting criticism of contemporary politics has been mis-cast as a bulwark against social justice; in the second, a bulwark against bipartisanship is inaccurately received as clever and biting criticism. While these objects are wildly different in their aims and techniques, I argue that approaching either with only the theoretical perspectives and critical tools gleaned from the rhetorical study of optimistic satire fails to enable full appreciation of the depth of their strategic workings.

CHAPTER TWO

SATIRIC PERSONA

This chapter appraises the rhetorical techniques of pessimistic satire. Later chapters will ask how these techniques can be made useful in our current political context by evaluating specific case studies. In this chapter, I attempt to elucidate the rhetorical value of pessimistic satire through two axes: tone and persona. Tone and Persona make useful theoretical bulwarks for the study of pessimistic satire because they help us to understand how texts that appear to only destroy may still offer positive alternative possibilities to an audience. Tone refers to an attitudinal spectrum from optimistic to pessimistic elan, and persona will demonstrate how seemingly eschatological outlooks are discounted in the speaker-audience relationship. This chapter starts by analyzing the tonal spectrum, then introduces some new ways to think about pessimistic satire before showing how the rhetorical concept of Persona can further elucidate the ways pessimistic satire interacts with its audience. The chapter ends with a theoretical case study in the French satiric Bouffon to demonstrate how tone and persona interact to inform affiliation and message reception across divergent audiences.

To start, a question of appetite: Why Tone and Persona?

Tonal analysis shows how pessimistic satire conveys its message. What are the qualities inherent to pessimism as a way of speaking/writing/thinking when compared to an optimistic tone? Any kind of answer tends to derive from the performer's worldview, attitude, and disposition. To talk of Juvenal as a pessimist is to talk of Juvenal as both a character and an author, a distinction felt and interpreted by his audience. This chapter begins with a dissection of

the optimistic-pessimistic split in satire studies. I show that while there is considerable value in maintaining and applying tone as a spectrum, assumptions made of pessimistic satire (chiefly that it has little suasive value) may not hold up to scrutiny. The most significant contribution here follows a rather simple question: how do we evaluate satiric pessimism in its own right, absent comparison with optimism? In answer to this question, I introduce the concept of *Anti-Clarity* to elaborate how pessimistic satire can induce alternative epistemic strategies in an audience by terminally complicating linear readings of a text.

If we are thinking about the relationship between author, character, and audience, we will find considerable resources in the rhetorical concept of persona. First persona, for example, sheds light on the way a satirist's character is received by an audience, and in turn how the satirist can play with authenticity to simultaneously present two or more competing perspectives (satirist-performer and satirist-writer, if not more) within a single voice. Once the rhetorical concept of "first persona" is applied to pessimistic satire, it was only natural to see what could be illuminated by applying other conceptual personae: auditors implied by the text (2nd), the audience not invoked (3rd), the silenced (null), and the coded (4th). Evaluating satiric technique in relation to the Second, Third, Null and Fourth Persona elaborates how satire allows us to go beyond satiric characters to theorize a more complex author-audience relationship, opening a novel set of pathways for how we might evaluate pessimistic satire.

This chapter concludes with a theoretical case study where the twin axes of tone and persona are shown at work in the pessimistic satire of the Bouffon. The Bouffon is a figure derived from European theatre, a character or archetype of folklore and legend not unlike a satyr, clown, or groundling. As a theoretical case study, the Bouffon shows the significance of binding

tone and persona as a reading strategy to make sense of how audiences may find encouragement and value in a vile, offensive, even scatological performance

Situating Satiric Tone: Optimism and Pessimism

Communication and rhetorical studies have produced a respectable batch of studies on satiric tone and so it is worth briefly reviewing how tone is currently situated in that academic milieu before a more thorough interrogation of the God text from which those discussions seem to emerge. The God text of satire studies is Gilbert Highet's influential work the history of satire from a literary perspective, *The Anatomy of Satire*.[1] As we will quickly see, modern theorization on satiric tone rely heavily on Highet's work, though in the process some of the more precise and careful distinctions made by Highet get lost in academic telephone, flanderizing[2] his pessimistic/optimistic split and in the process often missing out on Highet's own reservations regarding tonal differences. Two quick caveats before we proceed. First, mild disagreements about a 50-year-old text should not in any way negate the value of other scholars' works nor undermine the theoretical grounds of their conclusions – my reintervention should only serve to offer additional pathways incidentally (and accidentally) closed through enthusiastic support of optimistic satire's potential. Second, the pessimistic/optimistic binary may still be useful when evaluating tone as it is sometimes quite informative to say a performance/text would improve by being more or less optimistic. Again, my goal is not to dismiss the tool, but to elaborate our ability to judge a pessimistic satire *as such* without relying on the contrast with an optimistic alternative.

Let us begin by establishing the significance of Highet's commentary on the Horatian/Juvenalian split. Of significant note, an overwhelming majority of essays in rhetorical

studies that makes a distinction between Juvenalian and Horatian satire cites either Gilbert Highet's Anatomy of Satire or multiple other sources that appear to borrow assumptions from Highet. Essays from Megan Hill, R. Lance Holbert, and Heather LaMarre, as well as books by Fredric Bogel, Leonard Feinberg, Charles Knight, Charles Sanders, Edward and Lilian Bloom, Charles Schutz, and Dustin Griffin (the second most cited text on satire) all use Highet's work to clarify tonal differences between optimistic and pessimistic satire.[3] Looking through these texts makes it apparent how Highet's analysis is xeroxed across studies, and in the process of uptake and circulation, Highet's work loses some of the finer definition. What starts as a relatively porous comparison of contained elements steadily (albeit perhaps unintentionally) becomes calcified in rigid association. For the most part, this reduction is strategic and innocuous – we endorse the optimism-pessimism spectrum because it provides a broadly understood staging ground to begin commentary on a satiric text/performance. The existence of robust commentary on the pessimistic/optimistic spectrum demonstrates that the concept is alive in academic discussions regardless of the pedigree of its heritage, so let us turn now to see how Highet has been taken up.

Highet identifies a core schism between Horace and Juvenal, optimism and pessimism, and it is this identification that has persisted to this day in communication scholarship. As Highet explains, Horace is the optimist: "The satirist, though he laughs, tells the truth."[4] In contrast, Perseus and Juvenal, pessimists, tell their own truth, one that is "limited to the triumph of wickedness."[5] Highet notes that "In the first, he expects the truth to do good; in the second, he expects it to hurt many people and to endanger himself."[6] The first (Horace) "tells the truth with a smile, so that he will not repel them, but cure then of that ignorance which is their worst fault."[7] The other's "aim therefore is not to cure, but to wound, to punish, to destroy. Such is

Juvenal."[8] Though the first may make use of ridicule and *indignatio*, optimistic satire aims ultimately to recover. As Highet explains, "If their satire does prick us a little more deeply than is comfortable, it is merely a hypodermic: the pain and the swelling will generate healthful antibodies."[9] On the other hand, Juvenal, and pessimistic satirists like him, proclaim that there is no cure for villainy and corruption to be found in the extant organization of politics, society, and/or power. Pessimists argue, on the surface at least, that man is irredeemable, believing that man "deserves only scorn and hatred," so much so that "If he laughs at them, it is not the laughter of fellowship, there is no joy in it, no healing warmth."[10] Cynical, grim, and deadly serious, "The misanthropic satirist looks at life and finds it, not tragic, nor comic, but ridiculously contemptible and nauseatingly hateful. His vision makes his mission."[11]

These accusations are quite serious if we are to claim that pessimistic satire has the potential for opening new alternatives. It appears the best a pessimist might hope for is that auditors take a lesson from those not worth saving. Tragic satire is often considered a moralizing rhetoric *against* immorality that lacks the hortatory goad towards a tangible, better future (in contrast with tragic literature more broadly, where the downfall of man is more popularly recognized as a goad towards greater character, etc.). However, even in this slate of distinctions we see a commonality that serves as the hidden basis for comparison between pessimistic and optimistic satire: in both cases, though tone may differ considerably, the aim is ultimately to move the audience in some way or another. The satirist may be trying to help the public by giving advice, or by bringing scandal out into the open, or "merely" attempting to eradicate toxicity, but in all cases the text is written with an audience in mind, and thus we can conclude the text does not and cannot – in principle – abandon the attempt to influence audiences.

A significant problem for the Horatian/Juvenalian split is locking in an assumed and stable relationship between tone and aims. Namely, that Horatian satire is both criticism with a smile and a reformist paradigm while Juvenalian satire is an acidic tear-down that appears to be a refusal of reformism because of its refusal of affiliation. The problem with this schema is the implicit association of form with goal: smile with reform, acidity with destruction. I might suggest that this association is the inevitable outcome of keeping optimism and pessimism articulated in opposition. So it goes, as we list the qualities of one tone, we may be too quick to ascribe the theoretical antonym to the other: if smiles make friends, frowns must make enemies, if gentle laughter generates interest, harsh roasts must turn audiences away, etc. Problematically, these packages stop being essential or strategic, instead treated as axiomatic connections. While these pairings may be common, to assume the pairing is inevitable denies the singularity of a given tone. Surely, one can destroy with a smile as much as a radical statement can really be code for reform.

Some recent studies have tried to evaluate the difference in tone on audience reception with the aim of identifying when one tonal choice may be more strategic than another. The conclusions are generally murky but do provide substantial insight to what pessimistic and optimistic satires can offer in terms of persuasive effect and heuristic processing. Holbert et al produced a relatively small study claiming that "Horatian and Juvenalian [satires] remain relatively equal when it comes to levels of perceived persuasive intent" but that the "low message strength" of Horatian satire resulted in "low perceived influence."[12] The study further suggests, tentatively, that Horatian satire may invoke relatively less heuristic processing than Juvenalian satire (which, in turn, was coded rather similarly to opinion editorials in terms of an elaboration likelihood continuum). LaMarre et al. further contributed to this discussion with their claim that

"different satirical approaches can change the level of audience agency in the persuasion process."[13] LaMarre et al argue that Juvenalian satire triggers a resource allocation in message recipients, causing them to spend more cognitive activity decoding the message, thereby reducing argument scrutiny. The end effect is "an inverse relationship between individual-level argument scrutiny and political message persuasiveness."[14] Put together, it seems that pessimistic satire may yield greater processing for message recipients, but that processing is dedicated to message decoding and less to message scrutiny. A recent study by Weinmann and Vorderer suggests that Horatian and Juvenalian content have different opportunities to persuade – the former at its best when viewers prefer entertainment to appreciation, and the latter at its best when viewers are willing to engage in "internal deliberative reflection" (but still wish for some level of entertainment).[15] Thus, any speculation about a satire's persuasive potential is further complicated not only by the epistemic/ideological coordinates of its audience, but even their mood! Collectively, these studies make a case that there is no clear and stable relationship between tone and persuasive appeal.

In sum: a popular assumption in satire scholarship holds steady a causal relationship between tone and persuasive potential, yet it is the case that literary, theoretical, and empirical research reveals those relationships to be more complex than they appear. If we are to ask where to go from here, we may want to ask how we got here. Or, what are the building blocks for this assumption? When pessimism is put in conversation with optimism, the following contrasts persistently appear: persuasion vs denouncement, healing vs punishing, and hope for a better tomorrow vs nihilism at our current lot. I'm not telling any tales from school to say that these contrasts frequently grace the pages of serious discussions on satiric archetypes, or even more to say that most often these contrasts are attributed directly to Highet himself. So, a point of

intervention is in order. I will now briefly address these contrasts, arguing that even where they properly originate in Highet, they do not hold as clean divisions when placed under scrutiny (something Highet himself, we shall see, was quick to admit). Thus, scholars should be more cautious when taking inventory of the properties and abilities supposedly intrinsic to tonal distinctions. As I work through entrenched binaries my goal is to reclaim singularity: to say that pessimism achieves an effect regardless of the optimistic alternative, and furthermore to say that sometimes the effect of pessimism can be motivating, or at least rhetorical.

Difference 1: Persuade vs Denounce

Highet claims that satirists like Horace "persuade more than they denounce."[16] One could take this line from Highet to at least two secondary conclusions: (1) Juvenal denounces more than he persuades, and (2) that denouncement is not persuasive. Alas, the distinction between *persuasion* and *denouncement* is rather slippery in a rhetorical context. Denouncement is, of course, chiefly rhetorical. Denouncement is itself persuasive: one ought not do this thing. But I am being picky, and applying perhaps unnecessarily restriction to Highet, who likely does not imply "persuasion" the same as it may be taken up by scholars of rhetoric. Nonetheless, his distinction reveals a clearer motivational difference: Where Horace pushes his audience towards a higher good, Juvenal pushes his audience away from a base ill. In both cases, the satirist coaches an auditor, and thus the possibility of persuasion cannot be dismissed if we are to understand persuasion as not just goading towards, but also goading from.

Edward and Lilian Bloom offer some guidance in their explanation of a humanist frame of pessimistic satire which sees the pessimistic invective as a form of "self-serving malice."[17] For Bloom and Bloom, the pessimistic satirist is shaped by intention: "a moral-didactic impulse…one of man's expression of dismay, disappointment, even revulsion."[18] While it is "the

opinion of some critics" that "the satirist's incentive to criticize is resolved in nihilistic abjuration," the choice to share satire with the world denies charges of misanthropy.[19] Furthermore, Bloom and Bloom explain that even optimistic satire begins from a place of negation, as "the essence of satire" is

> generally the symbol of an author's disappointment in, or even annoyance with, his world and its inhabitants. As though pulled between the tensions of love and hate, he needs to wound those for whom he harbors a coalition of sympathy and antagonism."[20]

Thus, we cannot even make the case that optimistic satire is void of denouncement – and indeed any satiric critique logically contains a kernel of rejection, of selecting something other than the status quo. Bloom and Bloom's claim is consonant with Highet, not contradictory, as Highet merely theorizes that the optimist persuades *more* than she denounces, implying a residual mix of both carrot and stick. Thus, because denouncement, rejection, and disappointment are inevitably laden in satire broadly, we ought to maintain healthy skepticism at the claim that denouncement in and of itself holds tension with the goal of persuasion. Does the pessimist rage at the world picture? Very well, they rage. But all the while they rage in pursuit of motivating others to rage with them, and thus perhaps to create alternative possibilities.

Difference 2: Heal vs Punish

Succinctly: "The optimist writes in order to heal, the pessimist in order to punish."[21] But what do we make of the pessimist who punishes the cause of illness? The satirist who aims to eradicate a disease rather than treat a symptom? The optimist tends to textually rejuvenate the object of scorn, holding hope that the wicked may right their ways. If the optimist heals, they heal one patient. The pessimist, typically, does not believe in the capacity of the villain to be rehabilitated. The pessimist does not treat the subject, they quarantine them in the hopes of

preventing infection to the rest of society. The pessimist's pharmakon: clearing the disease to allow the body to begin its own healing process. Pressed to its limits, the distinction between healing and punishment struggles to reckon with the possibility of excision as the best medical option. You never really reform cancer; you often have to cut it out.

We may also struggle with the implication that optimism foregoes punishment. Or at least, we may struggle to believe that optimist satire out-and-out refuses dark humor, negativity, scathing critique, or any of the other literary techniques associated with pessimism, even if we are happy to accept the conclusion that those techniques appear relatively less frequently in optimism. It bears repeating that I am not arguing for collapsing the distinction between optimism and pessimism, I am arguing that the overlap more than we may think when putting them in conversation, and that we need to be rather careful when drawing conclusions between tonal techniques and intent. Recall that Lanx Satura implies a "full dish" rhetorical performance, and as such satirists may make use of the carrot and the whip (cream) both to stir their audience towards enlightenment. Highet, of course, readily admits this himself: "The flag of satire is not particolored, white on one side and black on the other. It is polychromatic."[22] Neither optimistic nor pessimistic satire is mono-emotional, and nearly all stripes of satire jostle, at least occasionally, between states of healing and hurting. Highet, again:

> In a single book, even in a single page, we can see the multiple emotions of a satirist struggling against one another for mastery; and ultimately it is this ferment of repulsion and attraction, disgust and delight, love and loathing, which is the secret of his misery and his power."[23]

So, Highet agrees that satirists are not, at their core, unwavering in their pessimism or optimism as implied by singular allegiance to attraction or repulsion, recovery or expulsion. A single page

can contain shades of either. Yet Highet shows how we can hold the distinction between carrot and stick, persuasion and repulsion as qualitative metrics of the content of a satire. Therefore we might be willing to say that a satire which makes healthier use of whip is more pessimistic, etc., but we ought not so quickly assume that pessimistic satire foregoes healing altogether. We should be encouraged to make classificatory claims, but not perhaps automatically the attending conclusion. Pessimistic satire may contain less "healing" in the textual level, but that does not necessarily disqualify a healing intent.

Difference 3: Hope vs Nihilism or, Whither Enthymeme?

To charge pessimistic satire with nihilism is to accuse it of abandoning the possibility of anything other than what is. Perhaps this may be the case if the text begins and ends with the page, but the endogenous text does not constitute the whole of the satiric apparatus which must be taken to include an audience and the soul of the satirist themselves. Even the most pessimistic satires ultimately battle for a better tomorrow. Highet again: "Although some are too embittered, others too convulsed with laughter, to give voice to their positive beliefs, all satirists are at heart idealists."[24] In optimistic satire, the author may offer clear imperatives to the audience – suggestions for a better tomorrow. We will not find such options in pessimistic satire, but Highet's insistence that even the most cynical of satires implicitly offers an ideal rings true in embodiment, persona, and performance. The pessimist offers no quarter at the level of the surface text but clears space for alternatives in their performance – as if to say to the audience "we are in this mess now, it looks bleak, so what are you going to do about it?"

If the pessimist believed social conditions to be truly inevitable, there would be no motivation to speak. Instead, "[t]hey wish to stigmatize crime or ridicule folly, and thus to aid in diminishing or removing it."[25] Furthermore, although "the pessimists will not admit it," Highet

retains that "They are protreptic. Not only do they denounce in such a way as to warn and to deter. They give positive advice. They set up an exemplar to copy. They state an ideal."[26] Bloom and Bloom concur that pessimism is not a closed route in satire. Rather,

> What makes the cruel accents of satire supportable are their echoes – however muffled – of authorial humaneness. Despite its surface lamentation, bitterness, or mockery, it attracts as a powerful vehicle of good-natured hope; not good-natured in the modern sense of easy-going compliance or mere kindliness, but in that defined by such men as Shaftesbury and Hutcheson.[27]

If the distinction is not hope vs nihilism, then what is the difference? At bottom, where Horace seeks to make clear a way out from moral failings, Juvenal (et al.) do quite the opposite: they complicate the certainty of our moral convictions, muddling rather than clarifying, as an intentional ethos. Pessimistic satire places the burden of responsibility on the audience, compelling auditors to confront the depths of their condition. While the pessimistic text may not offer clear alternatives, to stir an audience *against the world* implies there are other worlds possible. To borrow a phrase from Frank Wilderson, the pessimistic conclusion is "To say that we *must* be free of air, while admitting to knowing no other source of breath."[28] The pessimist offers a difficult proposition to the audience by painting a picture of a world steeped in corruption only to deny the instant gratification of possible relief. In this way, the pessimist does not necessarily foreclose alternative possibilities, instead forcing the audience to look within themselves to find the answer. Faith in the audience…talk about hope!

Satire's Pharmakon

Does the pessimist denounce? Very well, the pessimist denounces, but they denounce in pursuit of compelling movement, a persuasive tactic. Does the pessimist wound? Very well, the

pessimist wounds, the pessimist exiles and excises, but if she cuts into the body (politique) it is a minor wound, a surgical wound, necessary for structural healing. And yes, we may admit, the pessimist speaks in a dark language, she brings forth visions of corruption and withholds the antidote. But the pessimist does not truly predict extinction, it warns of extinction, threatens extinction, to compel its auditors to see how bad things truly are and take it upon themselves to make change. If we are convinced that pessimistic satire holds the potential for persuasion, for healing, and for hope, we can still admit to seeing much less of those elements – at least in the text itself – when perusing pessimistic satire compared to its optimistic counterpart. The spectral distinction holds for classification such that we can say satire X is more pessimistic than Y. Yet, upon making that classification, we should be careful when leaping to conclusions about intent, effect, or aim.

We are, hopefully, now convinced that pessimistic satire does not abandon persuasion nor the pursuit of a better tomorrow. The question turns: how? How can it be the case that a text is out-and-out negative but still "intend" to inspire something in its audience? How can barraging an audience with hopelessness compel them towards anything other than defeat? I have argued that pessimism functions in conversation with its audience, and furthermore that the pessimistic author is well aware of this truth. The pessimistic complicates the assumptions – epistemic or otherwise – of the audience: unsettling instead of settling, pyrotechnics instead of horticulture, clearing space for the audience to put in their own work. Negation intersecting with negation to create something else, like multiplying negative numbers. At a metatheoretical level, we can reckon with the function of negation as a precondition for something new. To move closer, to examine the text itself, reveals a rhetorical technique of complication and contradiction. I have named this rhetorical technique *Anti-Clarity*. Let's check it out.

Anti-Clarity and Pessimistic Satire

Satires of Persius, Juvenal, and other pessimists often make great use of a rhetorical tool I have termed *Anti-Clarity*. *Anti-Clarity* occurs as both a rhetorical device/technique as well as a motivation. That is, when an author makes use of *Anti-Clarity* we might say that both a part/portion of a text is a token of *Anti-Clarity* and also that the text as a whole gestures towards (or enacts) *Anti-Clarity* as an ethical/political/epistemic good. To think of *Anti-Clarity* and, in turn, pessimistic satire, in terms of style does not simply describe ornamental qualities of a discourse, but rather may function, much like the "Feminine Style," to "offer alternative modes of political reasoning."[29] The textual and performative construction of *Anti-Clarity* is mimetic in its content effect – it supports *Anti-Clarity* as a communicative and attitudinal practice.

A key assumption put under review by *Anti-Clarity* is the delimited context of a text itself. *Anti-Clarity* often expands the limit of the "text" beyond the so-called page to include the dynamic triad of author-text-audience, a relationship I will explore further when considering the role of Persona in pessimistic satire. As I will show now, *Anti-Clarity* as a style/device/ethos/episteme (for it is all at once) calls out for consideration of audience reception. *Anti-Clarity* functions in relation to an audience.

Contrasting *Anti-Clarity* to Strategic Ambiguity should help to show which parts of this concept derive from extant understandings of polysemy and which parts are unique to my concept. Strategic ambiguity is distinct from a general imprecision of language/speech – a pervasive phenomenon in language that is more or less inevitable to some degree regardless of speaker intention.[30] Strategic Ambiguity is defined by Eric Eisenberg as ''those instances where individuals use ambiguity purposefully to accomplish their goals.''[31] Sohn and Edwards describe the example of strategic ambiguity in corporate apologies that address controversy without clear

commitment or recognition of culpability. Accordingly, "strategic ambiguity encourages variability in communication by providing an abstract level of understanding upon which organizational participants can agree."[32] Strategic ambiguity is used to create divergent interpretations of a statement/text such that different audiences might take away different meaning. Strategic ambiguity is marked by non-commitment: it could be either A or B but never A *and* B.

The similarities between strategic ambiguity and *Anti-Clarity* are at least twofold: (1) both use coded language, double speak, and signifying jargon (pink herring, knowing winks), and (2) both "utilize semantic instability as a resource for creating new meanings," as described by Sohn and Edwards.[33] Strategic ambiguity differs from *Anti-Clarity* in in regards to commitment: where strategic ambiguity suggests a lack of commitment (the message has multiple equally plausible meanings), *Anti-Clarity* directly confronts, troubles, and undermines commitment. Where one lacks, the other expressly opposes. Strategic ambiguity is synonymous with "either or" while *Anti-Clarity* rhymes with "neither nor". The first relies on a strategic lack of information such that follow-up questions might reveal hidden commitments, the second turns in on itself such that further elaboration cannot unravel the knot. Perhaps most importantly: strategic ambiguity describes a single text that lends itself to divergent interpretations *by different audiences* while *Anti-Clarity* describes a text that holds divergence *in a single interpretation*. Any given strategically ambiguous message can be interpreted as A or B and either may have supporting evidence. Any given anti-clear message is both A and B where A is defined as Not B.

Anti-Clarity describes a text that actively resists hermeneutical approaches by increasing (rather than decreasing) in complexity and internal dissonance the more said text is interrogated.

Sometimes *Anti-Clarity* takes the form of an unsolvable conundrum or paradox that rests in the center of a text, other times when an author holds and maintains ideological/epistemic tensions (whether through multiple characters or self-defeating prose), and other times *Anti-Clarity* occurs only briefly in the text as a kernel or nub that binds and/or directs other premises into uncertainty. Though the moment of *Anti-Clarity* may be brief or only a small portion of the text in word count, that moment reveals a conundrum irresolvable on its own terms. Wherein a text obfuscates only temporarily such that the reader overcomes the tension itself through the unfolding of additional in-line premises, we do not have *Anti-Clarity*.

Some aspects of this are not new. Unreliable narrators are a staple in storytelling. Deception is commonplace. What sets *Anti-Clarity* apart is that this concept does not merely describe something that is not clear, but more specifically indicates the holding stable of contradictory theses *intentionally by the author*. *Anti-Clarity* does not mean that a text is wholly "unknowable" in the sense of James Joyce's *Ulysses* that is just some infinite set of puzzles that are exceptionally difficult to unlock. *Anti-Clarity* may be defined as a formal quality of discourse where authoritative claims cannot be elucidated through a hermeneutic approach; the more a text of this quality is studied, the *less* clear it becomes. Here by *Anti-Clarity* I do not mean "unclear" or "imprecise" which would imply a sloppiness or lack of artful tact. Quite the opposite: I am arguing that the adroit maneuvering in Juvenal's 6th satire between 4 alternating persona (Juvenal the deceiver, Juvenal the honest, his direct interlocutor, and the example of a separate party) actively works to increase contradiction and minimize certainty. *Anti-Clarity* is the term of choice because this feeling of being lost is intended by the author and carefully crafted in prose. As Jenkinson claims, pessimistic satire "forces you to give up your own and all ordinary modes of thought or give up the attempt to read."[34] *Anti-Clarity* in pessimistic work aims to leave the

audience in a state of loss, without clear positions or persona to latch onto. Sometimes *Anti-Clarity* will be a selling point of the performance, as we might expect with Juvenal's proclamations against the state in which he explicitly invites the audience to correct their ignorance. Other times, the author might make use of *Anti-Clarity* as part of a wider variety of rhetorical tools designed to wed entertainment with critique.

A simple example to demonstrate how *Anti-Clarity* functions in a suasive text: "I command you to disobey me." This statement is a rather straightforward paradox because it contains two contradictory premises simultaneously. Those contradictions are not met one after another in conversation, they are held in the same space and time. We can imagine the paradox to be elaborated through supporting evidence for both premises – all the reasons it would be good to listen to my commands and all the reasons it would be good for you to disobey me. At this point the conceit is still logically paradoxical as the reduced claim is contradictory despite a temporally induced appearance that the claims are in conversation. Even if one side persuades you, you cannot act in a way that escapes the paradox set forth by the imperative. Thus, the sequenced nature of elaborated discussion still gestures towards an irresolvable paradox. It stands to reason that the reader must approach the text as something other than a set of persuasive claims if they are to escape the paradox.

A second, slightly more complex example of *Anti-Clarity* can be found in Juvenal's 6th satire. At bottom, Juvenal's 6th is an elaborated version of "I command you to disobey me." Juvenal tells his audience they should be angry at women, then slowly reveals that their anger is more poisonous than helpful, before Juvenal ultimately denounces himself as a deceiver who can only lead men to disastrous paths and thus the audience cannot trust either premise on the value/danger of internalized anger. Juvenal insists he cannot be trusted! So long as one lives

"inside" of the text, Juvenal's oratory can only lead you in maddening circles. One must import their own way out of the maze, it will not be found in the pages.

Anti-Clarity can be a temporary effect, for example coaching a reader to approach paradoxes or contradictions from a higher metaphysical perspective. What Deleuze and Guattari or Kenneth Burke might describe as *transcendence.* In the above example, "I command you to disobey me", the reader escapes paradox by recognizing the statement as a literary device that illustrates a point; the reader then reaches an even higher metaphysical perspective by recognizing their leap (making this parenthetical a fourth level of observation, and so on). *Anti-Clarity* can therefore appear textually in part or section. One function of *Anti-Clarity* can be to direct the reader to a higher perspective such that, in order to make sense of the text, the reader must approach from without, recognizing not just the text but its context and creator.

At least two sources of *Anti-Clarity* can be found in the works of classically pessimistic satire: indignatio, and the effacement of *ethos*. In the first, *Anti-Clarity* emerges between the stated aim of universal destruction and the implied reality of remaining tethered to the social and political milieu the author rallies against, thereby discounting the author's invective. In the second, the satirist actively deconstructs their own character and credence. By directing the satirist's invective towards the audience, the speaker strategically complicates the auditor-orator relationship, sometimes tricking the audience, other times insisting to have their worst interests at heart. The production of *Anti-Clarity* as a formal element of satire is instrumental in the epistemic challenges offered by Juvenalian and Persian satires, and a brief drive-by through their works offers much in the way of example.

Anti-Clarity through Indignatio

Indignatio is formally defined as "a closing of a speech intended to arouse negative emotion toward an accused or an opponent and the actions or proposal at issue." In pessimistic satire, Indignatio produces *Anti-Clarity* by ruing not just a single aspect of society but, sometimes it seems, the whole of society itself. As the pessimist layers invective upon invective, the audience eventually must resist the temptation of defeatism and ultimately challenge the pessimist's implication that the world is irredeemable.

Juvenal displays Indignatio towards the whole of society, including himself. Juvenal claims in his verse to oppose all facets of society, yet he pours himself into carefully crafted prose and delivers his invective to the audience he apparently scorns: irony at its finest. Juvenal depicts himself as a marginalized outcast without political and social power, attacking-from-without at every facet of a society he no longer recognizes. As Larmour explains, Juvenal's satires "are informed by the ideology of an exile, but not of someone banished to a far-off place...the Juvenal of the Satires is, rather, an exile in his *own* land."[35] As such, Juvenal rails against a world "gone completely mad, with critical processes that do not take to minor adjustments, not even a complete overhaul."[36] Juvenal refuses reform because he sees corruption in every facet of Roman society and yet the audience must not follow him to the letter lest Roman society decay even further. His first satire rails against the poets, orators, and farmers, his sixth takes on women of all kinds and social status, and his seventh takes on the intellectuals. These rebukes signify his rage against the world picture, the form of attack shaping the affective intensity of his ire. In his rage, Juvenal refuses the comfort of company – he does not privilege one group against another, instead he strikes out, wildly, in all directions.

Juvenal strikes against the whole of Roman society because inclusion is not the goal. He produces *Anti-Clarity* by leaving no space for retreat, forcing the audience to engage at a level beyond passive reception if they are to make any use at all of Juvenal's decry. To flip the script, to empower the dispossessed wretched creatures that listen to Juvenal's oration, would only replicate the polarities and hierarchies that Juvenal finds so intolerable. He does not aim to reverse power orientations but rather to put the whole system under scramble. Juvenal signifies a move from bipartisan affiliations to an anti-partisan position.[37]

Unable to reconcile himself with society, Juvenal charges himself only with destructive revelry. As such, the audience is not expected to take up Juvenal's position literally, but to question the normalizing practices of hierarchy and status in their community. By virtue of his self-proclaimed outsider status, Juvenal resists the audiences' attempt at identification and tells the audience instead "to look upon oneself, one's world and one's ideas through the eyes of the 'other', from another point of view, one taking into consideration the ideas and arguments of somebody else."[38]

This is all to say that Juvenal's invective strikes so broadly as to turn back against itself, and this formal trait is not accidental, but rather insists that even the harshest of critics may be at fault, and that there is no clear alternative that can rectify social wrongs, such that an election or social call would be sufficient to upend Juvenal's complaints. That is, despite stating the ultimate goal of social reversal, the formal relationship between speaker and audience indicates that Juvenal's goal is not to literally inverse hierarchies of power but to deconstruct the internal logics which make those hierarchies possible: to remind the audience of the arbitrariness by which positions of power are afforded. Juvenal does not offer an alternative for his audience to follow. He does not replace one master with another. Rather, "the guilty, if capable of

repentance, are moved to self-redemption."[39] As Bloom and Blook argue, "The possibilities of reform lie within the readers. They are served by a provocative agent, the satirist, who must rely more on hope than certitude that his satire will in fact fulfill its appointed role."[40]

Anti-Clarity through Ethos Effacement

Conscious effacement of ethos is rife for *Anti-Clarity* as the author's disdain for her target audience creates a double negation that endlessly reflects upon itself such that the audience can never be certain where the author is sincere in their intention. Satirists may out-and-out admit to not having the audience's best interest at heart, even going so far as to caution the audience against taking the satirist's advice. They will proclaim that to follow their path leads to ruin! And yet, if the satirist insists you cannot trust her, then how can you trust that you cannot trust her? Perhaps the satirist claims to hate their audience, to see no redemption in them, but why would the satirist craft such excellent prose if not, on some level, to seek appreciation? In both cases, the use of *Anti-Clarity* in the author's intent cues against uncritical reception of the message, coaching the auditor to begin the work of reading between the lines and reckon with tensions between seemingly contradictory or paradoxical claims.

Both Persius and Juvenal are clear in their first satires that they loathe their audiences. As Freudenburg notes, "Persius' first job is to admit that he has no audience at all."[41] Persius' 1st makes clear that he has no interest in the audience's approval: "But it's splendid to be pointed out and to hear people say: 'That's him!' Is it worth nothing to you to be the dictation text of a hundred curly-headed boys?"[42] (31-35). Moreover: "I refuse to take your 'Bravo!' and your 'Lovely!' as the be-all and end-all of excellence. Why? Give that 'Lovely!' a thorough sifting: is there anything it does not include?" (50-54) Persius goes so far as to insult his audience directly:

> you say, “I love the truth, Tell me the truth about myself.” How, actually? Do you really want me to? You’re a fool, baldy, your fat paunch sticking out with an overhand of a foot and a half. Lucky Janus, never pummeled from behind by a stork or by waggling hands imitating a donkey’s white ears or by a tongue as long as a thirsty Apulian dog’s. You, of patrician blood, who have to live without eyes in the back of your heads, turn around and face the backdoor sneer! (55-65)

To what end does Persius compliment his critique of the poets with a critique of the audience? For one, Persius implicates the audience in the popularization of poor-quality poetry. This much is stated in the text: were their tastes more refined, demand for a higher quality of poetics would be automatic. But there is something more here. If Persius is going after “public opinion” he decides to give us a load of the public: he holds a funhouse mirror up to the audience, he distorts their being, their own status. He lets them know that he is not laughing with them, as if only the satirist had the inside track on the sorry state of poetry. He extends his critique from poetry to the social matrix through metonymic condensation: society is ill, poetry is ill, the poets are ill, and you this man in the audience is ill, and thus the circle completes and it is the fat paunch and the ignorant patrician who are responsible for the whole affair. Persius’ attack on his audience is an inflection of his critique, a subtle reminder that it extends beyond a simple object or stance towards the whole set of social values.

