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When news breaks, "The Daily Show" fixes it: Exposing social values through satire

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WHEN NEWS BREAKS, *THE DAILY SHOW* FIXES IT:

EXPOSING SOCIAL VALUES THROUGH SATIRE

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ABSTRACT

When News Breaks, *The Daily Show* Fixes It:
Exposing Social Values through Satire

by

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This thesis asserts that news satires (*The Daily Show*, *The Onion*, *Saturday Night Live*, and others) expose the mythological function of news by revealing violations of social values expressed implicitly in news stories. By employing irony, a rhetorical trope, these news satires provide a social critique of people and institutional power. Using a combination of critical analysis, content analysis, and historiography, this thesis defines news, irony, satire, and parody, and explores news satires that have found a mass audience in the United States in the decades following the birth of television. A synthesis of these definitions and explorations will support the claim that satires speak "truth" by exposing idealized social values that have been violated by subjects of news stories or by those who report the news.

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finished it. Both supported my undergraduate and post-graduate education in many ways; they would be proud to see my thesis "on the shelf."

CHAPTER 1

IS NEWS SATIRE RELEVANT?

The Pew Research Center for the People and the Press announced in September 2004

that Americans, especially adults under the age of 30, were turning to television comedy

for news about politics (2004). Over all demographics, television comedies like *The*

Daily Show and *Saturday Night Live* gained two percentage points from 2000 to 2004.

During this same time frame, nightly network television news lost nearly 25% of its

viewers, as only 35% of Americans watched the programs, down from 45% in 2000.

Similar declines occurred for local television news, where viewership dropped to 42% in

2004 versus 48% in 2000. Cable television news programming had a modest increase in

viewership, from 34% in 2000 to 38% in 2004. Among people aged 18 to 29, 21% got

their campaign news from television comedy shows (up from nine percent in 2000),

while 23% got it from nightly network news. In addition, 50% of this age group reported

they learn about campaigns at least sometimes from television comedy shows. As Pew

studies have found viewership increasing for television comedy shows, The National

Annenberg Election Survey has found that viewers of this type of programming are more

knowledgeable about current affairs than the average television news viewer. In

particular, viewers of *The Daily Show* "are more likely to know the issue positions and

backgrounds of presidential candidates than people who do not watch late-night comedy"

(2004, p. 1).

As more sources of information continue to avail themselves to the public, news satires like *The Daily Show* have salience with a growing audience. In fact, the show has cache with the very subjects it satirizes: Senators John Kerry and John McCain and former President Bill Clinton have all been guests (NAES, 2004, p. 2). Their appearances suggest that *The Daily Show* and other news satires have relevance with their audiences that these politicians desire. *The Daily Show* has also garnered more media attention than his contemporaries on late night television (Bianculli, 2004). But is that audience being entertained or informed? More importantly, is the show reporting the very same news it satirizes, or is it exposing a deeper meaning within the news? If the show is a satire, does it satirize the form and style of television news programming or the subjects of the news?

Relevance of Satire to News Programming

"Humorous devices – irony, satire, burlesque and others – are among the most popular techniques of rhetors and audiences in an increasingly information-dominated world culture" (Morris, 1987, p. 460). Former *The Daily Show* staff member Mo Rocca states, "The premise of any joke delivered by oddball newscasters is that they're making fun of the media's treatment of news as much as they are the subjects of the news" (St. John, 2004, E1). Rob Siegel, Editor-in-Chief of the satirical weekly *The Onion*, states, "It has to look like real journalism to create the comedic tension between what is being said and how it is presented" (Wenner, 2002, p. 50). Those who engage in parody must strictly adhere to journalistic style in graphic design, copy, and other production values, as style tells the joke (Wenner).

