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Kathryn Miller

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Citizens on Twitter: A Rhetorical Analysis of Emerging Political Satire

(TITLE)

BY

Kathryn Miller

THESIS

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF

Masters of Arts in English

IN THE GRADUATE SCHOOL, EASTERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY
CHARLESTON, ILLINOIS

2017

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ABSTRACT

This thesis provides an overview of the history of satire, its rhetorical structure, and my interpretation of its historically culminated five fundamental characteristics. I also introduce that the rise in popularity of American political satire through various media has inspired a new wave of American satirists who project their own political satirical messages through social media platforms and how Twitter, in particular, has provided those “average” individuals with the opportunity to more actively, directly, and satirically take part in political discussions. With a collection of two data sets of tweets—one larger live tweet sweep during the first 2016 presidential debate and a study of five “average” individual political satirists’ tweets throughout a majority of the 2016 presidential campaign and after—I analyze how these tweets command a legitimacy into the established satirical realm because of their adherence to the fundamental characteristics presented. I also analyze how this particular social media platform affects these texts’ productions through the challenges presented to satirists and strategies that have emerged to combat those challenges. I then discuss the implications for and opportunities provided to average American citizens as political satirical commentators on Twitter in the changing world of American politics.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to Dr. Terri Fredrick and my family; without their patience, dedication, and encouragement, I'm not sure this publication would have been possible. I am forever grateful.

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I want to thank my committee, Dr. Terri Fredrick, Dr. Melissa Ames, and Dr. Tim Taylor, for their collaboration and input on this thesis. I could not have had a better group of scholars to help me through this research and analysis. I also want to acknowledge and thank fellow students who went through this process with me for their continual interest with and encouragement for one another's projects. I feel blessed to have been able to work and study with such a wonderful group of humans.

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Chapter 1: Literature Review

Historic Overview

As Leonard Feinberg asserts, "Satire has thrived in several societies across time" and the "kind of satirist we become depends on our environment" (43). This has certainly proved true, as satire has a long and extensive history spanning back to ancient Greece. Sophocles' and Socrates' demonstrations of irony sparked Aristotle's own cultivating of what started to be understood as satire (Feinberg 41, 25). Gilbert Highet discusses the three main "shapes" satire could take as first introduced by Aristotle:

- **Monologues:** In monologues, satirists tend to speak as themselves and directly address the audience. Highet states, "[The satirist] states his view of the problem, cites examples, pillories opponents, and endeavors to impose his view upon the public" (13).
- **Parodies:** In parodies, satirists take an existing work or form of literature and make it "look ridiculous, by infusing it with incongruous ideas, or exaggerating its aesthetic devices; or [...] makes the ideas look foolish by putting them into an inappropriate form; or both" (13).
- **Narratives:** In narratives, the satirist is rarely present within the text. These fictional narratives take the form of a story or drama. Highet argues that narrative satire "seems to be the most difficult type of satire" because it is more likely to be

misconstrued by audiences and/or poorly constructed by authors (14).

Born shortly after Aristotle's death, a Greek philosophical missionary, Bion, soon became the voice for the next generation of satirists by adopting Aristotle's satirical "monologue" form. He began delivering humorous and off-the-cuff, unexpected messages to audiences about despising society by wittily attacking its issues, as he did due to his own misfortunes in life (Highet 31). Bion was successful in creating his satire because of his strong understanding of his audience; he appealed to those uninterested in going to lectures or sermons, "yet still capable of understanding moral problems and of changing their own lives" (Highet 32). Highet argues, "[Bion's satire] was effective in attracting and impressing hearers who would otherwise never have opened their minds to a single general idea" (32-33). Bion's characterization of society as an object of attack and his strategy of creatively and skillfully adapting to his audiences combined with Aristotle's primal forms of satire to provide the groundwork for satire to become what it has. Building on Bion's techniques and Aristotle's formal options, other satirists were able to explore satire's potential.

Although satire originated in Greece, classical satire is often associated with two of the major Roman satirists, Horace and Juvenal. It is believed that satire was first introduced to Latin in Rome by Ennius and elaborated upon by Lucilius, who then became an inspiration for Horace; Horace developed and refined satire's characteristics for others to follow for

centuries to come (Highet 41). Highet states, "Horace, a kindlier man, made [satire] milder, refined its style, and infused into it a richer ethical content," and Horace's particular form of satire was eventually claimed as Horatian (41). Horatian satire is known for its characterization as "a lightly phrased discussion of a social and ethical problem," "[telling] the truth with a smile, so that [the satirist] will not repel [the audience] but cure them of that ignorance" (Highet 235). Just decades later, Juvenal "enlarged [satire's] size and scope, endeavored to make it rival epic and tragedy, and spoke of vices and sins viler than any touched by his predecessors" (Highet 41-42). In stark contrast with Horatian satire, Juvenalian satire came to be known for its vulgarity and aggressive tone; unlike Horatian satire which seeks to "cure" audiences of their follies, Juvenalian satire aims "to wound, to punish, to destroy" those that embody those follies (Highet 235).

As Christianity's popularity in the Roman Empire rose, it became increasingly difficult to speak one's mind; many writers were silenced, and the legacy of those considered classical satirists ends with the Roman emperor, Julian, also known as Apostate, who died in 363 AD (Highet 43). Highet explains that this phenomenon caused satirical monologues to die away, but the budding of the Renaissance in the 14th century allowed individuals to again study satirical works: "The Roman satirists were more closely studied and understood; the works of the Greek satirical writers became known. Eventually [...] the full power and meaning of [...] satire was understood" (Highet 47). With a greater understanding of the scope of satire

and the ability to speak more freely growing, writers began to create their own satirical works throughout the centuries as “the modern descendants of Bion,” from Desiderius Erasmus to William Shakespeare, Lord Byron to Victor Hugo, and Henry Miller to Mort Sahl (Hight 48-51). Due to the rise in popularity of satirical texts throughout the years, satire has now become a valid and understood means of humorous yet relevant expression. And while satire can address a wide range of topics, political material continues to be a focus of modern satire, particularly for contemporary American satirists.

Political satire has become a ubiquitous aspect of modern Americans' lives. Political cartoons and magazines gave way to the creation of political and satirical television news sources, like *The Daily Show* and *The Colbert Report*. The popularity of these shows and their satirical material unsurprisingly made it easy for other satire to make its appearance online through sites like *The Onion*, a satirical online newspaper. However, all of these popular media produce satire through the voice of those being paid to do so; people like Jon Stewart or writers for *The Onion* perhaps come with some kind of built-in credibility due to their public status and connections to these institutions. In contrast, sites that allow individuals to produce user-generated content, like Twitter, YouTube, and Facebook, have given citizens the ability to produce and share their own political satire. Leslie Rill and Christopher Cardiel argue, “The rise of [online] user-generated content and political satire is undoubtedly deserving of further attention” (1740).

Victoria Crittenden et al.'s research discusses differences between “professional” and “nonprofessional” users generating political satirical commentary on social media sites such as Twitter and YouTube and its emerging importance in the political commentary realm, but little research has been aimed at these “nonprofessional” individual users, or those who have built their credibility through Twitter as opposed to “professional” users who have pre-established credibility, such as celebrities, authors, or comedians. With the rise in popularity of more political discussions taking place on Twitter, it is important to address satirical material in this particular social media political realm. Because of this, my research aims to give this further attention by analyzing user-generated political satire on Twitter, a particular topic that has not been given much scholarly attention so far. In order to better understand how political satire on Twitter is functioning, this chapter focuses on the history and definition of satire itself.

Satire as a “Frame of Mind” and “Pre-Genre”

Charles A. Knight categorizes satire as “an open and exploratory form, designed to pose questions and raise problems, suspicious of conventionally moralistic conclusions and those who pronounce them” (14). Like Knight, I encourage readers to see satire not as a fixed and rigid concept but rather a “frame of mind that expresses itself through formal characteristics” (14). While Knight is the only scholar who offers readers to imagine satire as a “frame of mind,” several scholars of satire agree with his notion that satire is not itself a genre: “Genre may not disappear as an

interpretive guide, but its force is weakened by the particular information that emerges from the text itself" (15). Leonard Feinberg similarly describes satire as "a heterogeneous mixture of incongruous elements which simply cannot be satisfactorily classified, except for the purpose of focusing discussion" (vii).