Perseus’ attack on the poets incidentally ensnares himself, further lacquering *Anti-Clarity*. He rhetorically sets himself up to fail through the audience bargain, for if they like him, he becomes one of the dumb poets he so laments. If he is correct that the present audience has no taste, cannot discern quality, and is such a bad judge of prose that their mere endorsement is evidence enough of failure, then any affection for Perseus condemns him! There is a recursive

loop here: if you like Perseus, then he is a bad poet, and therefore you should disregard him, which means disregarding the reasons why you would disregard him. Alternatively, if you do not like Perseus, it proves you have bad taste, and you should learn to like him, in which case we are back at the first loop. There are certainly multiple ways an auditor could reckon these tensions, whether navigating by strategic essentialism or staggering conditional propositions or even just outright ignoring some of Perseus' claims. Nonetheless, to activate any of those strategies requires the auditor to recognize a need to go beyond a straightforward reading.

Perseus's attack on his audience is a formal choice that accentuates the *Anti-Clarity* of the satiric critique: there is something wrong here, but it is neither simple nor discrete, and it is up to you to figure it out (if you can). Persius' disdain for his audience implicates their mode of uptake. Because they are not competent enough to fully grasp his claims, and because they are wholesale rejected from the start, whatever they take away is not given. Persius clues in his audience that they will have to fight both himself and their own cognitive limitations if they wish to comprehend his prose. He invites them into the hermeneutic texture of the speaker-audience relationship, demanding their investment.

Whether invoked by fervent indignatio, effacement of ethos, or some other irresolvable paradox, *Anti-Clarity* problematizes the audience's ability to receive a text at its face value, encouraging a form of transcendence where the reader must approach from a higher level to reckon with tensions and contradiction. Through *Anti-Clarity*, the pessimistic satirist can take aim at institutions, cities, governments, schools, even the audience themselves, all the while cuing the audience into the possibility that something better is possible, even if it remains unknown. Of course, not every pessimistic satire takes aim at the structural rebar of existence, some are petty, others personal. However, wherever satire is pessimistic there is, foundationally,

a complicated relationship between wounding to heal and denouncing to persuade, intrinsically offering potential for *Anti-Clarity*. Pessimistic satire tends to extend into the audience, playing with our expectations for how an author plans reception, and *Anti-Clarity* offers only one aspect of that play. To find other aspects – though we must admit we may never find them all – I turn now to the rhetorical concept of persona as a ground for elaboration.

Satire and Persona

Persona provides a rich set of guides for navigating the author-audience relationship. The following analysis reflects on several different types of Persona (first, second, third…) to display different aspects of satire's possible audience relations. We find, when applying those guides to the formal nature of satire, some resistance where we might only consider one persona or another. Satire invites us to explore additional layers and applications of persona as a stacking and/or interlocking matrix of analysis. We may also yield new insights into strategic use of persona when facing hostile audiences: even though satirists do not only speak to hostile audiences, when facing an audience attitudinally opposed to a message, satire is sometimes relatively more potent than "direct" lines of engagement.

First Persona

Applying the first persona to satiric works contributes to our understanding of how satire plays with the tension between authentic and fictional personas to complicate meaning-making. The "First Persona", according to Dan Waisanen and Becker, "projects an identity that authors strategically imply through their texts, as persuasive acts and identity arguments."[43] An author's first persona is typically linked to their ethos, as a first persona is most often concerned with the character presented by the author. Authors construct and perform a persona to reach an audience.[44] That character does not necessarily have to be an accurate reflection of the author -

for example, Donald Trump might secretly be a very polite and humble man who wears his carnival barker persona only in public. Audiences, therefore, may doubt the authenticity of persona. Satiric persona often plays on that doubt by representing an obviously fictive character. The first persona of the satirist is at once present and contested - the satirist offers a persona but the audience knows the "true" persona of the performance/performer (that is to say, the satire's intent, but not necessarily the satirists' soul) is anything other than the surface personality. (Stephen Colbert the conservative newsman is nothing at all like Stephen Colbert the actor.)

The "obvious" nature of the first persona in satiric fiction is qualitatively different than the perceived inauthenticity of a politician or Martha Stewart or your grandmother when company is around. The "fiction" of the public persona is well-tread territory - the most significant patch of grass here being the way public-facing persona is tuned against expectations to play in authenticity. Some examples: We all "know" a politician or a public access preacher or a morning talk show host is "fake" in the sense that we all (deeply) suspect that person of playing a role, but there is of course some residual hope that the person we see is (Secretly?) somehow authentic.[45] Other personas come off sincere and authentic to their target audiences: Trump supporters believe he "tells it as it is" and doesn't hide his true self; I'm told Tom Hanks is exactly as nice in person as he seems on the screen. In contrast, Hillary Clinton offers an empathetic case study in a persona that has desperately tried to communicate authenticity for decades but is still often considered phony by so-called middle Americans and even young leftists.[46]

These examples of first persona show there is a range of success in projecting authenticity at work when creating a public-facing character. These examples also allude to the possibility an author may be aware of the risk that their persona is not taken at face. Wayne

"Juggler" Elise reminds us that, ironic as it is, sometimes one must modulate their persona to be taken as legitimate.[47] If you are an overly enthusiastic person, you may have to tune that down when meeting strangers at the bar or people will think you are putting on an act. A person can be in a pinch between trying to come off a certain way but risking the charge of fakery if the attunement of persona is not quite right. We can see this pincer at work at the 2016 Democratic National Convention: Hillary Clinton, regularly criticized for coming off as frigid and humorless, does an over-the-top cartoonish triple take at some falling balloons[48] to relate a feeling of amusement and joy. The pincer: if her fake "fun" reaction was not *loud* enough, it would not effectively counteract public perception that she is a cold heartless automaton, but to those who already saw Clinton as frigid, her reaction appears so over the top as to be completely fabricated. Thus, to some, Clinton missteps by going too big, and now they “know" she's faking, even if Hillary’s ride-or-die crew simply thought she was enjoying some balloons. Here, prefabricated perception of the person directly implicates the potential of the persona by imposing a splint *even if* in reality Hillary really just thought those balloons were awesome.

We can see the tension of Hillary Clinton’s public persona in a brief cameo on *Saturday Night Live:* Hillary plays a bartender serving drinks to a Hillary Impersonator, the two banter, and the humor is found in the juxtaposition between the tame cordiality of Real Hillary and the cartoonish narcissism of Fake Hillary. The biggest in-studio laughs occur (1) when Fake Hillary gently barbs the real one for taking time to support gay marriage and come out against the Keystone Pipeline, (2) when Fake Hillary proclaims blood feud with Trump, and (3) when Real Hillary does a (reasonably amusing) Trump impression. The audience also applauds (without laughter) several times in support of Hillary policies. If we follow the laughs, we can see the audience’s skepticism towards the Real Hillary implicates their reception of the laid-back chill

Real Hillary Bartender Persona. The audience laughs when Bartender Hillary interacts with the (obviously) fake authenticity of Fake Hillary, as if to say "we know that neither of these personas is real, but we also may not be certain which is more fictitious." When the audience laughs *with* Real Hillary it is when she laughs at herself or mocks Trump (the greater evil), possibly because humility is at odds with the negative perception that she is uptight, and thus serves as effective humanization. Following the laughter suggests that the (interpreted) humorous grounds for the sketch is some form of disbelief towards Hillary's authenticity while supporting her political ambitions, nonetheless. Again, Hillary tries hard to appear grounded, realistic, and human, but the audience laughs because they know that the grounded down-to-Earth Hillary persona does not tell the full story.

A brief caveat on target audience: some may be more receptive to the carnival barker, others naturally more skeptical – perhaps explaining why Trump's audience believes his persona while Clinton's audience might be willing to vote for her even if they were never fully convinced they knew her authentic self. Indeed, what "success" in a first persona means is quite often conditioned on the audience. Does Trump really care if most Americans do not believe in him so long as 400,000 "window-lickers from Ohio"[49] think he's a blue-collar dude who just happens to have a golden toilet?

Of course, we are being grossly generalistic here and there is a wide spectrum of perception when it comes to Clinton (and similar politicians), but when it comes to rhetorical persona, I see Hillary as a sort of anchor point on the authenticity map. Hillary Clinton is a real person who is treated as a persona, and she often struggled within that fictional presupposition to "break through" and somehow reveal an authentic self that the public can believe.[50] The point remains that the successful dialing of authenticity feeds on twin inputs of a fictionalized ideal

self and the presentation of self that is permitted by one's audience. Satiric personas may not be limited in the same way as other first personas precisely because satiric ones can make use of the "fictional" aspect of public-facing persona to generate more ground for play before triggering their target audience's deception sensors.

The satirist is held to different standards of authenticity in the first persona. Contrast Hillary Clinton's so-called authentic self with the concept of comedic impressions. Impressions are the most obviously fake persona as the joke is that I am NOT celebrity X and no one can mistake me for the real Jim Carrey no matter how on-point I hit that "alrighty then". Yet, studies on political impersonation suggests the impression-persona can be "mistaken" for the real thing. (Mistaken in this sense: all discourse swirls into a murky cloud of fact, claim, and figure, and voters struggle to differentiate Palin from Fey). Everyone knows Tina Fey is not Sarah Palin is not Darrell Hammond is not Bill Clinton…and yet when you, dear reader, hear someone do a Bill Clinton impression, they are probably actually doing an impression of Darrell Hammond doing Bill Clinton, an impression's impression. Suddenly, the imposter stands in for the real thing. Did you miss the discount? It was there, in the very premise of the performance: the core setup of the joke is that Tina Fey is NOT Sarah Palin, but the punchline is that Tina Fey is more Palin than Palin herself. Tina is Palin turned up to an 11: she can admit to our suspicions of Palin's true character (empty headed, childish, borderline illiterate, etc.). *Finally*. we all exhale, *Sarah Palin is being authentic with us!* The caricature, the impression, does not just substitute for the real thing, it displaces it, such that we now read Palin through Fey rather than Fey through Palin. In this instance, Fey's satire effectively reverberates to transform the satirized object through the play of authenticity in persona. I will return to this concept of impression's impression when analyzing the case study of Alec Baldwin's Donald Trump.

I've set up two extremes here: (1) the real person who struggles to be taken as anything other than someone trying, and failing, to be an expected fictional character (Clinton), and (2) the fictional character mistaken for the real McCoy (Fey's Palin). Treat these examples as plots on a graph to indicate a range of ironic content in a first persona. Satire may occupy one or many plots of ironic persona – whether in the textual author, the incongruity between actual author and fictional character, or even the complete lack of known authorship. Across these plots we can see varying levels of ironic intensity. By way of example, one plot that makes use of intensity can be found in Lacy Lowrey, Valerie Renegar, and Charles Goehring's study on Sarah Silverman.[51] Silverman's schtick is ironic in that she combines a sweet and childlike ethos with explicit and shocking content. Lowrey, Renegar, and Goehring describe ironic persona as something like a dial: "Throughout most of her act, the sweeter her delivery appears, the raunchier and [more] shocking her jokes become."[52] As Silverman's childlike persona becomes more intense, so too does the intensity of her content – so long as the ratio holds, Silverman can turn up or down the twin tracks of her ironic persona and maintain audience approval. As Silverman becomes "sweeter" we can imagine her point on the plot moving as the audience is more and more aware of the fakeness of her persona. Greg Dean explains that the singular performance is read twice by the audience and "interpreted on two levels, once through the perspective of the character, and next, through the perspective of the actual performer."[53] Silverman's combination of naivete and controversy enacts a perspective by incongruity "that is deeper than her literal, surface message."[54]

Silverman's ironic persona, and many others like it, relies on the assumption that "her audience will recognize the multiple levels of meaning embedded within her unique style of humor,"[55] but it is possible for the audience to fail to read ironic cues. David Kaufer explained

that “the ironist’s audience faces an either/or situation, and [the audience] is bifurcated into two distinct audiences according to its association with either the literal or ironic meaning.”[56] Kaufer’s warning can be applied to each ironic turn, each cue, and each twist of the signifier. It might be worth exploring what happens when an audience misses some, but not all, of the ironic tensions in a text or performance. How a satire navigates the possibility of audience misunderstanding may contribute to our overall evaluation of its effectiveness. Chapter 3 will explore this case when considering the problematic reception of sketch show *Million Dollar Extreme*.

Second Persona

The First Persona governs study of how audiences receive and interpret the implied author of a text. Moving beyond the implied author, Edwin Black identified “a second persona also implied by a discourse, and that persona is its implied auditor."[57] Black argues that texts contain “hints as to whom we should become” that coach audiences to adopt ways of thinking about and being in the world.[58] By identifying ideological tokens in a text, the critic simultaneously identifies “vectors of influence” that accumulate to direct public life.[59] Black emphasizes ideology as a fulcrum for human behavior, describing ideology as “the network of interconnected convictions that functions in a man epistemically and that shapes his identity by determining how he views the world."[60] While it is likely that Black overstates the role of ideology in human becoming (a criticism I will return to shortly), his linkage between stylistic tokens and epistemology provides a framework for understanding how satire might compel an audience towards certain (moral?) outcomes.

When decoding satire, the audience is coached to search for clever tokens gesturing towards some secret meaning found in the rearticulation of key signifiers from the satirized

object. If we squint, it may not be so absurd to say that the satirist is essentially offering a second persona analysis of the satirized object. That criticism may not be as clear as the work offered in academic journals, but at bottom satire takes up the key signifiers of an established text/genre/object and, through the parodic process, makes commentary on the uncritical acceptance of those signifiers by a projected audience. Towards that end, it is possible we can judge a satire by how it identifies and makes use of the ideological tokens found in "the original". We are concerned here with how to find tokens, the motivation for their placement, and any qualitative differences between the satirist's tokens and those found in more straightforward texts.

At least some of the ideological tokens found in satire derive from the parodied object and those tokens characterize the relationship between satire and original. Satire twists and turns the *thing* it takes up, but the audience must still recognize the original hidden within the new permutation of signs. Those signifiers that recall the original genre/text/object are put under argument: the satirist is asserting that those signifiers should be understood as the textual core of the original. Even if the satirist is not intending to comment on ideological tokens, the satiric process works like a filter, straining out everything that *can* be changed from the original without sacrificing its core identity. What remains is necessarily the rebar of the original, otherwise the satire will fail as the audience struggles to identify what, exactly, is being satirized. Alternatively, if a satire retains too much of the original object, it risks losing the status of commentary, potentially being received as a cheap copy or iteration of the original. Here we must make an inferential leap for the sake of judgement: if we assume the satirist believes that the signifying remainder constitutes the ideological kernel of the satirized object then we can evaluate a satiric text the way we would peer review a colleague's second persona analysis.

In many ways, the satirist compels the audiences to become meta-critics who judge a performance, at least partially, on how effectively the performance itself judges and critiques something else. Sometimes, then, adequate reception of a satiric text requires an audience to work through second persona, finding hints of how the putatively typical audience of the "original" is compelled to become. Perhaps it is also the case that the satiric audience is also compelled to view themselves, to find hints of their own persona in the projection of the object, a strategy employed by the Bouffon who we will discuss later in this chapter. However, it is often the case that the satirist is aware the audience searches for hints, and so they will not always be so easy to find! I'll explore this aspect further when discussing pessimistic tone and its relationship to *Anti-Clarity*.

Of course, this should not suggest satire automatically identifies the right ideological tokens, or even that satire creates the best possible conditions to comment upon them. Instead, I am offering a measuring stick to use when we ask, "what makes a satire successful"? We might say that satire can be evaluated by how it identifies/reveals ideological and emotional tokens found in "the original" (the satirized subject). Good satire, like good second persona criticism, could be measured at least in part by how accurately it identifies significant tokens in the original, and how it reconfigures those tokens to explore critique. Better satires would make use of tokens that effectively represent the original in either formal quality (a knight, a princess, a castle) or ideological/emotional quality (a savior complex, unrequited love, human triumph). Of course, the best satires would not simply make use of the same tokens – the best satires would re-present those tokens strategically to best reveal unstated assumptions or otherwise reconstitute the audience's relationship with those tokens as signifiers. In that case, it may be possible that we find conflict or discontinuity between satiric meta-layers (for example in the continuity between

the knight-princess-castle and the savior complex). We would need to be mindful of how criticism can turn against itself and how the satirist reckons with the tension between ideological and emotional pulsions. The familiar equivalent would be an academic essay on how the performance of second persona criticism implicated academic audiences. Thankfully, Celeste Condit has written just that very thing.

Condit's criticism of Black offers an example of how the critic (say, me) might use the lessons of second persona to effectively approach satiric criticism. Condit engages Black's second persona by underscoring the relationship between ideology and pathos, arguing that Black's original formulation was overly reliant on ideology to explain human behavior.[61] She notes that emotion and ideology are not always consonant, and warns that "seriously flawed readings can be produced if one begins with the presumption that public emotions are necessarily consonant with, subordinate to, produced by, or predictable based on a dominant ideology."[62] Emotional appeals elicit reactions in audiences that can support an ideological current, or other times oppose one (for example, fear appeals often contradict messages designed to motivate audiences to coordinate quickly against a threat). Condit also criticizes Black's application of the second persona to Robert Welch's *Blue Book*¸ arguing that Black misses substantial emotional tokens and may be mistaken in his reading of a certain metaphor. Condit offers a model for how the critic should attend to satire in at least 3 ways: (1) the critic should be aware of both emotional and ideological tokens in a text (as well as their potential consonance and dissonance) (2) critics should judge which tokens are made significant – and which are not – in the performance of a second persona criticism (exported, that would be the satire itself) and (3) critics should attend to how audiences receive second persona criticism, with special attention towards the creation of affiliations and action tendencies.

Putting Condit and Black together, we can see that texts produce tokens of varying effect that coach audiences towards different becomings, and perhaps multiple effects may stack together to create hidden becomings. Both Condit and Black are interested in the little becoming, the pulsional aspect of text that contribute to individual (and collective) epistemic/ontological change. Condit's insight towards the potential contradiction between ideology and pathos rests as a warning against mixed messages, yet it may also be possible for those contradictions to serve a purpose. *What if that contradiction is intentional?* Afterall, Black refers to ideological tokens merely as "vectors of influence," and it stands to reason that multiple vectors converge a unique trajectory. In physics terms: a message might yield X magnitude of force in Y direction, and Black would be concerned with the size of X and the morality of Y. Condit identifies that there may also be (at the pathetic level) messages of N magnitude in Q direction, and further that Q and Y may not be parallel. My contribution is to suggest that sometimes an author may choose to utilize non-parallel, or even perpendicular, vectors to move an audience to a third direction (or fourth or fifth etc. depending on the complexity of the satire). Why might an author create two vectors, one at 90 and one at 0, when a single vector at 45 would do the work? Does the question persist if we find out our audience is fatally afraid of 45-degree angles, but needs desperately to climb a hill of the exact incline? A brief example: Juvenal's 6th satire starts by getting men very angry at women and concludes by coaching the audience to turn that anger upon themselves. The first vector fuels a simmering flame, then the second flips that momentum to force the audience to confront their own hypocrisy. Juvenal makes use of emotional and ideological appeals to unsettle dangerous opinions about women, though whether he was effective remains up for debate. Nonetheless, one may struggle to even identify Juvenal's tactic without adroit rearticulation of an elaborated second persona.

Third Persona/ Null Persona

Philip Wander argued in his article "The Third Persona" that critics should pay attention to audiences not invoked or constructed by a rhetor as symptomatic of communities and interests excluded in dominant rhetoric. He writes:

> Just as the discourse may be understood to affirm certain characteristics, it may also be understood to imply other characteristics, roles, actions, or ways of seeing things to be avoided. What is negated through the Second Persona forms the silhouette of a Third Persona—the 'it' that is not present.... the Third Persona, therefore, refers to being negated ... being negated in history, a being whose presence, though relevant to what is said, is negated through silence.[63]

For Wander, critics of the Third Persona would attend to those audiences that are rejected, negated, or merely absent in the text. The author's exclusion of certain populations may be intentional, or it may even be the unintentional but inevitable conclusion of an arrangement of power/material conditions. Critics are attuned to identify what is conspicuously absent: institutional backgrounds, dissident groups, moral foundations, or anything else the critic puts under erasure through silence.

Satiric criticism makes at least two uses of Wander's third persona. First, the satirist may themselves perform third persona criticism by identifying and revealing what is conspicuously absent in another text, judging those pregnant silences as pernicious and intentional. Persius often makes use of this strategy by showing hidden corruptions and incentives in other orators. Second, the satiric text may have its own silences. Those may be intentional in the way Wander envisioned – strategic deflections away from weakness/insecurity/impropriety. Those silences may also be intentional in a different way – as in, a satirist may offer only full-fledged and fire-

bellied scorn but the audience is subtextually directed toward those persons/practices/institutes escaping criticism.

Dana Cloud has shown how silence may be the result of a "null persona" wherein the speaker is not silent by choice or accident, but rather *silenced* by such and such power/force, all the while leaving behind tracings of what was never spoken. She explains:

> If the first persona is the rhetor, perhaps the phenomenon of self-silencing noted in these transcripts could be referred to the constitution of oneself in the role of "null persona." The null persona refers to the self-negation of the speaker and the creation in the text of an oblique silhouette indicating what is not utterable.[64]

For my purposes, the null persona is significant because of its fundamental proposition: sometimes, what is not said is just as important as what is said. Furthermore, Cloud (above) offers a heuristic for generating text from silence in "an oblique silhouette." Obviously, the critic is not permitted to simply invent a text and assert "this is what they would have said" – rather, we look for what should be present but is conspicuously absent. Cloud argues that attending to the silence of "what cannot be said" reveals that social change is not only driven by "the crafting of consciousness," for the preclusion of thought or ideas or speech also contributes to social momentum.

For the satirist, the null persona's signature silhouette should be relatively clearer than other types of speech. As we know by now, satire is sometimes employed to make a controversial claim to audiences that might otherwise be less receptive to straight-forward argumentation. Satire is a relatively better choice in those instances where the audience must be brought to an idea in a roundabout fashion, whether that roundaboutness occurs by working on the perimeter of an idea without directly stating it (as we might see in Juvenal's satires) or by

strategically marrying tone and claim to indirectly approach a thesis. Further, satire may be strategically deployed when the "message" is best reached at the audience's own volition; the "aha!" moment when the audience "gets it" and simultaneously decides the idea they have uncovered what was really their own all along. In all of these instances what is present in the satiric text should, if thoroughly scrutinized, also gesture towards a cutting room floor where something is *not said*. Satirists craft their silhouettes like architects of shadow.

Cloud's concept of null persona directs us towards a few significant questions for how satire can present something to an audience without representing it as the null persona enables the critic to reconstruct the silhouette of intention from speech that is interceded by power relations. First, we might question what is barred from being said in public discourse, and why it has been barred (whether by stately decree or social conditioning). Second, if the satirist is barred from speaking some truth, what clues might the satirist provide for us to uncover what was unsaid? What *is there* to help us discover *what is not*? Cloud's original example was of workers who could not speak out against their employer – she cites the material conditions of capitalism as the motivation for those workers to remain silent. Why would the satirist be silent? And when? There may be suasive or immaterial barriers, in addition to material ones, that coach the satirist towards self-negation. The satirist, as covered in chapter one, is often given extended ground to offer critique, and yet our consideration of the strategic nature of satire suggests the satirist nonetheless often relies on what is unsaid to communicate an idea. These questions are made more complicated when reintroducing the second persona and the satirists' understanding that the attuned audience is already searching for hidden clues.

Fourth Persona

The fourth persona, theorized by Charles Morris III, is a type of double coded speech called "passing" wherein the author addresses two audience: one who does not get the coded message and another who gets it and (in some cases, at least) remains silent to avoid "outing" the author.[65] While an audience of "dupes" misses the rhetoric's double-coded nature, a different audience is gestured toward by the "textual wink[s]" and "subversive enthymemes" at play within a text.[66] It stands to reason that the audience gestured toward by these winks and enthymemes, on some level, understands they are being addressed indirectly – they are in on the joke. Morris' description of passing applies quite aptly to the satirist: "To succeed in veiling one's identity, i.e., convincing certain audiences of an 'acceptable' persona, these rhetors-with-secrets employ tactics of impersonation, deflection, and silence in the public sphere."[67] Sometimes the satirist will attempt pass as something else as part of their performance: a concerned citizen, a business tycoon, an activist. Finally, it may be the case that any given audience member begins as a dupe but is not fated to remain one. In satire the audience may be split against itself – a single reader encounters epiphany and re-interprets the text with a fuller understanding of the winks and nods missed up to that point.

In passing, one performs acts that are invisible to one audience but quite "telling" to a second audience that remains silent. The fourth persona exists only insofar as a message can be successfully coded such that one audience is fooled and the other is not – whether those audiences are real, hypothetical, or imaginary is a secondary question. When analyzing satire, Morris' fourth persona directs us to question how messages are designed to *pass* such that one audience can make sense of the text on a level unavailable to another. *The Colbert Report* and *The Onion* are from time to time taken as literal news by some audiences who are not in on the

joke – *dupes*, Morris would call them. Other times, a satiric performance may be interpreted differently based on an audience's access to referent materials such that how much of the performance you "get" is gatekept behind byzantine cultural reference (we might imagine a sketch perceived as a lighthearted jest by most, but those "in the know" recognize a seething attack). In these cases, the satirist *passes* as a legitimate news source or gentle ribbing to some, while "winking" to others. Morris warns that "passing implies peril,"[68] which is often true for the satirist, who may risk being outed as such, and thus losing cache with duped audiences (for example, *The Colbert Report* could no longer get interviews with conservative politicians after they figured out he was a satirist). A straightforward port of Morris's theory would enrich our understanding of satiric performances that clearly aim to dupe one audience while speaking in code to a second – perhaps a performance where the satirist would be harmed for outright speech (as we've seen in early Black/African-American comedy among other examples).

The Fourth persona may also be significant for satire when the duped audience *is* the target audience, a possibility outside of Morris' original design but one informed by his underlying conceptual framework. Here I am imagining a satire that is constructed in such a way that the duped audience *becomes* the aware/inside audience and retroactively picks up the winks they missed along the way. In Juvenal's 6th, for example, the audience could be coached to recognize they have been duped by Juvenal's earlier calls for anger towards women, and in turn that audience would reconstitute their understanding of the earlier portions of the performance. Sometimes the satirist only intends to pass briefly, other times the satirist aims to hide as long as possible, but in both cases, it may be the satirist's goal to coach the audience to realize they are in the process of being duped, to make them aware of their own situation as victims of intellectual piracy. Swift's *Modest Proposal* loses some of its edge when you find out it is a

high-class joke and not a serious proposition but therein lies a rhetorical transformation of the text from a preposterous proposal to commentary on what passes for plausibility. There is rhetorical value in the act of turning a corner, of slowly coaching the reader to realize that the proposal is in fact not serious (and then, perhaps to wonder why it may have been taken seriously to begin with). Sam Hyde's *Paradigm Shift 2070* relied on tricking TEDX organizers into believing he was a globe-trotting activist before he mocked the entire organization to its face – the same audience of dupes is let in on the joke, separating themselves from their past selves, transcending the error as they become aware of themselves and their own shortcomings. Satirists strike a balance between telling winks and critical concealments so the audience may double-back on the text, seeing how they have been duped as well as the clues that were present all along but were hidden from view. I will explore this idea of re-coding/de-coding further in my discussion of Million Dollar Extreme in chapter.

Persona and Tone in the Bouffon

Distinct from Juvenal and his direct descendants, but still chiefly on the side of pessimistic satire, we have The Bouffon. While Juvenal and Perseus can obviously be contrasted with Horace, the Bouffon has no such contemporary and thus serves as a fringe or renegade satiric figure not unlike a clown or satyr. The Bouffon offers a unique persona to compliment a similarly pessimistic attitude as Juvenal and Perseus, but it is the (first) persona itself that enables markedly different modes of critique. Further, the Bouffon holds special significance by way of its theatrical and historical origin so reflecting on its possibilities may help insulate any theoretical conclusions from charges of *rolling our own*.

Before explaining the nature of the performance, let us quickly examine some of the context of the Bouffon as a satiric figure. If what makes satire meaningfully different from

normative critique are comedic and parodic elements, and if we are in the market for new modes and genres of the satiric, it may behoove us to turn to comedic professionals. Jacques Lecoq and Phillipe Gaulier are world renowned Master Clowns who have dedicated themselves to intellectualizing the comedic.[69] Prominent in their theories is the figure of the Bouffon, a satiric personage who brings with it specific entailments, goals, and an articulation between the audience and the satirist themselves that necessitates analysis of the satirist's relationality to community. This figure is a particularly useful one for generating a theoretical account of a pessimistic *type* because it has recurred throughout history and accounts for a broad number of embedded positions. Lecoq argues that "The number of Bouffons is legion; their limits are incalculable. There are echoes in the paintings of Hieronymus Bosch, Aristophanes, Shakespeare, Pere Ubu, the gargoyles on medieval cathedrals, the king's fool, and forty-year old babies."[70]

The Bouffon does not inhabit society, rather the Bouffon lives outside of it and returns to temporarily proffer critique. As Gaulier explains:

> The Bouffon is the one person of whom the finger of scorn was pointed and we say you, you are ugly, you are mad, you are homosexual, you are dwarf, you are horrible, you are not the son of god. So, if you are not the son of God you are the son of the Devil. If you are the son of the Devil... God doesn't want you, go to the ghetto. The ghetto was full of these people: the bane of humanity.[71]

Sacha Baron Cohen claims the Bouffon originated somewhere around the 15th century, though the facticity of this claim is uncertain. More relevant is the literary value of the Bouffon as a satiric figure, much the same way that the Satyr never literally existed but is "real" insofar as it is useful. Baron Cohen identifies "a bunch of outcasts from society who were gays, heretic priests,

Jews, people with deformities who had been told to live outside of villages…in the forests or little ghettos. They were ostracized…they were freaks of some nature."[72] In the historic moment of their conception, the Bouffon were quite outcasts who were wholly rejected from society. In the modern era we may better think the Bouffon as a figure partially integrated in society – those liminal bodies permitted to exist but perhaps bereft of political or social power. Nilufer Ovalioglu suggests that the Bouffon is representative of "minorities with a precarious position in Western society: homosexuals, Jews, prostitutes and Africans."[73] Decontextualizing the Bouffon from its mythical historical roots clarifies how such a relationality may be useful today.

Rhetorically, Bouffon performances function through a weaponized parody that highlights the gap between assumed ideals and imperfect reality, utilizing brutish and vile caricature to demonize its target. The Bouffon does not offer redemption, it offers only a grotesque mirror, a nightmarish first persona. In this way, the Bouffon is sister-figure to Juvenal and Perseus but with significant differences in persona and effect.

Sacha Baron Cohen provides a salient example of a medieval Bouffon play to illustrate the ideal potential of this type of performance. This story is purely fictive and is not a historical example, but it highlights the potential relationality between the Bouffon and those in power. In this Bouffon play: a "three and a half foot tall man would pretend to be the King of France" and would stroll around the stage with all the pomp and circumstance of an actual ruler. Further, the real King of France is in the audience, watching the play, becoming increasingly irate, embarrassed, and full of rage, until finally he proclaims to the audience "that's not me! That's not me! That guy is tiny! He is three foot tall!" The Bouffon and King then squabble over who was the true ruler of France, until "eventually the king would have a heart attack and die." While

the audience looks on in a mix of surprise, terror, and bemusement, the Bouffon is confident in his victory and says "…well, that's one for me!"[74]

In Baron Cohen's example, the theatrical Bouffon is the outsider pretending to be king. The King of France in the audience is real – he really rules France, he sits among his people, and he watches the play of the three-and-a-half-foot tall man. In an ideal (though historically unrealized) Bouffon performance, the real king would literally die purely through the actions of the performer. The ideal of the performance of the Bouffon is thus a "nasty knowing form of satire" which aims to "undermine the establishment" rather than correct it – to kill the King rather than reform him. For this reason, the Bouffon is securely situated within the pessimistic tradition: healing through wounding, persuading through denouncing, finding hope in abandoning the present.

However, that does not mean the Bouffon performance is only "successful" if the audience/King literally dies. Rather, as Lisa Colletta informs us, in satiric performances such as these, "the primary objective is to improve human beings and our institutions."[75] While the Bouffon, on its surface, demands the head of the King, at bottom it may gesture towards significant reform or demand inclusion of the periphery. The performance, according to Colletta, "always has a deeper meaning and a social signification beyond that of the humor," and it is up to the audience to read through the text to locate that meaning – and indeed, sometimes the "answer" will be that there is no clear meaning at all, or that the performance is intentionally open to multiple interpretations and resists the privileging of any one take (and thus take the form of *Anti-Clarity).*[76] Indeed, this is true for all satire, which always disguises its true aim underneath the winking nod of parody and humor. What is unique to the Bouffon tradition compared to Juvenal and Perseus is the nature of the inversion of power: the outcast plays as the

King while maintaining the embodied otherness of the outcast. Where for Juvenal and Perseus their status was assumed by the audience and so to have destabilized their authority would have required self-effacement, the Bouffon instead is assumed by the audience to have no status and therefore ironically and comically plays at kingship.

The Bouffon is, seemingly, neither friend nor foe to society. The First Persona at work in the Bouffon complicates reception because the Bouffon does not appear to clearly ally with anyone at all. In Baron Cohen's example, the Bouffon is enemy to the king. On the other hand, while he repudiates the social structure, and by implication at least some substantial part of the community-as-structural entity, he is not automatically an enemy of the audience who are, nonetheless, members of that society. While the Bouffon rails against all of society, the complexity of his persona allows the audience to identify with something in between the Bouffon's true outcast status and the performative caricature – otherwise the audience would not be "in" on the joke, would not side with the Bouffon, and would not find the performance humorous. We must remember the identity of the Bouffon: they are not purely outcast, or they would have no right to speak, so they are outcast at some discounted rate. They are not the king because everyone knows the king is not three feet tall! Therefore, audience identification is complicated and uncertain – the very performance of the Bouffon is steeped in *Anti-Clarity,* no matter the opacity of the Bouffon's claims, because persona overtakes information. Here we can see how *Anti-Clarity* forces the audience to transcend the text to place it within social context and locate a meaning/message outside of the text-as-such.