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Satire "is a primary technique for deflating egos and providing social criticism" (Gring-Pemble and Watson, 2003, p. 136). Satire and its kin offer the opportunity to humanize newsmakers as mistaken rather than demonize them for their faults (Gring-Pemble & Watson). Burke (1984) calls this interpretation of parody "perspective by incongruity" (Gring-Pemble & Watson; Rockler, 2002). Burke suggested that by looking at valued assumptions in new ways, one could change one's perspective on an issue or idea. That incongruity is essential in making satires and parodies "work."

Booth (1974) explains the mental process one uses to make sense of a satire. First, one notices incongruity and passes on accepting a literal interpretation, then tries an alternate interpretation. Third, one must interpret from the author's point of view for interpretation, and, finally, accept that interpretation. In this sense, irony is a participative rhetorical act. An author intentionally inserts incongruity into the work which the audience notices. The audience must then deconstruct the work, reconstructing a text intended by the author. As a result, the audience has high affinity for the author because the author has written how the audience thinks. Furthermore, the audience has participated in creating the text. Later, this will help to explain why audiences are so passionate about satirical content.

A satirist also demands that the audience have a working knowledge of the subjects of the satire. National surveys (NAES, 2004; PRCPP, 2007, 2008) have found consistently that viewers of *The Daily Show* are very knowledgeable about current affairs. In particular, the National Annenberg Election Survey (2004) found that even after accounting for rival hypotheses, *The Daily Show*'s viewers know more about campaigns than either newspaper readers or broadcast nightly news viewers. Research by the Pew

Research Center for People and the Press (2007, 2008) confirms findings by Annenberg about the news knowledge of *The Daily Show*'s viewers. Audiences for news satires visited more news sources: on average, more than 7 out of 16 compared to the overall average of 4.6 (PRCPP, 2007). Audiences who are heavy news consumers are also more knowledgeable (PRCPP, 2008, p. 5) and more engaged (PRCPP, 2007). This may help to explain why research (PRCPP, 2004, 2007, 2008) suggests that *The Daily Show* does carry credibility with its audience and the general public.

A Call for a Critical Analysis of News Satire

The purpose of this thesis is to reveal why people watch *The Daily Show* and, by extension, consume other news satires. Several avenues of research are available to understand this relationship between audience and genre. The researcher conducted a content analysis comparing a single episode of *NBC Nightly News* and *The Daily Show* from November 10, 2004. The purpose of this content analysis was a pilot study to see if a content analysis was the best research methodology for understanding the relationship between news satires and news programming. The pilot study asked the following question: how will *The Daily Show* and *NBC Nightly News* use visuals to tell their stories? In the pilot study, the literature review defined and contextualized parody; outlined the development, form, and content of television news programming; and described *The Daily Show*.

Since that pilot study, other researchers (Baumgartner & Morris, 2006; Fox, Koloen, & Sahin, 2007; Holbert, Lambe, Dudo, & Carlton, 2007) have utilized quantitative research methodologies to understand the impact of *The Daily Show*. This research will cite quantitative studies but finds their methodologies wanting in explaining the root

interest audiences have in news satires. The pilot study revealed the mechanics of *The Daily Show*'s satire of nightly news programming, but not the effects of that satire on its audience. Even Baumgartner and Morris note that their research was constrained by sampling only young adults (p. 363). By synthesizing research and theory on news, satire, and irony, a critical analysis of news satire can help broaden our understanding of how news satire functions within mass media for audiences.

<p align="center">*Trajectory of Research*</p>

The Daily Show is the latest incarnation of political satire to achieve critical acclaim, acceptance by mass audiences, and economic viability. During the age of television, three other publications and programs have achieved similar success: *MAD Magazine, Saturday Night Live*, and *The Onion* (web and newspaper).[1] Though many other satires have been created and found audiences over the past 60 years, this thesis will focus primarily on *The Daily Show*, a news satire that deals with current affairs, presented in a news format. As Gans (1979) revealed in a study of network nightly news and weekly news magazines, a vast majority of news deals with politics – our leaders and their actions.