Classifying satire into any one genre seems impossible except to say that satire consistently *does* certain things through defining characteristics rather than by fitting into any particular textual form. Because of this, satire can be classified as "pre-generic," or ideas for material that can adopt a variety of genres for those notions to be expressed; Knight asserts, "As a pre-genre, satire is a mental position that needs to adopt a genre in order to express its ideas as representation" (4). Paul Simpson also states that satire itself is not a genre but requires one to exist, instead describing satire as a "discursive practice" (8). Perhaps, for the purpose of this project, we can think of satire as a frame of mind or rhetorical aim that then instigates a discursive practice. The practice itself cannot be considered a genre but instead creates messages that exploit commonly understood genres in order to provoke reactions from readers. Therefore, while any satirical material's genre may influence the production and reception of the messages, what satire does and the core messages it portrays become more important for discussion than any particular form it may take.

Satire's Rhetorical Triangle

While satire is classified as pre-generic, the rhetorical triangle for satire always includes the three same elements: the audience, the satirist, and the satirized/satiric object (Bogel 2; Simpson 8). Fredric V. Bogel asserts that in this rhetorical triangle, the satirist “aims a certain combination of attack and artifice” at the object of attack (2). In order for the audience to receive the message as satire successfully, readers’ positions on the topic are expected to parallel those of the satirist, and audiences must also understand the context of the message (Bogel 2; Knight 41). Figure 1 below portrays this rhetorical triangle (Simpson, 86):

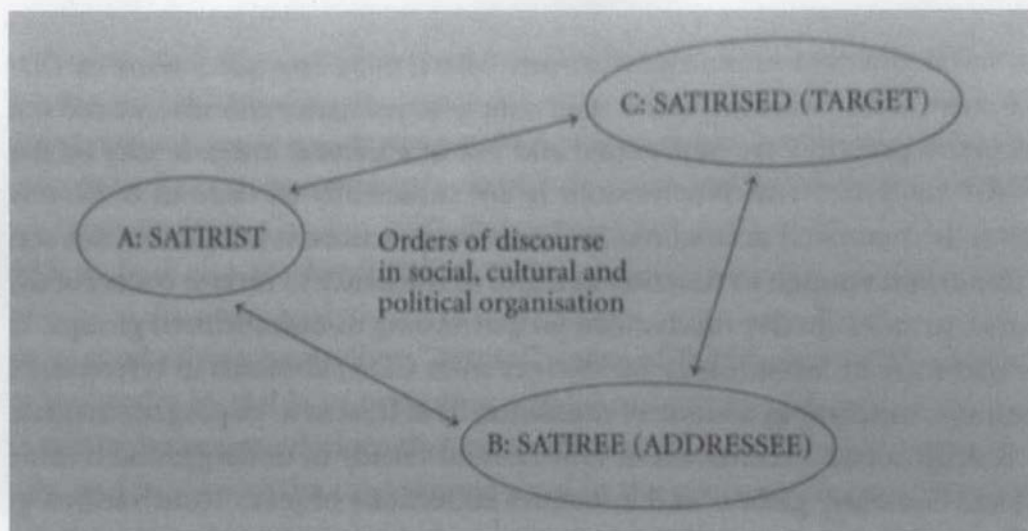


Figure 1. Rhetorical triangle of satire as discursive practice

Remembering to imagine satire as a frame of mind that becomes a discursive practice, as mentioned, it is still vital to discuss what satire *does*, particularly for those in the rhetorical triangle, perhaps rather than what it is. Knight argues that it seems more productive to discuss “what satire does [rather] than to make authoritative statements about its essential nature,” a

statement that I agree with and wish to make foundational to my research and understanding of satire (1).

Audience

If audiences receive satirical messages by aligning their beliefs with that of the satirist, satire can provoke several reactions for readers depending on their relationship with the satirized object. Feinberg asserts that, when successful, satire “offers readers pleasures of superiority and a safe release of aggressions” (5). Successful satire also allows its readers to laugh along with the satirist while reveling in “getting the joke,” perhaps enhancing feelings of inclusion in intellectual superiority. This in turn creates a communal sense of a shared distaste toward the object of satire, often likely to reinforce readers’ previously held beliefs and ideologies (Feinberg 5). In some cases, when readers are somehow connected to the satirized object, successful satire may cause some readers to enact a change in their opinion on the topic in order to avoid being satirized themselves and are, therefore, able to align their beliefs with the satirist and again enjoy the pleasure of laughing with others (Feinberg 206).

Once the work reaches its audience, in order for the work to be successfully received, readers must understand the context given--one of the defining characteristics of satire. While ephemerality, ambiguity, and brevity may complicate this characteristic and any particular audience’s understanding of the text at any given time, particularly on a constantly-updating social platform like Twitter where texts are limited to a specific

number of characters, it is essential for satire's context to be understood. As Knight states, "The referential function of satire implies an audience sufficiently informed of the context for the message to be comprehended" and that "the mutual nature of this understanding is crucial" (45, 41). Simpson describes readers as "participants in discourse," because readers must understand what the text is referring to in order to understand its satiric value (3). He explains further:

The relationship of the satirist and the satiree to the validity claims is developed through the mnemonic of the three "Rs": one subject position *raises* a particular claim while the other *recognizes* it, with the claim ultimately *redeemed* across both positions. (Simpson 10, emphasis in original)

Readers must not only understand the context but also agree or align their own beliefs with that of the satirist in order for the text to be considered a successful satirical piece.

Scholars have argued over the true intent of satirical works themselves and whether they should settle the issues they shake up for their audiences; however, Knight argues that this is not satire's true purpose:

Its purpose [...] is perception rather than changed behavior, although change in behavior may well result from change in perception. Dustin Griffin appropriately argues that the functions of satire are inquiry and provocation rather than moral instruction and punishment. (5)

Feinberg proposes a similar argument: "Satire does not always teach a moral lesson or offer a desirable alternative to the condition it criticizes" (3). He contrasts satirical works to sermons: while those hearing a sermon are often *expected* to do something about what is being discussed, that is not the case with satire; readers of satire are not expected to initiate any particular behaviors as a result (Feinberg 7).

In addition, sometimes satire just does not work or is not well suited for a particular audience; as previously mentioned, perhaps the driving factors behind unsuccessful satire is because the audience has not understood the context or does not align themselves with the satirist's viewpoints. Satirists do run the risk of having their texts be misunderstood or rejected, but this certainly has not stopped people from writing. Feinberg provides several reasons why satire may not work in certain instances. He suggests that satire "is often puzzling" and "generally regarded as being cruel" or "negative," which can be off-putting to some readers who do not understand the message or otherwise disagree with the satirist (Feinberg 264–270). Readers who do not agree with the message may "be hurt, withdraw from certain activities, strike back, camouflage behaviors, or pretend to share in the merriment" (Feinberg 259). In these cases, satire can be considered unsuccessful in being received by its audience. As Knight mentions, readers should be able to form their own questions and recognize the issues being satirized; perhaps this is why Feinberg suggests that "writers and the intellectually curious" are the most apt audiences to

successfully receive satirical messages, because satire “affects thinking and styles of minds not yet set in rigid patterns,” reflective of satire itself (262). He argues that the “chief effect” of satire on readers is “pleasure through relief from dullness or reason or authority” through the use of humor (Feinberg 261). It seems fitting that those who find pleasure in this particular kind of relief might consider themselves “intellectually curious,” as defying logic or power dynamics are trademark characteristics of critical thinkers.

Satirists

In contrast, what satire does for satirists seems to be closely linked to their motivation for writing the piece. Satirists wishing to simply vent their thoughts are able to do so through their writing. Susan Isabel Stein argues that satire “provides a relatively benign emotional vent for civilization and its malcontents” (27). In this way, satire is not meant to be threatening to its readers but provides an outlet of emotion for its writer. Some create satire because it may be one of the only means to have some kind of voice under oppressive circumstances. “Wit provides the means by which we can evade the censor and at least talk about forbidden subjects,” claims Feinberg (176). Knight similarly asserts that satire gives its writers the ability to “articulate elements in our personal, public, and physical lives that cannot be expressed by conventional genres” and claims that satire is “a release from repression” (20). Those who are oppressed can use satire to find a voice, yet others can use satire to maintain their supposed superiority.