In many ways, Bouffonic performance mirrors Mikhail Bakhtin's carnival: the temporary reversal of the powerful and the powerless. The result is not a sustained reversal (the peasant does not wear the crown for long). Instead, as Priscilla Meddaugh explains, "carnival offers a

social space outside official life; as such, hierarchies of social, economic, and political structures are suspended to allow egalitarian contact among citizens."[77] By reversing the relationality of power, "Carnival laughter positions audiences as insiders, in contrast to their traditional roles as outsiders of official discourse and authorized modes of communication."[78] What results is described by Bakhtin as "an entire system of crooked mirrors, elongating, diminishing, distorting in various directions, and to varying degrees," which opens space to rethink and reorganize the structures of power.[79] Even though the performance of the Bouffon does not create a new reality which adheres to the tenets of the play, the performance itself provokes the audience to rethink the relationality of the other within a matrix of power.

As a satiric sub-genre or pessimistic type, the Bouffon is particularly insightful because it brings to the forefront of our analysis the embedded position of the satirist themselves. The Bouffon potentially represents any of those who are in some fashion "outcast" from civil society: disenfranchised black voters; silenced Trans voices; belittled and infantilized women; the immigrant whose accent discounts the power of their voice; and also those voices excluded microcosmically from ad hoc and improvisational communities. This outsider position is essential to the Bouffon and is also the source of their critical power. By embodying the abnormal, argues Ovalioglu, "their outcast body also liberates them from social restrictions, allowing them to joyfully parody the hierarchically superior."[80] Because the Bouffon is outcast from civil society, he/she/it is able to attack mercilessly without the otherwise necessary rejoinders of the comic frame to seek reconciliation within the performance. The Bouffon has no hope of reintegration and is thus able to critique society at its core. As Lecoq argues, "In a Bouffonesque body, the person who mocks can say the unsayable, going so far as to mock what 'cannot' be mocked: war, famine, God."[81]

The articulation of Bouffon to outsider status opens new avenues of critique resisted by entrenched positions. As Lynn Everett explains, "Its driving force is parody and derision, designed to effect a dislocation in the audience's constructions of society and all that society holds dear."[82] The Bouffon is liberated from the pressure of "celebrat[ing] common humanity" precisely *because* "they exist on the periphery, inhabiting a socially marginal world."[83] Simultaneously included and excluded, the Bouffon spouts *libertas* through *licentia* – seemingly self-indulgent claims against community and society, though these also may in fact impart harmonizing and constructive messages to auditors. The audience is not expected to take up the Bouffon position, but to question the normalizing practices of hierarchy in their community. Through its fun-house mirror, the Bouffon rails against our contradictions and inconsistencies. It gives us an eagle-eyed view of ourselves: "if this is who you want to be, then so well, but you better start taking it more seriously." By virtue of their outsider status, their otherness, the Bouffon resists the audience's attempt at identification and instead, as Lech Witkowski notes, forces the audience "to look upon oneself, one's world and one's ideas through the eyes of the 'other', from another point of view, one taking into consideration the ideas and arguments of somebody else."[84] For Bakhtin and Gaulier both, the ultimate goal of social reversal is not literally inverse hierarchies of power but to deconstruct the internal logics that make those hierarchies possible: to approach a "utopian realm of community, freedom, equality, and abundance."[85] The king may live to rule another day, but the Bouffon performance traffics in a question mark for that authority – it reminds the audience of the human discretions at the base of all positioning of power.

CHAPTER THREE

A CRUEL SATIRE'S THESIS: CANONIZING *MILLION DOLLAR EXTREME*, PATRON SAINT OF THE ALT RIGHT

Million Dollar Extreme Presents: World Peace burst onto the scene in August 2016 as part of *Cartoon Networks'* "Adult Swim" bloc of adult-oriented entertainment. Following in the wake of shows like *Tim and Eric's Awesome Show, Great Job!*, *Check it Out! with Dr. Steve Brule*, and *The Eric Andre Show*, *Million Dollar Extreme* (hereafter *MDE*) was conceived as an absurdist sketch show that satirized social politics. *MDE* premiered to a sizable audience of more than a million viewers and averaged 900,000 viewers during its first season run, a relatively successful premier for the network when comparing *MDE* to similar shows in their first season.[1] Despite its impressive numbers, *MDE* was not picked up for a second season. The reason behind the show's sudden cancellation is likely the same reason you may have heard of the show at all: association with the (then) emerging alt right. In this chapter I offer an alternative reading of *MDE* that stands in opposition to the critical consensus. By reading MDE through the lens of pessimistic satire, I demonstrate how the seemingly wounding nature of the program contains the potential for healing, manifested through adroit use of *Anti-Clarity* and satiric persona.

Million Dollar Extreme Presents: World Peace lasted for only six episodes but left behind an immensely dense satirical text that makes adroit use of juxtaposition, contrast, and *Anti-Clarity* to question prefabricated assumptions found in traditionally liberal *and* traditionally conservative worldviews. If the target audience of *MDE* were able to encounter the text without the terministic assumption that the show is alt right propaganda, they might find checks against

liberal smugness, aimless masculinity, and a sinister but seemingly overlooked propensity of white leftists to tokenize the marginalized. Furthermore, *MDE*'s use of *Anti-Clarity* often coached audiences to make sense of complex contradictions, decentering ideological anchors through the interplay of logos and pathos. In this chapter I demonstrate how *MDE* makes strategic use of violent imagery to pull the rug from under viewers who froth at the sight of blood, most often implicating audience appetite for humiliation and degradation as the same motivation found in scumbags, villains, wife beaters, and murderers. While *MDE* does indeed frequently trade in the symbolic currency of the alt-right, the show rarely aligns with reactionary politics. Quite the contrary, I see in *MDE* distaste for bootlicking, disgust with abuses of power, and a burning desire for the public to become more active participants in the building of their own lifeworld.

Critics of *MDE* center primarily on the accusation that the show "is" alt-right. Predominately associated with *Buzzfeed* journalist Joseph Bernstein (whose claims would be repeated continuously in other outlets), the argument at hand suggests that *MDE* is written with an alt-right audience in mind, its content substantiates alt-right ideology, and the overall tone of the show adheres to alt-right values (racism, anti-Semitism, anti-feminism, and so on). Despite widespread criticism of *MDE,* there is very little in the way of textual criticism and very much in the way of symbolic association. Often, these critics identify moments of cruelty, villainy, violence, and destruction as synonymous with endorsement of the acts portrayed. Burdens of proof are inverted: it is assumed that *MDE* is associated with White Supremacy and the burden then falls on *MDE* and/or its creators to prove otherwise. Once the account of supremacy is settled, all moments of ambiguity present in *MDE* are read through a terministic screen, disentangling webs of complexity through reduction to cut-and-paste ideological tropes.

However, if we consider *MDE* a pessimistic satire, it may be possible to reframe its use of out-and-out villainy as well as its use of questionable signifiers as parts of a more dynamic and layered commentary that makes consistent use of Anti-Clarity to scramble the linear connections between those signifiers and their embedded social meaning.

I submit that there are at least two ways to read *Million Dollar Extreme Presents: World Peace*, and an elaboration of those possibilities is necessary to understand how pessimistic satire functions in oppositional contexts. The first way to read *MDE* is as an outright neo-Nazi dog whistle, as we will see from Bernstein et al., wherein *MDE* uses comedy to disguise a serious and dangerous political agenda that caters specifically to white nationalists, incels, and other undesirables. The second way is to read the show as a pessimistic satire of contemporary social issues that employs heavy uses of violence and vulgarity rhetorically to set the stage for criticism of the audience's appetite. The first way of reading *MDE* is rather reminiscent of how optimistic/pessimistic satire is de facto utilized in communication studies: because optimistic satire aims to heal in text, therefore pessimistic satire must aim to wound in intent. The slippage between text and intent is inevitable when one postulates, as Bernstein and others have, a direct relationship between media depiction and audience uptake (the implication being that once an audience member sees violence on TV, for example, they are now markedly more prone towards enacting violence themselves). An example of criticism that emerges from an uncritical theory of media effects: because *MDE* shows a woman subjected to violence, they therefore must celebrate that image and wish for their viewers to recreate it in real life. The parallel: optimistic satire, because it is kind with words, must have kind effects, and pessimistic satire, because it is cruel with words, must have cruel effects. Another reading strategy is possible by moving from effects per se to the complexity of satiric messaging, as seen by the application of persona and tone.

This reading strategy would entail recognizing *MDE* as a chiefly pessimistic satire, first and foremost, cueing in an alternative set of criteria than we might use when judging an optimistic satire. As we have seen, often the proprietary goal of pessimistic satire is traditionally not to impart clear moral wisdom but instead to disentangle audiences from entrenched epistemic holdings through Anti-Clarity. Where pessimistic satire heals, it heals through wounding, targeting cancers and toxins for removal. For these reasons, we may find it particularly difficult to partition a violent image from a satiric context, making the clear-cut moral judgement of Bernstein et al. suspect by virtue of ignoring the heuristic processing coached by the text. Pessimistic satire does not offer a thought so much as a way of thinking.

Such a shift in interrogative frame, from direct effects to heuristic processing, would also shift the grounds for ethical concern. On an ethics angle, one may initially question why we would even want to redeem *MDE,* or what value could possibly be had in successfully arguing that a show was not alt-right and instead merely vile and acidic. By shifting from effects to the rhetorical concept of persona as a means of criticism we approach an alternative perspective on how a text can interact with its audience. This is particularly true of pessimistic satire, which can position the reader in the role of critic, encouraging not just passive reception of arguments but more precisely coaching the reader to make judgements of their own. When it comes to *MDE,* rather than ask if the program's content is dangerous on the surface, one may instead ponder how it seeks to encourage its audience to read the content being satirized. Combining this perspective with nuanced understanding of pessimistic satire alters the grounds for critique - now we cannot just dismiss vitriol as purely negative and instead must consider vitriol as part of a broader epistemic strategy (often in partnership with *Anti-Clarity*).

I must admit from the outset that a single possible read of a text is hardly authoritative. How might we evaluate the fidelity or accuracy of a critical read? It is highly possible, after all, that even if my read is persuasive, it is neither largely adopted nor the "intent" of the author. We can perhaps dismiss the question of author intent a priori, but by what metric could we judge the overall "correctness" of my read when it competes with a meaningful swathe of so-called journalists? A reminder from the epigraph: *You Gotta Laugh!*

If it is the case that *MDE* invites audiences to laugh at the dispossessed in ways that reinforce negative power imbalances, or otherwise coaches its audience to become crueler and smaller minded, then we should see the evidence of those hateful tokens in both ideological and emotional appeals. As mentioned in my prior discussion of Condit and Black in chapter two, at times emotional trajectories and ideological trajectories can be at odds with one another. In the case of *MDE*, often those trajectories collide to form different pathways altogether, complicating criticism focused on ideology and representation. A proper account would have to reckon with *Anti-Clarity*, identifying the matrix of affiliations extended through laughter to make sense of what possibilities might be hidden within this densely pessimistic satire.

Painted in another clown's makeup, we may posit the all-important comedic question: what is the joke? *MDE* is, at bottom, a comedy show. It is billed as a comedy show and airs on a comedy network in a late-night comedy bloc surrounded by other comedies. All questions of taste aside, *MDE* is written with the intent of invoking laughter and amusement in its audience. Therefore, sharp understanding of the functions of comedic writing can serve as a quasi-impartial judge. If I believe a scene implies X then I should be able to track the comedy - here is the setup, here is the punchline, here is why it is funny, and so on. If two critics disagree on the function of a scene and only one of those reads can reckon with joke structure, it stands to reason that the

critic who accounts for both argument and entertainment is likely to have a more accurate understanding of *all* that is happening on the screen.

Failure to account for the comedic aspect of *MDE* is synonymous with ignoring the show's affective or emotional output. If we are to laugh, are we laughing at or are we laughing with? The distinction is enormous when considering lines of affiliation built through shared comic sense. If we are laughing to dismiss, ostracize, or denounce, we will see breaks in affiliation that may similarly break frames associated with the object of ridicule. A finer question: when we laugh to dismiss, are we dismissing people or ideas? The former, sometimes dangerous, the latter, perhaps essential. If we are laughing, do we feel good about it? Are we laughing out of repulsion or joy? Finally, if we are laughing because we are repulsed, in what direction are we fleeing? Perhaps, we may find, because pessimistic satire so often lacks clear alternatives at the surface level, it will be in lines of comedic affiliation that we make sense of how the audience is encouraged to live, think, and act.

This chapter re-presents *Million Dollar Extreme* to show how pessimistic satire can make use of anti-clarity to create opportunities for decentering conviction. I start by laying out the mainstream media account of *MDE*, explaining the charges leveled against the program and elaborating the evidence used to suggest association with the alt right. While I agree with the critics that the potential for *MDE* to be received as a pro-authoritarian and anti-justice text is indeed problematic, I disagree with the suggestion that such a take naturally emerges from an attentive read of *MDE.* After considering media reception, I work through an episode of MDE that received the most critical attention to show how the program actively challenged a wide spectrum of ideological claims.

Bernstein Bares (All): Media Reception of *Million Dollar Extreme*

Criticism of *Million Dollar Extreme* in popular news outlets centers on two major talking points: first, the show and its creators are associated with the alt-right, and second, the show depicts vulgarity and violence in ways that may be received uncritically. Upon cancellation, the final blips of *MDE* in mainstream outlets pondered whether Trump's election influenced the decision, with the evidence strongly suggesting that Trump's victory soured any residual audience appetite for the show. In this section I will lay out the case made against *MDE*, showing how it can be construed to reenforce problematic ideology. While I will ultimately argue that a better (i.e., more full) reading of *MDE* is possible, it is indeed the case that a seemingly dangerous read is also possible, and it is worth examining how a show that I will claim is ideologically subversive was taken to reinforce a conservative agenda.

Joseph Bernstein penned the first major article on MDE, arguing that the "Alt-Right has its very own TV show." The evidence for Bernstein's claim is not textual, as he admits that "Though none of the three episodes that have aired so far have touched on politics or the alt-right, they have hardly been in good taste."[2] Instead, the bulk of Bernstein's critique relies on the murky affiliations of Sam Hyde, the central creator of *Million Dollar Extreme*. On Twitter, Hyde makes fun of Hillary Clinton and Lena Dunham, he makes ironic observations about burqas in video games, and he even mocks Black Lives Matter activists like Shaun King. Bernstein argues that these tweets, and other messages by Hyde, are dog whistles and clues to an alt right audience. David Sims of *The Atlantic*, citing Bernstein, further elaborates the claim that Hyde is secretly beckoning a dangerous audience: "Hyde crafts his comedy with the goal of shocking his young, liberal, Millennial audience while simultaneously appealing to like-minded members of a white-nationalist movement that generally supports Donald Trump."[3]

Despite Bernstein's claims, Hyde's political affiliation is questionable. Hyde is certainly no Leftist, but rebukes association with the "alt right", asking "What is that? Some kind of indie bookstore?"[4] Hyde's early work, as well as his more formal interviews, further complicate the mystery of his true affiliations. Consider a sketch like "Officer Maggot" that depicts cops as racist, sexist, morons who abuse power in ways that reflect their own insecurity – a clever, pointed, and often hilarious critique that leaves no room to empathize with police. At the same time, "Officer Maggot" builds its humor through abusing racial stereotypes, so while it suggests that those stereotypes and beliefs are held by despicable people, the script of "Officer Maggot" is wholly offensive and generally unfit for publication. Hyde has popular videos mocking male entitlement but also has videos lambasting artists, performers, and activists. In an interview with *The Hollywood Reporter*, Hyde comes closest to revealing his motivations when he disavows the idea that he and his collaborators are "people who callously try to create suffering and think cruelty for its own sake is funny."[5] Hyde goes on to clarify that the show's motivation was always in good humor: "It's supposed to poke at different things. We made fun of white people more than any other group on the show. That's what comedy does, good comedy at least. It pokes fun or highlights problems."[6] If Hyde et al. did not intend to provoke serious feelings of malice, and if we can believe Hyde's word at that claim (tricky, given his ironic detachment), then serious criticism would need to move beyond the image-out-of-context and begin to look deeper into the connective tissue of the text to understand how seemingly out-and-out destructive revelry could possibly inspire something else in an audience.

Sam Hyde is a difficult performer to read, purposefully cloaking his beliefs in lacquers of irony to deflect against charges of sincerity. His refusal to clarify the intent of his messages offers some strategic utility by occluding audience attempts to read *MDE* through an established

ideological framework, but such ambiguity also leaves *MDE* vulnerable to association outside of their control. One notable example: early in the show's run, an infamous online troll hacked printers at the University of California, Santa Cruz, to disperse a document filled with hate speech, swastikas, slurs, and a horrific vision of mass murder by a radicalized white male. The document concluded with: "This atrocity happened as a result of *MILLION DOLLAR EXTREME* PRESENTS WORLD PEACE [sic], Friday nights on Cartoon Network's Adult Swim."[7] Hyde denied knowledge of the publication, and for his part the troll responsible claimed to be acting with the intent of harming *MDE* through association.[8] Without the ability to gesture towards established ideological grounding, Hyde and *MDE* struggle to conclusively dispel lingering doubts about their innocence. Hyde could have shunned the troll and the stunt, but that would require some modicum of sincerity, of breaking character and revealing some kernel of truth underneath the veneer. In the end, Hyde chose his persona and maintained ironic detachment from the severity of the controversy. While this choice likely derives from a strategic performative theory, it is nonetheless a choice that gives credence to those critics who would condemn *MDE* itself for welcoming the alt right.

Ambiguity is at the heart of the second major criticism of *MDE,* shading critical reception of its ironic use of vulgarity, violence, and hyperreality. Sims argues that "There's a political edge to much of the show, but its meaning is often intentionally oblique" as "the whole enterprise seems cloaked in irony."[9] The show's first advertising blurb is a gambit of inconclusive irony. Seemingly placed in opposition to increasingly "woke" media, the tagline claims: "World Peace will unlock your closeted bigoted imagination, toss your inherent racism into the burning trash, and cleanse your intolerant spirit with pure unapologetic American funny_com [sic]."[10] This statement, taken literally, is not substantially different than the claims

of many other shows to interrogate systemic racism, challenge economic inequality, or otherwise cancel honkies[11]. We can tell the statement is an ironic wink in the last few words, "American funny_com" serving as a reduction of rival comedies like *Atlanta*, *Dear White People*, *Broad City*, and *Woke* that might unironically claim to achieve the hyperbolic anti-racist aims referenced here. If *MDE* is coded as alt right, then the advertising tagline can be easily *decoded* to simply mean the opposite of what is said, implying that *MDE* will close your imagination, embolden inherent racism, and otherwise provoke intolerance. A more nuanced read, assuming that the "truth" is in neither the literal nor inverted read, might suggest that *MDE* is mocking social investment in comedy shows as liberatory tools, taking aim at the preachy hubris of shows like *Dear White People* (or perhaps we should say particularly zealous fans of such shows), while still nominally addressing the belief that media influences public opinion. In that case, *MDE* may not be criticizing the assumed magnitude of change available to "woke" programming, nor the broad strokes moral direction.

Critics who center the assumption that *MDE* is an alt right show interpret the text as needlessly cruel and intentionally offensive. *The Atlantic* highlights a few egregious inclusions:

> In one, a man trips a woman and sends her flying head-first into a glass table, covering her face in blood— simply because he deems her too unattractive to marry his brother. In another, Hyde appears in blackface, screaming at a woman in exaggerated vernacular. In another, kids and puppets perform a song called "Jews Rock!" while executives watch, bored, from behind the stage.[12]

Other critics would echo concern over the show's depictions of women, with *Huffington Post* claiming *MDE* enacts violence against women "just because they found her unattractive."[13] I would like to delve deeper into the claims made by the mainstream media against *MDE*, but their

claims begin and end with the identification of problematic imagery – never is there consideration of how those signifiers perform within a satiric context. As I will show in a more extended textual analysis, these moments in *MDE* occur in contexts that are designed to complicate an uncritical reception of, for example, the endorsement of violence against women.

One might forgive the critics for assuming *MDE* catered to alt right audiences given its popularity with the group. In fact, both Sam Hyde and his critics agreed that the show's cancellation was largely because of "the type of crowd it attracted."[14] Comedians such as Brett Gelman, Judd Apatow, and Tim Heidecker – all well-known leftists and well know satirists – pushed Adult Swim to cancel *MDE* for its alt right association with Trump and the alt right. Sims argues that the 2016 election results would be the final nail in Hyde's coffin, arguing that "after Trump's surprising win, it's clear that many comedians are no longer willing to hold their nose and ignore what they once had dismissed as a radical fringe."[15] Bernstein corroborates the idea, reporting that (unnamed) executives at *Adult Swim* pushed to have *MDE* cancelled after Trump's election, believing the show would further stoke support for Trump's presidency.[16] Hyde, speaking with inside information, claims that it was Trump's election specifically that turned the tide against *MDE,* with marketing in particular upset with the show's association:

> The executives weren't worried until the articles started coming out and the heat started getting turned on to Turner corporate. They had agreed to pick up a season two. [Senior executive vice president] Mike Lazzo said he wanted to shoot a hundred episodes. We were in talks to have season two be ten episodes instead of six. Everyone was on board until the pressure turned up and the marketing people started getting pissed off, so Turner gave it the ax.[17]

Generally, there is a settled account that Trump's election changed the nature of pressure against *MDE*. With Trump in office, the appetite for a caustic satire chastising liberal talking points seemed to have dried up among executives, rival comedians, and perhaps even the ideal audience. Given that so much of Adult Swim's target audience is left-leaning adolescents and young adults, and given the severity of that demographic's opposition to Trump, one might forgive Turner marketing executives for struggling to sell *MDE*. Even taking Hyde at his word that *MDE* was meant to "make fun" and "highlight problems," after Trump's election one might question the desire for criticism among the wounded leftists, reeling in the wake of Trump's victory. Hyde himself identified a growing distaste for what *MDE* had to offer: "Trump getting elected has caused people to double down instead of taking a step back and looking at the general hysteria."[18] From one perspective, Trump's victory was at least partially a result of liberal elitism enabling a general dismissal of the "working class" as irrelevant to the democratic party. While such a perspective is widely disputed, we can at least note the irony of a supposedly self-reflexive audience balking at a program aiming to highlight problems in cultural leftism.

Even if I may offer a compelling alternative read of *MDE,* Bernstein and other critics are correct that MDE's popularity with known alt-right outlets is concerning. If it is the case that Hyde et al. maintain favor with racists, xenophobes, etc. (and certainly, they do) then we may rightfully be suspicious of hidden messages and coded content. Then again, it seems no one has much of a grasp on what the "alt-right" is to begin with, so perhaps we can narrow our question: does the best possible read of *MDE* show that it supports reactionary and/or oppressive worldviews? If there is a potentially heightened reading of *MDE* it will be revealed through robust rhetorical criticism, and if such a reading exists then we may be permitted to make limited

claims about the potential effectiveness of pessimistic satire in coaxing an audience towards self-reflection.

In the next section, I work through the episode of *Million Dollar Extreme* that received the most media attention. While *MDE* only lasted six episodes before cancellation, each episode is incredibly dense, and space does not provide for a thorough rhetorical analysis of each one. Additionally, if the conceit of my argument is, on some level, a claim that the media response to *MDE* is flawed, then talking back to that criticism directly is necessary to elaborate differences in reading strategy. I have chosen to analyze this episode as opposed to recurring themes or tropes to illuminate how *MDE* produces *Anti-Clarity* in condensed packages – specifically, this choice better enables me to show how the juxtaposition between sketches complicates reading the signifiers of *MDE* without attending to their intertextual arrangement.

Reading Million Dollar Extreme: *Not Everyone Thinks You're a Hero*

Episode five, titled "Not Everyone Thinks You're a Hero" received significant media attention for its depiction of an act of gratuitous violence against a woman. The episode has also received praise for its exceptionally artistic concluding sketch that explores the nature of passivity and the resilience of the human spirit. As I offer my read on this episode, I analyze its key signifiers and tropes through reference to the theoretical tools I have previously established for unpacking pessimistic satire: *Anti-Clarity* and satiric persona. While there are grounds for a conservative-friendly reading of this episode, I will demonstrate how attention to comedic affect reveals how the text serves to subvert, rather than endorse, alt-right ideology.

Before entering the weeds of scenic analysis, a brief overview on the episode's contents will help establish how scenes will contrast one another to complicate their internal messaging. This episode contains three major scenes: a dinner party, a gym for men, and a man on trial.

Each scene emphasizes a different style of agent: A man of passivity born of meekness, a man dedicated to self-empowerment, and a man who stoically refuses to accept an unjust reality. Three flavors of masculinity: the first a satire of the ineffectually anti-conflict pacifist, the second an ego-driven brash meathead, the third quietly withdrawn but unwavering. None of these men are to be idolized.

The first sketch of episode five received focused attention from mainstream critics as a clear example of the types of violence supposedly endorsed by MDE. I contend that a more comedy-literate reading reveals that the humor in the sketch coaches the audience to unsettle some elements of toxic masculinity, specifically condemning a perceived forced choice between masculine extremes (tempered meekness and aggressive might). *Huffington Post* reduces the scene to a singular image, suggesting that *MDE* "laughed about men tripping women into glass tables because they found them unattractive."[19] This claim is likely, to most readers, a neutral and accurate representation of the show, and under such auspices the claim serves to prove *MDE* is actively cruel and intentionally hurtful to women. However, this claim is on-face incorrect if one tracks the emotional cues of the scene, as I will elaborate in the next paragraphs.

The dinner party sketch does indeed use a man tripping a woman into a glass table as the inciting incident for conflict, but the moment of violence is a node, not a conclusion. The scene opens with four couples laughing in a semi-circle, clinking glasses, and making small talk. Sam remarks, "That cheese we tried, that I liked, couldn't figure out what it was? It was swiss cheese." The dialogue invites the auditor to recognize a skewed reality - it contains the rhythms of normal conversation, but the language is peculiar and unexpected. The auditor is not watching a faithful representation of human behavior, they are watching a distortion. As conversation shifts to Nick's opinion of Sam's wife, Amber, the tone darkens:

Nick: I like hanging out with my brother's wife, even though she is what she is.
Sam: Nick, she's got an associate degree. I know you may think she's just a hot little package, but she's educated! I love her forever, no matter what.
Nick: You guys make me sick when I look at you, but it's not because you because you're my brother and I love you it's this dog of a woman that you married
Sam: Choose your words carefully big guy, this is my wife you're talking about here.

Notice that Nick and Sam are arguing about Amber's quality as a person, and Sam tacitly agrees that it is acceptable to judge his wife externally by defending his wife's status instead of rejecting the premise that Nick's opinion matters at all. Nick calls Sam's wife a "dog of a woman" and the most Sam can muster is a gentle plea to "choose your words carefully." The dialogue makes clear that Sam has a deep affinity with Nick, and furthermore that Sam's loyalties are contested. At this point the audience may be unsure of what to make of Sam: he is either a calmly de-escalating presence, or a spineless wimp incapable of defending his wife's honor. Maybe Sam is the kind of man who believes that defending his wife's honor is chauvinistic, or he is secure enough in his relationship not to rise to Nick's attacks. Whatever Sam's motivations are, the audience is made aware from the jump that he does not take insults to his wife particularly seriously, and maybe further that he would not risk his social status to defend her.

Amber stands to get another glass of wine, and as she walks out of the scene Nick extends his legs and cracks Amber in the face with a bottle, forcefully tripping her into a glass table that shatters across the living room. The room is in shocked silence, mouths agape. Instantly, a blue tint is applied to the screen, implying a perception shift and darkened tone. Prior to the trip, the scene was accompanied by gentle adult contemporary background music, but as Amber falls through the table the music stops, replaced with dark ominous tones and a rhythmic beat of high-pitched beeps. As Amber attempts to right herself, there is blood and broken glass everywhere, her face in pained expression makes it is clear she has been seriously injured. There is no hint of levity towards the violence: the soundtrack switch from dulcet notes to a sinister

brooding bass, the tinted overlap, and a lingering camera cinematically highlight the extent of Amber's suffering.

In the wake of Amber's fall, Sam appears confused while Nick's facial cues suggest he thinks Amber "had it coming" as he displays no signs of remorse. What follows is a deconstruction of several elements of toxic masculinity: lack of empathy, prioritizing male friendships over female romantic partners, and disregard for the effects of violence. As Amber bleeds out on the rug, Sam and Nick nonchalantly discuss the tripping without ever bothering to help the woman:

> Sam: Nick, what's going on big guy? you just tripped my wife
> Nick: Brother, I'm not going to invite you to my beautiful home, have a wine party, so I can throw your wife through a table.
> Sam: Nick, we're talking about my wife here for Christ' sake, you just tripped her, I watched you do it with my own two feet.
> Nick: You really wanna sit here and go through the rigamarole?"
> Sam: Nick, my wife is laying here bloody and bashed. C'mon. You tripped her, Nick.
> Nick: She can say whatever she wants but I didn't trip your wife. I didn't trip you! You fell!
> Sam: When my field hockey wife asked me to marry her, I said 'yes', and I made a vow that day to stand behind her, so you don't go tripping her.
> Nick: You're gonna sit here and point fingers at me and she's gonna crawl around on my 1900-dollar rug, bleeding from her fucking eye sockets, and try to tell me that I shoved her through a goddamn table? You're fucking crazy as she is!"
> Sam: ...I think you're right.
> Nick [smiling, To Amber]: You owe me two thousand dollars

Amber is forgotten, instrumentalized into an object for debate rather than a fully-fledged human being. A more discerning critic might observe the clear analogy to the founding text on intersectionality: a woman is dying in the intersection, and onlookers are too busy arguing over responsibility to help her. Eventually, Sam admits that Nick is right, and his wife must have fallen. Amber will be charged for a new rug.

Sam and Nick are depicted as callous villains, too self-interested to overcome petty squabble and help a woman who is inches away from them. Whatever smugness we see from

Amber early in the scene, the tonal shift makes it clear that the violence enacted on her is gratuitous, grisly, and horrific - the audience may not be coached to identify with her, but they are also not coached to find humor in her suffering. One does not have to be an expert on comedy to view Sam and Nick's reaction to Amber's suffering and understand immediately that the violence depicted does not seek laughter from the audience - it seeks shock.

The comedy of the dinner party scene grows out of the juxtaposition of an extreme exigence and the passivity of Nick and Sam. Where we would find an audience laughing, we would expect it to come from discomfort at first, and then at the end through the unexpected resolution that the victim would be asked to pay for a rug. In the first, the condition of humor emerges from the protracted awkwardness of two brothers politely – but firmly - arguing over whether a woman crashing into glass was intentional or accident. Dark, but still potentially humorous, as the clock ticks and no one helps Amber, her face pouring blood, the situation becomes increasingly absurd. If we laugh, we laugh at the unexpected quietude of Sam, who does not even raise his voice after seeing his wife get "bloodied and bashed" at the hands of his resentful brother. It is therefore Sam, and not Amber, who is the target of the scene's punchline, the final laugh produced through the inexplicable concession that Sam's wife is responsible for her own assault and must pay restitution to Nick. One might imagine a kind of nasally-exhale of a laugh, produced through surprise, a laugh that reflects the preposterous nature of the outcome and therefore can only be elicited in an audience member who recognizes that outcome as comically unrealistic and undeserved. If one truly believed that Amber was in the wrong, or that the violence she endured was justified, the concluding line could not elicit laughter through surprise. *Huffington Post* has misread this scene if it presents it as an encomium to violence against women.

As the audience processes the scene, lines of affiliation are blocked, and all three players (Nick, Sam, Amber), made out to be detestable - though Amber's only crime appears to be drinking wine with an attitude, so there are meaningful qualitative differences in how detestable we are coached to find these characters. Although Nick is the greatest offender, the neutral audience is also least likely to initially identify with his character, and especially unlikely to find him appealing after harming Amber. Nonetheless the scene does offer a message to those who would identify with Nick: if you think women like Amber are deserving of a comeuppance, *MDE* pushes you to question what kinds of comeuppance are acceptable, and thus if the audience initially identified with Nick's disdain for Amber, they are quickly reminded of how that absurd disdain can escalate into absurd evil. This is not an isolated positioning in the program; *MDE* makes a similar move in episode two, which begins with "The Wall Show", a fictional gameshow that has Nick and Sam berating women in their 30s for having unduly high standards for future romantic partners. While early in the episode, the humor seems to emerge from mocking women's egos, the final sketch turns that assessment on its head by revealing the entirety of the gameshow to take place in the imagination of a burnt-out neurotic CEO who creates elaborate fantasies in which he receives the praise and adoration missing from his lived reality. In both the dinner party sketch and "The Wall Show", laughing *at* women is a hook or trap, and the audience is made to reckon with their affiliation with anti-woman sentiment – in the first by associating that sentiment with grisly violence, and in the second by suggesting that sentiment is fostered by a rather pathetic type of self-loathing.

While the audience is coached to find Nick contemptable for enacting violence, it is more likely Sam who serves as the point of identification for a potential audience. Initially an uncertain character (is he calm or afraid, mending or retreating?), as the scene unfolds and Sam's

cowardice is brought to the forefront, auditors should be increasingly repelled by Sam. Whether Sam should have called the police, immediately left, and/or cut ties with Nick altogether is left uncertain - the audience is not coached *toward* any alternative and productive version of masculinity, only coached away from Sam's cowardly passivity. Specifically, Sam's passivity is cowardly because he recognizes the severity of a problem but still refuses to correct injustice because of the implied social cost. Endogenously, the scene's depiction of violence is visceral enough to dispel a logical trail ending with the belief that Sam should have responded to Nick with violence of his own, so neither Sam's behavior nor the logical opposite are condoned by *MDE*. Perhaps some would advocate substituting Sam's cowardice with testosterone-fueled vengeance. For those, the second sketch of the episode counters the counter, as it were, offering a compelling counterargument that the inverse of the passive way of life (specifically a thoughtless muscle-bound gym-rat) is just as empty and embarrassing.