Using critical analysis, this thesis will examine the components of news satires – irony, news, and audience – to better understand how news satires resonate with their audiences. This analysis will reveal that news satires expose the mythological function of news by revealing violations of social values expressed implicitly in news stories. In

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[1] Other recent examples of successful satires include *The Colbert Report, The Borowitz Report*. Historical examples include *Laugh-In* and *That Was the Week That Was*. Contemporary examples that have a tangential relationship to news satire include *The Simpsons, Family Guy, The Late Show with David Letterman, The Tonight Show with Jay Leno, Late Night with Conan O'Brien*, and *The Late Late Show with Craig Ferguson*.

doing this, they speak "truth" by exposing the idealized social values that have been violated in the news by both news subjects and news reporters.

In Chapter 2, this thesis will look at the interrelationships between satire, parody, and irony. The purpose of this analysis will be to understand how a news satires uses irony as a rhetorical trope to create an enthymematic connection with their audiences. It will define the terms of irony, satire, and parody. It will also explain the challenges that satirical authors and audiences face in making a deep, meaningful connection through a satirical work.

Chapter 3 will trace the rise of satirical news from the end of World War II through today, focusing on *MAD Magazine, Saturday Night Live*, and *The Daily Show*. This will take the form of a historiography and will attempt to contextualize the content in both its contemporary social and media landscape. In addition to presenting this satirical lineage, this historiography will aim to identify the reasons why people turn to satirical news content – in addition to or in lieu of – conventional news coverage.

In Chapter 4, this thesis will analyze news as a storytelling medium that performs a function of storing social values for audiences. Generally speaking, people have a need to understand the world around them – the social norms, rights and wrongs, of public affairs. The news media provide a venue for understanding the social norms in which public affairs operate. There is a correlation between heavy news consumption and high engagement in public affairs. News is also a storytelling form, a mythology, with familiar structures and forms. Sometimes, either the subjects of the news or the form of the news itself violate these social norms and story structures. As a rhetorical form, satire critiques violations of social norms. Therefore, viewers of *The Daily Show* (a news

satire) watch because they are news consumers, engaged in public affairs, who seek affirmation about their suspicions about violations of social norms.

This thesis will propose in Chapter 5 that *The Daily Show*, like its predecessors, performs social criticism through exposing violations of social values by subjects of the news and the news itself. News satires manipulate explicit information and implicit norms and beliefs in ironic forms to tell "truths" to their audiences. Therefore, this thesis will also identify why these satires and parodies work and what makes them popular. Ultimately, this research will reveal how these shows find their voices, what their voices say, and why people listen. Currently, no communication research exists that explores the factors of content, context, and audience when looking at ironic content. This research will explain why *The Daily Show* "works."

CHAPTER 2

AUTHORS AND AUDIENCES, TEXTS AND MEANINGS:

HOW SATIRE WORKS

Critics and audiences have labeled *MAD Magazine*, *Saturday Night Live*, *The Onion*, *The Daily Show* and their kin parodies and satires (Bianculli, 2004; Cader, 1994; Davies, 2004; Gross, 2005, 2006a, 2006b; Guinto, 2004; Hewitt, 2001; King, 2006; Kroft, 2004; McLuhan, 1994; NAES, 2004; Now with Bill Moyers, 2003; Pesca, 2004; Project for Excellence in Journalism, 2008; Reidelbach, 1991; Rosenbaum, 2004; Safer, 2006; St. John, 2004; Siegel, 2005; PRCPP, 2004, 2007, 2008; Wenner, 2002). These genres have a significant degree of mutual exclusivity. When writers create parodic or satirical works, they must employ irony to achieve their desired effects in with their audiences. "Irony, like the sublime, can be 'used' or achieved in every conceivable kind of literature" because it is pervasive, part of all human communication (Booth, 1974, p. xiv). "The essential nature of irony," according to Cuddon (1998), is "that it eludes definition; and this elusiveness is one of the main reasons why it is a source of so much fascinated inquiry and speculation. No definition will serve to cover every aspect of its nature" (p. 429). There is some truth to Cuddon's claim; as this section will show, scholars and authors alike have wrestled with irony, both in concept and in practice.