Feinberg asserts that for those in a supposed position of authority, laughing at others provides a sense of superiority, often coming from a place of aggression; however for those using satire as a means to evade censorship or feel oppressed, aggression could certainly be the same motivating factor for those satirists for different reasons (208-209). Perhaps the motivation for satirists' texts, the drive behind the aggression, is the cause for the varied ideas scholars present about satire. In either circumstance, the motivation for the satirist creating a satiric piece is often similar to the motivation for audiences to read satire.

Some scholars believe that satire meant to relieve aggressive drives can be hostile; Knight even dubs some satirists as "irate attacker[s] of individuals" (3). Highet adds that the "misanthropic satirist" believes that evil is innate in human nature and aims "to wound, to punish, to destroy" the object of attack (235). This type of satire would closely resemble the classical satire of Juvenal. Highet contrasts misanthropic satirists with those who could be categorized as more optimistic, much like Horace. This kind of satirist "believes that folly and evil are not innate in humanity, or, if they are, they are eradicable" and writes to "cure" readers of their ignorance (Highet 237). He adds that "optimistic" satirists find pleasure in persuading and advising others through their writing (Highet 243). Knight also mentions the notion of an "observant but skeptical" satirist who hopes to change readers' perceptions; Knight asserts that this type of satirist believes that "[readers] are incurable unless perception is changed," and that is what these

particular satirists are wont to do for their readers (3). Similarly, Stein calls satire a “highly evolved, finely tuned, non-violent means of discharging misanthropic impulses” and “one of the most considerate displays of aggression of which humankind is capable” (27). It seems that most of satire itself allows its writers a vent for their thoughts and emotions, regardless of their motivation to write and anticipated outcome. Whether as a means to express an otherwise oppressed voice or maintain a position of authority, to attack and punish readers or guide them to lead them from their supposed ignorance, satirists seem to always find some kind of pleasure or relief in writing these works.

While scholars agree that satire’s main purpose is provocation and inquiry, Bogel offers an additional purpose: to produce strong differences between the satirist (and the audience, if their beliefs are aligned) and the satirized. He states, “Satire, then, is a rhetorical means to the production of difference in the face of potentially compromising similarity, not the articulation of differences already securely in place” (Bogel 42). The potential for audiences to change their perspectives on the subject matter may vary, but by satirizing an object in general, audiences are made fully aware of the differences between the satirist and the satirized within any satirical work. Perhaps the “aesthetic desire for self-expression” is itself motivated by an underlying intent of distancing of oneself from the object of satire.

Satirical Material/Satirized

The context itself must have this object of attack: another defining characteristic of satire itself. Simpson asserts that the “satirized can be an individual, an episode involving human agents, an aspect of experience/existence, or another discursive practice,” so the text itself can address a variety of social issues (8). Satirists create this “attack” through differentiating themselves from this object, which Bogel addresses as a “necessary play of identification and division” (50). Simpson also asserts that the “framework for satire” is the differences created between the satirist and the satirized (10). These objects are attacked because they pose a threat to the satirist’s accepted cultural and societal values, and expressing those differences shows the satirists’ beliefs while condemning and criticizing others (Bogel 42). This object of attack provides the very grounds for all of the other characteristics to take place as well, providing the foundation for satirical material.

If satirical texts do embody these characteristics, readers can begin to look more closely at the messages themselves, or the object of satirical attack. Since satire generally addresses societal concerns and issues, it seems fair to claim “satirists always see society as material” (Feinberg 43). Feinberg also argues that the hypocrisy of society plays a major role in satirical material; satirists are able to shine light on these hypocrisies through humor in order to provoke readers’ reactions (26). On the smallest scale, the hypocrisy of individuals is often the material of satiric pieces.

Feinberg mentions that characters of fictive satirical works often embody “types” of people “because [the satirist] is usually concerned with Man rather than men, institutions rather than personalities [...] Externality and typicality are appropriate for satire, introspection and individuality usually are not” (232). However, while this statement may prove true more often than not for satirical fiction, “real-world” individuals and their particular behaviors and beliefs are still subject to becoming an object of attack for satirists. What is “appropriate” material for satire definitely extends beyond fictional characters. Feinberg asserts that “successful satire deals with specific individuals in particular situations” (37). So, whether fictive or not, individuals are not exempt from being satirized.

As Feinberg mentions, some satirists may be using fictive characters as a means to address issues that extend beyond any one individual; however, satirists also are willing to directly address hypocrisy of these actual institutions, like nations, societies, government systems, particular groups of people, companies, religions, and so on. Knight goes into more detail about satirists who use nations and/or particular societies as the material of their work, categorizing them as either “satiric nationalists” or “satiric exiles” (50). He later defines these terms more clearly:

Satiric nationalism looks at a nation from the critical or sympathetic position of a member of that nation. Satiric exile looks at both the nation that had been the exile’s home and

the nation in which the exile now lives from the position of an outsider. (Knight 52)

While foreigners do have the opportunity to satirize other nations, those who have lived or continue to live in the country being satirized have a unique, perhaps more informed perspective on the subject matter. Individuals and institutions make up a majority of satirical subject matter, but on a grander scale, satirists also play with the notion of “cosmic irony,” or “the irony of fate” (Feinberg 41). Satire that addresses the unpredictability of life and nature often falls close to being categorized as tragedy as well; we feel that we can have some kind of control over individuals and institutions, but human life, its course and inevitable end, is impossible to change, often leaving readers feeling uneasy and less humored than when reading about other satirical topics.

While most scholars seem to highlight fictional satire, satirists throughout the centuries have made politics--nonfiction political individuals and institutions--their object of attack. Political satire has the ability to continually provide satirists with new material and the opportunity to voice concerns as a citizen for a variety of purposes, as discussed in the last section. This has definitely proved to be true for American citizens, particularly within the last three presidential campaign cycles with the rise in popularity of the internet and social media sites providing citizens with the online space to express their opinions through satirical means.

Fundamental Characteristics

As mentioned before, while satire does not fit into any particular genre, it often is associated with five overarching characteristics that allow these messages to be successfully considered satirical:

- Audience must understand the context of the material.
- An object of attack must be present.
- Texts must have elements of humor.
- Texts must be topical.
- Texts must be unexpected in context and craft.

The first two of these characteristics have already been addressed, and the remaining characteristics will be discussed in the subsections below.

Satire is Humorous

All satire must have the characteristic of humor (Knight 13). Highet also classifies humor as a defining characteristic of satire (5). Satire is most commonly associated with provoking laughter, or at least a sense of humor from its audience. In order for any message to be classified as satirical, regardless of the type or kind, the characteristic of humor must be present (Knight 13). Stein argues that humor and laughter are a “discharge of tension,” and satire is meant to provide this for both writers and readers (34). While humor must be present in order for a piece to be considered satirical, Stein also offers that satire is often associated with “tendentious humor,” or “humor with a social purpose” (34-35). Because of the social purpose behind most satirical works, satire often seems to produce “hostile humor” as a means to express “that which is culturally unacceptable or

forbidden by law” (Stein 34). Satire allows its producers to air their grievances through humor as a way to make their opinions heard without directly confronting the issues, cushioning the blow through humor and laughter. Stein suggests that through humor, satire provides a more indirect means of attack (35). While satire may sometimes “use laughter as a weapon” or “use the grotesque as a median between terror and laughter,” its connection to humor is always there (Bogel 1; Feinberg 63).

Satire is Topical

In addition to humor, for any work to be considered satire, it must be topical, particularly political satire. Simpson describes these texts as “inextricably bound in context” (1). Knight similarly asserts that “historicity” is a “formal characteristic” (14). Satire’s subject matter must be about specific times, places, events, and/or people; satire must be “concerned with the nature of reality” (Feinberg 3). Bogel also highlights this characteristic of satire, stating that “referentiality and factuality are essential conventions” (11). Without a specific context or reference to *something* in our world, texts cannot be considered satirical. Yet, it seems like the inevitable obstacle of passing time is the eventual downfall of most satirical material, in that since satire is topical, the time span in which it remains relevant to readers may be limited. Feinberg asserts that because of this and the continual changes in language, most satire is simply forgotten (272). So while some satirical works remain relevant, most others are doomed to being overlooked with time because of their content and topical nature. Satire on Twitter is

perhaps even more likely to be overlooked because of the ephemeral nature of the social media platform itself; since users' Twitter feeds are continually updating, some political satire on the site may not reach its larger potential audience depending on the time the tweet is published. The only real way to "save" or preserve any particular tweet to maintain its relevance is by taking screenshots and sharing those, pinning a tweet to a user's page, or having someone else retweet the original text. So while topicality is a central characteristic of satire, satirical political tweets are very much susceptible to being "lost" because of these inherent complications.