In case someone missed the lines of affiliation offered in this complicated opening sketch, the second sketch of Episode 5 is uncharacteristically straightforward for *MDE*. "Guy Heaven Gym" follows a "powerlifter" (played by Sam) who is a "fully natural 100% beast." Sam's character is a clear satire of gym-obsessed men who fall for fad bulking schemes and overpay for magical gym equipment. Satirizing popular trends among internet fitness gurus, Sam "switches up" his routines, obsesses over form, and drinks a gallon of milk a day, admitting to spending "$2000 a year on milk." Despite his supposed dedication to the gym ("If you wanna be strong, you gotta commit"), Sam has a limited and relatively uninformed perspective on health. He challenges the listener: "Would you rather have the ability to do 30 sit ups in a row? Or would you rather be able to lift an atlas stone?" We follow Sam as he does preposterous exercises and otherwise makes poor use of gym equipment: throwing weights, loudly jumping up

and down in a standing calf press, overclocking an elliptical at no resistance, and "invent[s] new ways of working out." He says he likes "quiet in [his] gym" but yells at the top of his lungs after dropping a deadlift. He throws up milk on his shirt, spitting dribbles onto a mirror as he simultaneously psyches himself up and degrades himself: "Don't you ever touch my weights, bitch." Other gym members share looks of fear and confusion.

"Guy Heaven Gym" offers toxic masculinity on a platter and the comedic cues of the sketch posit Sam's powerlifter as the butt of the joke. The powerlifter is an object of ridicule. Sam's character is rude to women, ignorant of the effects he has on his surroundings, confident despite being uninformed, and can barely contain his insecurity. We are coached to laugh at his bravado, his energy, and his completely unjustified ego. When Sam shouts "tick tick boom!" and jumps off a foot-tall platform, we laugh because his seriousness and enthusiasm are in stark contrast with his absurd methods. Sam is deluded, out of touch with reality, and repeats hackneyed "bro-science" understandings of fitness. Thus, by the time Sam has puked his gallon of milk over his shirt and the gym floor, the audience laughs because his downfall was the direct result of his own actions. Sam's character is worthy of derision precisely because the evidence of his limitations is readily apparent to every observer but not to himself – his ego needs deflation, and the longer he is allowed to continue his lifestyle the more undo harm he will cause others.

Alternatively, if one views this sketch through the same lens used by the above cited media to reduce the dinner party sketch to a celebration of violence against women, then "Guy Heaven Gym" might be read as a literal endorsement of our powerlifter's worldview. Such a read might say that Sam's character is portrayed powerfully, that he is the central agent of the scene, and therefore that the audience is supposed to identify with and affiliate towards him. However, this read would not be consonant with the comedic entailments of the scene. If Sam is to be

lionized here, then the joke could only be that onlookers should be rightfully be scared of his power and therefore that the people suffering from his antics are deserving of discomfort because they have not ascended to drinking a gallon of milk a day. Such a read cannot reckon with Sam's downfall – how can our protagonist be held in righteous light when he is covered in his own milk-laden vomit? Furthermore, such a read would have to argue that Sam's strange exercises are somehow legitimate, or at least that they represent a desirable method of fitness development, but in that case the audience would not be coached towards laughter during Sam's routine because his act would not be incongruous with expectations. While it is possible one could argue that the ideological signifiers of "Guy Heaven Gym" endorse a particularly musclebound brand of masculinity, the affective signifiers thoroughly rebuke the uncritical reception of Sam's powerlifter as a figure worth idolizing. If an audience member identifies with Sam (perhaps they too drink a gallon of milk a day), the initial presentation of Sam as powerful serves as an attention-generating hook before that depiction is consistently unsettled by comedic cues.

The final sketch of the episode receives a title card: "The Man Who Would Never Be…What They Made Him to Be" (ellipses in the original). This sketch stars an unnamed Man as he endures a wrongful conviction through the power of denial, never accepting the reality of his fate until it is too late to change it. Shot in black and white, we meet a pipe smoking man in front of a family farm, being arrested without charges. He meekly protests, but does not resist: "ya'll are crazy, I didn't do nothin'." A judge sentences him to 10 years federal maximum-security prison, to which the Man responds, "10 years, 40 years, 200 years: how about I'm doing none of 'em?" Sitting in his cell, overhearing the screams of other prisoners, the denial continues: "Not me, not never. Ain't happening. Nope." A corrupt dice game with C.O.s adds further insight to the Man's delusion: "You just did a nickel in Detroit." "I've never even been

out of Rhode Island before, I don't know what you're talking about." The C.O. offers a chance at freedom: "you roll a 7, you walk tomorrow. Anything else, it's another dime." The Man remarks that "you can't win if you don't play," rolls the dice, and confidently announces "snake eyes." When told "you got a five and a one," he coolly responds "hell yeah." The Man remains unphased and unemotional. Years have passed, the man is now bald, and he is being stabbed in the stomach while benching, calmly protesting, with a chuckle, "quit horsing around guys, I'll be done in a second." Blood pools around the entry wounds, the Man continues to look forward, unflinching, focused on his lift. A quick montage of a ticking clock passes time to the Man's release: a guard remarks "20 years hard time, how does it feel?" which is met with a disinterested "Hm? Bye."

By the time the Man has returned home, his farm is in tatters and his house has been burned down. Swirling in the audio space we hear the judge's sentence "10 years… 10 years…" mix with the sounds of prisoners and guards. As the camera pulls back to reveal the sketch's sets arranged in a circle, the audio cuts to the opening chords of a song while the camera remains focused on the Man. Though he screams, the audio shift silences his cry, and thus the Mans' rage is silenced as he makes his way to a naked bed in the center. Written on the side: "To Go To Bed Forever." The man gets into the bed as John Maus's "Hey Moon" continues in the background – a solemn, quiet ballad contrasting the violent rage of the Man. He kicks and screams and curses and tears the bed apart, flipping the mattress and crying into the dark void, alternating between restless sleep and impotent rage. In the background, we see a continuation of the previous set pieces - the judge, the cops playing dice, prisoners working out, they all carry on. The world continues to turn. Though his tantrum is silent, his body speaks loud enough to the audience, revealing a man who has endured only to find the end of the rainbow completely empty. The

Man was oblivious to his situation. He never fought, never resisted, and now it is too late. In the end, his house is destroyed, and his farm had burned to the ground. He goes to bed forever. Maus sings in the background as the scene fades to credits: “Hey moon, if I was to fall/ I won't fall so deep/ Though I doubt I'm gonna/ You can wake me up if you wanna.”

“The Man Who Would Never Be…What They Made Him to Be” is a pastiche of 1930s prison films such as “The Big House,” borrowing the black and white aesthetic, transatlantic accent, and quiet stoicism we might associate with the kinds of “tough guy” movies your grandfather used to watch in nickel theaters. The sketch is a pastiche of those films, and not a satire, because it borrows their cinematic language, but those films are not the object of critique. Nor is the sketch a parody, as the commentary is not directed at the reality of nor perception of the justice system. Cops, judges, and prisons operate metaphorically for institutions broadly. A corrupt C.O. rolling the dice to determine a man’s fate is not a pointed commentary on a given individual guard, instead that moment reflects the aleatory nature of fate and underscores how our agency is often limited to attitudinal reaction to forces outside of our control. What personalizes the scene is the perspective of the Man; his abject refusal to accept the conditions of his reality is still an act – a choice, enacted by his own agency, and a willful decision made to cope with injustice. The Man endures. Arrested, assaulted, cheated, and robbed, he merely endures. Even as the man finally rages, his outburst is literally silenced by the soothing lullaby of “Hey Moon,” suggesting that even sympathizers will tune out post-facto tantrums over what could have been. The final lesson is disturbingly clear: refuse to accept your situation, deny your reality, and eventually it will be too late to change course.

As a generalized claim for how we should engage with the world, “The Man Who Would Never Be” could be taken to argue against a glazed-over passivity and lament aimless drift – a

type of "cool" masculinity reflective of Gregory Peck or *Easy Rider*. Concretizing this metaphor is much trickier, and it may even be the case that gender/masculinity is a red herring and the sketch transcends identity concerns to speak more broadly to detachment as an individual aesthetic. There is no definitive account of what this sketch is an allegory for, and its content could be applied to a wide range of scenes. If the lesson of the sketch is that one should not take injustice laying down, there remains a rather large question of what constitutes injustice. A skeptical critic *could* argue that the sketch is a metaphor for being white in the modern world – in which case the justice system is a metaphor for (something like) Critical Race Theory, and the Man's refusal to accept his condition is a heroic refusal of social pressure to accept guilt by association. Were that the intent of the sketch, the Man's final rage would be quite troubling, as it would suggest whites must "fight back" against "warrantless" accusations of culpability by virtue of unearned privilege. Maybe this is even a compelling read of the sketch, given how the visual choice to shoot in black and white could be a subtle reference to racial binaries. However, one could just as easily invert the races of this read such that the Man is a metaphor for enduring anti-black racism and the point of his impotent rage is to suggest that racism must be destroyed institutionally. We can continue this exercise with other ideological poles: fight against patriarchy, or fight against anti-male sentiment; fight against immigrant waves before they destroy your town, or fight against xenophobia before our communities are atomized; whatever one figures as the most important struggle for justice, the lesson is to wise up, recognize what is happening, and act before we are sent to bed forever.

What constitutes injustice is only the first major unanswered question in "The Man Who Would Never Be," the second being one of tactics: how to rage, and when? The narrative framing of the sketch prioritizes exigence, spotlighting the delay in the Man's outrage by the use

of a bed as an end-of-life impotence metaphor, but once the attendant auditor works through the encouragement to act, they are left without guidance on where or how to strike. Endogenously, we may even question what benefit the Man would accrue through protest. He is, after all, at the mercy of institutions, and thus his protests could never manifest to material redress. There may even be a claim that the Man's refusal to accept his fate was a survival strategy, that his denial was a coping mechanism to make sense of his abject powerlessness in the face of oppression. Again, we can plug in any number of specific ideological concerns here to prove the plasticity of the implication: institutional racism, the welfare state, immigration, corporatism, sexism, misandry – sources of injustice to some, unassailable monoliths to nearly all. "The Man Who Would Never Be" leaves the audience with an unresolvable tension between exigence and incapacity, between the need to act and the recognition of the act's ultimate futility. One could equally argue that the Man should rage in protest against his captures or that his state of denial was necessary to retain his sense of self.

MDE does not need to clarify an object of critique for "The Man Who Would Never Be" to potentially coach audiences towards higher levels of thinking than they might expect from an absurdist sketch comedy. Regardless of political affiliation, this sketch encourages the audience to come to terms with the tension between their desire for a better world and the limitations of their own agency. For some, that may ironically reinforce an internalized rage because the sketch is received as a reminder of the limitations of political agency. For others, the interrelation between the Man as an individual wronged and the metaphoric expansion of his plight to a commentary on power broadly could instigate questions about institutional authority. Let us not lose sight of the fact that the justice system is textually on trial in this sketch – police, judges, guards, and the entire brick and mortar institution are made hateful and indifferent. Thus, while

there is some space for the skeptic to argue that this sketch enforces libertarian arguments about self-sufficiency or that it is a thinly veiled metaphor for conservative insurrection, those claims would struggle to reckon with the out-and-out negative depiction of the prison pipeline. Whatever other source of injustice is likened to prison in an attempt to mobilize this sketch's allegory, it remains the case that prison serves as an unwavering example of injustice against which other institutions are compared.

Arrangement is significant for *MDE*, and these three sketches cohere to offer insights greater than the sum of their parts. I have suggested that attention the contents and arrangement favors a reading emphasizing three flavors of masculinity, offering a multiple-choice test in which every answer is wrong, therefore fulfilling a function of pessimistic satire to add through subtraction, to heal through wounding. In function, the juxtaposition of these three scenes sequentially discourages the audience from finding quarter in popularized and mass mediated male ideals. Beginning with the dinner party, Sam's character represents a satiric persona mocking leftist nu-males (colloquially referred to as "Soy Boys") who abhor violence, never raise their voice, make their pets vegan, and otherwise are perceived as finding shelter in traditionally non-masculine roles. Sam's caricature is wholly pessimistic – there is nothing redeemable about the character, proven by his choice to side with Nick in the face of irrefutable violence. By the end of the dinner party sketch, the audience should have a much-lessened affiliation towards the type of persona Sam places under critique, but that leaves a wide array of alternatives to gravitate towards instead. However, the arrangement of sketches across the episode continues to chase down such alternatives: if one finds comfort in physical strength as a response to Sam's cowardice, then "Guy Heaven Gym" serves as a roadblock against overinvesting in muscle-masculinity as a means of transcending the tensions found in the dinner

party. If the audience is coached towards a more balanced toughness, say the kind of masculinity found in Gregory Peck ("the strong silent type"), then "The Man Who Would Never Be" questions the fate of those who would disengage through stoic denial. Of course, there are many other permutations and gradations of masculinity, and the tropes satirized in an 11-minute episode of television could not hope to capture them all, nevertheless *MDE* makes strategic use of negation to complicate the tendency towards extreme tribalism. By satirizing the Soy Boy, the Meathead, *and* Gregory Peck, all without providing anything in the way of a positive example of masculinity, *MDE* unsettles assumptions about the hegemony of masculine prototypes while simultaneously coaching the audience to discover their own personalized balance.

Anti-Clarity is an important aspect of *MDE*'s rhetorical strategy because the target audience tends to be resistant to direct claims about masculinity and because the concluding sentiment is not to replace one masculine meta-trope with another. As a pessimistic satire, *MDE* excises the cancers of masculine extremes and leaves the space for something new to grow. While there is little direct coaching on what should fill that void, the negation of several toxic elements offers some possibility for improvement. Importantly, it would seem the goal would be that whatever the audience develops in the way of masculine identity would at least be consciously developed rather than mindlessly copied from cultural archetype.

(Un)Settling *Million Dollar Extreme:* Problematic, or Problematizing?

In this chapter I have demonstrated how the theoretical tools established in chapter two may be used to best elucidate the rhetorical content of pessimistic satire. Where mainstream critics have accused *Million Dollar Extreme Presents: World Peace* of offering a wholly "alt-right" ideological frame, I have argued that careful attention to the use of *Anti-Clarity* and comedic affect in satiric persona reveal how *MDE* uses alt-right signifiers as a hook to draw

attention before complicating and unsettling attendant ideological assumptions. While *MDE* may indeed display graphic violence against women, it does not endorse that violence, instead coaching the audience to interrogate the motivations of someone who would find that violence amusing (or at least unimportant). Through pessimistic tone, *MDE* discounts and challenges masculine archetypes without offering replacement, forcing the audience to seek a higher level of awareness of how they participate in prefabricated modes of being.

In a different world in which Hillary Clinton defeats Donald Trump in the 2016 Presidential Election, perhaps *MDE* would have been much better received. Given the seeming inevitability of Clinton's victory at the time (assumed by mainstream media and much of the public), it stands to reason that *MDE* was written with a level of acidity designed to curb maximized leftist smugness. As it was, *MDE* arrived right at the cusp of a rather significant shift in the American political scene, and as we have seen much of the mainstream reaction to the program filtered through Trump-shaded glasses that limited the world to a rather essentialized binary of pro-Trump or anti-Trump. Leftist appetite for "I told you so" was at an all time low as many feared that Trump's election would serve as a signal that welcomed coalitions of violence and threatened our imminent futures. As the cloud of anxiety grew, the desire for programs like *MDE* diminished in return. Furthermore, had Trump not won the election there may have been considerably less magnitude of risk if *MDE* is mistaken by audiences as an alt-right dog whistle, for without Trump in office those groups would lack the political leverage necessary to threaten the liberal order. Instead, with Trump in office, there is some credence to concerns that *MDE* could accidentally embolden radicals intent on, say, storming the capitol.

Insofar as I have a negative critique of *Million Dollar Extreme*, it is a commentary on the complex balance of ideology and pathos: the satire is at times too dense for its given audience,

and too caustic for its ideal audience. Those that gravitate toward the show may be less than likely to perform the critical interrogation necessary to unlock the (surprisingly) anti-partisan agenda woven throughout the show's textual fabric, especially if they approach *MDE* with the assumption that it uncritically affirms conservative viewpoints. Alternatively, the ideal audience of self-reflexive politicos who need grounding and a healthy dose of comic criticism are likely to avoid the show either because its vulgarity is too painfully at odds with decorum or empathic emotions or because the show appears to "punch down" by targeting some rote woke talking points. In *MDE*, the gap between pessimistic satire as an ideal and pessimistic satire in practice is brought to the fore. In this context, the struggle between ideal audience and the audience's appetite modulates the capacity of pessimistic satire by failing to hold the attention of a necessary audience and failing to effectively reach the audience it has. Such a troubling dilemma for the rhetorician: if a text is helpful for an unreached audience, and destructive for the audience received, what types of judgements can be made? Historical evidence on the reception of Juvenal, Horace, and Perseus is limited, yet scholars continue to engage in those texts for what rhetorical techniques they contain internally, and how those techniques may seek to articulate positions that are critical to the range of human positionalities rather than lobbing tribalist critiques of one position from the vantage point of its opposite.

All satire carries the risk of failure, and *MDE* carries more than most. Any satire runs the risk of being misunderstood in a negatory fashion (ranging from, e.g., “I didn’t get it” to “I don’t care”). Some satires run the risk of being understood in ways where the satirized message is taken literally, such as conservatives who took The Colbert Show seriously. *MDE* is a high probability, high magnitude risk. Considering that well paid, well supported media analysts from institutions as prestigious as *Buzzfeed* read *MDE* as a conservative rallying cry, it should not be

surprising that some significant portion of the audience similarly felt that *MDE* supported alt-right ideology. Some people *do* find cruelty funny. While *MDE* might, potentially, influence some portion of its audience towards higher levels of self-awareness or critical inquiry, there is also a substantial risk that much of the audience finds catharsis in *MDE* because they too read only into the surface level of the signifiers, and therefore perceive *MDE* as a public support for their worldview. The magnitude of the risk is that *if MDE* is regularly received positively by the alt-right, then the show is serving to reinforce exactly the types of problems it seeks to address. Particularly troubling in the political context of its time, if *MDE* is reinforcing alt-right beliefs it is also tacitly contributing to anti-immigrant vigilante violence, superstructures of oppression, and potentially even acts like the January 6th insurrection on the U.S. Capitol. Thus, the final question: is the hook worth it? Maybe. How else are we reaching the alt-right?

When making judgements of the potential for *MDE* to unsettle conservative ideology, we should try our best to reach an apples-to-apples comparison, rather than comparing *MDE* against a hypothetical ideal. The key question when considering the negative potential of *MDE*: What show is the conservative audience watching instead? They aren't watching *Atlanta* and certainly aren't entertaining woke-scold monologues from *Dear White People* et al. I have shown how *MDE* at least has the potential to be read in a way that is dissonant with alt-right worldviews, and furthermore have shown how the use of comedic affect in *MDE* actively coaches the audience to follow that trail. An anti-conservative reading is possible, and some amount of the audience likely read the show in this way. Some number of people tuned in because of poop humor and the promise of "owning the libs". Possibly, a slice of those people left with a few of their ideological anchor points destabilized (I've identified the possibilities, the actualities would require clinical study outside my scope). Conversely, of the population that would see *MDE* as

an endorsement of reactionary politics, without this sketch show would their worldview really be troubled? If one *wants* to read conservativism in *MDE,* it seems likely such a person could find a number of alternatives to fill the void, and thus *MDE* is less likely to uniquely contribute to normalizing the alt-right. MDE is a problematic show because it carries a tremendously high risk of being misinterpreted, but at the same time, this show reached an audience in a unique way that has yet to be replicated. *Black Lady Sketch Show* isn't flipping 4chan trolls. *Million Dollar Extreme* might at least inspire a few of them to hate the police.

CHAPTER FOUR

WHO'S BOUFFON WHO?: BALDWIN'S TRUMP AND LESSONS FROM A FAILED CLOWN

If we are to understand the nature of satire in the Trump era, it may behoove us to glance at satire *of* Trump, himself. While many comedic performers have taken a turn at mispronouncing "China" and saying "Yuge", by far the most iconic impersonation of President Donald Trump was done by Alec Baldwin on NBC's *Saturday Night Live*. Trump's impression was initially received with tremendous fanfare, support, and celebration as a possible poison pill to Trump's public appeal. Lauded as a perfect impression that accurately represented the depths of Trump's cruelty, Baldwin's take inspired countless positive reviews across mainstream outlets. No flash in the pan, Baldwin's Trump remained popular throughout Trump's presidency: not only retaining viewers, also motivating countless thought pieces, essays (and of course tweets) until the character was retired (no spoilers!).

Despite the positive reviews, I argue in this chapter that viewing Baldwin's Trump through the lens of a Bouffon performance shows the limitations of Baldwin's performance, and elucidates how his act may have ultimately caused more psychic harm than good. At bottom, Baldwin's Trump exists improperly between the heuristics of the Bouffon and the Clown – he is too hateful to find innocent, but too innocent to find culpable. He is too evil to be ignored, but too foolish to cause any real harm *even if he wanted to*. In some moments, Baldwin's Trump is not villainous enough – not cunning enough, not dark enough – to inspire fear or anger. Yet in

others he is also too self-interested and egotistical to pity. Baldwin's Trump offers a compelling case study in the failure of well-intentioned pessimistic satire.

I will argue that Baldwin's Trump fails to provide effective political opposition to Trump with any of the three most salient potential audiences: Trump supporters, the politically apathetic, and the Anti-Trump crowd. While it would be unlikely for any singular performance or caricature to effectively address all three possible audiences, failure in all three accounts is noteworthy for a program as nominally successful as *SNL*. In the first audience, Baldwin fails to dislodge Trump's oxymoron of populist billionaire, and thus appeals that Trump does not have his base's interests at heart are likely to go unheeded. For the apathetic, Baldwin's resistance to fully commit to the Bouffonic persona weakens the exigency of intervention appeals, framing Trump as a man too stupid to fear. I will spend the most time on the third audience, for they are the most likely target audience for Baldwin's performance and, quite frankly, the most likely target audience for a theoretical foray into satire (hey ya'll!). For the anti-Trump crowd, Baldwin's impression confirms hazardous suspicions of Trump's ineptitude but continues to deny his effectiveness and therefore cannot explain his continued "success," inevitably reinforcing problematic assumptions held by much of the Anti-Trump audience. It is perhaps the audience most critical of Trump that are, in turn, most harmed by the inevitable conflation of Baldwin and Trump. By seeing Trump as inhumanely stupid, he is denied power, intelligence, and cunning. Dehumanizing the enemy, Hegel famously warns us, risks dehumanizing the self (for what are we if we cannot defeat something so pathetic?). I will conclude this discussion of the stakes with a sensational claim to be elaborated later: Baldwin's Trump rhetorically constitutes the audience as Wile E. Coyote, fecklessly deploying ACME-branded impeachment

claims at an enemy neither respected nor truly understood. The consummate viewer need only look down to realize they have been standing on air.

My choice of Baldwin's Trump as a case study is not reflective of professional vendetta, or personal taste; I have chosen to examine Baldwin's Trump because (1) *Saturday Night Live* is the farthest-reaching satiric program in the United States, making this impersonation the most circulated satire of Trump, and (2) critics have described Baldwin's Trump with Bouffonic language, suggesting that the theoretical tools developed thus far would be quite useful in analyzing his performance. On the first, it is important to hold Baldwin's Trump to task because of *SNL*'s ubiquity and trackable influence on political discourse. If we accept the foundational claim that satiric impersonations may influence public perception of politicians, the best place to look may perennially be *Saturday Night Live* due to its relative gravitas and wide-spread distribution/circulation compared to other satiric outlets. Maybe there is a "better" Trump impression out there, but this is the Trump impression the most people watched, digested, shared, and internalized.

The case for *Saturday Night Live*'s influence is robust. Described by Amber Day and Ethan Thompson as a "cultural staple,"[1] for over 40 years *Saturday Night Live* has routinely capitalized on political events and actors to draw in audiences and produce comic material.[2] *Saturday Night Live* is one of the largest comedy programs in the United States, regularly drawing in millions of viewers, with early episodes in Trump's presidency averaging 10 million viewers a night.[3] Shawn Parry-Giles and Trevor Parry-Giles reminded critics that "millions of voters and citizens consume politics and create political meaning via programs like Saturday Night Live" – so even if the corny sketches and tired jokes do not seem groundbreaking or exciting to the heightened critic, to many others the show maintains considerable cache.[4]

Saturday Night Live has been recognized by scholars for its rhetorical significance, with critics arguing the show has: enabled better understanding of humor types on political candidate evaluations[5]; influenced news media attributions of blame and culpability during politicized controversy[6]; and even transformed carnivalesque bodily performance into necropolitical burlesque.[7] Amber Davisson argues that performances on SNL have the capacity "to transform affect into an opportunity for deliberation and a platform for collective action," suggesting that comedic skits offer a pathos-laden political pulsion.[8] Finally, *SNL* has produced a legion of political caricatures made profoundly mainstream: Chevy Chase as Gerald Ford, Phil Hartman as Ronald Reagan, Dana Carvey as H.W. Bush, Darrell Hammond as Bill Clinton, Darrell Hammond as Dick Cheney, Will Ferrell as George W. Bush, and of course Tina Palin as Sarah Fey. While these impersonations are not equally influential (and if we are being honest not equally funny), they have all had some relative influence on public perception of various politicians. Perhaps more importantly, the collective submission of impersonations has tenured Saturday Night Live as a meaningful source of commentary on politics, viewed by some as the chief producer of political satire.

The second reason I have chosen Baldwin's Trump as a case study is that the media reception of Baldwin consistently described his performance in Bouffonic language. Baldwin's Trump should be evaluated as a bouffon performance because of its vile/irredeemable depiction that attempts to destroy the object of scorn. Baldwin's Trump has been described as a vile and irredeemable caricature; a funhouse mirror designed quite specifically to mock President Trump to his face and puncture his ego. Baldwin himself suggestively wondered aloud "if this is the guy we need to see ourselves clearly," a claim that strongly resonates with the affiliative function of the Bouffon as described in chapter two.[9] I will argue, however, that though Baldwin's Trump

has many things in common with the Bouffon, there remain key differences that will be underscored not to suggest that Baldwin fails by breaking rule XYZ and such is not a "real" Bouffon, but instead to show how deviations from a Bouffonic Ideal may jeopardize the intent of Baldwin's performance.

Before we jump into the fun, this chapter begins with a brief consideration of the role political-impression-based satire plays in shaping public consciousness. Thankfully, this is well-established territory, specifically in the case of *Saturday Night Live,* to boot! Second, I collect media reflections on Baldwin's Trump to prove my claim that he is received as a Bouffon, considered both an irredeemably vile parody and one that may threaten the king himself. Media reception grounds my counter reading of Baldwin's bouffon performance where I identify three major tropes constituting Baldwin-Trump: Trump's *inhuman* stupidity, Trump's lack of connection with his base, and Trump's inevitable demise. I will argue that the combined appeal of these tropes ultimately fail to properly motivate any of Baldwin's possible audiences to generate effective anti-Trump momentum, with the greatest risk being posed, ironically perhaps, to those who were already affiliated against Trump.

Impression's Impression

Forces of political parody can at times be quite tremendous when it comes to the ancient art of caricature, and a rather substantial amount of communication studies literature has addressed this concern through analysis of *Saturday Night Live*. R. Andrew Holbrook and Timothy Hill argue that viewers struggle to make cognitive distinction between legitimate and illegitimate sources of political information, suggesting that parody may operate on the same cognitive track as other competing inputs.[10] The challenge for politicians is one of persona: the

lay public (perhaps subconsciously) may flatten the "real" candidate (itself a fiction) with "fictional" depictions in places like *Saturday Night Live* and *The Onion*.

A few examples of caricature bleeding into political reality have received extended treatments in communication studies. The first chapter discussed the case of Al Gore, who worked tirelessly in his 2000 presidential campaign to grapple with his *SNL* impersonation. According to Chris Smith and Ben Voth, Gore was compelled to reverse a completely fictitious image that was, nonetheless, taken rather seriously by the voting public as an accurate representation of the candidate.[11] Further discussed in the first chapter: Tina Fey's impression of Sarah Palin generated considerable studies on the effect of political satire on audience perception of Palin's leadership abilities, and other scholars have suggested that political impressions of Joe Biden, Bill Clinton, and Georgia Bush have all exerted notable (if relatively minor) influence on how a politician is perceived.[12]

Comedic theory further backs up the theoretical claim that impersonations meaningfully interact with the public perception of famous, iconic, and influential people. Comedic legend – the kind of legend you find in underground shows or by hanging out too much at comedy clubs - has it that once an impersonation has been "broke" all future impersonations are no longer of the prime subject, they are instead of the prime impersonation. All that follow are impersonations of impersonations such that the echo of an iconic figure in personal parlance is interrupted by the hegemony of the prime impersonation. Nobody does Ed Sullivan, they do Rich Little doing Ed Sullivan ("rrrrreally big show, really big"). Nobody does John Madden, they do Frank Caliendo doing John Madden. That's not an accurate Bill Clinton, but it might be a spot-on Darrell Hammond doing Bill Clinton, and so on. The central claim here is difficult to prove in a short space, so let us treat the claim – that one typically does an impression of an impression, and less

so an impression of a subject – as a tentative possibility. Maybe that is the case sometimes, or at least we can think of times that might be true. *When* it is true, we do not even need to make the claim that the impression of an impression substitutes for, nor overwhelms, the original. We need only to believe that both exist together in the mind of the auditor such that even a marginal residual habitation of the impression's impression offers influence into the gestalt of the prime subject. The relative magnitude of that influence may have to remain speculative, but insofar as there is influence at all, there is grounds for intervention through the application of communication theory to entertainment media.

Whether the audience treats political satire with fanfare or seriousness, the result may be a real if intangible effect on voter perception of politicians. While it is unlikely for a stirring *SNL* skit to elect a president, good caricature influences the agenda for interview discussions and establishes one baseline for public opinion. Most importantly, these studies indicate that audiences struggle to differentiate between fact and fiction, quip and policy, when it comes to identifying with their appointed officials. How a politician is taken up in the impression space matters because it modulates lines of affiliation – the more affable, relatable, and likable an impression, the easier it is for the audience to positively associate with the mimicked. Although it might be rare for satire to dominate a politician's persona, nonetheless it is increasingly frequent that important dimensions of the substance of a public person may be lost amongst swirling fragments of policy and punchline. That is to say, there is no singular Trump, at all. No singular Palin, Biden, etc. There is only the Trump et al of perception, some doubly fictitious figure conjured in the mind by piecing together impressions, fragments, and lingering moods. Or perhaps this is all to say that since there is no objective Trump, equally shared by all auditors,

working through a satire of Trump offers one of the many pieces that refracts Trump into the public consciousness.

Crowning the would-be Bouffon

Media reception of Baldwin's Trump was largely positive, at least in the mainstream accounts. Described in *The New Yorker* as a "Perfect Donald Trump," Baldwin's impression was doted on for how it balanced villainy and grotesqueness with "spot on" physical and verbal cues.[13] Looking closely at how Baldwin was celebrated shows two common talking points: (1) Baldwin's Trump is adequately vile, and (2) this caricature may negatively effect Trump, personally. Both claims are in-line with what we might expect from a Bouffon performance, which is typically marked by weaponized parody designed to dethrone the powerful (or at least reveal the precarity of their perch). Of course, Baldwin's Trump can never be a true Bouffon because Baldwin himself does not constitute the dispossessed exile necessary to activate the full tension between dereliction and dynasty... Nevertheless, Baldwin's caricature comes extremely close to a "traditional" Bouffon satire and reading Baldwin through the Bouffon should reveal strategic opportunities and missteps unique to this style of pessimistic performance.

Baldwin's Trump was broadly painted in negative language in the manner Phillipe Gaulier described for Bouffon performances. Acting as "A swirly-haired buffoon,"[14] according to *The Washington Post,* Baldwin depicted Trump as a hulking monster equally motivated by greed and incompetence. *Newsweek* claimed that Baldwin "offers a lecherous and vile Trump," to be received with "disgust."[15] *Salon* noted that "Baldwin's caricature of President Trump relies on grotesque facial expressions and explicit misogyny throughout."[16] Willa Paskin of *Slate* praised Baldwin's Trump for managing to capture the "ridiculous and grotesque" ways that Trump loves himself. Likening Donald Trump to "a bear with a comb-over, hurling feces," Paskin suggests

that Baldwin's impression is effective because it does not simply depict Trump as a feces-throwing bear, but a feces-throwing bear who is *also a failure*.[17] On a similar note, Ian Crouch of *The New York Times* argued that Baldwin was effective because he accurately reflected the darkness of Trump's soul:

> Beyond capturing the low-hanging Trumpisms, Baldwin conveyed the pathetic smallness of Trump's cruelty, the pithy meanness with which he attacks anyone who irritates him (be they babies, political opponents, or beauty queens)—a meanness that Trump cannot seem to control."[18]

As Chris Jones of *The Atlantic* claims, Baldwin's "Trump is mimicry, born of disgust." Jones makes it clear that Baldwin is not importing a carbon copy, he is re-presenting Trump in horrific terms: "not Trump, exactly, but some nightmarish goof on Trump, a distillation of everything gross about him, boiled clean of any remnant that could be mistaken for competence or redemption."[19] Note the judgement in Jones' account: Baldwin's Trump is not just monstrous, he is *beyond redemption.* There is no chance for healing when it comes to Trump, at least according to Baldwin's portrayal.

Baldwin's Trump aims to go beyond public embarrassment and witty retort, attempting in the extreme to dethrone the king himself. According to the legend of the Bouffon, one of the most powerful effects of Bouffonic performance is the death of the ridiculed subject. Here, we refer to death both literal and symbolic: in Sacha Barron Cohen's telling of the Bouffon, the mocked King literally dies of embarrassment. Such legends, of course, amount to no more than literary fiction…not that the status of fiction has discouraged comedians from at least trying, nonetheless. Afterall, many consider Trump to be a "TV President," so perhaps it was not so farfetched to believe it would take another TV President to stop him.

When it comes to Baldwin's Trump, there is indeed some evidence that Baldwin's Trump impression is regularly viewed by the President (with disdain). Trump has even commented on Baldwin's performance: "Time to retire the boring and unfunny show. Alec Baldwin portrayal stinks. Media rigging election!"[20] Note the deflection and the fear as Trump claims both that Baldwin's portrayal is boring/unfunny *and* that it is powerful enough to possibly sway the election. Trump is not alone in this belief as some critics have claimed that Baldwin "got under Trump's thin skin and caused him to lash out," so maybe we can imagine, in some comedic utopia, the possibility of a skit so powerful Trump's heart explodes in rage.[21] Other critics have suggested that Baldwin is actively influencing politics through satire. *The Atlantic* claims that

> Baldwin has become our deflator in chief, a weekly pinprick in Trump's balloon. Every time Trump tweets a wounded Sunday-morning response, every time Spicer laughs off McCarthy's portrayal but then tries a little harder to bury his rage… Baldwin can tell himself that SNL is not just making laughs but effecting change.[22]

Baldwin himself has also expressed hope that his performance has the potential to influence Trump. Specifically, Baldwin "hopes that, because Trump and his team seem so vulnerable to televised criticism, the constant belittlement might sting them into submission."[23] From the privileged perspective of hindsight, we can more or less assume that Baldwin's Trump would ultimately have little effect on Trump's policies, nor did Baldwin cause untimely death per se, but we would need substantially more evidence to make a claim on how Baldwin affected the voting public. Thus, for now, we may be satisfied with noting the intent of the performance, clearly designed with Trump in mind as a potential auditor. The intent to wound, to dethrone, through vile caricature is precisely the modus operandi of the Bouffon.