This chapter will use a combination of definitions, theory, and research to explain how satire uses irony as a rhetorical trope. First, key terms of irony, satire, parody, and burlesque will be defined. After a brief consideration of irony and satire in history, this

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chapter will consider the role of audience in irony. In particular, this chapter will discuss

the process by which audiences recognize and respond to an ironic work. The definitions

and historical context presented in this section is a first step in providing a context for

understanding how irony functions rhetorically. By understanding how satire uses irony,

we will begin to understand how *The Daily Show*, a news satire, employs satire to expose

social values violated in news content.

Definitions

Irony

Irony is an intentional incongruity between the literal meaning and an intended

meaning (or meanings) by an author in a work (Baldick, 1990; Beckson & Ganz, 1989;

Cuddon, 1998; Kennedy et al., 2006; Murfin & Ray, 1997; Turco, 1999). According to

Booth (1974), irony feeds both "the conviction that 'there is more here than meets the

eye' and the suspicion that there is less" while "pretending to only feed the second" (p.

178). Dews, Kaplan, and Winner (1995) consider irony a form of meaning substitution

where the intended meaning is different than the literal meaning or any equivalent

paraphrase (p. 348)

Scholars have interpreted irony in a variety of ways. Beckson and Ganz (1989)

define irony as "contradictory" (p. 132), while Murfin and Ray (1997) use contradiction

and incongruity interchangeably in their definition (p. 176). Turco (1999) describes irony

as "witty mockery [...] saying the opposite of what is actually meant" (p. 132). Kennedy,

Gioia, and Bauerlein (2006) delineate ironies of language from ironies of life, defining

the former as an "opposite" and the latter as "a discrepancy[2];" both ironies require

context or distance "to recognize the meaning as ironic" (p. 83). Baldick (1990),

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[2] Turco (1999) also makes this distinction.

describing irony as "[a] subtly humorous perception of inconsistency," also notes the importance of context (p. 114). Cuddon (1998) summarizes: "[I]t seems fairly clear that most forms of irony [involve] the perception or awareness of a discrepancy or incongruity between words and their meaning, or between actions and their results, or between appearance and reality. In all cases there may be an element of the absurd and the paradoxical" (p. 430).

Irony appears as one of three types: verbal, situational, or structural. Verbal irony is an incongruity between the literal and intended meaning (Baldick, 1990; Beckson & Ganz, 1989; Cuddon, 1998; Kennedy et al., 2006; Murfin & Ray, 1997). It is also the most commonly used form of irony. As with irony itself, scholars interpret verbal irony differently. Some scholars (Beckson & Ganz; Booth, 1974; Murfin & Ray) view irony as a rhetorical trope, since it is a rhetorical device that involves saying one thing but meaning the opposite. For Cuddon "verbal irony involves saying what one does not mean" (p. 430). Baldick and Murfin and Ray emphasize verbal irony as discrepancy. Baldick compares it to "its crude form, sarcasm" (p. 114) while Murfin and Ray suggest a comparison of the author's words against his or her beliefs. They also note subtleties of both comedy and rhetoric found in irony (p. 177). Kennedy et al. state that the opposing meanings found in verbal irony "[imply] criticism, a jab at someone's pretense, stupidity, vanity, willfulness, and so on" (p. 83).