Satire is Unexpected

Much like the material of satire, the techniques, or as Highet calls them, "weapons of satire," used to produce these works are just as varied (18). Because satire itself has the potential to be a more indirect means of attack, satirists often play into this by using displaying unexpectedness, indirection, and incongruity. Feinberg suggests that this can be done through techniques such as exaggeration, understatement, incongruity, symbolism, and dramatic irony, among others (90, 111, 168). Highet adds that such works that use the unexpected do so through being unexpected in "plot, discourse, emotional tone, vocabulary, sentence structure, and patterns of phrase" (18). This unexpectedness, particularly regarding vocabulary and word choice, is often seen through "cruel and dirty words," "obscenity," and "colloquial anti-literary words" (Highet 18). Perhaps one of the best-known

political satires to use several of these unexpected techniques is Jonathan Swift's "A Modest Proposal." The essay reads:

I have been assured by a very knowing American of my acquaintance in London, that a young healthy child well nursed is at a year old a most delicious, nourishing, and wholesome food, whether stewed, roasted, baked, or boiled
[...] (Swift)

The essay's calm, professional tone while proposing eating infants as a means to solve the poverty and hunger crisis in Ireland through gruesome words choices is perhaps the epitome of a satirists' ability to successfully use these techniques.

However, Hight also argues that satirists can use a more direct approach with these messages by using "clear language to describe unpleasant facts and people" with the intention of shocking readers through vivid and direct phrasing (19-20). Feinberg also suggests using the technique of brevity to appeal to more readers, arguing that readers' attention spans are often limited (85, 99). With rapidly increasing technology and the rise in popularity of shorter messages online, perhaps Feinberg's suggestion is even more relevant for satirists today. For example, parodying the "breaking news" trope from popular news network television shows, @Manda_like_wine tweets, "Breaking: Trump picks Mr Whitey McWhiterson as his new national security adviser" [posted Jan. 25, 2017]. While she does parody "breaking news," within less than 140 characters, she

has also kept the political satire brief by using “clear language to describe to describe unpleasant facts and people,” as Highet describes (19-20).

Knight asserts that satire “straddles the historical world of experience and the imaginative world of ideas and relies on both,” calling it an “imaginative assertions about a historical topic” (45). This “imaginative world of ideas” expresses the vital characteristic of unexpectedness in the way the text is written. Feinberg calls this characteristic its “freshness, its originality of perspective. We are shown old things in a new way. [...] It presents the familiar in a new form” (15). Similarly, Simpson argues that satire “relies on linguistic creativity” (3). With a never-ending supply of contexts/referents and the ability to use a variety of genres and linguistic techniques, satirists have all the tools they need to continue to come up with fresh material with original perspectives on topics.

Satire on Twitter

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, modern American political satire has become especially popular on online social media sites, allowing the average citizen to voice their own satirical messages. Rill and Cardiel argue that while social media became an important aspect for the 2008 presidential campaign, social media continued to grow increasingly vital for American politics; the 2012 presidential campaign was even dubbed the “social media campaign” (1740). Now it is part of the American political zeitgeist for politicians to have a social media presence. American citizens have reveled in the ability to directly address politicians online--an aspect of campaigning

that our current president fully understands, responding to issues and events and informing the American public directly through his Twitter account. With Twitter as now a defining means of communication for American politics, it comes as no surprise that American citizens are also using Twitter to discuss their own political leanings, and satirical political tweets have also become part of the changing political atmosphere in America, particularly regarding the most recent presidential campaign.

Crittenden et al. define differences between "professional" satirists, like comedians, and "non-professional" satirists, or the general public, and their satirical online postings (178). My research, however, is particularly focused on these "non-professional" satirists, or the average American citizen who perhaps does not have the instant credibility that professional satirists often have. Crittenden et al. argue that non-professionals may not have the skills or techniques to produce successful political satire, questioning satire's ability to be effectively produced by citizens: "Will that opportunity for constructive criticism [through satire] lose out to the tech savvy of a new generation of voices?" (179). While the more well established methods of political involvement certainly remain relevant, the flood of political discussion through media is undeniable, as is its relentless force over the American public.

David Dadurka and Stacey Pigg offer a similar view on this "new generation of voices," arguing for readers to think of "social media writing as a potential site for community interaction and knowledge creation" (10).

In particular, Twitter has become a popular space for users to convey short, political and satirical messages. Sophia McClennen and Remy Maisel agree that Twitter has emerged as an accepted communal online space to instantly share satirical political messages with users, but the authors provide little information about what is actually going on rhetorically within tweets (141). Twitter allows individuals to use short texts, images, videos, and sounds in combination to convey political satire, creating a unique space quite different from previous message venues. Since talk about political issues and events is pervasive on Twitter and can be discussed almost instantly, Twitter is a space that allows satirical messages to be shown concurrently with information presented as facts, causing users, as satire does, to compare the types of messages and determine their own moral standing regarding a particular subject as well as their understanding of the text as satire or misunderstanding of the text as fact.

I have researched this use of Twitter by gathering and analyzing individual users' satirical political tweets about the 2016 presidential election, as well as a larger corpus of tweets related to the first 2016 presidential debate between the nominated Democratic and Republican candidates, Hillary Clinton and now-President Donald Trump; I focus on messages regarding the campaign between these two candidates and reactions to the outcome of the election as well, specifically highlighting satirical tweets that both address larger political issues and the candidates themselves. My motivation for this research stems from the rise in

popularity of Twitter as an essential means of discussing American politics. While other social media sites such as Facebook and YouTube have provided politicians and satirists alike the means to voice their opinions for the past few years, it seems that Twitter has recently come to be the defining media for both citizens and politicians to interact with each other and share and discuss political information, as it provides the opportunity for direct and instant communication (Crittenden, Hopkins, and Simmons; Dadurka and Pigg; Rill and Cardiel).

Reena Flores notes how, in an interview with *60 Minutes*, President Trump himself has attributed his successful nomination to his Twitter usage, and now, unprecedented, we have a president who more often directly addresses the American people through Twitter rather than the formerly conventional televised messages regarding the state of the nation (“In ‘60 Minutes’ Interview”). The expectations for political communication have changed; even more generally trusted news networks like CNN, FOX News, and NBC now gather and broadcast information about politics and current issues through posts from politicians’ Twitter accounts. Because of this, it seems only natural that those producing political satire would follow the same route and share their material through Twitter as well. The expectations for politicians to have a Twitter presence affords all citizens (with access to the internet) the ability to also use the platform to express their own political opinions. The 2016 presidential election absolutely has and continues to expose the importance and need for further investigation

of citizens as political commentators through satirical messages on Twitter where these political discussions are more often taking place as a means of engaging in humorous constructive criticism of current political affairs. Because politicians are now using Twitter as a means to engage with the public, the media platform for citizens to join in on political conversations undoubtedly is shifting. Citizens are becoming more aware of this shift, acknowledging its potential for not only political conversations but also political satire. Crittenden et al. argue that a "thorough understanding of how [political and satirical] media messages are deconstructed allows for understanding on why and how people come to form certain cultural and political values in everyday life" (177). The use of Twitter in the political arena certainly is becoming more of an influence on all citizens, so user-generated political satire on Twitter also becomes an important aspect of American politics to further investigate.

In order to investigate this new phenomenon and generation of political satirists on Twitter, I gathered two groups of tweets: one through a larger sweep using a hashtag and a collection of tweets by specific individual users. These two groups of texts represent and highlight different features of satirical tweets. The larger hashtag sweep can show how a group of individuals discussing the same political topics interact with both the topics and other users to produce these texts. Since these users are all producing texts focused on one topic at one particular point in time as well as reading others' texts regarding the same content, analyzing this combination can

show how this particular interaction may affect how some satirical tweets are produced. In contrast, while some of the tweets from the group of individual users may use hashtags to participate in live tweeting events, focusing on these users' feeds throughout the election campaign provides a range of political issues and topics over time. This allows us to look more in depth at specific individual users who are consistently producing satirical tweets--information not necessarily available through a live tweet sweep. While these users may not represent all political satirists on Twitter, their tweets provide a solid foundation for analyzing individual citizens as satirists.