The multilayered complication of Baldwin's Bouffon can be elaborated across three possible lines of affiliation: Trump Supporters, the politically apathetic (or Trump apathetic), and Anti-Trumpers. Each audience may interpret the Bouffon in different ways based on their relationship with the target of scorn. In an ideal world for Baldwin, he would convince Trump supporters to abandon their king, encourage the apathetic to act quickly, and strengthen the resolve of the anti-Trump crowd. I argue, however, that the theoretical analysis of satire that I have elaborated indicate that the chief rhetorical appeals of Baldwin's Trump are unlikely to achieve any of these effects and may even have had the opposite outcome. To wit, after analyzing every frame of Baldwin's performance as Trump across his first two years, I have identified three essential and recurring tropes: (1) Trump is *inhumanely* stupid, (2) Trump is out of touch with his base, and (3) Trump is doomed. The first trope is an appeal to all three potential audiences, suggesting that Trump's incompetence is existentially threatening, but it backfires by transmogrifying Trump from a low-IQ goon to a fully-fledged Clown. Here, I mean Clown in a specific theatrical sense – one who is too stupid to be held responsible for their actions, too stupid to hate, innocent by way of being criminally incompetent.[24] The second trope is more clearly targeted at Trump supporters who may incidentally tune into *SNL* for non-Trump material, and I will argue that it fails to generate traction because it cannot overcome Trump's own inoculation against rich/poor juxtaposition as a self-proclaimed billionaire cheeseburger fanatic. The third trope, that Trump is inevitably doomed, is most likely aimed at the anti-Trump crowd as a type of mental prophylactic against the mounting anxiety of Trump's reign. Believing that Trump will inevitably implode – especially as the result of bumbling crookery – may have been billed as ingratiation for the anti-Trump crowd, a sort of discount of an all-to-certain future where those who hate Trump could momentarily bask in his final destiny. I will show, however,

that investing in the belief of Trump's inevitable downfall when combined with belief in Trump's inhuman stupidity does not fill the anti-Trump auditor with determination. Instead, as each week passes without Trump's demise, the anti-Trump auditor is rhetorically constituted as Wile E. Coyote: a fanatic who doubles their efforts after failure, who could quit at any time but pathologically attaches to the fleeing object, and who does more harm to themselves than the Roadrunner (Trump) ever could. Beep-Beep, indeed.

Trump's Inhuman Incompetence

From the perspective of *Saturday Night Live*, Trump is incomprehensibly *stupid*. Stupid: slow of mind, obtuse; given to unintelligent decisions or acts; acting in an unintelligent or careless manner; lacking intelligence or reason. Also: dulled in feeling or sensation; lacking interest or point.[25] Baldwin depicts Trump as a man who is beyond the human realms of unintelligence. He is not merely mistaken, confused, or uninformed. We may expect for Baldwin's Trump to not understand the job of President nor the core concept of governance, or we may expect Trump to regularly get outmaneuvered by established politicians, and these criticisms should seem fair game given how much Trump himself played up his outsider status. Baldwin's Trump is not just a political outsider, though. He struggles to pronounce basic words and phrases, does not understand common idioms, completely lacks common knowledge, is barely literate, and regularly conflates television with reality. While any one sketch may not reveal the full picture of Baldwin-Trump's inhuman stupidity, as I spend the next pages unfolding his nexus of nimrodery, we can see the depths of ignorance implied by Baldwin's caricature.

Baldwin's Trump is shown to have absolutely no grasp of the role of a president, nor any grasp of policies (broadly or specific). Immediately upon entering office, Baldwin-Trump,

pleased with his cabinet picks, tells his advisors "now all I have to do is pick who will be president." In the same sketch, Trump plays with an expanding ball toy while fictional Putin and Rex Tillerson explain how they will run deals without Trump.[26] We do not see much of Baldwin-Trump in office nor acting as a president, but when we do it is only in terms of failure. In the third presidential debate, Baldwin-Trump explains that he has no policies, and the only notes he brought are the phrases "nasty woman" and "bad hombre".[27] He does not understand pardon power, offering to dress Paul Manafort as a turkey (though he admits “there's a good chance [he]'ll screw that up too).[28] Even on his own policies, Trump is shown completely out of his depths. He relies on Google and Siri to generate a plan for ISIS; when confronted with challenges to ejecting immigrants, scrapping Obamacare, or locking up Hillary – the key pillars of his campaign - he immediately gives in and abandons plans.[29] In a later sketch, Baldwin-Trump announce that he will replace Obama care with a "wonderful plan [he] just read about this week" called "the affordable care act."[30]

Interactions with other politicians do not fare better for Baldwin-Trump. On a call with the mayor of San Juan, Baldwin-Trump please for patience because “FEMA takes a few days, unless you join FEMA prime." That same phone call reveals that Trump not only does not know that Puerto Rico is a US territory, he barely understands how shipping works, warning: "Ma'am I don't know if you know this but you’re in an island in the water. The ocean water, big ocean, with fishies and bubbles and turtles that bite." Near the end of the call, Trump will admit that he “might have a degenerative brain disease."[31] Trump routinely struggles with geography; he cannot identify Afghanistan on a map and does not know if the blue on a map means water.[32] Finally, Trump is regularly outwitted by foreign officials. In a single phone call he is embarrassed by Australia, Mexico, and Germany to such a point that he threatens war. [33] After

hanging up he tries to bully Zimbabwe (“one of the little guys”) and gets verbally destroyed, implying that even Trump’s most formidable quality of “great negotiator” is as thin as his hairline.

Baldwin’s Trump is not just stupid with political concepts, he is stupid with words. Confronted about his intelligence, Baldwin-Trump proclaims, "I have one of the healthiest mentals: my mentals are so high."[34] A man who claims to be brilliant but utterly fails to show proof: "I took an IQ test and let me assure you, it came back positive. Most people don't even know what IQ stands for: in-quedible (incredible)."[35] Many times, Baldwin-Trump hits a wall with common English phrases: he struggles for several seconds to pronounce "I hereby declare,"[36] claims that "Sexual violence is an issue that's near and dear to my hand,”[37] and cannot understand basic sarcasm when directed at him. Donald Trump, a man who regularly sarcastically cuts down his enemies on Twitter and in high stakes debate, is here reconstituted as a man that cannot comprehend the nature of sarcasm at all! Baldwin-Trump is *contradictorily stupid*: he fearfully takes the idiom "If these walls could talk" literally but in the same skit does not understand Putin directly telling him that he is being bugged.[38]

Lest we be mistaken to believe that Trump is a clever man who simply struggles to communicate, Baldwin doubles down on Trump’s stupidity at a conceptual level. Baldwin’s Trump believes “All of the blacks live on one street in Chicago, all on one street. It’s called Hell Street.”[39] He laments that "Nobody knows this, but you can damage your eyes staring into an eclipse. Nobody knew this before, nobody."[40] Elsewhere he believes Caesar only made salads and even though he knows there are only 7 billion people on earth he still earnestly believes that 10 billion people watched his state of the union (the rest were illegals).[41] Baldwin’s Trump cannot tell that a smoldering corpse is not alive, suggesting he has no connection of shared

reality at all. In a rare moment of openness, Baldwin-Trump admits that he trusts Alex Jones purely because he is always taking off his shirt.[42]

One may not be surprised that Trump has such a loose understanding of reality given how often he conflates it with television. Here, *SNL* riffs on the idea that Trump is "a TV president,"[43] playing in the pun to suggest Trump is a president elected because of television, governs as if he on a television show, and often mistakes fictional characters for real people. Baldwin-Trump regularly privileges celebrity opinions. He believes that Billy Bush - a celebrity interviewer - is a significant figure worth showing off toward.[44] Later, reflecting on his greatest sins, Billy Bush weighs heavy on Trump's conscious.[45] In another skit, Trump wants to appoint Steve Harvey to help Ben Carson as Secretary of Housing.[46] Staring down waves of protests across the country, Baldwin-Trump seems to earnestly believe that people are marching in the streets because *The Apprentice* has declined in quality (and not, obviously, against his policies).[47] For Baldwin-Trump, appearing on television is the ultimate qualification. He celebrates having "Chachi" as a "cream of the crop" supporter[48] and wants Rick Perry as Secretary of Energy because he "saw him on *Dancing with the Stars.* This guy has so much energy."[49] In a hypothetical scenario in which Aliens invade the Earth, when told that everyone in California is dead, Baldwin-Trump horridly exclaims: "even Arnold?!"[50] Baldwin-Trump argues that Rudy Giuliani "has one of the sharpest legal minds since My Cousin Vinny" and is looking into hiring Kanye West as his new chief strategist.[51] This is a man who is equally concerned with Eminem as he is Rex Tillerson and Bob Corker,[52] who believes that Omarosa is more threatening than the biblical rapture.[53] Consistently jumbling television history with authentic history, in one moment Baldwin-Trump is reminiscing about "Martin Luther Kings *'I Dream of Genie'* speech,"[54] and in another wants us to remember "the documentary film *Home Alone 2: Lost in New York.*[55]

Baldwin-Trump's poor grasp of foreign policy is filled in with popular culture. Warning that we must increase domestic production, he proclaims that "They're all beating us: China, Japan, Wakanda. Wakanda is laughing at us. Right? They've got flying cars!"[56] In a single skit, Trump praises the great Baltic state of Stankonia, refers to the president of Latvia as "Balki from perfect strangers" (later "Borat") and notes that "these three [leaders] came all the way from Hufflepuff." In that same skit, Baldwin-Trump mistakes Mad Max Fury Road for a realistic account of migrant caravans and when confronted on this, he doubles down: "that's right, they are some Mad Max-icans."[57] Movies, music, and television are not the only sources of Trump's conflation, as he celebrates expelling "the infamous Chinese billionaire P.F. Chang"[58] in the name of international stability.

Fundamentally incapable of making the distinction, for Baldwin-Trump perception *is* reality. Having already won the election, Trump is glib about his prospects because Hillary "is still ahead in the polls."[59] He threatens insubordinates with tweets, never material consequence, certain that "Those tweets are so powerful, aren't they? You fear the tweets!"[60] Performance stands in for practice, all style and no substance. In one poignant example, Baldwin-Trump is confronted by a confused supporter who wants to know why he did not protect her healthcare. Trump sees no mistake: "I did everything I could. I made phone calls, I got into a truck and I posed for pictures, I went HONK HONK"[61] Honk honk? A little on the nose, eh?

Naturally, the Bouffon may be encouraged to disparage the target of scorn on the intellectual level – the King is never as clever as their position might imply - however, there is a limit to how stupid Trump can be if the audience is expected to hold him culpable for his actions. It is not just *that* he's stupid, it's *how* he's stupid that matters. Eventually, the Bouffon becomes the Clown, and our ire towards the president loses grounding. In the language of classic theatre,

the Clown is always innocent of wrongdoing because the Clown is "too stupid to live," and therefore does not understand how it violates decorum or expectation.[62] As Trump turns from Bouffon to Clown, the audience may lose their appetite for destruction, and may even start to empathize with Trump's condition, believing him to be "the unintended victim of his own stunt," instead of a cunning businessman robbing Americans blind.[63] In Kenneth Burke's terms: if Trump the *agent* is too stupid to *act* with any sense of *agency* nor *purpose* then the audience may struggle to accuse Trump of anything more than *motion.* Thus, we must be cautious in diminishing Trump if our aim is to generate fervor and exigency against his administration, for if the audience believes Trump is too stupid to exist, they very well might struggle to simultaneously believe he could do any real harm.

As Baldwin-Trump's first persona turns the dial from uninformed to pathologically incapable of thought we abandon the possibility of optimistic reform *and* the possibility of motivating hatred. In the first, because Trump is not simply mistaken, he is ontologically flawed, he cannot be redeemed through comic juxtaposition. There is no turning back, there is no ability to return Trump to the flock because his failure is intrinsic to his character and as such, he cannot learn from his past to transcend himself. As a strategic choice, we might forgive Baldwin for abandoning this line of persuasion – he does not want to redeem Trump, after all, he wants to kill him. Alas, the nature of Baldwin-Trump's stupidity does not necessarily support the imperative to remove him from office, either. If one was already motivated, then seeing Trump as a sort of stumbling baby being manipulated by outside forces should inspire affection and sympathy, not anger. If Trump does not have the agency to block our goals, then our ire must be directed elsewhere (Bannon? Giuliani? Putin?) and if he is so stupid that he can barely operate a desk chair, then we may struggle to believe he is deserving of fear. As he turns Trump from Bouffon

to Clown, Baldwin steadily erodes the culpability of Trump's office, evoking more childlike innocence than malicious intent.

Trump as Out of Touch with his Base

Insofar as *Saturday Night Live* attempts to depict Trump in a way that would be toxic to his base, they do so by characterizing him as an out-of-touch billionaire with no exposure to the difficulties of the working class. In theory, this could be a successful strategy as it attempts to dislodge the seemingly incredulous claim that Donald Trump has the general public's best interest at heart. In practice, this strategy is heavily complicated by the extant context of Trump's voting base – a group of people who may consider him eccentric, but also believe his non-traditional ethos is appealing because he is a rogue, he is unpolished, or he is otherwise non-presidential. To effectively display Trump as out-of-touch with the real interests of his base requires something more than turning-up his eccentric qualities to an 11 as that depiction does not sufficiently evidence that Trump is uniquely out of touch with the people who support him *to* the people who think he has their best interests at heart.

Trump's image is constructed on the back of a strategic balancing act between a man of the people and a man of transcendence. Trump's base simultaneously believes him to be a world-class billionaire and a person deeply concerned about the struggles of low-income whites. At least one of the ways this is achieved - by Trump - is consistent use of juxtaposition between wealth signifiers and populist signifiers. A golden toilet. Trump-branded $50 hamburgers. Eating KFC and McDonalds on a private jet. Using massive political power and one of the largest direct-communication platforms to ever exist just to engage in petty interpersonal disputes. The President of the United States of America is a prominent member of the *WWE Hall of Fame*.

If Trump's audience already perceives him in populist shades, and also already demonstrated a strong affinity for his character, there is likely to be a rather high threshold for a supporter to be unsettled by the depiction of extreme contradiction between Trump's pro-everyman claims and his pro-billionaire actions. The audience is already inoculated against that tension and may in fact celebrate Trump for maintaining it. Thus, if Trump does not know the name of a foreign dignitary, struggles to pronounce words, or misunderstands government functions, the pro-Trump audience can compartmentalize those barbs as proof of Trump's everyman status. Moreover, Trump's audience may grow fonder of him after making the same types of flubs they would make because they have positive relational identification, thereby coding his mistakes as humanizing and honest. Alternatively, if Trump does not know the price of milk, spends millions on frivolities, or is more interested in golfing than working, those traits might be excused as the typical behavior of a successful billionaire businessman. The first association colors the judgement of the second: Trump does billionaire things, sure, but since he is still "one of us", his incongruous behavior is palatable because the discerning auditor imagines they would act the same way were they to achieve such success.

One way Trump is depicted as out of touch with his base is through the casual disregard and profaning of sacred conservative icons. In terms of policy, Baldwin-Trump has no plan for ISIS, does not know how much the wall costs, and quickly forgets his own campaign promises.[64] Gun rights are treated flippantly: "Maybe we just take everyone's guns away? Nobody is allowed to have a gun, even the whites. Look at that, both sides hate it. I don't care."[65] From Baldwin's perspective, Trump has no regard for institutions political nor religious. He feeds Paul Ryan dog food while claiming he has the Republicans "right in [his] hand."[66] He displays ignorance of and disrespect toward Christianity: "Folks, we're gonna start saying Merry Christmas again. And you

cannot disrespect our lord and savior, Santa Claus, like that.[67] In a poignant barb targeted toward the Pro-Israel Pro-Trump crowd, Baldwin-Trump insists on making Holocaust Remembrance Day about his ego, reminding us that “over six million…people were at [his] inauguration.”[68] He is literally incapable of saying the phrase "good of the country," stumbling like Porky Pig as he struggles to get the words out. [69]

Ego is often at work in Baldwin-Trump’s garish displays, depicting a President more concerned with his image and bottom-line than the well-being of his constituents. Immediately after election, Baldwin’s Trump displays his magnanimity by explaining that he “had an obligation to thank all my supporters…by standing in front of them while they cheered for me."[70] Pathologically incapable of caring about anyone else, Baldwin-Trump centralizes a counter-protester’s death by noting that "There was a tragic victim that came out of Charlottesville: me."[71] During a time of fictionalized crisis, the president is more concerned with the popular vote and his inflated hotel valuations than massive civilian casualties: Zorblat 9 is destroying entire states and Trump reassures us that "we don't know that they are from Zorblat 9, I've actually heard that Zorblat 9 is very beautiful, very fantastic," before an onlooker wonders aloud if Trump has ties to the invading force.[72] In one sketch, Baldwin-Trump is exhausted with his façade, and responds to a cutting question with the admission that his entire presidency is about himself:

> Reporter: "Mr. President, are you worried that your tariffs are ruining our economy and your immigration policy has destroyed America’s standing in the world?
>
> Trump: No, I'm not. I’m not worried at all because here’s the thing that no one else is saying and I’m the only one who's willing to actually say this ok? I. Don't. Care. About America. Ok? This whole presidency is a 4-year cash grab and admitting that will

> probably get me 4 more years, but I do not care. About. Any. Of. You. Ok? Does that pretty much answer all of your questions?[73]

Baldwin-Trump's response is met with hearty laughter from an audience typically made up of wealthy New Yorkers. How might the pro-Trump base take the line?

Baldwin-Trump's out-and-out admission that he does not care about America nor anyone but himself is a claim that will not be heard by Trump supporters from the mouth of Alec Baldwin. Here, a moment of Anti-Clarity that works against the author. Baldwin consistently displays disdain for Trump and his supporters, and I would wager Trump-supporting viewers picked up on that quickly. For Baldwin to, in essence, break character and transcend the first persona to make a pseudo-direct appeal to the pro-Trump audience is unlikely to succeed because Baldwin himself has no cache with the pro-Trump audience. The double negative backfires: Baldwin tells them that he hates them, so if he tells them it is in their best interest to disregard Trump, their affiliative links ensure reinvestment in Trump. Perhaps it is even the case that Baldwin's open declaration that Trump is running a 4-year cash grab inoculates the pro-Trump crowd further against future criticism that Trump is running a poorly concealed Ponzi scheme: after all, that's just an *SNL* talking point. There is some slippage in my argument here where the condition of failure is not unique to Baldwin – the whole Fake News controversy shows that outlets critical of Trump are regularly dismissed by Trump supporters, so perhaps we cannot blame anything specific about Baldwin's performance on the failure of this appeal. However, we can say that given the evidence on how Trump supporters reject out-and-out criticism of Trump, for Baldwin to break the fourth wall is much more likely to risk alienating his chance at reaching the pro-Trump crowd than it is to break through their reflexive defenses.

An alternative way of framing the relationship between Trump and his supporters is achieved in the sketch “Trump’s People” by centering Trump supporters from Kentucky as the sketch protagonist. This shift enables the writers to maximize empathy with the people hurt most by Trump, offer a realistic appeal to their wellbeing, and still depict Trump in Bouffonic tones. [74] Throughout the sketch, Trump doesn't really listen to what supporters want, ignoring their pleas for help and generally misunderstanding the issues. He hears concern about "after school program" and shouts "its cut" or hears "minimum wage" and insists it will be abolished. Another citizen is concerned that the closest federal rehab center is an hour away. Trump promises to get rid of the rehab program so he doesn't have to drive far anymore. An homage to draining the swamp, Baldwin-Trump’s response to every problem is removal: “Your house? Junked!” “Your health care? All of it, gone.” Showing lip service to cyclical dispossession, Baldwin-Trump blusters that "I know how hard it is out there for you. Things have changed so much since I was growing up. For example, a lot of poverty is white now." Yet another supporter is concerned about job security, having just been laid off from a coal mining plant, only to be assured "I'm going to do everything I can to make sure you people work in coal for the rest of your lives. And your kids will work in coal, and your grandkids, and it’s going to be incredible." Gently, the President is admonished that “all we want are good jobs, it doesn’t have to be coal”. Baldwin-Trump breaks the bad news:

> Sorry Hombre, it's all coal. In Trump's America men work in two places: coal mines and Goldman Sachs. Therefore, I'm cutting all job killing regulations. I’m proud to announce that as of today, your coal mines will have absolutely no regulations. None. It’s a free for all.

As Trump barrels on, actively ignoring the plight of his constituents, they appear confused and uncertain. The more he explains policy vision, the less certain they appear in their conviction. Baldwin-Trump asks the laid off coal miner "Did I make you feel better now?" and he replies "I'm not sure…but I voted for you, and you're my president." At the end of every interaction, no matter how perplexed, the supporters offer the same confirmation: "I voted for you, and you're my president!" Baldwin-Trump relishes in his supporter's ignorance, likening them to someone who "found a finger in your chili, but you still eat the chili because of how much you told everyone you love the chili. It's tremendous." As Trump leaves for his helicopter, he makes a final appeal to the audience: "Remember, I'm one of you!"

"Trump's People" reveals possible roads to persuasion as much as it reveals the pitfalls of the path chosen. In other sketches, Trump supporters are primarily instrumentalized, if they are present at all. Contrasting the humanity of a confused unemployed man struggling to reconcile his own cognitive dissonance with the cartoonish depiction of Trump supporters in later sketches shows the extent to which Baldwin abandons Trump supporters as a potential audience. For example, in one of his last performances as Trump, Baldwin is ensconced by conspiracy theorists, racists, and drunk illiterates – not so much an empathetic depiction of Trump's flock as an extension of the Bouffonic performance.[75] *SNL* cannot make both choices, to empathize with Trump supporters as mistaken but well-intentioned *folks* as well as depict them as untethered morons who got the president they deserved. The first depiction is potentially effective if the aim is to weaken the affinity of Trump's base because it has the capacity to generate a resonant ethos for *SNL* that suggests the program (and perhaps even Baldwin) care enough about Trump's base to not discard them as out-and-out deplorables. Enfolding the Trump supporter into the Bouffonic performance *could* in theory work by holding the carnival mirror and insisting the

Trump supporter take a look at how they are perceived. One might imagine such an extension to be particularly effective if the ravenous anti-Trumper is similarly enfolded into the Bouffon performance, such that *SNL* takes aim at political zealotry more broadly. Alas, to change Baldwin's performance in these ways would be directly at odds with the goal of appealing to the Anti-Trump base. Placating the appetite of the anti-Trump audience does not afford much room on the plate for sympathy toward the Trump supporter.

Baldwin's performance is not a true Bouffon because Baldwin himself does not occupy a dispossessed social location: he is not an outcast; he is a well-know Democrat and established Hollywood Elite. In the traditional Bouffon, the performer is afforded freedom to criticize all in attendance by virtue of their dispossessed status. The Bouffon cannot "punch down" because the Bouffon occupies the bottom of the social ladder. Alec Baldwin is not at the bottom of the social ladder, in fact occupying a rather elite status in terms of monetary value and social notoriety. Ironically, Baldwin's own background may cause the pro-Trump crowd to reject Baldwin's performance as out-of-touch! The Trump supporter knows that what they see in Baldwin's Bouffonic mirror is not *their own* twisted reflection; what they see is *Baldwin's* depiction. The persistence of Baldwin as Baldwin complicates Baldwin as Trump at the level of reception and announces his motivation. Insofar as Baldwin is motivated to appeal to his in-group and satiate the desires of the Anti-Trump crowd, his performance is limited in its ability to simultaneously appease the pro-Trump group. Sympathetic depictions of the Trump supporter are in tension with the appetite of the Anti-Trump crowd, and as such Baldwin makes a choice to denigrate Trump's base to maximize his appeal to Trump's enemies.

Trump is Doomed (This Time for Real)

Trump is doomed! Making up nearly half of Baldwin's appearances, no less than 13 different events are promised to be the end of Trump in just the 2017 to 2018 seasons of *Saturday Night Live*: Hillary Clinton's candidacy, the Russian Pee-Pee Tape, the Muslim Ban, bungling North Korea, firing James Comey, the kneeling controversy, Paul Manafort's house arrest, the Michael Flynn investigation, Jared Kushner's meeting with a Russian envoy, Jeff Sessions squealing to the Justice Department, bribing Stormy Daniels, Michael Cohen's arrest for lying about bribing Stormy Daniels, and finally, the Mueller Report. Every single controversy is presented as the final nail in the coffin, the silver bullet that will put down this beast. As such, every controversy is presented with the same gravitas, the same significance. Magnetizing the beats of reality around an abstract array of floating Trump signifiers, we chant: This time, for sure! This time, for sure! An endless soup of gaffes and goofs, each one foretold by prophecy to strike the heart, each one failing. I want to get off Mr. Bones' Wild Ride, but *this train has no brakes*.[76]

From the jump - the literal moment that Trump is introduced in the 2016 presidential race - the tonal framing of his candidacy is that he is doomed to failure. The first sketch before Baldwin takes over as Trump ends with the admission that Trump has no faith in his victory: "You're never going to be president, Donald!" "Yeah, no kidding. None of us are, genius."[77] In Baldwin's premiere as Trump, the writing clearly attempts to build toward a concluding laugh line in which Hillary Clinton (played by Kate McKinnon) smugly declares "I think I'm gonna be president!"[78] Here, in that first concluding line, the discerning comedic eye can see how the writing was on the wall: no one laughed. From an audience stocked with elite New Yorkers, we hear much in the way of cheers and applause, but no laughter. I suggest there is no laughter

because the line is not *funny*. Funny typically requires some aspect of surprise, of violating expectation. For Hillary to assert her inevitable victory, in that moment, was not funny because it was precisely what was expected. This theme continues in both following debate sketches: "Can we say this yet? -Probably fine- President Hillary Clinton." A more extended line delivered by Hillary: “Donald Trump and I disagree on almost everything, but I do like how generous he is. Just last Friday he handed me this election."[79] Functionally the entire premise of the third debate sketch is that the debate is meaningless since Hillary’s victory is so certain. The joke - if there is one - is that Hillary is overconfident. But the joke fails because the tone of the sketch implies that her victory is inevitable and therefore her confidence is apt. Trump is told “you’re probably going to lose,” only to quickly reply “correct.”[80] If even Trump believes he is going to lose, then there is little to solace to be found imagining his demise.

After beating Hillary Clinton in the general election, the cause of Trump’s downfall decidedly shifts, with few exceptions, from outside forces to suggest Trump will be his own undoing. Generally, the comedic tune follows these beats: Trump has done something corrupt, the evidence of that corruption will be sufficient to get him out of office or otherwise severely wound him, and now Trump must attempt some madcap effort to save face. Very importantly, the implication is always that Trump’s madcap effort is destined to fail, usually because Trump is too stupid to escape that week’s dilemma.

Early January of 2017 brings the Russian Pee-Pee tape, an alleged recording of Donald Trump engaged in perverse sexual acts with prostitutes in a Russian hotel. To distract from the tape, Baldwin’s Trump declares war on China, Canada, and Meryl Streep.[81] The crisis is resolved through time – the tape never really existed and was eventually forgotten. Or perhaps instead of being forgotten, we should say the tape is pushed out of the news cycle because early February

brings the Muslim Ban. After district judges strike down Trump's attempt to ban immigration from predominately Muslim countries, Baldwin-Trump appears on the People's Court to impotently demand his way. [82] This moment is unique in how it depicts Trump's downfall compared to the controversies that follow because Trump does not risk his impeachment. Rather, Baldwin-Trump's performance in the People's Court implies that institutional checks will shut down his agenda. The effect is a drastic reduction in feelings of exigency: Trump is always already destined to fail because his cartoonish incompetence gets walled by upright bureaucrats. Hope in the balance of institutions is short lived, as mid-April brings about the North Korea controversy, where Trump is criticized for bungling attempts at de-nuclearizing the East Asian dictatorship.[83] To date, I'm still not sure where we settled on that one, but nothing exploded and Trump was not impeached, so whatever hope *SNL* was trying to inspire in *this* being the time, were inevitably dashed. That's three times now. "Fool me, you can't get fooled again."

Come May of 2017, Trump is in hot water for firing FBI director James Comey (likely because Comey was investigating Trump's ties to Russia). In a mock interview, Lester Holt briefly entertains the idea that Trump has been "got" after admitting to obstruction of justice. [84]

> Holt: Back to James Comey. Your staff has been insisting all week that you did not fire him because of his Russian investigation
> Trump: No, I did.
> Holt: wait what?
> Trump: I fired him because of Russia. I thought, 'he's investigating Russia, I don't like that, I should fire him."
> Holt: And you're just admitting that?
> Trump: Uh-huh
> Holt: But that's obstruction of justice.
> Trump: Sure, ok
> Holt: Wait so…did I get him, is this all over?

Lester Holt is informed via earpiece that no, he “didn’t get him,” and that “nothing matters, absolutely nothing matters anymore.” The joke here is that while the real Trump would never openly admit his motivation, even if he did it seems like there would be no effect. Notice that this gesture is precisely the type of meta-ironic detachment-disenchantment that David Foster Wallace warned us about.[85] *SNL* gets to simultaneously moralize about Trump on the regular, suggest that his doom is inevitable, but also openly say "nothing will happen.” While the fictional Lester Holt comically dismisses Comey’s firing as an impeachable offense, the sentiment is not shared universally across the scene. A week later, the Trump-Comey saga is predicted to have reached its crescendo, and Trump’s demise seems certain. So much so, that in lieu of the traditional sketch, *SNL* opens with Baldwin’s Trump playing Hallelujah on piano. [86] As the camera pans across the bit players in Trump’s cabinet, the sentiment of the scene clearly communicates a moment of catharsis, calling back to Kate McKinnon’s somber performance of the same song, on the same piano, after Hillary Clinton lost the 2016 election. Of course, early reports of Trump’s death are greatly exaggerated.

The next slate of controversies all center around someone close to Trump threatening his status. In November, Paul Manafort is placed on house arrest and we are led to believe he is certain to flip on Trump. Baldwin-Trump visits his home, desperately pleading with him to remain silent (though the glint in Manafort’s eye suggests he has other plans).[87] No time for boring old Paul Manafort, the next month Michael Flynn takes over as the impending threat to Trump’s presidency after Flynn lied under oath about interactions with a Russian ambassador. This time, Trump is definitely going down! We’ve got a turncoat *and* a tie to Russia! *SNL* immortalizes the moment in a Scrooged-style telling of the ghosts of Trump’s future wherein a giddy Hillary Clinton discloses that she feels "sexual gratification at the sight of your slow

demise."[88] Ultimately, Flynn would be pardoned, and Trump would continue to not be removed from office. Two weeks later, it seemed that Jared Kushner might be the key to Trump's undoing, as we find him packing a Go-Bag because he fears going to jail for unscrupulous dealings with a Russian envoy.[89] After Kushner, we are instructed to invest our hope in Jeff Sessions, who proudly explains that he just had lunch with the Justice Department and Trump's "name popped up more than a weasel in a pumpkin patch."[90] A few weeks later marks the beginning of the Stormy Daniel's controversy in which Trump is accused of violating federal campaign finance laws by having his lawyer, Michael Cohen, pay Daniels to not disclose an affair. Cohen is depicted as shaky, nervous, and certainly going to jail.[91] In multiple appearances, Cohen is pressured to flip and testify against Trump, and the prevailing sentiment is that he is likely to do so out of weakness and cowardice.

SNL concludes its second season run of Baldwin's Trump with the looming threat of Robert Mueller and the brand new, top of the line, ACME Mueller Report. Set in a diner, the sketch framed in homage to the final episode of *The Sopranos,* wherein the series main character Tony Soprano is executed at dinner with his family. Michael Cohen, Rudy Giuliani, and Trump's sons accompany him at the diner, frantically lobbing ideas for how they can escape Mueller. Giuliani offers "a loophole where they can't legally subpoena you. You ever heard of faking your own death?"[92] The scene ends with Mueller entering the diner and staring down Trump, implying that Trump is in his sights, and will soon be brought to justice. (Narrator: He would not.)

With every controversy, *SNL* depicts Trump and his administration on the verge of collapse. Time and again, the audience is coached to invest their hope in a new McGuffin, a new smoking gun that will be the key to Trump's undoing. Problematically, each time Trump escapes harm, there is no sign of accumulation – that is, Baldwin's Trump remains exactly as inept and

exactly as dangerous, unchanged for the worse or better. As Trump continues to jump the General Lee over the Constitution, we might expect that Baldwin's performance to comment on Trump's Teflon nature. Instead, there is comically little in the way of reflection, almost no sign that Baldwin or the *SNL* writers recognize the "crying wolf" nature of their proclamations. Baldwin's Trump encounters each dilemma anew, with no context or connection to his previous schemes. Baldwin's Trump remains the same, and so too does the audience relationship, coached to find each roadblock equally plausible as a victory condition. Trump, for his part, never wavers from being entirely clueless to how he manages to consistently escape capture.

Framing Donald Trump as a brainless cretin while also framing his opposition as highly intelligent, highly capable, and strongly equipped, leaves only one outcome for the anti-Trump audience as Trump consistently and inexplicably manages to dodge rockets and anvils: the audience is rhetorically constituted as Wile E. Coyote. Or, to put it in terms of the Second Persona: the audience is coached to become Wile E. Coyote. To understand this claim, we may need a quick refresher on the *rules* of Roadrunner cartoons:

> Rule 1: The Road Runner cannot harm the Coyote except by going "Beep-Beep!"
> Rule 2: No outside force can harm the Coyote – only his own ineptitude or the failure of the ACME products.
> Rule 3: The Coyote could stop anytime – if he were not a fanatic. (Repeat: 'A fanatic is one who redoubles his efforts when he has forgotten his aim.' -George Santayana)
> Rule 4: No dialogue ever, except "Beep-Beep!"
> Rule 5: The Road Runner must stay on the road – otherwise, logically, he would not be called a Road Runner.
> Rule 6: All action must be confined to the natural environment of the two characters – the southwest American desert.
> Rule 7: all materials, tools, weapons, or mechanical conveniences must be obtained from the ACME corporation.