Rather than consider situational and structural irony separately, it is easiest to contrast the one with the other. Situational irony "derives primarily from events or situations themselves" (Murfin & Ray, 1997, p.178), while works featuring structural irony are functionally ironic. For Murfin and Ray, "Works that exhibit structural irony contain an

internal feature that creates or promotes a discrepancy that typically operates throughout the entire work" (p. 180). Baldick (1990) adds, "The more sustained structural irony in literature involves the use of a naïve or deluded hero or unreliable narrator, whose view of the world differs widely from the true circumstances recognized by the author and readers" (p. 114). The difference between situational and structural irony is scope. Situational irony may appear in plot or in a character's actions, but in structural irony, the work is ironic to its core (Murfin & Ray, p.180).

"Simplicity and sincerity provide earnest, literal expressions; irony requires duplicity and play" (Kennedy et al., 2006, p. 83). When considering irony rhetorically, Booth (1974) identifies three duplicities to consider: covert/overt (how obvious is the irony?); stable/unstable (how stable is the reconstructed, intended text?); and local/infinite: (what is the "scope of the 'truth revealed?'") (pp. 234-35).

Recent quantitative research on irony has explored motives for using irony (Anolli, Ciceri, & Infantino, 2002; Dews, Kaplan & Winner, 1995; Matthews, Hancock & Dunham, 2006). In a series of experiments, researchers found that ironic criticism was more effective than literal criticism, allowing the sender of criticism to appear less aggressive and receiver of criticism to save face. However ironic compliments are more ambiguous in their meanings and may have the opposite effect, appearing more aggressive than a literal compliment (Dews et al.). This research also suggests that the function of the irony may play a significant role in how irony is used to communicate meaning, or even if irony is used at all. Dews et al. identified four social functions of irony: humor, status elevation, aggression, and emotional control. Because of its incongruity, an ironic text can be funnier than a literal text. Value-based comments

(criticism or complimentary) may affect the status between the sender and receiver of an ironic text. They note that an ironic text can be interpreted as being both more and less aggressive than a literal text (pp. 349-50). Ironic texts may also be a method to achieve emotional control. The results of their experiments showed that humor was a consistent function of irony. The functions of status, aggression, and emotional control were all dependent on context (p. 363). Recent research confirms that context may be a key determinant in whether irony is used in a given situation (Matthews et al., p. 22).

The 2007 segment "Professional Important News" from *The Daily Show* demonstrates the motives for using irony. Correspondent Demetri Martin analyzes the legal battle between Viacom, the company that owns Comedy Central, and YouTube "Basically, we're talking about whether it is illegal to watch me discussing the legality of you watching me on *The Daily Show* if you're watching it on YouTube," Martin said. "Maybe I'm on YouTube right now" (Stewart & Martin).[3] "Professional Important News" is rich with ironies. Before beginning the segment, the segment parodies the introduction of Martin's popular "Trendspotting" by replacing the word "trendspotting" with "professional important news." Martin explains the lawsuit using puppet cut-outs of Viacom chairman Sumner Redstone and "the Google guys," Sergey Brin and Larry Page, in a hand-drawn courtroom on Martin's undershirt. Redstone vulgarly asserts that the Google guys have stolen his clips by posting them on YouTube, while Brin and Page are impressed with their own wealth and ability to Google themselves. As the segment continues, Martin uses his ironic treatment of the lawsuit to expose the truth that this is a a fight over money. Viacom is "worth only $25 billion, whereas Google is worth like

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[3] In an added irony, a version of this segment has appeared on YouTube (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NpqgWW0z7vM) with Stewart and Martin disguised with moustaches.

$14 trillion. They got their own verb. And they can change their logo whenever they want." Stewart, expressing some confusion, says that it seems like it's a win-win for the companies, but Martin says that there is a loser, and he is that loser "because the only thing I like better than watching a TV show is watching it smaller and blurrier. What's next? Are we going to have to start paying for music, too?" Stewart answers, "I believe you do have to pay for music." Without missing a beat, Martin replies "Man, you are old." Martin advises viewers to make their clips untraceable by adding moustaches or creating their own versions. Martin give an example: *The Schmaily Schmow* with a child, Schmon Schwewart, as host and a set made of handwritten cardboard.