All of the tweets collected were considered satirical if they displayed the five fundamental characteristics of satire, as defined in the previous chapter:

- Audience must understand the context of the material.
- An object of attack must be present.
- Texts must have elements of humor.
- Texts must be topical.
- Texts must be unexpected in context and craft.

Once the tweets were identified as satirical, I collected those for closer analysis. I kept an Excel sheet for the live tweets and took screen shots of the individual users' tweets. Since one of the characteristics of satire is that the audience must understand the context of the material, it is important to note that I was the audience for understanding and therefore considering

these texts as satire; however, I did my best to let go of my own biases in what I consider humorous--another main characteristic--in order to collect a more rounded set of tweets. It is with these selected tweets that I conducted my analysis.

The larger corpus of tweets was gathered through NodeXL from the start to end of the first presidential debate on September 27, 2016 between Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump. These tweets are considered "live" tweets because they were published simultaneously with this particular event and in direct, instant response to what was occurring at that time and what others were tweeting about it as well. The tweets that were gathered in this sweep all use the hashtag "#debatenight." Using these particular "live" tweets to analyze individual satirists and their material on Twitter allows for a better understanding of how users are producing satire while simultaneously engaging in a nationwide event with others online by using a hashtag to participate in that particular conversation. From the 13,237 tweets gathered during this live tweeting event, I marked 409 as tweets that were humorous and could possibly be considered satirical. I then went back through the smaller list of tweets and selected 93 as tweets that could be considered satirical because they ultimately displayed the five major characteristics of satire. These tweets could all also be considered political satire since they addressed candidates and political issues.

I have also gathered tweets from five separate individual users who have consistently produced satiric political tweets throughout the entirety

of the presidential campaign and after, rather than just during one particular moment. I have chosen to focus on individual users rather than parody accounts, because I believe that the individual users provide their readers with the sense that they are the “average American citizen” voicing satirical political opinions. Parody accounts provide no real sense of who the author or satirist is, because these accounts may be run by one or many individuals who largely remain anonymous. The “new generation” of satirists that I am concerned with for this research consists of those who are using their own personal accounts to consistently produce political satirical messages; this allows their readers to acknowledge that these users present themselves as American citizens who vote and are also concerned with the state of America’s politics, avoiding any mystery of the author’s intent by not being anonymous.

I found these five individual users by searching through the users who follow some comedians who are well known on Twitter for their political satirical material as well, such as Stephen Colbert, Chelsea Peretti, Rob Delaney, and others. I started to search through comedians’ profiles I was already following and expanded my search by looking through comedians they were following as well. Within some of those individual users’ sites I found, I also searched through the users they retweet and also follow on Twitter. While I found several Twitter users who produce satirical material, I believe that these particular users, @OhNoSheTwitnt, @SCbchburn, @JoshNoneYaBiz, @GOP_Contessa, and @SortaBad, are

defining examples of individuals consistently producing political satirical tweets, providing a solid foundation to look more in depth at how these kinds of tweets are working rhetorically and over a period of time, with posts ranging from August 2016 through March 2017. I took screenshots of the tweets from these five users who I thought fit the five characteristics of satire previously mentioned. I believe this collection of tweets to be sufficient for a closer analysis of satirical political tweets.

- I gathered 22 tweets from @OhNoSheTwitnt. In her biographical information, this user describes herself as a 35-year-old “Jewish American Disney Princess” living on the East Coast. With 126,600 followers, her tweets can range anywhere from one to tens of thousands of likes and retweets, depending on her promotion and timing of publication. She often retweets and responds to tweets from other individual users, most of whom also create political satire tweets, as well as several news sources. Often her posts are political and meant to be taken seriously, but other posts are still continually riddled with satire.
- I gathered 15 political satire tweets from @SCbchbum, or Erica, from Southern California. Her biography reads, “Got 86’d from Whole Foods for showering. My thighs rub together when I walk,” along with links to her other social media accounts (Instagram and favstar). She boasts 38,400

followers, and like @OhNoSheTwitnt, her posts can receive likes and retweets anywhere from the single digits to the thousands. She also retweets other humorous satirical posts, and while not all of her posts are satirical, most are intended to be funny.

- I gathered 12 tweets from @JoshNoneYaBiz, or simply Josh. He has around 21,300 followers, and his biography reads: “One time Liberal, who woke up. Check out my MAGA store, and send request! <https://teespring.com/stores/maga-2>.” His own satirical political posts are sparse, but he does often retweet other political messages with a more conservative viewpoint. He uses this particular platform as a means to promote his own political endeavors, such as his “MAGA store” and political blog. He typically receives between tens to the low-hundreds in like and retweets.
- I gathered 20 tweets from @GOP_Contessa, or Julie, who currently holds 1,793 followers. Her biography states, “Political Muse ~ Moderate Conservative ~ Pessimistically Optimistic ~ Short person problems.” Her political satirical tweets occur more often in her feed than Josh’s, but like Josh, she frequently retweets others’ conservative political posts; however, her feed is also filled with other non-political posts as well.

- I gathered 17 satirical political tweets from @SortaBad. This user, Brian Essbe, a San Francisco resident, claims in his biography that he is “the hero we didn’t know we needed.” Brian currently has 44,200 followers, and his likes and retweets are consistently between double and triple digits. While this user also retweets other satirical posts, most of the content on his account is his own. A majority of his posts have been about politics, but he also produces other non-political, more light-hearted satirical material as well.

Unlike gathering tweets through a hashtag, I found individual users through my own searching. After searching through hundreds of accounts on Twitter for consistent satirical feeds, these five stood out the most to me because of their consistency producing political satire. These particular users can therefore be identified as political satirists, allowing for a closer look into this new generation of satirists this analysis concerns, without being bound to one particular political issue or discussion as the live tweets are. As previously noted, I was the audience for all of these tweets, so if I did not understand the context, I researched the material in order to see if the text fit as a satirical tweet. I also tried to ignore my own political biases in what I found humorous in order to collect a more rounded set of tweets, which is why I chose both left- and right-leaning individual users who have conflicting points of view. However, I believe this provides a more thorough look at the average American citizen on Twitter in a bi-party-abiding

country. I also chose individuals with a relatively low number of followers as compared to celebrity users, as well as a range of the number of followers within those five users to, again, collect a more rounded focus of average American Twitter users, as “popularity” on Twitter comes in various forms from the array of points of view of users. I wish not to address these five users’ particular political leanings or their following but rather analyze their own particular satirical texts over time via Twitter. These nuanced complications that are inextricably bound to satire itself allow for more tentative conclusions about political satirical tweets and users to be made rather than making larger general assumptions about them.

After I identified these satirical tweets and gathered them into two sets of data, I read through all of them again to begin my analysis of how these tweets are rhetorically functioning on this particular social media platform and its implications for a new generation of satirists and satire itself. In the next chapter, I will first address how all of the tweets collected from both data sets adhere to the five fundamental characteristics of satire, as defined in other, better known genres and platforms of satire. Then, I analyze the challenges presented to political satirists on this particular social media platform and the rhetorical strategies used to combat these challenges. I then discuss the implications this has and opportunities provided for political satirists in regards to the average American Twitter user, as opposed to more well known professional writers and comedians, and the importance of this emergence of individual citizens as satirical

political commentators on this particular social media platform and its influence in the changing world of technology and American politics.

Chapter 3: Analysis

Introduction

Over the past decade or so, social media has begun to transform the way in which we communicate with others, particularly regarding political discussions. While it has been noted in the first chapter that the 2008 election gained notoriety as the “social media election” (Rill and Cardiel 1739), social media’s abilities and outreach have grown exponentially since that time. Americans’ means to participate in political discussions has changed drastically: instead of mainly politicians using social media platforms for their own promotional and campaign purposes, American citizens themselves have now taken to these sites to more directly engage with political issues and politicians. These platforms allow citizens to participate in political discussions with a much larger audience than possible before social media. The 2016 presidential election proved to be the most reliant on social media so far in American history, with Twitter as one of the defining spaces for political discussions. President Trump’s own Twitter use throughout the campaign period and after perhaps has inspired more citizens to take to the social media site to voice their opinions as well. While political commentary has before taken place more generally by those already involved in politics, Twitter allows all citizens to join the conversation with elements such as hashtags and retweets.