Rule 8: whenever possible, make gravity the Coyote's greatest enemy.

Rule 9: The Coyote is always more humiliated than harmed by his failures.

A typical Road Runner cartoon follows these beats: we open with the Road Runner easily outrunning the Coyote on foot (for the Coyote cannot catch the Road Runner using only his natural abilities). Dejected, the Coyote seeks and obtains some elaborate means of ensnaring the Road Runner or boosting his own speed (cages, anvil drops, rocket boots). This new strategy backfires – either the technology blows up or the Road Runner escapes the trap – and the Coyote is left baffled that the Road Runner has eluded him yet again. Often it is the case that Coyote's new weapon backfires in ways that exceed any reasonable expectation: paint that magically makes a tunnel and summons a truck to lay the Coyote flat, for example.

Baldwin's depiction of Trump invites the audience to *become* Wile E. Coyote. Trump could not be overtaken by normal political means (voting), so the audience will need some other weapon to defeat him. This is made out to be a relatively easy task on the surface as Trump should be considered stupid and ineffectual. So, the audience is made to psychically invest hope in their new ACME product: an obstruction of justice claim, a pee-pee tape, a rogue Russian envoy, the Mueller report. *The Coyote could stop at any time.* Afterall, because Trump is so foolish, we should not need much to ensnare him, so whatever hesitation the audience may feel is glossed over by a persuasive but terministic screen that narratively constructs Trump's defeat as the only plausible outcome. Inevitably, when Trump dodges the case, denies the tape, or is impeached without being removed from office, there is no textually endogenous explanation for *how* Trump could escape. The audience is left baffled. *The Coyote could stop at any time.*

No outside force can harm the audience, only their own hubris. A major claim to Trump's incompetence is his inability to pass legislation or otherwise leave lasting change (a joke made no less than four times through Baldwin's run is that his list of accomplishments amounts to a

tax bill and a few judges). Now, you and I may disagree and believe that Trump is indeed quite dangerous, but that is not how he is depicted in the text: here, he is structurally incapable of *doing* much of anything. Whatever harm Trump may cause the audience is shaded in discursive terms: it is his demeanor, his disrespect, his tweets that threaten democratic ways of life. Trump can only harm the audience by saying Beep Beep. *The Coyote could stop at any time.* From a performance standpoint, the players in *SNL*'s depiction of Trump certainly *speak* but whether we would consider that *dialogue* depends on one's feelings towards epistemic echo chambers. Notice that the liberal audience is never woven into the Bouffonic performance the way Trump's supporters are – the audience at home, salivating over Trump's demise, are left to their own devices, a significant omission. Absent any gesture towards self-reflection, the audience is coached to maintain their hunt, redoubling faith in the next artificial concoction: this time for sure!

The cruel optimism of Baldwin's Trump is potentially dangerous, but likely not existential. The extent of my implication does not reach much further than the metaphor: I do very much mean that the worst thing to come out of Baldwin's Trump impression is the rhetorical constitution of an audience as Wile E. Coyote. Donald Trump was a cartoon president and his depiction on *Saturday Night Live* was a live-action cartoon, so it seems fitting to frame the consequence of Baldwin's performance in cartoon terms. It is no fun to be the Coyote, to be continually embarrassed as your latest scheme turns to ashes. Can you imagine the family dinners week after week, promising Trump is finally going down only to show back up to Uncle Steve's and have to live down being so wrong so frequently? Wile E. Coyote will never stop chasing the Road Runner long enough to try and befriend it, and so he lives a lonesome life at that. A final ironic observation: Wile E. Coyote is the protagonist of the show, but his name does

not appear in the title card – his existence is dependent on the continued pursuit of the enemy, without whom there would be no more show. The Coyote exists only to chase the Road Runner. One may worry about the fervent Anti-Trumper, and the risk that they might invest themselves so wholly in Trump's demise that they lose sight of broader commitments, identities slowly reshaping around Trump's rhythm.

Some might argue that *SNL* has an obligation to make politics apolitical to foster a spirit of healing,[93] but even if one disagrees with that imperative, it seems the case that Baldwin's Trump actively made political divides worse by coaching the anti-Trump audience to double down on their convictions in potentially self-defeating and self-destructive ways. Even if one only tasked *SNL* with appealing to the Anti-Trump demographic, I have argued here that the choice of appeals does not result in psychic fulfillment nor offer a palliative to Trump-induced anxiety. My analysis suggests that the Anti-Trump demographic is made worse off when coached to reinvigorate losing strategies, maximize disdain for the Other, and believe in the cruel optimism of Trump's inevitable downfall (especially when that downfall is not the result of continuous hard work by the opposition). Lest I appear overly apocalyptic, it is likely that the magnitudes of these vectors of influence are likely small. Nonetheless, the direction of influence is quite troubling, as Baldwin's Trump is unlikely to change the Anti-Trumper's strategies, encourage the consideration of alternative lines of persuasion, nor rethink friend/enemy divides

Building a Better Bouffon

There was much potential for a Bouffonic performance of Donald Trump to make headway with Trump supporters, the politically apathetic, and the anti-Trump crowd. Unfortunately, Baldwin's performance falls short for each. By comically overstating Trump's intellectual incapability, Baldwin dampens depictions of Trump as a threat to democracy.

Although there is some attempt to depict Trump negatively in ways that would resonate with his supporters, the tonal and affiliative constraints of Baldwin's performance largely fail to communicate an ethos necessary to reach that audience. Finally, an argument could be made that Baldwin's Trump functions as a kind of psychic medicine for anti-Trump audiences who may find delight and joy in seeing Trump mocked to such a degree. However, by consistently depicting Trump's downfall as the inevitable result of his own incompetence, the audience is discouraged from looking inward to explain how Trump came to power in the first place. Combining Trump's inhuman stupidity with his consistent ability to escape harm leaves the anti-Trump audience baffled, absent explanation for how he keeps getting away with blatant corruption. The faithful anti-Trump audience is led astray, redoubling their efforts with no concern for changing tactics.

We could imagine a slightly different Bouffonic performance that would maintain a claim to Trump's intellectual paucity but admit more frankly to his genius as a grifter. Baldwin's Trump could explain his continued success through the corruption of institutions broadly, directing the Bouffonic performance at the confluence of economic and political entities that shield Trump. Perhaps Trump really is a buffoon who can barely drink a glass of water let alone orchestrate a 1.9-billion-dollar cash grab[94] of America's coffers, but if that is the case then he is being enabled by those very same institutions supposedly threatened by Trump's presidency (and one must begin to imagine exactly how foolish this Trump fellow really is). From time-to-time *SNL* depicted other Republicans, for example, though typically they were framed in the same bumbling and incompetent fashion as Trump. Alas, the Republican party is but one of many elements currently at work in the American political system to maintain concentration of power in the hands of an elite few. One may recall a veritable cornucopia of tweets by democrat

politicians proclaiming, "somebody should do something!"[95] A slightly more strategic Trump, still vile and self-interested but also a capable manipulator, could have commented on these institutions, making for a robust critique of concentrated executive power and the weakness of norms to check presidents. Such a performance might have also fared better with the politically apathetic by turning their attention to the lower-level politicians and bureaucrats that structurally enable something like the Trump presidency. Depicting Trump as a cunning grifter may also have helped break through the pro-Trump crowd's vision of a stalwart if gaffe-prone defender of the people.

Alternatively, or perhaps in tandem, we could imagine a more self-reflexive and extended Bouffon performance in which the anti-Trump audience is depicted as a bloodthirsty mob taking up arms at Trump's every typo, reflecting at the audience a grotesque mirror image of their hunger for vengeance (and the gullibility with which they buy into every assassination attempt). Such a depiction would tropologically widen the thrust of Baldwin's critique to say "if you can't beat this guy, what does that make you?" Such a performance might inspire the anti-Trump audience to loosen their conviction that all he touches must be purged, perhaps even encouraging shared commonality between Trump's supporters and *SNL*'s target audience. Instead, the liberal audience is conspicuously maintained in the third persona – a group purposefully ignored. By failing to turn criticism's arrow to the anti-Trump crowd, Baldwin inadvertently leads that audience astray, coaching them not to empowerment but to an audacious and self-defeating externalization. It is never the Coyote's fault he cannot catch the Road Runner, at least not from his perspective. For were the Coyote to ever pause his efforts and reconsider his aim, he would not be a fanatic. *The Coyote could stop at any time.*

CHAPTER FIVE

CURTAIN CALL

Insofar as this dissertation can be boiled down to a single catchphrase, it is this: *you gotta laugh!* This maxim is a motivation as much as a tactic as much as a strategy. Rhetorical criticism has a rich history of celebrating comedy as a means of breaking down barriers between people, and as a means of dwarfing the severity of our all-too-human limitations and failures. To laugh together is to live together – to share a hearty guffaw with someone else is an act of affiliation building that emphasizes consubstantiality and solidifies common ground. When the laughter ends, things start to get tense, and the fun of intellectual curiosity and hearty debate starts to turn sour, risking public discourse marred by vicious condemnation and a race towards perfection. So yes, we *gotta* laugh, but it is also the case that laughter is rarely neutral, and the differences in how we elicit laughter matter greatly. I have made the case in this dissertation that we are at our best when we are laughing *with* others and laughing *at* ourselves, and I have further argued that pessimistic satire has the potential to be a rich and timely source of the very type of laughter we need the most.

In this dissertation I have attempted to make the case for pessimistic satire as a means of healing, and a rather timely means of healing at that. The first of my contributions to ongoing academic discussion of satire is the recovery of pessimism as a route towards recovery. I have made the case that in pessimism, we may cut and excise, but we excise to create space for healing. In pessimistic satire, we wound ourselves as much as we wound the other, and all the while we are prone to resist the temptation of a miracle cure. I have introduced the term *Anti-*

Clarity to explain *how* pessimistic satire can complicate the present without pushing the audience from one polemic to another. *Anti-Clarity* is a rhetorical technique in which a text is intentionally complicated in contradictory or paradoxical ways such that the text might resist attempts at locating "true meaning" within a morass of style and substance, ultimately aiming to clear away clarity and reveal the murky interior of our seemingly crystalline assumptions. I have argued in chapter three that *Million Dollar Extreme* made great use of *Anti-Clarity* through structure negation, pushing the audience away from tropes in a way that also complicated the adoption of their inverse. If it is the case that pessimistic satire is often concomitant with *Anti-Clarity*, it is because *Anti-Clarity* aids in the complication of the present but cannot meaningfully contribute to political directive. I have identified that *Anti-Clarity* occurs not just in tensions between premises but also between logos and pathos, between ideology and emotion.

Tracking laughter in *MDE and Saturday Night Live,* I have shown how the possible tensions between ideology and emotion can be both intentional and productive such that the audience can led to affiliate with both ideas and persons they might otherwise fine suspect (or, in turn, affiliate against ideas and persons found comfortable). I have demonstrated with *MDE* how pessimistic satire can hit the right theoretical notes, but still fail to reach either its intended audience or actual audience. I have demonstrated with Baldwin's Trump that pessimistic satire can misfire by not being pessimistic *enough*, showing how false hope can turn to cruel optimism. From a theoretical perspective, pessimistic satire offers a rather hearty response to much of what ails us, yet the case studies in this dissertation are hardly shining examples of the best that pessimistic satire can do. In their respective chapters I have tried to argue that both *MDE* and *SNL* attempted to balance the rhetorical constraints of our political-cultural milieu with both the relatively timeless rules of comedy and the exigence of Trump's America. Indeed, while both

may have been well-intentioned (at least from the perspective of their creative drivers), neither were particularly successful in moving their audiences at the time.

Despite the limitations and shortcomings of my objects of study, I still retain full belief that comedy is more important now than we might give it credit for. As I argued in chapter three, *MDE* might have been the most successful satiric program of the last century if Hillary Clinton won the presidency, and thus there was a healthier demand among leftists for a challenging (but still entertaining) critique from a non-leftist perspective. As a sign of good faith, I am willing to admit that *SNL* has never been good satire. Regardless, the point here is that the failure of a particular script in a specific timeframe does not necessarily mean that the attendant theoretical framework of pessimistic satire is poppycock. This chapter ends with a brief discussion of the limits of my study, followed by a brief discussion of what future research in this arena might entail. Between then and now, however, I will make the case that we should not only resist calls to abandon comedy, but also that re-injecting comedy into the public sphere is a crucial precondition to effectively addressing the material risks of the 21st century.

As described briefly in the first chapter, we occupy a point in history where the intellectual mood is rather hostile to comedy. We are told often that "this is no laughing matter" by those who see a binary between comedy and more serious business. I see comments like this repeated commonly on social media, discussion forums, and other outlets for academic-political discourse. Typically espoused by loosely affiliated activist-academics who insist on the bleakness of our current world order and see laughter as a violent sort of dissent against collective understanding of global misery (where misery is found in sexism, racism, armed insurrection at the U.S. Capitol, Woody Allen, and so on). Perhaps we can empathize with their motivation – they see comedy as an escape or deflection, as a tool to ignore suffering rather than

engage in corrective action. It is common to hear lamentation by my friends and colleagues that “satire is dead” or “Trump killed satire.” Often, the warrant behind such claims is a bleak description of our lifeworld, and the attendant assumption that, in times of crisis, existential risk, and tribalism, laughter is a luxury many believe we cannot afford. I respectfully disagree.

I have argued in this dissertation that there is quite a lot of potential for laughter when things are tense. Laughter is, after all, the very best medicine. Laughter builds affiliation, lessens inclinations towards animosity, and produces good endorphins. I hypothesized in chapter one that pessimistic satire *may* lend unique qualities to argument that can sidestep natural defenses against confrontation. Chiefly, this effect would be possible because humor contains an equalizing agent - if we laugh together, we are affiliated together - and because the lack of clear alternative in pessimistic satire might enable critique without tribalist comparison (i.e., critique of the thing itself without resorting to "whataboutism"). As identified in chapter one, several scholars who have come before me argued a compelling case that satire often operates by decentering and deconstructing taken-for-granted truths without re-centering alternatives. I have gone a step further in arguing that pessimistic satire is particularly well suited to the current political milieu because the *metagame* of suasive discourse is dominated by charged acidity: Attack! Pessimistic satire offers unique potential in this space because it can be caustic and aggressive and otherwise resonate strongly with the affective desire of polemicized actors to seek victory against the other without fueling the ontic drive to destroy the enemy. Pessimistic satire can fulfill our lust for destruction rhetorically without directing an audience towards palliative reforms nor particularized solutions to systematized problems. At the height of its power, pessimistic satire can even encourage the cultivation of rage, anger, and hatred only to force the

audience to turn their rage upon themselves, potentially offering a powerful tool of self-evaluation.

Given the whole wide world of persuasive tactics, many discursive forms have the potential to sway the other side, to expand the reach of our message, to shift the focus of debate, and so on, but we may be reaching a limit to how effective those types of speech can be when they actively excise comedy as a mode of interaction. The inclusion of comedy does not automatically improve the suasive potential of a discourse, but the systematic evacuation of comedy from intellectual engagement may take us down a rather dangerous path. Once we have dismissed comedy as a social-intellectual-political lubricant, the nature of our discourse inevitably becomes less and less welcoming, and we view our role in the world as increasingly vital. We are risking the power of association not only between friend and perceived enemy, but also between like-minded individuals who are more and more inclined to escalate petty violations of decorum or tact as capital offenses. I worry that when I identify a schism amongst world visions that said schism is automatically associated with a rather drab political bifurcation of liberals and conservatives. While it is the case that Democrats and Republicans functionally occupy different epistemic worlds, members of political parties hardly constitute a monolith and are themselves replete with tensions, schisms, and contradictions. Instead, when I discuss the nature of tribalism in the status quo I am speaking of the fault lines in our closest circles, with a keen eye on how those fault lines extend throughout and across a social-political milieu.

The balkanization of information is one of the greatest threats to our collective future – we are drifting down a river of atomization and that process is accelerated in conditions hostile to comedy. The most persuasive argument to me against succession of the American South was that if the South succeeded from the Union then there would have been nothing to stop the South

from splitting again and again. I worry, sometimes, that the natural inclination towards separation and hierarchy threatens collectivity in ways the *Inteligencia* largely underestimates. "Very well, you are a Marxist, but are you a post-third-intersectional-anarcho-marxist? If not, you can't come to my tea party." If all the Marxists occupy only their own tiny fragmented and self-imposed exile islands, the possibility of collective revolution depends entirely on *everyone else* changing their tune and swimming to a single outpost. In the meantime, our groups have seemingly given up on trying to convince anyone that their island is more hospitable or welcoming, instead seemingly content to bash other islands for being imperfect. Whatever forces motivate us towards this process of isolation, cutting, and exile, those forces are as energized by the condemnation of laughter as they would be threatened by its presence. In a world in which we have trained ourselves to laugh with our interlocuters, we *should* be less likely to denigrate the other based on residual difference. In a world in which laughter is a felony offense, how else could we possibly expect discursive exchange to unfold than hierarchy and rejection? In that world, in which we stubbornly refuse to even engage the perspective of our so-called enemy, there is rather little hope to read their position generously, and even less hope of the gradual adoption of truly divergent perspectives. Comedy *can* help us to see from the other's perspective, but the absence of comedy makes it much harder to adopt another way of seeing the world. If we are not permitted to laugh, we are not permitted to accept our own faults as inevitable and innocent, and in turn we will struggle to offer the same empathy to others.

Without a doubt, the world faces an infinite gamut of material and existential crisis ranging from global warming to structural racism to the passive acceptance of perpetual war, and each of those crises is deserving of our concern and investment. Much of our most celebrated rhetorical performances attempted to directly pull the levers on those issues – voting rights,

peace talks, and so on. In turn, much of our most celebrated works of rhetorical criticism champion speeches that seem to "get there" in terms of moving and shaking the world. Typically, the most celebrated of those speeches in history have attempted to heal division and motivate collectivity. Today, it seems more and more that our celebrated discourses aim to rile up limited constituencies in opposition to someone or something else. My point: there are endless significant material entailments worthy of our attention, but at some point, we must reconsider the ideological civil war and the nature of succession with regards to lasting progress on material issues governed by collectives. To what end is our speech aimed at healing, recovering, and motivating (something like) contingent-strategic partnerships? Alternatively, how much of our speech is directed *solely* at enforcing already held beliefs? In a world without comedy, it is much harder to generate the former, and much easier to follow the terminal path of the latter – a path that can inevitably *only* result in the rejection of countervailing thought and the fortification of epistemic boundaries.

Comedy, laughter, and satire are not poison pills for the trend towards atomization, but they may offer opportunities to modify our trajectory. Of course, not all comedy is made equally, and those differences have been put on display in the previous chapters. Both *Million Dollar Extreme* and Baldwin's Trump attempted to influence similar demographics of (relatively) young politically-savvy comedy fans, but only one of them (*MDE*) tried to court an audience hostile to the message, yielding a substantially different set of attendant possibilities. *MDE* was largely unsuccessful in maintaining a self-reflexive liberal audience, and we should hesitate to say they made much headway with more traditionally conservative audiences, but my close reading suggests that the comedy was largely meant to unsettle doxa and throw a wrench in popular sets of assumptions about issues like gender, activism, and identity politics. It was rather clear that

Baldwin's Trump was intended to be a feel-good farce for the Anti-Trump crowd and never intended to empathetically display Trump nor his supporters, so whatever laughter emerges from those sketches should raise concerns of bashing the other, instead of trying to understand them. Baldwin's Trump attempted a shift in social-political trajectory by trying to broaden anti-Trump sentiment, and attempted to use ridicule to motivate that shift, but as I have demonstrated in chapter four, there will be times wherein we find enormous gaps between laughter's potential and comedy's outcome. Comedy comes in many forms, and from that perspective there are grounds for critique that comedy can reinforce hierarchy and perhaps even distract us from exigent needs. Comedy can be dismissive, safe, or provocative, and each entail substantially different affiliative gestures.

Comedy is at its absolute worst when it empowers one group to dismiss another - a form most often identified by the externalization of the comedic subjects such that one laughs *at* rather than laughs *with* the ridiculed. Here we will find those strands of comedy that actively attempt to legitimize extant hierarchy and actively attempt to denigrate the dispossessed. We will also see comedy that treats its targets as undeserving of empathy, or even fear. Dismissive comedy does not respect the target of scorn, nor does it ever attempt to fully understand the target's perspective. Dismissive comedy finds revelry in physical disability purely through the identification of difference; dismissive comedy mocks gender dysphoria with no sympathy for those who suffer from it; dismissive comedy makes fun of the plight of low-income whites because they had their chance. Dismissive comedy is routinely condemned for "punching down" – a pattern in which the powerful mock the disempowered, thereby subtly normalizing extant power relations and dampening momentum for social justice. When it comes to pessimistic satire, we must be cautious of the risk that clever performances are taken up as dismissive acts. If

one tunes out of Juvenal's 6th at the three-quarters mark, they are liable to repeat intentionally bad talking points about how women cannot be trusted. As demonstrated in chapter 3, *MDE* is most guilty of this offense, as their high-risk strategy was rather liable to being misinterpreted as "punching down" against women, activists, and prisoners.

Comedy is at its safest when it goes after established power concentrations that the audience has already agreed to dislike – playing to what an audience wants, rather than what it might need. Unfortunately, audience appetite is not universal, so while you (dear reader) and I and our collective associates would never consider, say, Trans Women of Color at the top of the global power hierarchy, there are audiences who believe "the left" dominates media, politics, etc., and therefore believes that jokes at the expense of Trans Women of Color constitute a liberatory resistance against a new world order. Here we see the intersection between comedy as a stultifying weapon and the broader social trend towards atomization in the way that comedians can modulate their acts to maximize appeal to built-in and assumed audiences. Doing a horrible Chinese accent and stretching your eyelids is likely to get you kicked off stage in most cities. but might be a perfectly safe and well-received bit in rural Georgia. Alternatively, puckering your lips and saying "Yuge" might net a 4-year appearance deal with *NBC*, but it is unlikely to draw any viewers that were not already predisposed towards a specific worldview. In both cases, a performer may even be lauded for taking risks or "pushing the envelope" but such praise only functions in a mythical space in which audiences are ideologically diverse and/or forced to endure oppositional discourse. As I have shown in my analysis of *Saturday Night Live's* Baldwin-Trump, what may appear controversial from a generalized perspective will sometimes be purely banal from the perspective of the true consuming audience. If everyone watching already thinks Trump is a buffoon, then playing Trump as a moron is as safe as can be. Even

worse, the consuming audience may pat themselves on the back for patronizing such a brave and provocative performer.

Comedy is at its most controversial – and possibly its most disruptive – when it aims at disputed power structures (groups, entities, and institutions that some believe are worthy of scorn and others perceive as either sacrosanct or in need of protection). What constitutes a disputed power structure is most often in the eye of the beholder. We cannot forget the audience in this equation, for what is controversial to some will be well received by others. For a comedian to violate decorum, the audience must have a shared sense of decorous expectations, and for a comedian to challenge an idea, the audience must, on some level, resonate with that idea (otherwise, we are back to pandering). At bottom, the performer must produce speech that the audience disagrees with – whether they disagree with the way it is said (expletives, for example) or they disagree with the implication or the logic or whatever else, the nature of controversial comedy *requires* resistance. This was the ultimate flaw of Baldwin's Trump: Baldwin attempted to be provocative, but he was playing to a room that already had the lowest possible opinion of Trump, and thus there was nowhere to go but down. Of course, the strict inverse is also mostly prone to failure – I am not sure that Baldwin's performance would have been considered "provocative" at an Arizona Cracker Barrel as much as he would have been ignored by patrons and firmly asked to leave by staff. We have now returned, full circle, to the fundamental question posed in this dissertation: how do you get someone to listen to something they do not want to hear? A profoundly complex question with many possible answers, we may not know the ceiling on how to approach an oppositional or hostile audience, but we may hazard a guess that when comedy is properly controversial, properly disruptive, it is on some level achieving this goal.

The conditions for controversial or provocative comedy are much harder to meet than it may seem at first glance. One of the ways pessimistic satire attempts to meet those conditions is through an affective bait and switch – as we have seen in *MDE* or Juvenal where a performance agitates an audience's ire towards an external source before steering their focus back onto themselves. Another way that pessimistic satire may achieve provocation is by coaching the audience to higher levels of heuristic processing such that they must work through layers of complexity (sometimes *Anti-Clarity)* to understand their laughter, along the way internalizing messages and reaching conclusions of their (seemingly) own accord. In both cases, the cynical critic might identify an air of trickery or deceit, though a more generous critic might identify instead a specialized form of producing the unexpected. As many comedy scholars have suggested, laughter is generally triggered by surprise (though surprise does not always elicit laughter), which would make "the unexpected" something like the ontological rebar of comedy. Once one accepts surprise as unassailably key to laughter, it is much easier to see the bait-and-switch style tactics of pessimistic comedy as a natural outgrowth of the performer-audience relationship.

In sum, pessimistic satire comes close to achieving the rather tenuous goal of communicating something to an audience that falls outside of their preconceived range of acceptable ideas. Sometimes this is effected through the juxtaposition of an inviting style with acidic implications merely hinted at through subtext, other times this is effected by directing an affective journey for the audience that raises intensity of emotion before subverting the audience's expectation of where that emotion is invested. I could not comfortably claim that pessimistic satire, with its unique use of comedy as both carrot and stick, is the best way of shaping public discourse to overcome the problem of epistemic balkanization, but I believe the

evidence laid out in this dissertation makes a rather compelling case that pessimistic satire offers robust and novel routes for engagement across divisions. While the objects of study in this dissertation did not clearly succeed in this goal, understanding precisely how they fell short suggests that the limitations of *MDE* or *SNL* are incidental, not structural. As we continue to navigate a world in balance between atomization and connectivity, between tribalist micro-islands and epistemic globalization, the tenets of pessimistic satire offer a bulwark of strategies for increasing engagement without recourse to reductionist polemics. For these reasons we should keep in mind, as we doom-scroll through the endless chatter of our digital publics, and as we let the cacophony of hot takes and barely informed opinions wash over us: *you gotta laugh!*

Present Limitations and Future Possibilities

I have identified two significant limitations to this study. The first, is that theory on satiric reception is simultaneously generalized and demands nuanced understanding of audience relationality. Towards that end, it is difficult to make judgements of how satire is received in its time without more focused clinical study that considers specific audiences. There is some tension between the needs of theory to be widely applicable and the potential for pessimistic satire to address different audiences in different ways. In the case of *SNL* the theoretical constraints are clear enough, and the target audiences are broad enough, that rhetorical analysis is quite helpful in showing how the program attempted to position its audience relative to Trump and Trump supporters. This is not the case for *MDE*, as I have demonstrated the complexity of the show could potentially yield extremely divergent interpretations depending on an audience's assumptions or political background. Furthermore, if we are rightfully concerned about the atomization of populations, then we may be leery of undergoing studies that aim to understand the effects of highly niche programming on highly niche audiences. There might be outcomes

where we determine that *MDE* only achieves the desired potential of pessimistic satire for incredibly small segments of their viewer base, greatly complicating theoretical understanding of how satire can bridge social cleavages. It may be the case that achieving broader harmony requires hyper specific messaging targeted at micro-slivers of society to entice already atomized populations to consider broader collectives. To find out, we would need qualitative and quantitative studies that target audience reception more specifically.

The second major limitation to this dissertation occurs in the gap between potential and outcome. Neither *SNL* nor *MDE* were well received by their audiences in the sense that we would have demonstrable evidence of pessimistic satire's theoretical potential played out in an audience. Even Juvenal, who is broadly celebrated for the craft of his rhetoric, is largely absent in historical record and we may never have a clear picture on how his satires were received by his immediate audiences. I concluded both chapters on *SNL* and *MDE* with a brief discussion of how they *could have* hit their marks (SNL could have expanded the bouffon performance to include anti-Trump sycophants; *MDE* would have been easier to stomach without Trump's electoral victory), but is there pessimistic satire that worked *as is*?

Having identified where efforts to deploy pessimistic satire can go wrong, a needed project would be to identify instances where it ‘goes right’ and adumbrate the distinctions between the failures and successes. An unexpected hypothesis suggested by this study is that pessimistic satire is a potential that is always calling but never doomed to fail. Recent studies, identified in chapter one, have suggested that some relatively successful satiric programs contain shades of optimism and pessimism, and further elaborate that the pessimistic aspects have different functions for audiences. One route for future projects might be to further dissect a single satiric program across its optimistic and pessimistic threads to illuminate the utility of

tonal balance. Another route might be to find the pessimistic elements of successful satire that may appear optimistic at first glance. Yet another route might be to identify lesser-known pessimistic satires that resonated with specific audiences. It may be the case - and perhaps we would not be surprised to find - that pessimistic satire requires smaller audiences and struggles to scale up in mediums like cable TV. Given the robust theoretical basis for pessimistic satire, and its rather tenured history, there must be a reason for its eternal return. Perhaps it will be the case that pessimistic satire is effective but in ways that differ considerably from what we expect, or perhaps that pessimistic satire has effects that are largely unmeasurable. The case for pessimistic satire as a significant genre of comedic rhetoric is solid from historical and literary perspectives. How pessimistic satire can effectively function with contemporary audiences is a question in need for further consideration.

WORKS CITED

Angela D. Abel and Michael Barthel, "Appropriation of Mainstream News: How 'Saturday Night Live' Changed the Political Discussion," *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 30:1 (2013): 1-16.

James Anderson and Amie D. Kincaid, "Media Subservience and Satirical Subversiveness: The Daily Show, The Colbert Report, The Propaganda Model and the Paradox of Parody," *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 30 (2013): 171-188.

Edward C. Appel, "Burlesque Drama as a Rhetorical Genre: The Hudibrastic Ridicule of William F. Buckley, Jr.," *Western Journal of Communication* 60:3 (1996): 269-284.

Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and his world* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1984).

Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* (Bloomington, IN: Midland Books, 1984).

Meital Balmas, "When Fake News Becomes Real: Combined Exposure to Multiple News Sources and Political Attitudes of Inefficacy, Alienation, and Cynicism," *Communication Research* 41 (2014): 430-454.

Geoffrey Baym, "*The Daily Show*: Discursive Integration and the Reinvention of Political Journalism," *Political Communication* 22 (2005): 259-273.

Geoffrey Baym and Jeffrey P. Jones, "News Parody in Global Perspective: Politics, Power, and Resistance," *Popular Communication: the International Journal of Media and Culture* 10 (2012): 2-13.

Amy B. Becker, "Comedy Types and Political Campaigns: The Differential Influence of Other-Directed Hostile Humor and Self-Ridicule on Candidate Evaluations," *Mass Communication and Society* 15 (2012): 791-812.

W. Lance Bennet, "Relief in Hard Times: A Defense of Jon Stewart's Comedy in an Age of Cynicism," *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 24 (2007): 278-283.

Faridullah Bezhan, "Tarjoman or Interpreter, The First Satirical Newspaper and the Emergence of Modern Satire in Afghanistan," *Media History* 20:3 (2014): 302-321.

Edwin Black, "The Second Persona" *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 56 (1970): 109-119.

Edward A. Bloom and Lillian D. Bloom, *Satire's persuasive voice* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1979.

Fredric V. Bogel, *The difference satire makes: Rhetoric and reading from Jonson to Byron* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2001).

Wayne C. Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (Chicago University Press: Chicago, 1961).

Mark Boukes, Hajo G. Boomgaarden, Marjolein Moorman, and Claes H. de Vreese, "At Odds: Laughing and Thinking? The Appreciation, Processing, and Persuasiveness of Political Satire," *Journal of Communication* 65 (2015): 721-744.

Susanna Morton Braund, *Juvenal and Persius* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015).

Paul R. Brewer "'Science: What's It Up To?' The Daily Show and the Social Construction of Science," *International Journal of Communication* 7 (2013): 452-470.

Maegan Parker Brooks, "Oppositional Ethos: Fannie Lou Hamer and The Vernacular Persona," *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* 14 (2011): 511-548.

Britta C. Brugman, Christian Burgers, Camiel J Beukeboom, and Elly A Konijn, “Satirical News from Left to Right: Discursive Integration in Written Online Satire.” *Journalism* (December 2020).

Hanne Bruun, "Political Satire in Danish Television: Reinventing a Tradition," *Popular Communications* 10 (2012): 158-169.

Wesley Buerkle, Michael E. Mayer, and Clark D. Olson, "Our Hero the Buffoon: Contradictory and Concurrent Burkean Framing of Arizona Governor Evan Mecham," *Western Journal of Communication* 67:2 (2003): 188-203

Kenneth Burke, *A Grammar of Motives* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1969).

Michael L. Butterworth, “The Passion of Tebow: Sports Media and Heroic Language in the Tragic Frame," *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 30: 1 (2013): 17-33.

A. Cheree Carlson, "Limitations on the Comic Frame: Some Witty American Women of the Nineteenth Century," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 74 (1988): 310-322.

Kundai Chirindo and Ryan Neville-Shepard, "Obama's 'New Beginning': US Foreign Policy and Comic Exceptionalism," *Argumentation and Advocacy* 51 (2015): 215-230.

Adrienne E. Christiansen and Jeremy J. Hanson, "Comedy as Cure for Tragedy: Act Up and the Rhetoric of AIDS," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 82 (1996): 157-170.

Noam Chomsky, “An interview on minimalism,” in *On nature and language* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

Dana L. Cloud, "The Null Persona: Race and the Rhetoric of Silence in the Uprising of '34," *Rhetoric and Public Affairs* 2:2 (1999): 177-209.

Lisa Colletta, "Political Satire and Postmodern Irony in the Age of Stephen Colbert and Jon Stewart," *The Journal of Popular Culture* 42 (2009): 856-874.

Celeste Michelle Condit, “Pathos in Criticism: Edwin Black’s Communism-As-Cancer Metaphor,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 99:1 (2013): 1-26.

Celeste Michelle Condit, “Post-Burke: Transcending the Sub-Stance of Dramatism,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 78 (1992): 349-355.

Tom Coogan, “Usually I love The Onion but This Time You’ve Gone Too Far,” *Journal of Literary and Critical Disability Studies* 7(1) (2013): 1-17.

Amber Davisson, "'Hallelujah': Parody, Political Catharsis, and Grieving the 2016 Election with Saturday Night Live," *Communication Quarterly* 66:2 (2018): 196-213.

Amber Day, "Shifting the Conversation: Colbert's Super PAC and the Measurement of Satirical Efficacy," *International Journal of Communication* 7 (2013): 414-429.