"Professional Important News" displays many traits of irony discussed thus far. There is an incongruity between the literal and intended meanings. The literal meaning is a amateur, childish treatment of a multi-billion dollar lawsuit between companies, but the intended meaning is contradictory: perhaps the lawsuit is what is truly childish, a sandbox fight over what belongs to whom. This ironic criticism is more effective than a literal criticism and humor was used as a function. Just as Dews et al. found, Martin and Stewart do not appear aggressive in their criticism and allow Redstone, Brin, and Page to save face by appearing only as cut-outs.

Genres Using Ironic Tropes

Satire. Satire is a genre that uses elements of irony and ridicule to criticize humans' moral failings. A satirist may also use wit, humor, sarcasm, representation, exaggeration, and non-sequitur to lower the audience's esteem of the subject of satire. Often, silence can be as deafening as what is said. The tone of satire varies from amusement to scorn (Baldick, 1990; Beckson & Ganz, 1989; Cuddon, 1998; Kennedy et al., 2006; Murfin &

Ray, 1997). Irony and satire are distinct from each other. In comparing irony and satire, irony can be viewed as a trope, a morally neutral, rhetorical device compared to satire, a genre chosen by an author to communicate an intended message to his or her audience (Murfin & Ray).

The intent of satire is not malice towards its subjects but correcting their moral failings in different aspects of society for the benefit of humanity. This quality has been a constant among satirical works since ancient Greece (Baldick, 1990; Beckson & Ganz, 1989; Cuddon, 1998; Kennedy et al., 2006; Murfin & Ray, 1997). In his examination of the satirical poetry, Jack (1954) states, "Satire is born of the impulse to protest: it is protest become art" (p. 17). Beneath the mechanics of the satirical work, there is a "moral design" that is both entertaining and instructive about societal norms (Kennedy et al., 2006). "The satirist is thus a kind of self-appointed guardian of standards, ideals and truth; of moral as well as aesthetic values," says Cuddon (1998), "who takes it upon himself to correct, censure and ridicule the follies and vices of society and thus to bring contempt and derision upon aberrations from a desirable and civilized norm" (p. 780).

Burlesque. Burlesque also uses the ironic trope, employing it as an inverted incongruity where the subject and its treatment are opposites: serious subjects are treated trivially and trivial matters are glorified. Often used on stage, burlesque intends to ridicule its subject: a person, an event, or a style (Baldick, 1990; Beckson & Ganz, 1989; Kennedy et al., 2006; Murfin & Ray, 1997). In burlesque, inversion is used for comic effect, with humorous outcomes. Weighty matters lose their gravity and trivial matters become noteworthy (Kennedy et al.; Murfin & Ray). To achieve its desired effects with audiences, burlesque requires its audience to have a basic cultural literacy of what "high"

and "low" in society (Kennedy et al.). Booth (1974) refers to this as a "circle of inferences" where participants (in this case, author and audience) "perform an intricate intellectual dance together" (p. 31).

Like satire, authors may use burlesque to imitate and critique its subjects. Authors employing burlesque have also adapted it to the norms of their eras. Kennedy et al. (2006) give the example of opera in the 19th century. "Gilbert and Sullivan's Victorian operettas burlesqued grand opera, taking the latter's high passion and theatrical action and putting it comic uses. But because of the decline of opera's popularity today, it is no longer an effective target for humor" (p. 19).

Parody. Popular since ancient times, parody is a mocking, imitative form of irony that exaggerates and ridicules its subject – a work, a person, or a style – for comic effect (Baldick, 1990; Beckson & Ganz, 1989; Cuddon, 1998; Kennedy et al., 2006; Murfin & Ray, 1997). Parody vacillates between imitation and distortion of style, demanding that the audience have knowledge external to the work itself (Booth, Cuddon). Booth notes that this is a "curiously doubled external reference": the knowledge about the subject needed to understand the parody is the knowledge that will make the ridicule possible (p. 123). In a sense, a parody bites the hand that feeds it while working within the constraints of the subject's style.