For centuries, satirists have engaged their audiences in political conversations as a means to expose and confront difficult issues and

concerns through humor; now, through Twitter, *all* users are potentially able to gain some kind of audience or following. For satirists on other media platforms, the approval of an intermediary is necessary in order to produce messages on those platforms; for example, political satire on shows such as *Saturday Night Live* must be approved by lead writers and producers before the satire airs, just as satirical letters to the editor in newspapers must be approved by an editor before they can be published. Likewise, authors and movie directors of political satire must gain the approval of publishers and film studios to proceed with producing their materials. However, citizens on Twitter producing political satire do not need the approval of an intermediary to publish their messages, an advantage not afforded to those creating political satire through other platforms. Because of this, more opinions have the potential be shared through satirical political posts, giving the average Twitter user/ citizen the ability to influence opinions. The nature of Twitter and its increasing popularity as a platform to discuss politics has caused a shift in who can be considered a political satirist. And while tweets can only contain a maximum of 140 characters, deconstruction of messages produced by this new wave of virtual political satirists is still warranted, for Twitter has become a legitimate space for these conversations and consequent reader interpretation to take place. This analysis aims to address the following questions regarding satire in general, but in particular, regarding political satirical messages published on Twitter.

All of the texts in this analysis can be considered satirical by demonstrating the five fundamental characteristics of satire, allowing us to further deconstruct these messages and analyze them as valid satirical works. I will use the following questions to guide my analysis:

- How does political satire on Twitter demonstrate features of satire as defined in other, older genres of satire?
- In what ways does political satire on Twitter differ from other established forms of satire?
- What challenges or constraints are present in this particular form of political satire?
- In what ways do political satirists on Twitter combat these challenges?
- What opportunities does Twitter present for political satirists?

Features of and Challenges for Political Satire on Twitter

Satire on Twitter demonstrates all of the fundamental characteristics of satire as defined in other, older genres. Satirists on Twitter can demonstrate these characteristics by incorporating, if not slightly modifying, those commonly understood, historically present features in a different textual form. Because these features are still present, Twitter can be considered a legitimate and powerful space for satirical texts to be potentially produced by all citizens, giving these writers a larger virtual platform for their voices. These fundamental features include the following:

- An object of attack is present.

- Texts are unexpected in terms of context and craft.
- Texts must be topical.
- Texts must be humorous.
- Audiences must understand the context.

While political satirical messages may differ in many ways because of their origin, they still portray the established fundamental characteristics of political satire that have permeated cultures for thousands of years, continually rhetorically evolving with technological advances. Although tweets can adhere to the five fundamental characteristics of satire, the platform of Twitter itself presents some challenges for creating political satire that are not present in for writers using other forms of satire.

140-Character Limit

Perhaps the most defining feature of Twitter is its 140-character limit for tweets, so these texts must be concise. Political satire on Twitter is different because the texts only allow for 140 characters per tweet, including letters, spacing, and punctuation. Unlike other genres and platforms for satire, Twitter limits its authors to more concise texts, forcing satirists to condense their messages in ways not previously necessary. Political satirists via Twitter have adapted and evolved the fundamental characteristics of satire in various ways to maximize character count and produce some different, new forms of satire that are specific to its platform. What readers can see on Twitter itself are the texts that must capture the reader's attention, making them the most important aspect of any successful

tweet. Satirists want their texts to be read, and to do so, authors must pay close attention to what their readers actually see. The design and creation of tweets must catch the reader's eye while maximizing all used characters, including spacing and punctuation, in order to create a successful message—a writing challenge not presented to satirists on any other platform. While users can attach links to a tweet to redirect readers to a longer text, I am concerned with the actual text that appears on the Twitter feed or timeline, not redirected texts outside of the social media platform. Satirists using other media typically do not have to concern themselves with character limitation, as most satirists not on Twitter can use established forms of writing and speaking to convey ideas like action and dialogue.

Even More Ephemeral

Aside from managing character limits through various means, successful political satirists on Twitter must understand the ephemeral nature of the social media platform and satire itself. Since a fundamental characteristic of satire is for the audience to understand the context of the satirical text, this characteristic is challenged even more so on Twitter. Because Twitter provides no room to explain or elaborate ideas to make context clearer for readers, satirists must ensure their tweets will be understood. However, political satirical tweets are most likely to be “successful” only for a very short period of time due to a consistently updating news feed for users, constantly burying older tweets away from a reader's attention. Because Twitter is most concerned with the “present

moment,” political satirists must continually produce content that appeals to their readers, a challenge not presented to satirists on other platforms. So while satire is itself ephemeral, political satire on Twitter is even more so because of the nature of the social media platform.

“Crowded” Platform

Twitter can be considered a “crowded” platform, meaning that while it allows for all citizens to have their voices heard, it also creates a space that is dense with several voices, presenting the challenge of how to break through the “noise” for particular tweets to be read. If satirists on Twitter are to gain any kind of popularity or notoriety for their tweets, they must continually prove to their readers—new and familiar alike—that they are consistent in their writing, a challenge that has not presented itself as prominently before for satirists using other platforms. In order to be successful, political satirists on Twitter must prove that they can unfailingly continue to create satirical works because of Twitter’s crowded nature, as opposed to other established satirists who have the ability to rely on just a single-digit number of their satirical texts for notoriety, such as Alexander Pope or even Stanley Kubrick. Political satirists on Twitter are definitely challenged creatively in much different terms than other satirists in order for their works to stand out among a sea of tweets.

Strategies for Combating Challenges

Sentence Structures, Punctuation, and Genres

In light of these challenges, particularly Twitter's 140-character limit, satirists on Twitter have created their own means of conveying political satire by using spacing and punctuation to their advantage. With the character limitation, context must be conveyed differently than other forms of satire, since such little room to explain context is available. The means that political satirists on Twitter who do this have grown within the Twitter community, manipulating established forms of writing and creating new commonly understood means of conveying those messages. For example, during the first debate, @lushmommumbles tweeted the following:

Hillary: the sky is blue

Trump: That is not true. Directly looking at the sky tells you nothing. #debatenight

Like others on Twitter, this user adopts elements of written drama in order to convey this particular satirical scenario. These techniques are common among Twitter users to convey dialogue by using colons after a person's name. She clarifies to readers that this text is meant to signify a back-and-forth dialogue, or a call and response, by placing Trump's "line" under the other rather than just using a space. While it would still be clear without the spacing, the spacing makes the tweet take up more space on the Twitter timeline and, therefore, more eye-catching for readers scrolling through their Twitter feeds. While these elements of drama may not be new to the average reader, their integration into this platform allows users to better understand these kinds of tweets. @OhNoSheTwitnt uses a similar format to

convey a dialogue/scene but introduces new elements as well. On January 23, 2017, she tweeted:

[wakes up from coma]

So what's new in 2017?

"Donald Trump is president, fake news is real, and punching Nazis is bad."

[flatlines]

Her use of brackets suggests action, also drawing on elements of written drama, as used to convey stage directions. However, this tweet differs from @lushmommumbles's in that no particular actors or characters are given, a new characteristic that has sprung from Twitter. Omitting this element from a text allows satirists on Twitter to minimize the number of characters used in such a constrained platform, but it also allows readers to imagine *anyone* in this particular scenario. While readers can imagine two people in this dialogue because of the spacing and suggestions of action, the actual subjects supposedly forming the text, both the one performing the actions and asking the initial questions and the one responding, do not matter as much in this kind of satirical tweet. These implied subjects allow readers to form their own ideas about the subjects of the presented scene, as well as create a unique rhetorical structure that is not present in other written forms. This defies the established "rules" of the English language itself; until now, imperative sentences have been the only form of the language in which the subject—you—can be understood as implied. Now, however, through

manipulation of punctuation, tweets can convey implied subjects of anyone, not directed at any one person. So, while tweets do draw from other established forms of texts to convey ideas, new rhetorical features have and continue to emerge in order to maximize characters on this particular platform. And while other ways of saving space to combat the 140-character limit are available to Twitter users, these two particular tweets note a variety of these tactics and provide examples that show how effective those strategies can be.