Amber Day and Ethan Thompson, "Live From New York, It’s the Fake News! Saturday Night Live and the (Non)Politics of Parody," *Popular Communication*, 10 (2012): 170-182.

Marilyn DeLaure, "Environmental Comedy: No Impact Man and the Performance of Green Identity," *Environmental Communication* 5:4 (2011): 447-466.

Bonnie J. Down and Mari Boor Toon, “’Feminine Style’ and Political Judgment in the Rhetoric of Ann Richards,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 79 (1993): 286-302.

Rachel E. Dubrofsky and Megan M. Wood, "Posting Racism and Sexism: Authenticity, Agency and Self-Reflexivity in Social Media," *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies* 11:3 (2014): 282–287.

Eric M. Eisenberg, “Ambiguity as strategy in organizational communication,” *Communication Monographs* 51 (1984): 227-242.

John Etty. *Graphic Satire in the Soviet Union: Krokodil's Political Cartoons*. (University Press of Mississippi: Jackson, 2019).

Lynn Everett, “Jacques Lecoq’s Bouffons in Australia,” *Australasian Drama Studies* 53 (2008): 168-185.

Joseph Faina, "Public Journalism is a Joke: The Case for Jon Stewart and Stephen Colbert," *Journalism* 14 (2012): 541-555.

Thomas B. Farrell, “Comic History Meets Tragic Memory: Burke and Habermas on the Drama of Human Relations,” in *Kenneth Burke and Contemporary European Thought*, ed. Bernard L. Brock (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1995).

Leonard Feinberg, *Introduction to satire* (Ames: The Iowa State University Press, 1967).

Lauren Feldman and Caty Chattoo Borum, ""Comedy as a Route to Social Change: The Effects of Satire and News on Persuasion about Syrian Refugees," *Mass Communication & Society* 22:3 (2019): 277-300.

Lauren Feldman, "Cloudy with a Change of Heat Balls: The Portrayal of Global Warming on The Daily Show and The Colbert Report," *International Journal of Communication* 7 (2013): 430-451.

Jessyka Finley, "Black Women's Satire as (Black) Postmodern Performance," *Studies in American Humor* 2:2 (2016): 236-265.

Christopher J. Gilbert, "If This Statue Could Talk: Statuary Satire in the Pasquinade Tradition," *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* 18:1 (2015): 79-112.

Christopher J. Gilbert, “Toward the Satyric,” *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 46 (2013): 280-305.

Dustin H Griffin, *Satire: A critical reintroduction* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1994).

Robert Hariman, "Political Parody and Public Culture," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 94 (2008): 247-272.

Roderick P. Hart, “The Rhetoric of Political Comedy: A Tragedy?,” *International Journal of Communication* 7 (2013): 338-370.

Roderick P. Hart and E. Johanna Hartelius, “The Political Sins of Jon Stewart,” *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 24 (2007): 263-272.

John B. Hatch, "Reconciliation: Building a Bridge from Complicity to Coherence in the Rhetoric of Race Relations," *Rhetoric and Public Affairs* 6:4 (2003): 737-764.

Jennifer Heusel, “The Rhetoric of Heresy: The Boondocks Resurrects Martin Luther King Jr. and Agitates the Beloved Community,” *Western Journal of Communication* 78:1 (2013): 22-38.

Rebecca Higgie, "Public Engagement, Propaganda, or Both? Attitudes Toward Politicians on Political Satire and Comedy Programs," *International Journal of Communication* 11 (2017): 930-948.

Gilbert Highet, *The Anatomy of Satire,* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1962).

Megan R. Hill, “Developing a Normative Approach to Political Satire: A Critical Perspective,” *International Journal of Communication* 7 (2013), 324-337.

R. Lance Holbert, "Developing a Normative Approach to Political Satire: An Empirical Perspective," *International Journal of Communication* 7 (2013): 306-323.

R. Lance Holbert, Jay Hmielowski, Parul Jain, Julie Lather, and Alyssa Morey, “Adding Nuance to the Study of Political Humor Effects: Experimental Research on Juvenalian Satire Versus Horatian Satire,” *American Behavioral Scientist* 55:3 (2011): 187–211.

R. Lance Holbert, John M Tchernev, Whitney O. Walther, Sarah E. Esralew, and Kathryn Benski, "Young Voter Perceptions of Political Satire as Persuasion: A Focus on

Perceived Influence, Persuasive Intent, and Message Strength," *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media* 57:2 (2013): 170-186.

R. Andrew Holbrook and Timothy G. Hill, "Agenda-Setting and Priming in Prime Time Television: Crime Dramas as Political Cues," *Political Communication* 3 (2005): 277-295.

Linda Hutcheon, *A Theory of Parody: The Teachings of Twentieth-Century Art Forms* (Urbana:University of Illinois Press, 1985).

J.R. Jenkinson, *Persius: The Satires* (Warminster, 1980).

Freddie J. Jennings, Josh C. Bramlett, and Benjamin R. Warner, "Comedic Cognition: The Impact of Elaboration on Political Comedy Effects," *Western Journal of Communication* 83:3 (2019): 365-382.

Barbara Johnson, "Teaching Deconstructively," in *Writing and Reading Differently: Deconstruction and the Teaching of Composition and Literature*, ed. G. Douglas Atkins and Michael L. Johnson (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1985).

Steven E. Jones, "Intertextual Influences in Byron's Juvenalian Satire," *Studies in English Literature*, 1500-1900 33:4 (1993): 771-783.

David Kaufer, ‘‘Irony and Rhetorical Strategy,’’ *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 10:2 (1977): 90-110.

Gloria J. Kaufman, *A Patchwork of Feminist Humor and Satire*. (Indiana University Press: Bloomington and Indianapolis, 1991).

Gloria J. Kaufman and Mary Kay Blakely, *Pulling Our Own Strings: Feminist Humor and Satire*. (Indiana University Press: Bloomington, 1980).

Charles A. Knight, *The Literautre of Satire* (Cambridge University Press, 2004).

Heather L. LaMarre, Kristen D. Landreville, Dannagal Young, and Nathan Gilkerson, “Humor works in funny ways: Examining satirical tone as a key determinant in political humor message processing” *Mass Communication and Society* 17:3 (2014): 400–423.

David H.J. Larmour, "Juvenal, Ideology and the Critics: A Plan for Resisting Readers," *Pacific Coast Philology* 26:1 (1991): 41-50.

Jacques Lecoq, *Theatre of Movement and Gesture* (Oxon: Routledge, 2006).

Jacques Lecoq et al, *The Moving Body: Teaching Creative Theatre* (Great Britain: Methuen Publishing Limited, 2000).

Hoon Lee and Nojin Kwak, "The Affect Effect of Political Satire: Sarcastic Humor, Negative Emotions, and Political Participation," *Mass Communication and Society* 17 (2014): 307-328.

Todd V. Lewis and K. Arianna Molloy, "Religious Rhetoric and Satire: Investigating the Comic and Burlesque Frames Within The Big Bang Theory," *Journal of Media and Religion* 14 (2015): 88-101.

Lacy Lowrey, Valerie R. Renegar, and Charles E. Goehring, "'When God Gives You AIDS...Make Lemon-AIDS': Ironic Persona and Perspective by Incongruity in Sarah Silverman's Jesus is Magic," *Western Journal of Communication* 78:1 (2014): 58-77.

Priscilla Marie Meddaugh, "Bakhtin, Colbert, and the Center of Discourse: Is There No 'Truthiness' in Humor?" *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 27 (2010): 376-390.

Matthew R. Meier, "I Am Super PAC and So Can You! Stephen Colbert and the Citizen-Fool," *Western Journal of Communication* 81:2 (2017): 262-279.

Matthew R. Meier and Christopher A. Medjesky, "The Office was Asking For It: 'That's What She Said' as a Joke Cycle that Perpetuates Rape Culture," *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies* 15:1 (2018): 2-17.

Patrick Merziger, "Humor in Nazi German: Resistance and Propaganda? The Popular Desire for an All-Embracing Laughter," *IRSH* 52 (2007): 275-290.

Charles E. Morris III, “Pink Herring & The Fourth Persona: J. Edgar Hoover’s Sex Crime Panic,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 88:2 (2002): 228-244.

Stephen Gencarella Olbrys, "Disciplining the Carnivalesque: Chris Farley's Exotic Dance," *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies* 3:3 (2006): 240-259.

Nilufer Ovalioglu, "The Female Bouffon" (PhD diss., Brunel University, 2010).

Trevor Parry-Giles and Shawn J. Parry-Giles, “Expanding the Discipline’s Debate Contributions: New Potentials, Beyond Effects*,” Quarterly Journal of Speech* 101:1 (2015): 113-226.

Jennifer Peeples, Pete Bsumek, Steve Schwarze, and Jen Schneider, "Industrial Apocalyptic: Neoliberalism, Coal, and the Burlesque Frame," *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* 17:2 (2014): 227-253.

Jason T. Peifer, "Palin, Saturday Night Live, and Framing: Examining the Dynamics of Political Parody," *The Communication Review* 16:3 (2013): 155-177.

Jason T. Peifer and R. Lance Holbert, "Appreciation of Pro-Attitudinal Versus Counter-Attitudinal Political Humor: A Cognitive Consistency Approach to the Study of Political Entertainment," *Communication Quarterly* 64:1 (2016): 16-35.

Jason T. Peifer and R. Lance Holbert, "Developing a Systematic Assessment of Humor in the Context of the 2012 U.S. General Election Debates," *Argumentation and Advocacy* 49 (2013): 286-300.

Steven T. Piantadosi, Harry Tily, and Edward Gibson, “The communicative function of ambiguity in language,” *Cognition* 122:3 (2012): 280–291.

Larry Powell, "Satire and Speech Trait Evaluation," *Western Journal of Speech Communication* (1977): 117-125.

Ian Reilly, "From Critique to Mobilization: The Yes Men and the Utopian Politics of Satirical Fake News," *International Journal of Communication* 7 (2013): 1243-1264.

Valerie R. Renegar and George N. Dionisopoulos, "The Dream of a Cyberpunk Future? Entelechy, Dialectical Tension, and the Comic Corrective in William Gibson's Neuromancer," *Southern Communication Journal* 76:4 (2011): 323-341.

Joseph Rhodes, "The Atheistic Voice," *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* 17:2 (2014): 323-348.

C.A. Van Rooy, *Studies in Classical Satire and Related Literary Theory* (Leiden: Brill, 1965).

Jonathan P. Rossing, “Deconstructing Postracialism: Humor as a Critical, Cultural Project.” Popular Communication: *The International Journal of Media and Culture* 10 (2012): 44-61.

Charles Sander, *The scope of satire* (Glenview, IL: Scott, Foresman, & Company, 1971).

Charles E. Schutz, *Political humor: From Aristophanes to Sam Ervin* (Cranbury, NJ: Associated University Presses, 1977).

Gary Stevens Selby, "Scoffing at the enemy: The Burlesque Frame in the Rhetoric of Ralph David Abernathy," *Southern Communication Journal* 70:2 (2005): 134-145.

YJ Sohn and Heidi Hatfield Edwards, "Strategic Ambiguity and Crisis Apologia: The Impact of Audiences' Interpretations of Mixed Messages," *International Journal of Strategic Communication* 12:5 (2018): 552-570.

Julie Stewart and Thomas Clark, "Lessons from South Park: A Comic Corrective to Environmental Puritanism," *Environmental Communication* 5:3 (2011): 320-336.

Rachel E. Silverman, "Comedy as Correction: Humor as Perspective by Incongruity on Will & Grace and Queer as Folk," *Sexuality & Culture 17* (2013): 260-274.

Kara Shultz and Darla Germeroth, "Should We Laugh or Should We Cry? John Callahan's Humor as a Tool to Change Societal Attitudes Toward Disability," *Howard Journal of Communication* 9:3 (1998): 229-244.

Chris Smith and Ben Voth, "The Role of Humor in Political Argument: How 'Strategery' and 'Lockboxes' Changed a Political Campaign," *Argument and Advocacy* 39 (2002): 110-129.

David M. Timmerman, Grant F. Gussman and Daniel King, "Humor, Race, and Rhetoric: 'A Liberating Sabotage of the Past's Hold on the Present'," *Rhetoric Review* 31:2 (2012): 169-187.

Ben Voth, “Saturday night live and presidential elections,” In *Laughing Matters* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2008).

Don Waisanen, “A Citizen’s Guides to Democracy Inaction: Jon Stewart and Stephen Colbert’s Comic Rhetorical Criticism,” *Southern Communication Journal* 74:2 (2009): 119-140.

Don Waisanen, “Crafting Hyperreal Spaces for Comic Insights: *The Onion* News Network’s Ironic Iconicity,” *Communication Quarterly* 59 (2011): 508-528.

Don Waisanen, “The Comic Counterfactual: Laughter, Affect, and Civic Alternatives,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 104:1 (2018): 71-93.

Don J. Waisanen and Amy B. Becker, "The Problem with Being Joe Biden: Political Comedy and Circulating Personae," *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 32:4 (2015): 264.

David Foster Wallace, “E Unibus Pluram: Television and U.S. Fiction,” *Review of Contemporary Fiction* 13:2 (1993): 151-194.

Philip Wander, "The Third Persona: An Ideological Turn in Rhetorical Theory," *Central States Speech Journal* 35 (1984): 197-216.

Carina Weinmann and Peter Vorderer, "A Normative Perspective for Political Entertainment Research: connecting Deliberative Democracy and Entertainment Theory," *Communication Theory* 28 (2018): 466-486.

Frank B. Wilderson, *Red White & Black: Cinema and the Structure of U.S. Antagonisms* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010).

Dannagal G. Young, "Political Satire and Occupy Wall Street: How Comics Co-opted Strategies of the Portest Paradigm to Legitimize a Movement," *International Journal of Communication* 7 (2013): 371-393.

REFERENCES

[1] Melissa Chan, "Everything You Need to Know About the 'Clown Attack' Craze," Time, October 4, 2016, web. https://time.com/4518456/scary-clown-sighting-attack-craze/
[2] Robert Hariman, "Political Parody and Public Culture," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 94 (2008): 248.
[3] Megan R. Hill, "Developing a Normative Approach to Political Satire: A Critical Perspective," *International Journal of Communication* 7 (2013), 333.
[4] James Anderson and Amie D. Kincaid, "Media Subservience and Satirical Subversiveness: The Daily Show, The Colbert Report, The Propaganda Model and the Paradox of Parody," *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 30 (2013): 183.
[5] Christopher J. Gilbert, "Toward the Satyric," *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 46 (2013): 284.
[6] Hill, "Developing a Normative Approach," 331.
[7] Amber Day, "Shifting the Conversation: Colbert's Super PAC and the Measurement of Satirical Efficacy," *International Journal of Communication* 7 (2013): 14.
[8] Gilbert Highet, *The Anatomy of Satire,* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1962), 13.
[9] Highet, *The Anatomy of Satire,* 13.
[10] Highet, *The Anatomy of Satire,* 13.
[11] Druick, "Dialogic Absurdity," 301.
[12] Druick, "Dialogic Absurdity," 301.
[13] Linda Hutcheon, *A Theory of Parody: The Teachings of Twentieth-Century Art Forms* (Urbana:University of Illinois Press, 1985), 57.
[14] Amber Day and Ethan Thompson, "Live From New York, It's the Fake News! Saturday Night Live and the (Non)Politics of Parody," *Popular Communication*, 10 (2012): 174.
[15] Highet, *The Anatomy of Satire,* 15.
[16] Highet, *The Anatomy of Satire,* 15.
[17] Highet, *The Anatomy of Satire,* 16.
[18] In addition to those cited elsewhere in this chapter, the following offers a representative sampling of the types of satire scholarship in communication studies that rely on an inductive approach: Dustin H Griffin. Satire: A critical reintroduction. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1994; Dannagal G. Young, "Political Satire and Occupy Wall Street: How Comics Co-opted Strategies of the Portest Paradigm to Legitimize a Movement," International Journal of Communication 7 (2013): 371-393; Rebecca Higgie, "Public Engagement, Propaganda, or Both? Attitudes Toward Politicians on Political Satire and Comedy Programs," International Journal of Communication 11 (2017): 930-948; Lauren Feldman and Caty Chattoo Borum, ""Comedy as a Route to Social Change: The Effects of Satire and News on Persuasion about Syrian Refugees," Mass Communication & Society 22:3 (2019): 277-300; Mark Boukes et al., "At Odds: Laughing and Thinking? The Appreciation, Processing, and Persuasiveness of Political Satire," Journal of Communication 65 (2015): 721-744; Hoon Lee and Nojin Kwak, "The Affect Effect of Political Satire: Sarcastic Humor, Negative Emotions, and Political Participation," Mass Communication and Society 17 (2014): 307-328.
[19] Megan R. Hill, "Developing a Normative Approach to Political Satire: A Critical Perspective," *International Journal of Communication* 7 (2013): 323
[20] Hill, "Developing a Normative Approach," 325.
[21] Hill, "Developing a Normative Approach," 325.
[22] Hill, "Developing a Normative Approach," 329.

[23] Hill, “Developing a Normative Approach,” 329.
[24] See: R. Lance Holbert, John M Tchernev, Whitney O. Walther, Sarah E. Esralew, and Kathryn Benski, "Young Voter Perceptions of Political Satire as Persuasion: A Focus on Perceived Influence, Persuasive Intent, and Message Strength," *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media* 57:2 (2013): 183-184; Heather L. LaMarre, Kristen D. Landreville, Dannagal Young, and Nathan Gilkerson, “Humor works in funny ways: Examining satirical tone as a key determinant in political humor message processing,” *Mass Communication and Society* 17:3 (2014): 421; Carina Weinmann and Peter Vorderer, "A Normative Perspective for Political Entertainment Research: connecting Deliberative Democracy and Entertainment Theory," *Communication Theory* 28 (2018): 478.
[25] See Freddie J. Jennings, Josh C. Bramlett, and Benjamin R. Warner, "Comedic Cognition: The Impact of Elaboration on Political Comedy Effects," *Western Journal of Communication* 83:3 (2019): 365-382; Mark Boukes, Hajo G. Boomgaarden, Marjolein Moorman, and Claes H. de Vreese, “At Odds: Laughing and Thinking? The Appreciation, Processing, and Persuasiveness of Political Satire,” *Journal of Communication* 65 (2015): 19; Meital Balmas, "When Fake News Becomes Real: Combined Exposure to Multiple News Sources and Political Attitudes of Inefficacy, Alienation, and Cynicism,” *Communication Research* 41 (2014): 430-454; and Larry Powell, "Satire and Speech Trait Evaluation," *Western Journal of Speech Communication* (1977): 117-125.
[26] Jason T. Peifer and R. Lance Holbert, "Developing a Systematic Assessment of Humor in the Context of the 2012 U.S. General Election Debates," Argumentation and Advocacy 49 (2013): 298
[27] Chris Smith and Ben Voth, "The Role of Humor in Political Argument: How 'Strategery' and 'Lockboxes' Changed a Political Campaign," Argument and Advocacy 39 (2002): 110-129.
[28] Jason T. Peifer, "Palin, Saturday Night Live, and Framing: Examining the Dynamics of Political Parody," The Communication Review 16:3 (2013): 155-177.
[29] Don J. Waisanen and Amy B. Becker, "The Problem with Being Joe Biden: Political Comedy and Circulating Personae," *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 32:4 (2015): 264.
[30] In addition to the scholarship cited throughout this section, the following offer examples of the power offered by satire to the disempowered: Gloria J. Kaufman and Mary Kay Blakely. *Pulling Our Own Strings: Feminist Humor and Satire*. (Indiana University Press: Bloomington, 1980); Gloria Kaufman. *A Patchwork of Feminist Humor and Satire*. (Indiana University Press: Bloomington and Indianapolis, 1991); Jessyka Finley, "Black Women's Satire as (Black) Postmodern Performance," *Studies in American Humor* 2:2 (2016): 236-265; John Etty. *Graphic Satire in the Soviet Union: Krokodil's Political Cartoons*. (University Press of Mississippi: Jackson, 2019); Marilyn DeLaure, "Environmental Comedy: No Impact Man and the Performance of Green Identity," *Environmental Communication* 5:4 (2011): 447-466; Hariman, "Political Parody and Public Culture"; Hill, "Developing a Normative Approach to Political Satire"; Gilbert, "Toward the Satyric.
[31] Robert Hariman, “Political Parody and Public Culture,” Quarterly Journal of Speech 94:3 (2008): 247-272.
[32] Megan R. Hill, “Developing a Normative Approach to Political Satire: A Critical Perspective,” *International Journal of Communication* 7 (2013): 327.
[33] See: Christopher J. Gilbert, "If This Statue Could Talk: Statuary Satire in the Pasquinade Tradition," *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* 18:1 (2015): 79-112; Hanne Bruun, "Political Satire in Danish Television: Reinventing a Tradition," *Popular Communications* 10 (2012): 158-169; Faridullah Bezhan, "Tarjoman or Interpreter, The First Satirical Newspaper and the Emergence of Modern Satire in Afghanistan," *Media History* 20:3 (2014): 302-321.
[34] John B. Hatch, "Reconciliation: Building a Bridge from Complicity to Coherence in the Rhetoric of Race Relations," Rhetoric and Public Affairs 6:4 (2003): 737-764.
[35] David M. Timmerman, Grant F. Gussman and Daniel King, "Humor, Race, and Rhetoric: 'A Liberating Sabotage of the Past's Hold on the Present'," Rhetoric Review 31:2 (2012): 184-185
[36] Jennifer Heusel, “The Rhetoric of Heresy: The Boondocks Resurrects Martin Luther King Jr. and Agitates the Beloved Community,” Western Journal of Communication 78:1 (2013): 35.

[37] A. Cheree Carlson, "Limitations on the Comic Frame: Some Witty American Women of the Nineteenth Century," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 74 (1988): 319.
[38] Carlson, "Limitations on the Comic Frame," 319.
[39] Matthew R. Meier and Christopher A. Medjesky, "The Office was asking for it: 'that's what she said' as a joke cycle that perpetuates rape culture," Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies 15:1 (2018): 2-17.
[40] Kara Shultz Darla Germeroth, "Should We Laugh or Should We Cry? John Callahan's Humor as a Tool to Change Societal Attitudes Toward Disability," Howard Journal of Communication 9:3 (1998): 229-244.
[41] Tom Coogan, "Usually I love The Onion but This Time You've Gone Too Far," Journal of Literary and Critical Disability Studies 7(1) (2013): 1-17.
[42] Coogan, "Usually I love The Onion," 15.
[43] Wayne Booth, A Rhetoric of Irony, 9-13.
[44] Coogan, "Usually I love The Onion," 11-13.
[45] Britta C. Brugman, Christian Burgers, Camiel J Beukeboom, and Elly A Konijn, "Satirical News from Left to Right: Discursive Integration in Written Online Satire." *Journalism* (December 2020).
[46] See: Rachel E. Dubrofsky and Megan M. Wood, "Posting Racism and Sexism: Authenticity, Agency and Self-Reflexivity in Social Media," Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies 11:3 (2014): 282–287.
[47] Theodore Seuss Geisel, "Waiting for the Signal From Home," *PM Newspaper*, February 13, 1942.
[48] Patrick Merziger, "Humor in Nazi German: Resistance and Propaganda? The Popular Desire for an All-Embracing Laughter," IRSH 52 (2007): 281-282.
[49] Britannica, T. Editors of Encyclopaedia. "Krokodil." Encyclopedia Britannica, March 13, 2016. https://www.britannica.com/topic/Krokodil-Soviet-magazine.
[50] Geoffrey Baym, "*The Daily Show*: Discursive Integration and the Reinvention of Political Journalism," *Political Communication* 22 (2005): 273.
[51] Baym, *The Daily Show*, 274.
[52] Baym, *The Daily Show*, 273.
[53] Baym, *The Daily Show*, 273.
[54] Geoffrey Baym and Jeffrey P. Jones, "News Parody in Global Perspective: Politics, Power, and Resistance," *Popular Communication: the International Journal of Media and Culture* 10 (2012): 2-13.
[55] Joseph Faina, "Public Journalism is a Joke: The Case for Jon Stewart and Stephen Colbert," Journalism 14 (2012): 546.
[56] Faina, "Public Journalism is a Joke," 554.
[57] Paul R. Brewer "'Science: What's It Up To?' The Daily Show and the Social Construction of Science," *International Journal of Communication* 7 (2013): 466. See also: Lauren Feldman, "Cloudy with a Change of Heat Balls: The Portrayal of Global Warming on The Daily Show and The Colbert Report," *International Journal of Communication* 7 (2013): 430-451.
[58] James Anderson and Amie D. Kincaid, "Media Subservience and Satirical Subversiveness: The Daily Show, The Colbert Report, The Propaganda Model and the Paradox of Parody," Critical Studies in Media Communication 30 (2013): 185
[59] Anderson and Kincaid, "Media Subservience and Satirical Subversiveness," 178.
[60] Day, "Shifting the Conversation," 415.
[61] Day, "Shifting the Conversation," 415.
[62] Day, "Shifting the Conversation," 415.
[63] Ian Reilly, "From Critique to Mobilization: The Yes Men and the Utopian Politics of Satirical Fake News," International Journal of Communication 7 (2013): 1253.
[64] Reilly, "From Critique to Mobilization," 1244.
[65] Reilly, "From Critique to Mobilization," 1243.
[66] Here I refer to: *Full Frontal with Samantha Bee, Last Week Tonight with John Oliver, The Nightly Show with Larry Wilmore, The Patriot Act with Hasan Minhaj, and The Break* (with Michelle Wolf).

[67] Jonathan P. Rossing, “Deconstructing Postracialism: Humor as a Critical, Cultural Project.” Popular Communication: The International Journal of Media and Culture 10 (2012): 45.
[68] Rossing, “Deconstructing Postracialism,” 57.
[69] Matthew R. Meier, "I Am Super PAC and So Can You! Stephen Colbert and the Citizen-Fool," *Western Journal of Communication* 81:2 (2017): 264.
[70] Meier, “I Am Super PAC and So Can You! Stephen Colbert and the Citizen-Fool,” 265.
[71] Don Waisanen, “A Citizen’s Guides to Democracy Inaction: Jon Stewart and Stephen Colbert’s Comic Rhetorical Criticism,” Southern Communication Journal 74:2 (2009): 126.
[72] Don Waisanen, “Crafting Hyperreal Spaces for Comic Insights: *The Onion* News Network’s Ironic Iconicity,” *Communication Quarterly* 59 (2011): 524.
[73] Hart, “The Rhetoric of Political Comedy,” 360.
[74] Roderick P. Hart and E. Johanna Hartelius, “The Political Sins of Jon Stewart,” Critical Studies in Media Communication 24 (2007): 263.
[75] Roderick P. Hart, “The Rhetoric of Political Comedy: A Tragedy?,” International Journal of Communication 7 (2013): 339.
[76] Hart and Hartelius, “The Political Sins of Jon Stewart,” 271.
[77] Hart and Hartelius, “The Political Sins of Jon Stewart,” 246. See also: USA! USA! USA!
[78] Hart and Hartelius, “The Political Sins of Jon Stewart,” 268.
[79] Hart and Hartelius, “The Political Sins of Jon Stewart,” 270.
[80] W. Lance Bennet, "Relief in Hard Times: A Defense of Jon Stewart's Comedy in an Age of Cynicism," Critical Studies in Media Communication 24 (2007): 279.
[81] Bennet, “Relief in Hard Times,” 282.
[82] Bennet, “Relief in Hard Times,” 279.
[83] Don Waisanen, “The Comic Counterfactual: Laughter, Affect, and Civic Alternatives,” Quarterly Journal of Speech 104:1 (2018): 74.
[84] Rachel E. Silverman, "Comedy as Correction: Humor as Perspective by Incongruity on Will & Grace and Queer as Folk," *Sexuality & Culture 17* (2013): 260-274
[85] Michael L. Butterworth, “The Passion of Tebow: Sports Media and Heroic Language in the Tragic Frame," *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 30: 1 (2013): 20
[86] Burke, *Attitudes Toward History,* 5.
[87] Burke, *Attitudes Toward History,* 34.
[88] Gary Stevens Selby, "Scoffing at the enemy: The Burlesque Frame in the Rhetoric of Ralph David Abernathy," *Southern Communication Journal* 70:2 (2005): 135.
[89] Amber Day, “Shifting the Conversation: Colbert’s Super PAC and the Measurement of Satirical Efficacy,” *International Journal of Communication* 7 (2013): 417.
[90] It is worth noting that Burke’s conception of the tragic frame is rather distinct from the literary tradition of Tragedy in that the hero is not brought down by a fatal flaw, but rather overcomes her own insufficiencies to defeat her sinister foe. See: Burke, *Attitudes Toward History,* 43.
[91] Michael L. Butterworth, “The Passion of Tebow: Sports Media and Heroic Language in the Tragic Frame," *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 30: 1 (2013): 20.
[92] Butterworth, “The Passion of the Tebow,” 28.
[93] Kenneth Burke, *A Grammar of Motives* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1969), 39.
[94] Burke, *Attitudes Toward History,* 43.
[95] See: Julie Stewart and Thomas Clark, "Lessons from South Park: A Comic Corrective to Environmental Puritanism," *Environmental Communication* 5:3 (2011): 320-336; Silverman, "Comedy as Correction: Humor as Perspective by Incongruity on Will & Grace and Queer as Folk"; Timmerman, Gussman and King, “Humor, Race, and Rhetoric: A Liberating Sabotage of the Past’s Hold on the Present”; Marilyn DeLaure, "Environmental Comedy: No Impact Man and the Performance of Green Identity," *Environmental Communication* 5:4 (2011): 447-466; Adrienne E. Christiansen and Jeremy J. Hanson, "Comedy as Cure for Tragedy: Act Up and the Rhetoric of AIDS," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 82 (1996): 157-170.

[96] Kundai Chirindo and Ryan Neville-Shepard, "Obama's 'New Beginning': US Foreign Policy and Comic Exceptionalism," *Argumentation and Advocacy* 51 (2015): 220.
[97] See: Valerie R. Renegar and George N. Dionisopoulos, "The Dream of a Cyberpunk Future? Entelechy, Dialectical Tension, and the Comic Corrective in William Gibson's Neuromancer," *Southern Communication Journal* 76:4 (2011): 326; Lacy Lowrey, Valerie R. Renegar, and Charles E. Goehring, "'When God Gives You AIDS...Make Lemon-AIDS': Ironic Persona and Perspective by Incongruity in Sarah Silverman's Jesus is Magic," *Western Journal of Communication* 78:1 (2014): 58-77.
[98] Burke, *Attitudes Toward History*, 43, 42.
[99] C. Wesley Buerkle, Michael E. Mayer, and Clark D. Olson, "Our Hero the Buffoon: Contradictory and Concurrent Burkean Framing of Arizona Governor Evan Mecham," *Western Journal of Communication* 67:2 (2003): 188, 203.
[100] Chirindo and Neville-Shepard, "Obama's 'New Beginning': US Foreign Policy and Comic Exceptionalism," 217.
[101] Hatch, "Reconciliation," 744. The concept of the tragicomic has also been expertly developed elsewhere, see: Celeste Michelle Condit, "Post-Burke: Transcending the Sub-Stance of Dramatism," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 78 (1992): 355; Thomas B. Farrell, "Comic History Meets Tragic Memory: Burke and Habermas on the Drama of Human Relations," in *Kenneth Burke and Contemporary European Thought*, ed. Bernard L. Brock (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1995), 41.
[102] Burke, *Attitudes Toward History*, 167.
[103] Edward C. Appel, "Burlesque Drama as a Rhetorical Genre: The Hudibrastic Ridicule of William F. Buckley, Jr.," *Western Journal of Communication* 60:3 (1996): 269-284.
[104] Burke, *Attitudes Toward History*, 54.
[105] Todd V. Lewis and K. Arianna Molloy, "Religious Rhetoric and Satire: Investigating the Comic and Burlesque Frames Within The Big Bang Theory," *Journal of Media and Religion* 14 (2015): 88-101.
[106] Appel, "Burlesque Drama as a Rhetorical Genre," 270.
[107] Appel, "Burlesque Drama as a Rhetorical Genre," 270.
[108] Chris Smith and Ben Voth, "The Role of Humor in Political Argument: How 'Strategery' and 'Lockboxes' Changed a Political Campaign," *Argument and Advocacy* 39 (2002): 111, 113.
[109] Appel, "Burlesque Drama as a Rhetorical Genre," 271.
[110] Appel, "Burlesque Drama as a Rhetorical Genre," 272.
[111] Appel, "Burlesque Drama as a Rhetorical Genre," 272.
[112] Joseph Rhodes, "The Atheistic Voice," *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* 17:2 (2014): 332, 333.
[113] Gary Stevens Selby, "Scoffing at the enemy: The Burlesque Frame in the Rhetoric of Ralph David Abernathy," *Southern Communication Journal* 70:2 (2005): 135.
[114] Appel, "Burlesque Drama as a Rhetorical Genre," 272.
[115] Appel, "Burlesque Drama as a Rhetorical Genre," 272.
[116] Appel, "Burlesque Drama as a Rhetorical Genre," 272.
[117] Jennifer Peeples, Pete Bsumek, Steve Schwarze, and Jen Schneider, "Industrial Apocalyptic: Neoliberalism, Coal, and the Burlesque Frame," *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* 17:2 (2014): 232.
[118] Selby, "Scoffing at the Enemy," 136.
[119] Burke, *Attitudes Toward History*, 49.
[120] Burke, *Attitudes Toward History*, 49.
[121] Burke, *Attitudes Toward History*, 312.
[122] Burke, *Attitudes Toward History*, 313.
[123] Burke, *Attitudes Toward History*, 49.
[124] Burke, *Attitudes Toward History*, 313.
[125] Burke, *A Grammar of Motives*, 514.
[1] Gilbert Highet, *The Anatomy of Satire*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1962). Google scholar lists 763 works citing *The Anatomy of Satire*. To put that in perspective, the second most cited text is Dustin H. Griffin's *Satire: A Critical Reintroduction* at 687 cites. Griffin cites Highet multiple times. After Highet and Griffin, no book on satire cracks 400 citations. These numbers suggest that even

if one is uncertain about the claim that Highet is foundational to modern satire studies, it should be safe to say he is relatively more influential than any other source.

[2] Flanderization: a term derived from popular Simpsons character Ned Flanders, who like many other characters in the series became less nuanced and more extreme as the show went on. Flanderization is common in long-running shows and other media series as characters over time are identified for their most outlandish and unique traits, thus incentivizing writers to shelve human qualities in favor of cartoonish vulgarity.