As a genre, parody exists somewhere between satire and burlesque; scholars alternately compare parody with each. Cuddon (1998) identifies parody as a branch of satire, working like satire. Murfin and Ray (1997) add that parody is a tool used by authors to make a satirical point. Kennedy et al. (2006) see a distinction between the bawdy burlesque and parody, which plays within the boundaries of subject and style.

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Irony in Historical Context

Ancient Greece

The idea of irony can be traced to the Greek word *eironeia*, which means "dissembling" (Beckson & Ganz, 1989; Murfin & Ray, 1997). In Greek plays, the *eiron* used his wits and craftiness to overcome the brutish *alazon* (Beckson & Ganz; Cuddon, 1998; Murfin & Ray). Cuddon notes that Demosthenes saw the eiron as responsibility-averse and Theophrastus viewed the eiron as being "slippery in his speech, non-committal" (p. 428). The idea of the *eiron* and *alazon* permeates popular culture even today. In Warner Brothers' *Merrie Melodies*, "*eironic*" characters like Bugs Bunny, the Road Runner, and Tweety continually defeat the "*alazonic*" characters of Elmer Fudd, Yosemite Sam, Wil E. Coyote, and Sylvester the Cat using only their wits. Even Plato has Socrates perform the role of *eiron* in his dialogues. "[A]ssuming the pose of ignorance and foolishness," Socrates "asks seemingly innocuous and naïve questions which gradually undermine his interlocutor's case and trap him" into Socrates' point of view (p. 427).

In an explanation of oratorical style, Aristotle notes that language – "[c]ompound words, fairly plentiful epithets, and strange words" – can be used either for emotional or ironic means (trans. 1984, 1408b 10-11, 20). To increase the effectiveness of a rhetor's oratory, there should be elements of incongruity because audience will be less likely to see through the rhetor's language (1408b 4-5). Later, in *Rhetoric*, Aristotle juxtaposes irony with buffoonery, saying, "the ironical man jokes to amuse himself, the buffoon to amuse other people" (1419b 6-8). Aristotle sees a relationship between jests and irony, too, saying that a rhetor should use the opposite tone of his or her opponent (1419b 3-5).

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During the age of Rome, especially for Cicero and Quintilian, *ironia* was both a rhetorical trope and a form of discourse where the literal meaning contrasted with the intended one. Cuddon (1998) notes, "This double-edgedness appears to be a diachronic feature of irony" (p. 428). Kennedy et al. (2006) also note the duplicitous nature of irony (p. 83). In his *Institutio oratoria*, Quintillian identified delivery, the speaker's character, and the nature of the subject as clues for irony. If any of these are out of step with words, it is clear that the speaker intends something other than what is said (8.6.54).

Europe: The Golden Age of Satire

Cuddon (1998) notes that writers employed irony before fully understanding it as a concept. Seeing a strong correlation between the golden age of satire in the 17th and 18th centuries and rhetorical uses of irony, Cuddon theorizes, "It is as if before then many writers were fully aware of the possibilities and uses of irony but had not considered it to be a mode for conducting or bearing a whole work" (p. 431). Voltaire, Swift, and Gibbon set the gold standard for irony. "The dry, teasing, laconic, detached sensibility which permeates their work develops an individual vision of human beings and existence," according to Cuddon, because they "share the ability to make the smile on the face of their readers broader and broader and broader, very very slowly, until, finally, they find themselves laughing" (p. 430). Booth (1974) states the ways in which irony work rhetorically have been ignored since the 1700s (p. ix).