Additionally, tweets, like other established forms of satire, can parody voices, existing speech acts and genres, popular culture, and more in order to convey context. Let us use the following tweets from the first presidential debate as examples:

- “Playground Bully 2016: Take America’s Lunch Money Again #debatenight” [@helmetwings]
- “If you can’t convince them. Confuse them. Trump. #debatenight” [@Osayamen]
- “I can’t tell if this is a Presidential race or a new edition of America’s Dumbest Criminals #debatenight”
[@AngrySalmond]

The first tweet parodies political campaigns themselves as well as Trump’s particular slogan. Similarly, @Osayamen parodies the well-known saying, “If you can’t beat them, join them,” and @AngrySalmond adapts a popular speech act of “I can’t tell if.../or...” as a means to compare unexpected ideas

to highlight the author's confusion and/or the text's incongruity. By using familiar sentence structures to create their satirical messages, these political satirists are able to convey more context and information to audiences through fewer characters. While these tweets may incorporate commonly understood sentence structures, I argue that these texts seem more powerful on Twitter, because when political satirists use these sentence structures, they use ones that readers are more likely to understand the context, even in such short messages. By adapting and parodying these well-known sentence structures, satirists' texts are more likely to appeal to a larger audience.

Other than using different rhetorical structures to create parodies, Twitter users have also created their own textual structures that have emerged on this particular social media platform. Once a new sentence structure is created, if it is successful, other users tend to recreate their own satirical messages using that same structure, and a new, trending structure emerges. For example, one structure that has become popular to convey satire on Twitter is the use of a timeline. On September 14, 2016, @SortaBad tweeted, "2008: McCain isn't my favorite, really 2012: Romney kinda seems out of touch with reality 2016: * Googles 'Requirements, Swiss Citizenship' *." Similarly, on January 30, 2017, @OhNoSheTwitnt used a timeline to create her satirical tweet: "1930's: We must flee to America to escape the Nazis. 2017: We must flee America to escape the Nazis." These examples

show how timelines have become a solid textual structure to convey satire on Twitter.

While the preceding sentence structure example is only one of many that have emerged from Twitter, they seem particularly useful for political satirists. However, in comparison to tweets that use well-known sentence structures, these tweets rely more heavily on context to convey satire rather than the sentence structure itself. Yet, these emerging sentence structures can be just as easily understood in their purpose as those that are common. These means of producing political satire on Twitter have recently emerged as successful rhetorical tools specific to Twitter's platform that are becoming common, especially for those who consider themselves Twitter-literate.

Imagery

Another means of maximizing characterization on Twitter is through the use of other digital media in addition to text, such as memes, gifs, and videos. These elements all have the ability to add both text and visuals in addition to the 140-character limit. This allows users to add even more text as well as the possibility of a visual element to their messages. Twitter users have created a means to not only have visuals as an addition to a message but also be part of the message itself in order to combat the challenge of character limitations. This creates somewhat of a loophole for political satirists on Twitter to become more creative with the available technologies on this particular social media platform. While satire on television also

sometimes relies on images to help create humor, Twitter combines the features of text and imagery to create satirical messages. Using images on Twitter as part of a satirical message creates a stronger impact for readers, as they take up more space on the timeline and are able to more quickly grab the attention of readers as compared to tweets that contain only text; therefore, readers are probably most likely to be attracted to a tweet with an image, making that tweet more likely to be read. For example, on January 29, 2017, @GOP_Contessa tweeted the following:



This user creates a text that requires the image's presence in order for the satirical messages to be conveyed to readers. The image allows the satirist to minimize the tweet's character count as well as to add a visual element that is more likely to attract readers. Political satirists on Twitter

incorporate these images as part of the satirical message itself. Similarly, on January 28, 2017, @SCbchbum tweeted this:



Erica @SCbchbum · Jan 28

Since Planned Parenthood is being defunded, I guess this photo is the next best thing to birth control.



Like @GOP_Contessa, this user connects her statement with the image so that they must be together to be understood as satirical message. Both users allude to the images in their actual texts as well, conveying the importance of their connection to readers. While some users, even satirists, may add images as a supplement to texts, satirical tweets such as these make the graphic an essential part of the political satirical message itself.

Hashtags

While political satirists on Twitter may be challenged by its constantly updating feed, another main element of the platform that can help promote their texts is the use of hashtags. Hashtags allow users to

connect with others through keywords that link tweets with similar ideas or topics; they allow all users to have equal access to any particular conversation with their inclusion. Hashtags allow all citizens to participate in online conversations with others as well as the potential to reach a wider audience through those conversations. Hashtags link these conversations so that citizens' tweets can be viewed by all participating, introducing users to others who they may not have found on their own, particularly those interested in the same topics. Hashtags allow users the potential to gain a larger audience or following that might not have been possible without the hashtag, which is unique to this particular social media platform.

Twitter satirists have formed many nuanced means of using hashtags in order to convey their messages. Twitter suggests trending hashtags to users, which show the most current popular topics or ideas users are discussing. Trending hashtags can help political satirists on Twitter stay up-to-date writing on popular topics in order to maintain a larger audience who understands the context of any particular satirical tweet. Political satirists on Twitter can also choose to participate in ongoing hashtag tweeting or live tweeting events. Ongoing hashtags gain popularity over time, and the conversations associated with those hashtags continue over a longer period of time. For example, in late 2016-early 2017, the ongoing hashtag “#alternativefacts” grew popular in response to Kellyanne Conway’s use of the term while being interviewed on a popular news station. Twitter users responded by creating their own tweet versions of “alternative facts,” which

was an ongoing hashtag for several months. On January 22, 2017, @SCbchbum joined the trend by tweeting the following: "I didn't grab her by the pussy, her pussy just fell into my HUGE hands.' #alternativefacts." While some of the tweets within that hashtag conversation were a bit more innocent than @SCbchbum's contribution, she uses the hashtag to promote her own political satire. In contrast, live tweeting occurs over a set, limited amount of time. These tweets are in direct response to a particular event, such as a television show premiere, which happens at the same time for all Americans. For example, all the tweets mentioned in this project with the hashtag "#debatenight" were published during the set period of time in which the first 2016 presidential debate took place. During that time, @alicegoldfuss tweeted, "Lester jabs the pen into his thigh, embracing the white hot pain. 'Your two minutes have expired.' #debatenight." This particular tweet was part of the conversation at that time addressing the frustration of the moderator, Lester Holt, which seemed a bit obvious to those who were also watching the debate. Live tweets allow political satirists to directly participate in conversations that fellow Americans are also simultaneously experiencing.

An important distinction for satirists to make if including a hashtag in their tweet is whether the hashtag is simply supplemental to the message or an integral part of the satire itself. For example, on February 26, 2017, @JoshNoneYaBiz tweeted, "Let me know when lefties start blaming racist or Russia for the #BestPicture flub... #Oscars." In this instance, the two

hashtags used are not contributing to the satire itself; instead, this user uses them as a means to participate in a live tweeting conversation. In contrast, when @SCbchbum tweeted, “I didn’t grab her by the pussy, her pussy just fell into my HUGE hands.’ #alternativfacts,” the hashtag she uses becomes part of the satirical message, delivering the humor within the hashtag itself in combination with the rest of the text. While she has used it to participate in an ongoing trending hashtag as well, the hashtag is a vital part for understanding the satirical message as a whole. When this occurs, satirists are able to use hashtags for multiple purposes, making them a new and unique part of satirical texts that have not been used before in this way.

Political satirists on Twitter have also discovered a way to participate in online conversations using hashtags not necessarily for their intended purpose when they were created. Hashtags can allow users outside of a particular community to participate in conversations by co-opting hashtags as a means to oppose the intended conversation. For example, on March 1, 2017, @JoshNoneYaBiz tweets, “Liberals live in a world where they can discern 76 genders, but cant figure out who their President is.... #NOTMYPRESIDENTSDAY.” This particular hashtag was created as a means for those unhappy with the results of the presidential campaign to voice their distaste on President’s Day. However, @JoshNoneYaBiz, a self-proclaimed conservative, uses the hashtag ironically as a chance to satirically participate in the “liberal” conversation. His use of this hashtag in combination with the rest of his text makes clear that he is not using the

hashtag for its intended purpose but to instead satirize not only liberals themselves but also, in particular, fellow Twitter users who are using it to genuinely voice their concerns. This particular tweet shows how hashtags do not have to be used in a conversation for the like-minded; @JoshNoneYaBiz is able to use this hashtag as a means to participate in a trending hashtag topic as well as satirize the intended use of the hashtag and the audience who created it. This also creates a unique means for conveying satire through the use of hashtags that is not present on any other platform for satire.