[3] See: Megan R. Hill, "Developing a Normative Approach to Political Satire: A Critical Perspective," *International Journal of Communication* 7 (2013): 337; Holbert, R. Lance, Jay Hmielowski, Parul Jain, Julie Lather, and Alyssa Morey, "Adding Nuance to the Study of Political Humor Effects: Experimental Research on Juvenalian Satire Versus Horatian Satire," *American Behavioral Scientist* 55:3 (2011): 187–211; Jason T. Peifer and R. Lance Holbert, "Appreciation of Pro-Attitudinal Versus Counter-Attitudinal Political Humor: A Cognitive Consistency Approach to the Study of Political Entertainment," *Communication Quarterly* 64:1 (2016): 16-35; Heather L. LaMarre, Kristen D. Landreville, Dannagal Young, and Nathan Gilkerson, "Humor works in funny ways: Examining satirical tone as a key determinant in political humor message processing" *Mass Communication and Society* 17:3 (2014): 400–423; Fredric V. Bogel, *The difference satire makes: Rhetoric and reading from Jonson to Byron* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2001); Leonard Feinberg, *Introduction to satire* (Ames: The Iowa State University Press, 1967); Charles A. Knight, *The Literautre of Satire* (Cambridge University Press, 2004); Charles Sander, *The scope of satire* (Glenview, IL: Scott, Foresman, & Company, 1971); Edward A. Bloom and Lillian D. Bloom, *Satire's persuasive voice* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1979); Charles E. Schutz, *Political humor: From Aristophanes to Sam Ervin* (Cranbury, NJ: Associated University Presses, 1977); Dustin H. Griffin, *Satire: A critical reintroduction* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1994).

[4] Highet, *The Anatomy of Satire*, 234.

[5] Highet, *The Anatomy of Satire*, 234.

[6] Highet, *The Anatomy of Satire*, 235.

[7] Highet, *The Anatomy of Satire*, 235.

[8] Highet, *The Anatomy of Satire*, 235.

[9] Highet, *The Anatomy of Satire*, 237.

[10] Highet, *The Anatomy of Satire*, 235.

[11] Highet, *The Anatomy of Satire*, 236.

[12] R. Lance Holbert, John M Tchernev, Whitney O. Walther, Sarah E. Esralew, and Kathryn Benski, "Young Voter Perceptions of Political Satire as Persuasion: A Focus on Perceived Influence, Persuasive Intent, and Message Strength," *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media* 57:2 (2013): 183-184.

[13] Heather L. LaMarre, Kristen D. Landreville, Dannagal Young, and Nathan Gilkerson, "Humor works in funny ways: Examining satirical tone as a key determinant in political humor message processing," *Mass Communication and Society* 17:3 (2014): 421.

[14] LaMarre et al, "Humor Works in Funny Ways," 422.

[15] Carina Weinmann and Peter Vorderer, "A Normative Perspective for Political Entertainment Research: connecting Deliberative Democracy and Entertainment Theory," *Communication Theory* 28 (2018): 478.

[16] Highet, *The Anatomy of Satire*, 237.

[17] Edward A. Bloom and Lillian D. Bloom, *Satire's Persuasive Voice* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1979), 21.

[18] Bloom and Bloom, *Satire's Persuasive Voice,* 21.

[19] Bloom and Bloom, *Satire's Persuasive Voice,* 21.

[20] Bloom and Bloom, *Satire's Persuasive Voice,* 54.

[21] Highet, *The Anatomy of Satire*, 237.

[22] Highet, *The Anatomy of Satire*, 237.

[23] Highet, *The Anatomy of Satire*, 238.

[24] Highet, *The Anatomy of Satire*, 243.

[25] Highet, *The Anatomy of Satire*, 241.
[26] Highet, *The Anatomy of Satire*, 243.
[27] Bloom and Bloom, *Satire's Persuasive Voice,* 55.
[28] Frank B. Wilderson, *Red White & Black: Cinema and the Structure of U.S. Antagonisms* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010): 338.
[29] Bonnie J. Down and Mari Boor Toon, "'Feminine Style' and Political Judgment in the Rhetoric of Ann Richards," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 79 (1993): 288.
[30] See: Noam Chomsky, "An interview on minimalism," in *On nature and language* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 92–161; Piantadosi, S. T., Tily, H., & Gibson, E, "The communicative function of ambiguity in language," *Cognition* 122:3 (2012): 280–291.
[31] Eric M. Eisenberg, "Ambiguity as strategy in organizational communication," *Communication Monographs* 51 (1984): 230.
[32] YJ Sohn and Heidi Hatfield Edwards, "Strategic Ambiguity and Crisis Apologia: The Impact of Audiences' Interpretations of Mixed Messages," *International Journal of Strategic Communication* 12:5 (2018): 554.
[33] Sohn and Edwards, "Strategic Ambiguity and the Crisis of Apologia," 554.
[34] See J.R. Jenkinson, *Persius: The Satires* (Warminster, 1980), 6; Barbara Johnson, "Teaching Deconstructively," in *Writing and Reading Differently: Deconstruction and the Teaching of Composition and Literature*, ed. G. Douglas Atkins and Michael L. Johnson (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1985), 144.
[35] David H.J. Larmour, "Juvenal, Ideology and the Critics: A Plan for Resisting Readers," *Pacific Coast Philology* 26:1 (1991): 42.
[36] Freudenburg, "Faking It in Nero's Orgasmatron," 210.
[37] Steven E. Jones, "Intertextual Influences in Byron's Juvenalian Satire," *Studies in English Literature*, 1500-1900 33:4 (1993): 771-783.
[38] Lech Witkowski, "Education and the Universal Challenge of 'Border'" *Dialogue and Universalism* 10 (2000).
[39] Bloom and Bloom, *Satire's Persuasive Voice,* 13.
[40] Bloom and Bloom, *Satire's Persuasive Voice,* 66.
[41] Freudenburg, "Faking It in Nero's Orgasmatron," 202.
[42] A note on direct quotation of Juvenal and Perseus: because their works are mostly considered untitled, they are instead referenced by number. Here, "Perseus' 1s" refers to his first satire chronologically. Numbers in parenthesis refer to line number, not page number, as different printings may vary number of lines per page. The translation used in this text is from: Susanna Morton Braund, *Juvenal and Persius* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015).
[43] Don J. Waisanen and Amy B. Becker, "The Problem with Being Joe Biden: Political Comedy and Circulating Personae," *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 32:4 (2015): 258-259.
[44] A good example of using persona in the face of opposition – from a non-satiric perspective – can be found in Maegan Parker Brooks, "Oppositional Ethos: Fannie Lou Hamer and The Vernacular Persona," *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* 14 (2011): 511-548
[45] See Wayne C. Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (Chicago University Press: Chicago, 1961).
[46] One can hardly blame Clinton for her media portrayal as election studies suggest even mainstream media coverage of Clinton contributed to negative associations of inauthenticity, fakeness, and deception. See: Thomas E. Patterson, "Pre-Primary News Coverage of the 2016 Presidential Race: Trump's Rise, Sanders' Emergence, Clinton's Struggle," *Shorenstein Center* June 13, 2016, https://shorensteincenter.org/pre-primary-news-coverage-2016-trump-clinton-sanders/; *The Conversation*, "It wasn't just 'fake news' presenting a fake Hillary Clinton," Nov 21, 2016, https://theconversation.com/it-wasnt-just-fake-news-presenting-a-fake-hillary-clinton-68799
[47] Wayne Elise, *How to Meet and Connect with Women* (Charisma Arts, 2007), 3-7.
[48] ABC15 Arizona, "BALLOONS! Tim Kaine & Bill Clinton join Hillary Clinton on stage - Democratic National Convention," YouTube video, 4:52, July 28, 2016, https://youtu.be/vKWuhBhbWJA

[49] The phrase "Window-Lickers from Ohio" is spoken by Cecily Strong while impersonating Diane Feinstein, implying democratic leadership holds disdain for folks persuaded to vote for Trump (coded as blue-collars or "average americans"). *Saturday Night Live*, "Message from the DNC," YouTube video, 3:16, Nov 12, 2017, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CBUxNeXgC70
[50] Probably – almost certainly – because of her gender. For example, see: Shawn J. Parry-Giles, *Hillary Clinton in the News: Gender and Authenticity in American Politics* (University of Illinois Press: Urbana, 2014).
[51] Lacy Lowrey, Valerie R. Renegar, and Charles E. Goehring, "When God Gives You AIDS...Make Lemon-AIDS": Ironic Persona and Perspective by Incongruity in Sarah Silverman's Jesus is Magic," *Western Journal of Communication* 78:1 (2014): 58-77.
[52] Lowrey, Renegar, and Goehring, "When God Gives You AIDS," 59.
[53] Dean Greg, *Step by Step to Stand-up Comedy* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2000). 79.
[54] Lowrey, Renegar, and Goehring, "When God Gives You AIDS," 65.
[55] Lowrey, Renegar, and Goehring, "When God Gives You AIDS," 71.
[56] David Kaufer, ''Irony and Rhetorical Strategy,'' *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 10:2 (1977): 97.
[57] Edwin Black, "The Second Persona" *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 56 (1970): 111.
[58] Black, "Second Persona," 113.
[59] Black, "Second Persona," 113.
[60] Black, "Second Persona," 112.
[61] Celeste Condit, "Pathos in Criticism: Edwin Black's Communism-As-Cancer Metaphor," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 99:1 (2013), 8.
[62] Condit, "Pathos," 5.
[63] Philip Wander, "The Third Persona: An Ideological Turn in Rhetorical Theory," *Central States Speech Journal* 35 (1984): 209-210.
[64] Dana L. Cloud, "The Null Persona: Race and the Rhetoric of Silence in the Uprising of '34," *Rhetoric and Public Affairs* 2(2) 1999: 200.
[65] Charles E. Morris III, "Pink Herring & The Fourth Persona: J. Edgar Hoover's Sex Crime Panic," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 88:2 (2002): 230.
[66] Morris, "Pink Herring," 230.
[67] Morris, "Pink Herring," 230.
[68] Morris, "Pink Herring," 240.
[69] I am reminded of a quote often attributed to Mark Twain, George Carlin, and other cynical comics: "Never argue with an idiot; they will drag you down to their level and then beat you with experience." So we can admit, then, that there is a *better* idiot. There is something, some manifest property, which enables one idiot to *beat* the other at an idiot's contest. My point is that the title of "Master Clown" may appear to be a rather idiotic qualification, but just because one is studying clowns does not mean there is no such thing as the better or more expert clown.
[70] Jacques Lecoq, *Theatre of Movement and Gesture* (Oxon: Routledge, 2006), 120.
[71] Stock Umorea, "Buffoon is," YouTube video, 1:10, July 11, 2015, https://www.youtube.com/watch?list=PLf6EGpQtAkBzlG7TRLZbEP4ERNyT3ypEl&v=nP9M8ipMpHs.
[72] Sacha Baron Cohen and Marc Maron, "Sacha Baron Cohen 683," podcast audio, *WTF with Marc Maron*. MP3, 1:01:00-1:07:00, accessed October 20, 2016. http://www.wtfpod.com/podcast/episodes/episode_683_-_sacha_baron_cohen.
[73] Nilufer Ovalioglu, "The Female Bouffon" (PhD diss., Brunel University, 2010), 5-6.
[74] Baron Cohen and Maron, "Sacha Baron Cohen 683."
[75] Lisa Colletta, "Political Satire and Postmodern Irony in the Age of Stephen Colbert and Jon Stewart," *The Journal of Popular Culture* 42 (2009): 860.
[76] Coletta, "Political Satire and Postmodern Irony," 860.
[77] Priscilla Marie Meddaugh, "Bakhtin, Colbert, and the Center of Discourse: Is There No 'Truthiness' in Humor?" *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 27 (2010): 379.
[78] Meddaugh, "Bakhtin, Colbert, and the Center of Discourse," 379.

[79] Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* (Bloomington, IN: Midland Books, 1984), 127.
[80] Ovalioglu, *The Female Bouffon*, 6.
[81] Jacques Lecoq et al, *The Moving Body: Teaching Creative Theatre* (Great Britain: Methuen Publishing Limited, 2000), 118.
[82] Lynn Everett, "Jacques Lecoq's Bouffons in Australia," *Australasian Drama Studies* 53 (2008): 170.
[83] Everett, "Jacques Lecoq's Bouffons in Australia," 170
[84] Lech Witkowski, "Education and the Universal Challenge of 'Border'" *Dialogue and Universalism* 10 (2000).
[85] Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and his world* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1984), 9.
[1] Allie Conti, "The Alt-Right is a Subculture Without a Culture," *Vice* April 2, 2018. Web. https://www.vice.com/en_us/article/evm7wm/the-alt-right-is-a-subculture-without-a-culture
(Cites Bernstein to claim the show had hidden swastikas)

[2] Joseph Bernstein, 'The Alt-Right Has Its Very Own TV Show On Adult Swim', *BuzzFeed*, August 25, 2016, https://www.buzzfeednews.com/article/josephbernstein/the-alt-right-has-its-own-comedy-tv-show-on-a-time-warner-ne#.uw2A4KJ3m

[3] David Sims, "The Battle Over Adult Swim's Alt-Right TV Show," *The Atlantic* November 17, 2016. Web. https://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2016/11/the-raging-battle-over-adult-swims-alt-right-tv-show/508016/

[4] See Hyde's full interview with Bernstein: Cancerwraith, "(RE-UPLOADED) My Amazing BUZZFEED Interview w'ViewtifulBlockhead'Joe Bernstein," YouTube Video, 13:47, August 27, 2016, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TkXK95R5zSw.

[5] Seth Abramovitch, "Sam Hyde Speaks: Meet the Man Behind Adult Swim's Canceled 'Alt-Right' Comedy Show (Exclusive)," *The Hollywood Reporter* December 8, 2016. Web. https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/sam-hyde-speaks-meet-man-behind-adult-swims-canceled-alt-right-comedy-show-954487.

[6] Abramovitch, "Sam Hyde Speaks."

[7] Joseph Bernstein, "The Underground Neo-Nazi Promo Campaign Behind Adult Swim's Alt-Right Comedy Show," *BuzzFeed*, 13 September 2016. Web. https://www.buzzfeednews.com/article/josephbernstein/neo-nazi-promo-adult-swim-million-dollar-extreme#.fnQ48mlRe.

[8] Bernstein, "The Underground Neo-Nazi Promo Campaign."
[9] Sims, "The Battle Over Adult Swim's Alt-Right TV Show.

[10] Bernstein, The Alt Right Has its Very Own TV Show on Adult Swim.

[11] The term "Honky" recurs several times in *MDE* to describe a certain type of white person – most often a white male, uncritical, centrist or right-leaning, watches sitcoms and votes Republican, basically the "white men" that everyone is so angry about all the time. Dave Chapelle offers a useful definition: "Honky is a racial epithet used for white people. It was made popular by a man named George Jefferson in the 1970s. You see he and his wife Weezy had a dry cleaning business that they moved on up to the East Side, to a deluxe apartment in the sky. They finally got a piece of the pie." See: "Haters in Time,"

Comedy Central Presents: Chappelle's Show, Season Two: Uncensored!, performed by Dave Chappelle (2004, Paramount), DVD.

[12] Sims, "The Battle Over Adult Swim's Alt-Right TV Show.

[13] Maxwell Strachan, "Adult Swim Cuts Ties with Controversial 'Alt-Right'-Affiliated Show, '*Million Dollar Extreme*,'" *Huffington Post* December 6, 2016. Web. https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/million-dollar-extreme-canceled_us_5846d60ce4b02f60b024d57a.

[14] Michael Malice, "Trump Supporter Sam Hyde on Why Political Correctness Canceled his Adult Swim Show," *The Observer* December 12, 2016. Web. https://observer.com/2016/12/million-dollar-extremes-sam-hyde-speaks-out-on-adult-swim-cancellation/

[15] Sims, "the Battle Over Adult Swim's Alt-Right TV Show.

[16] Joseph Bernstein, 'Adult Swim Talent Want The Network To Cancel Its Alt-Right Comedy Show', *BuzzFeed* November 16, 2016. Web. https://www.buzzfeednews.com/article/josephbernstein/adult-swim-talent-trying-to-cancel-million-dollar-extreme#.mt74mV1LY.

[17] Malice, "Trump Supporter Sam Hyde on Why Political Correctness Canceled his Adult Swim Show." For further context, see: Sam Hyde, "'Adult Swim' Fired Me For Supporting Donald Trump - Here's How it Went Down," *The Daily Caller* December 09, 2016. Web. http://dailycaller.com/2016/12/09/adult-swim-fired-me-for-supporting-donald-trump-heres-how-it-went-down/

[18] Malice, "Trump Supporter Sam Hyde."

[19] Strachan, "Adult Swim Cuts Ties with Controversial 'Alt-Right'-Affiliated Show."

[1] Amber Day and Ethan Thompson, "Live From New York, It's the Fake News! Saturday Night Live and the (Non)Politics of Parody," Popular Communication 10 (2012): 181.

[2] Ben Voth, (2008). Saturday night live and presidential elections. In J.C. Baumgartner & J.S. Morris (Eds.), Laughing matters (pp. 229–240). New York, NY: Routledge.

[3] Joey Nolfi, "Saturday Night Live Ratings: Season 42 Opens to 8-year Premiere High." Entertainment Weekly, October 2, 2016, http://ew.com/article/2016/10/02/snl-season-42-premiere-ratings/; Michael O'Connell, "TV Ratings: Post-Election 'Saturday Night Live' Hits Season High." The Hollywood Reporter, November 13, 2016, http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/live-feed/tv-ratings-post-election-saturday-night-live-hits-season-high-946866

[4] Trevor Parry-Giles and Shawn J. Parry-Giles, "Expanding the Discipline's Debate Contributions: New Potentials, Beyond Effects," Quarterly Journal of Speech 101, no. 1 (2015): 122.

[5] Amy B. Becker, "Comedy Types and Political Campaigns: The Differential Influence of Other-Directed Hostile Humor and Self-Ridicule on Candidate Evaluations," Mass Communication and Society 15 (2012): 791-812.

[6] Angela D. Abel and Michael Barthel, "Appropriation of Mainstream News: How 'Saturday Night Live' Changed the Political Discussion," *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 30:1 (2013): 1-16.

[7] Stephen Gencarella Olbrys, "Disciplining the Carnivalesque: Chris Farley's Exotic Dance," *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies* 3:3 (2006): 240-259.

[8] Amber Davisson, "'Hallelujah': Parody, Political Catharsis, and Grieving the 2016 Election with Saturday Night Live," *Communication Quarterly* 66:2 (2018): 197.

[9] Chris Jones, "Alec Baldwin Gets Under Trump's Skin," *The Atlantic* May 2017, https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2017/05/alec-baldwin-gets-under-trumps-skin/521433/.

[10] R. Andrew Holbrook and Timothy G. Hill, “Agenda-Setting and Priming in Prime Time Television: Crime Dramas as Political Cues,” *Political Communication* 3 (2005): 277-295.
[11] Chris Smith and Ben Voth, "The Role of Humor in Political Argument: How 'Strategery' and 'Lockboxes' Changed a Political Campaign," Argument and Advocacy 39 (2002): 110-129.
[12] See: Jason T. Peifer, "Palin, Saturday Night Live, and Framing: Examining the Dynamics of Political Parody," *The Communication Review* 16:3 (2013): 155-177; Don J. Waisanen and Amy B. Becker, "The Problem with Being Joe Biden: Political Comedy and Circulating Personae," Critical Studies in Media Communication 32:4 (2015): 264.
[13] Ian Crouch, "Alec Baldwin is a Perfect Donald Trump," The New Yorker Oct 3, 2016, https://www.newyorker.com/culture/culture-desk/alec-baldwin-donald-trump-saturday-night-live.
[14] Emily Heil and Sarah Polus, "Alec Baldwin, who plays Trump on 'SNL,' asks Twitter if he should play president in real life," *Washington Post* April 8, 2019. Web. https://www.inquirer.com/politics/nation/alec-baldwin-donald-trump-saturday-night-live-snl-twitter-campaign-20190408.html.
[15] Nicholas Loffredo, "'Are You Not Entertain?' 'SNL' Tackles Trump Hot Mic Scandal," *Newsweek* October 9, 2017. Web. https://www.newsweek.com/snl-alec-baldwin-trump-hot-mic-scandal-508030?fbclid=IwAR10P7Ydq4BHvc4DCLUQ-Z-enR9F7vRrboQt8fwKAK4A1efhFOL-zgoXhGc.
[16] Alli Joseph, "WATCH: Alec Baldwin as President Donald Trump on 'The People's Court'," *Salon* February 12, 2017. Web. https://www.salon.com/2017/02/12/watch-alec-baldwin-as-president-donald-trump-on-the-peoples-court/.
[17] Willa Paskin, "Why Alec Baldwin's Donald Trump Impression Rankles Trump More Than Other SNL Impersonations of Him," Slate Oct 17, 2016. Web. https://slate.com/culture/2016/10/why-alec-baldwin-s-trump-impression-rankles-trump-so-much-more-than-other-saturday-night-live-impersonations-did.html.
[18] Ian Crouch, "Alec Baldwin is a Perfect Donald Trump," The New Yorker Oct 3, 2016, https://www.newyorker.com/culture/culture-desk/alec-baldwin-donald-trump-saturday-night-live. Crouch, incidentally, makes a delightful plea for humanizing Trump, something we know now would never come to be: "Baldwin has signed up to play Trump for the season on “S.N.L.,” and let’s hope that, in the coming weeks, he gets the chance to bore deeper into the Trump character, to combine a strong antipathy for his politics with what may be a touch of empathy for whatever it is that motivates him. If there is sadness, or any other honest human emotion, beneath Trump’s skin, perhaps Baldwin, in eviscerating him, will reveal it."
[19] Jones, “Alec Baldwin Gets Under Trump’s Skin.”
[20] Pamela Kruger, "SNL’s Alec Baldwin Once Again Skewers Donald Trump—With His Own Words," *Fortune* October 23, 2016. Web. https://fortune.com/2016/10/23/snl-alec-baldwin-trump-debate/.
[21] Dean Obeidallah, "How 'SNL' got under Trump's Skin," *CNN* July 12, 2017. Web. https://www.cnn.com/2017/05/21/opinions/saturday-night-live-finale-obeidallah/index.html.
[22] Jones, "Alec Baldwin Gets Under Trump's Skin.”
[23] Jones, "Alec Baldwin Gets Under Trump's Skin.”
[24] Gaulier traces the origin of the clown to early village life: "Always the village idiot in rural life was falling down in the flour, and he would come away completely white, and everyone would say, ‘Ho ho, he’s the village idiot’ – or the clown....a clown is innocent." See: Brian Logan, "'A Clown is innocent': Philippe Gaulier tips a bucket of water over creepy craze," The Guardian November 4, 2016. Web. https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2016/nov/04/creepy-clown-craze-philippe-gaulier.
[25] https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/stupid
[26] *Saturday Night Live*, “Trump's Christmas Cold Open,” YouTube Video, 5:55, December 18, 2016, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3Ar80sFzViw.
[27] *Saturday Night Live*, “Donald Trump vs. Hillary Clinton Third Debate Cold Open,” YouTube Video, 9:49, October 22, 2016, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-kjyltrKZSY.
[28] *Saturday Night Live*, “Paul Manafort's House Cold Open,” YouTube Video, 5:19, November 5, 2017, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=spkfIpPmPgs.

[29] *Saturday Night Live*, "Trump Prepares Cold Open," YouTube Video, 6:08, November 20, 2016, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JUWSLlz0Fdo.
[30] *Saturday Night Live*, "Donald Trump Press Conference Cold Open," YouTube Video, 7:56, January 15, 2017, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4_Gf0mGJfP8.
[31] *Saturday Night Live*, "The Chaos President Cold Open," YouTube Video, 5:46, October 1, 2017, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7e4vFMJmBIc.
[32] *Saturday Night Live*, "Donald Trump Phoenix Rally Cold Open," Facebook Video, 5:18, August 24, 2017, https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=10155580618116303.
[33] *Saturday Night Live*, "Oval Office Cold Open," YouTube Video, 6:32, February 5, 2017, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pZOF9q5fzfs.
[34] *Saturday Night Live*, "Presidential Address Cold Open," YouTube Video, 6:14, March 4, 2018, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6IL4sMC_XBE.
[35] *Saturday Night Live*, "Donald Trump Trucker Rally Did Cold Open," YouTube Video, 6:07, October 15, 2017, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PfVobgfXE34&t=9s.
[36] *Saturday Night Live*, "Alien Attack Cold Open," YouTube Video, 5:22, March 12, 2017, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MrkJM4JUB28.
[37] *Saturday Night Live*, "The O'Reilly Factor with Donald Trump," YouTube Video, 5:05, April 9, 2017, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7yq2CXkrZpo.
[38] *Saturday Night Live*, "Donald Trump Cold Open," YouTube Video, 5:56, April 16, 2017, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CgNgkwTusM4.
[39] *Saturday Night Live*, "Donald Trump vs. Hillary Clinton Debate Cold Open," YouTube Video, 9:45, October 2, 2016, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-nQGBZQrtT0&t=1s.
[40] *Saturday Night Live*, "Donald Trump Phoenix Rally Cold Open," Facebook Video, 5:18, August 24, 2017, https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=10155580618116303.
[41] *Saturday Night Live*, "Fox & Friends Cold Open," YouTube Video, 6:48, February 4, 2018, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K45mFsyZxtU.
[42] *Saturday Night Live*, "Alien Attack Cold Open," YouTube Video, 5:22, March 12, 2017, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MrkJM4JUB28.
[43] *Saturday Night Live*, "Trump People's Court," YouTube Video, 12-Feb-17, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dLYfwprjtog.
[44] *Saturday Night Live*, "VP Debate Cold Open," NBC Broadcasting, October 8, 2016.
[45] *Saturday Night Live*, "White House Christmas Cold Open," YouTube Video, 6:20, December 3, 2017, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H9wMNxbQM-4.
[46] *Saturday Night Live*, "Donald Trump Press Conference Cold Open," YouTube Video, 7:56, January 15, 2017, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4_Gf0mGJfP8.
[47] *Saturday Night Live*, "Oval Office Cold Open," YouTube Video, 6:32, February 5, 2017, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pZOF9q5fzfs.
[48] *Saturday Night Live*, "Donald Trump vs. Hillary Clinton Third Debate Cold Open," YouTube Video, 9:49, October 22, 2016, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-kjyltrKZSY.
[49] *Saturday Night Live*, "Trump's Christmas Cold Open," YouTube Video, 5:55, December 18, 2016, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3Ar80sFzViw.
[50] *Saturday Night Live*, "Alien Attack Cold Open," YouTube Video, 5:22, March 12, 2017, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MrkJM4JUB28.
[51] *Saturday Night Live*, "Michael Cohen Wiretap Cold Open," YouTube Video, 7:27, May 6, 2018, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K1K8s-tQGqY.
[52] *Saturday Night Live*, "Donald Trump Trucker Rally Did Cold Open," YouTube Video, 6:07, October 15, 2017, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PfVobgfXE34&t=9s.
[53] *Saturday Night Live*, "White House Tree Trimming Cold Open," YouTube Video, 7:25, December 17, 2017, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hOulcmOHCIQ.
[54] *Saturday Night Live*, "Fox & Friends Cold Open," YouTube Video, 6:48, February 4, 2018, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K45mFsyZxtU.

[55] *Saturday Night Live*, "Donald Trump vs. Hillary Clinton Town Hall Debate Cold Open," YouTube Video, 8:26, October 16, 2016, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qVMW_1aZXRk.
[56] *Saturday Night Live*, "Presidential Address Cold Open," YouTube Video, 6:14, March 4, 2018, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6IL4sMC_XBE.
[57] *Saturday Night Live*, "Donald Trump Baltic States Cold Open," YouTube Video, 7:23, April 8, 2018, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1iCm8tYX-Vw.
[58] *Saturday Night Live*, "Donald Trump Baltic States Cold Open," YouTube Video, 7:23, April 8, 2018, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1iCm8tYX-Vw.
[59] *Saturday Night Live*, "Trump Prepares Cold Open," YouTube Video, 6:08, November 20, 2016, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JUWSLlz0Fdo.
[60] *Saturday Night Live*, "The Chaos President Cold Open," YouTube Video, 5:46, October 1, 2017, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7e4vFMJmBIc.
[61] *Saturday Night Live*, "Trump's People," YouTube Video, 5:26, April 9, 2017, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CL7kenX3Vu8.
[62] Sacha Baron Cohen and Marc Maron, "Sacha Baron Cohen 683," podcast audio, *WTF with Marc Maron*. MP3, 1:01:00-1:07:00, accessed October 20, 2016. http://www.wtfpod.com/podcast/episodes/episode_683_-_sacha_baron_cohen.
[63] Peter Canellos, "Why Trump Should Be Thanking Alec Baldwin," *Politico* May 17, 2019 Web. politico.com/magazine/story/2019/05/17/trump-snl-impression-baldwin-saturday-night-live-226920 Baldwin humanizes trump, gives him relatable qualities.
[64] *Saturday Night Live*, "Trump Prepares Cold Open," YouTube Video, 6:08, November 20, 2016, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JUWSLlz0Fdo.
[65] *Saturday Night Live*, "Presidential Address Cold Open," YouTube Video, 6:14, March 4, 2018, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6IL4sMC_XBE.
[66] *Saturday Night Live*, "Lester Holt Cold Open," YouTube Video, 5:21, May 14, 2017, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZBPt335vcAQ.
[67] *Saturday Night Live*, "Donald Trump Trucker Rally Did Cold Open," YouTube Video, 6:07, October 15, 2017, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PfVobgfXE34&t=9s.
[68] *Saturday Night Live*, "Oval Office Cold Open," YouTube Video, 6:32, February 5, 2017, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pZOF9q5fzfs.
[69] *Saturday Night Live*, "White House Christmas Cold Open," YouTube Video, 6:20, December 3, 2017, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H9wMNxbQM-4.
[70] *Saturday Night Live*, "Trump's Christmas Cold Open," YouTube Video, 5:55, December 18, 2016, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3Ar80sFzViw.
[71] *Saturday Night Live*, "Donald Trump Phoenix Rally Cold Open," Facebook Video, 5:18, August 24, 2017, https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=10155580618116303.
[72] *Saturday Night Live*, "Alien Attack Cold Open," YouTube Video, 5:22, March 12, 2017, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MrkJM4JUB28.
[73] *Saturday Night Live*, "Donald Trump Baltic States Cold Open," YouTube Video, 7:23, April 8, 2018, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1iCm8tYX-Vw.
[74] *Saturday Night Live*, "Trump's People," YouTube Video, 5:26, April 9, 2017, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CL7kenX3Vu8.
[75] *Saturday Night Live,* "Trump Rally Cold Open," YouTube Video, 9:01, October 27, 2019, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Tw3M1x5m7h8
[76] Mr. Bones' Wild Ride is a player-made roller coaster in the video game *Roller Coaster Tycoon II* that lasts for 4 in-game years. Animated customers often complain "I want to get off Mr. Bones' Wild Ride," but there is no escape. The phrase "this train has no breaks" was common parlance in pro-Trump circles around the 2016 election, used to display optimism anytime Trump seemed to face a barrier, or to celebrate when Trump scored a win.
[77] *Saturday Night Live,* "GOP Debate Cold Open," YouTube Video, 6:34, December 20, 2015, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r0Th70moeuc.

[78] *Saturday Night Live*, "Donald Trump vs. Hillary Clinton Debate Cold Open," YouTube Video, 9:45, October 2, 2016, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-nQGBZQrtT0&t=1s.
[79] *Saturday Night Live*, "Donald Trump vs. Hillary Clinton Town Hall Debate Cold Open," YouTube Video, 8:26, October 16, 2016, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qVMW_1aZXRk.
[80] *Saturday Night Live*, "Donald Trump vs. Hillary Clinton Third Debate Cold Open," YouTube Video, 9:49, October 22, 2016, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-kjyltrKZSY.
[81] *Saturday Night Live*, "Donald Trump Press Conference Cold Open," YouTube Video, 7:56, January 15, 2017, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4_Gf0mGJfP8.
[82] *Saturday Night Live*, "Trump People's Court," YouTube Video, 12-Feb-17, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dLYfwprjtog.
[83] *Saturday Night Live*, "Donald Trump Cold Open," YouTube Video, 5:56, April 16, 2017, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CgNgkwTusM4.
[84] *Saturday Night Live*, "Lester Holt Cold Open," YouTube Video, 5:21, May 14, 2017, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZBPt335vcAQ.
[85] David Foster Wallace, "E Unibus Pluram: Television and U.S. Fiction," Review of Contemporary Fiction 13:2 (1993): 151-194.
[86] *Saturday Night Live*, "Hallelujah Cold Open," NBC Broadcasting, May 20, 2017.
[87] *Saturday Night Live*, "Paul Manafort's House Cold Open," YouTube Video, 5:19, November 5, 2017, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=spkfIpPmPgs.
[88] *Saturday Night Live*, "White House Christmas Cold Open," YouTube Video, 6:20, December 3, 2017, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H9wMNxbQM-4
[89] *Saturday Night Live*, "White House Tree Trimming Cold Open," YouTube Video, 7:25, December 17, 2017, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hOulcmOHCIQ.
[90] *Saturday Night Live*, "Presidential Address Cold Open," YouTube Video, 6:14, March 4, 2018, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6IL4sMC_XBE.
[91] *Saturday Night Live*, "Michael Cohen Wiretap Cold Open," YouTube Video, 7:27, May 6, 2018, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K1K8s-tQGqY.
[92] *Saturday Night Live*, "Donald Trump Robert Mueller Cold Open," YouTube Video, 4:58, May 20, 2018, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MW8M3tr1XXo.
[93] Former Castmate Rob Schneider thinks so. See: Christi Carras, "Rob Schneider Rips Alec Baldwin, 'Saturday Night Live' Politics," Variety April 27, 2018. Web. https://variety.com/2018/politics/news/rob-schneider-saturday-night-live-alec-baldwin-1202790450/
[94] Dan Alexander, "Trump's Businesses Raked In $1.9 Billion Of Revenue During His First Three Years In Office," Forbes September 11, 2020. Web. https://www.forbes.com/sites/danalexander/2020/09/11/trumps-businesses-raked-in-19-billion-of-revenue-during-his-first-three-years-in-office/?sh=7041a9651e13.
[95] Tom Scocca, "Someone Should Do Something," Slate September 20, 2019. Web. https://slate.com/news-and-politics/2019/09/nancy-pelosi-jerry-nadler-democrats-impeachment-trump.html