This same user co-opts the Oscars hashtag, as seen in the earlier example, as a means to change the topic within that hashtag conversation; while most using the Oscars hashtag were discussing the Oscars themselves, @JoshNoneYaBiz redirects the conversation to insert his own political ideas rather than solely discussing the awards show as the hashtag was intended. Using hashtags in this way allows users to change the main topic of conversation to suit satirists as they see fit while still participating in any particular hashtag conversation. These different means of using hashtags have created several ways for political satirists on Twitter to create their texts as well as directly participate with others interested in the same topics.

Continual Creation

In order for any one particular political satirist on Twitter to receive more interaction and notoriety from their material, authors must also keep up with the constantly changing and crowded feed by continuously

producing new material in order to stay relevant and have their audiences understand their contexts. For example, during the first presidential debate, @AnthonyVVeiner tweeted, "Trump just lost the 400 pound hacker vote #debatenight." This tweet in particular seems only relevant for that particular moment in time, as is it in response to Trump's thoughts on a lack of cyber security and who may have hacked the Democratic National Committee's emails: "It also could be somebody sitting on their bed that weighs 400 pounds, okay?" This one short comment from Trump was probably forgotten by most perhaps even minutes later but surely lost on a majority of people at this point in time, months later. Unless someone were to remember the particular statement made by Trump at that time, the above tweet's context will probably not be understood anymore, deeming a very short successful shelf life for this particular tweet. This challenge of Twitter's ephemeral nature is an element of the platform that will continue to affect the creation of political satire for writers; however, to combat this platform constraint, many users, such as @OhNoSheTwitnt, @JoshNoneYaBiz, and @SCbchbum, tweet political satirical messages multiple times (even up to 50 different tweets) per day in order to maintain their consistent presence on users' news feeds. However, this also allows political satirists on Twitter the ability to create messages with less enduring subject matter as compared to those producing satire through movies or television. Because Twitter satirists are tweeting so much, they are often less pressured to produce content that is somewhat universal or

long-standing. This allows Twitter satirists to touch on a wide variety of political topics, even those that may seem fleeting or menial. Despite the discussion of any particular political subject, consistently creating content ensures that political satirists' messages are more likely to be successful at any given moment in time.

Twitter Communities

Non-professional political satirists who are well versed in how to convey their messages on Twitter have also started to form comedic communities by following and retweeting each other, promoting their own satirical work by helping to promote others doing the same. This can lead to the possibility of professional satirists also helping to promote average users' satirical tweets. Tagging other users in tweets can also help promote political satirical texts, since they directly notify those who are tagged. This is particularly useful if a political satirist intends for the object of attack to see that message. However the average American as a political satirist chooses to promote their tweets and join online political discussions, Twitter provides numerous means for all citizens to engage with a larger virtual audience and the potential for all users to be equally heard on a continuously updating and crowded social media platform.

Conclusion

While professional writers and comedians on Twitter may also use these rhetorical elements to create political satirical tweets, Twitter is an especially important platform for the average American user. Twitter allows

all citizens, of all social standing, to directly participate in online political discussions and to have access to a potentially much larger audience without the need for approval from an intermediary source. Crittenden, Hopkins, and Simmons suggest that four different types of political satirists have emerged through online platforms: the “traditionalist” and “creator” are professional writers, but the “rookie” and “technologist” are categorized as non-professional satirists (177). It is the latter two kinds of satirists that this project is concerned with. They assert that “the rookie is the non-professional satirist who enjoys the humor of satire and wants to try his or her skill at creating satire” and “the technologist is the non-professional satirist who uses the medium to deliver humor” (178). However, I argue that these non-professionals, or average citizens, have come to portray elements of both the “rookie” and “technologist,” joining these characterizations into one as non-professionals who enjoy reading and writing satire as well as using this particular technological medium to produce these texts. The use of Twitter to create political satire demands that writers understand both the underlying characteristics of satire as well as the medium they are producing texts within—the understanding of both content and media use are intrinsically connected in this way. While Crittenden et al. show concern that the non-professional satirists will cause satire to “lose its status as a highly influential form of political discourse” (179), I argue that these non-professional, average American political satirists on Twitter are not causing satire to lose its influential status but

instead contributing to the established political satirical realm in new, nuanced ways that may be unfamiliar to rhetorical scholars. Average Americans as political satirists on Twitter are not taking away from satire as a whole but instead reshaping and adding more rhetorical options for future potential political satire.

Like satire in all forms, some readers may not successfully receive some satirical messages, as satire always runs the risk of being misunderstood or not humorous to some, especially if the reader and writer have differing political opinions. Regardless, Twitter has provided its users with a powerful medium to convey political satire, as well as the potential to reshape American politics in general. It seems that because of continual technological advances, online media has become an extremely powerful force for satire, particularly in regards to the changing dynamics of American politics as well. Twitter allows for all users, all Americans, to voice opinions and become satirical political commentators ourselves, which seems especially relevant in a time of politics when Americans are demanding, more than ever, to share their individual political concerns.

Political satire has been a fundamental means of humorous yet serious expression for people for centuries; its presence and continual evolution while still binding to core characteristics have legitimized political satire as a potentially successful mean to continually create these kinds of messages for a particular audience. Successful political involvement can come in so many forms that have been around for years: voting at all levels

of government; attending and voicing opinions at town meetings, protests, and other political gatherings; writing, emailing, or calling political representatives. Yet, with the changing political and technological worlds, Twitter has proved to be a solid figure in *all* citizens' abilities for political involvement. Major corporations, organizations, and political figures are all taking to Twitter, often hiring teams specifically dedicated to social media platforms. Twitter's presence in the American political (and ultimately related business) realm has taken its hold and should not be underestimated. President Trump has consistently taken to Twitter in order to directly address the public, approaching the press much differently than his presidential predecessors, and most politicians have done the same. Yet, unlike other established means of political discussion, Twitter allows all users—any average American with an account—to directly participate in political discussions and engage with politicians themselves as well as a potentially larger virtual audience, an element not afforded on most other platforms for political involvement.

Producing political satire on Twitter provides citizens with several opportunities not afforded to them before through other platforms. Those who did not have the ability to use or access to other platforms of satire, such as movies and television, now have a media that is free and easily available to use, without the need for others to approve or allow these political satirical productions. Other forms of satire are often directed toward and read by those with similar ideals as the author; progressive

citizens tended to watch *The Daily Show* with Jon Stewart, while conservative television viewers were more likely to tune in to *The Colbert Report* with Stephen Colbert. However, tagging users and injecting hashtags into tweets allows for political satirists to reach beyond solely like-minded audiences. In the past, audiences did not have to read or see satirical material they do not agree with; now, on Twitter, political satirists with opposing views can insert themselves into conversations, making an unavoidable impact on how audiences receive satirical messages. Using Twitter as a platform also provides citizens the opportunity to quickly create and circulate political satire since messages are short and do not need editorial work or approval, as opposed to other forms of political satire.

Because of Twitter's 140-character limit and ability to incorporate visual digital elements and hashtags in new and unexpected ways while still pulling from established means of communication, people from across the nation have been able to adapt and understand the changing rhetorical characteristics associated with satire on this particular platform. Twitter seems to have created a new wave of American political satirists—those who have realized one does not need permission or editorial approval to successfully voice opinions, rather just be fluent in an understanding of how tweets can be produced to convey political satire in tweet form. In light of recent political events and advances in technological interactions, the power of social media should not be ignored; yet, with its consistent and extensive

history, political satire should not be dismissed either. While the combination and rhetorical usage of political satire on Twitter is continuously evolving, these new “average American” political satirists deserve recognition for their potential to influence all Americans—both citizens and government officials. Twitter provides the ability to represent the average citizen in ways never available before; and while technological advances and social media platforms will continue to expand for Americans to engage in political satire, Twitter and its attentive users have set a new precedent for others from here on out.

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