The 20th Century

While Cuddon (1998) claims that satire and irony were in decline in the 20th century (p. 432), Booth (1974) notes, "One of the most astonishing developments in critical history is the outburst of articles and books about irony since the 1940s" (p. 12). Later, in

A Rhetoric of Irony, Booth notes that in modern times, irony is the mark of good literature (p. 201-02). While use of irony in higher forms of art and literature are outside the scope of this research, the continued growth, propagation, and popularity of ironic content like *Saturday Night Live*, *The Daily Show*, and *The Onion* would suggest that writers and artists continue to find value in using irony to communicate their ideas to audiences. Let us now explore further the relationship between author and audience for an ironic work.

Role of Audience in Irony

In considering the relationship between author and audience in an ironic work, it is important to remember that irony is a rhetorical trope that involves saying one thing but meaning the opposite (Beckson & Ganz, 1989; Booth, 1974; Murfin & Ray, 1997). In this section, I will argue that irony is a participative rhetorical act where an author intentionally places an incongruity into the work. As an audience reads that work, they notice the incongruity. The audience must then deconstruct the work, reconstructing a text intended by the author. This reconstruction creates high affinity for the audience towards the author because the author has written how the audience thinks and the audience has participated in creating the text. This will explain why audiences are so passionate about satirical content and their authors, as well as the betrayal they feel when the work "changes" or "degrades."

Making connections

"Irony is commonly employed as a 'wink' that the listener or reader is expected to notice so that he or she may be 'in on the secret'" (Murfin & Ray, 1997, p.176). The key question becomes how authors and readers achieve irony together (Booth, 1974, p. xiv).

In *A Rhetoric of Irony*, Booth probes the potential for irony to communicate meaning. Irony is a "meeting of the minds," both author and audience. "It is always good [...] for two minds to meet in symbolic exchange; it is always good for an irony to be grasped when intended, always good for readers and authors to achieve understanding" (p. 204).

Artistic metaphors are useful in describing the relationship between author and audience. Irony is alternately an "intricate intellectual dance" that allows people to "know each other in ways only extended conversation could have otherwise have revealed[4]" (Booth, 1974, p. 31) and "dramatic engagement of person with person" in the form of peering and unmasking (p. 33). Murfin and Ray (1997) also use the metaphor of a mask. "The ironist wears a mask that must at certain points be perceived as a mask" (p. 177). Beckson and Ganz (1989) antagonize the relationship between author and audience, arguing that regardless of the ironic form, "the writer demands that the reader perceive the concealed meaning that lies beneath" the literal text (p. 133). Ironic texts "bring to light the hidden complexities that are mastered whenever [people] succeed in understanding each other in any mode" (Booth, p. 44).

When successfully performed by an author and interpreted by a reader or viewer, irony can foster a deep, meaningful connection between them. Irony engages authors and audiences in the act of community-building, where the primary emotion is "joining, of finding and communing with kindred spirits." Irony builds a connection because the reader assumes the author wrote with him in mind (Booth, 1974, p. 28). It is an "astonishing communal achievement," as "the whole thing cannot work at all unless both

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[4] In *A Rhetoric of Irony*, Booth (1974) later notes that conversational ironies are easier to interpret than literary ones because of the medium of delivery (93).

parties to the exchange have the confidence that they are moving together in identical patterns" (p. 13).

When an ironic voice is used by an author, "readers inevitably begin to take interest and pleasure" in the qualities and actions of that voice. "Once we have read a few pages by any of these authors we have experienced so many stable ironies that the appetite for more of them becomes essential to whatever the works intend," Booth wrote (p. 176). "To get more of that voice" of the ironist, audiences will read the author's best and even "plow through inferior stuff" (p. 176). This concept of an ironic voice extends beyond what is written to how it is spoken. Experiments by Anolli et al. (2002) have proven that the ironic value of a statement is found in a combining the intended meaning with the "suprasegmental profile," the vocalized patterns of speech. The profile of the ironic voice is distinct from an unironic voice: by using "caricatured stress of the suprasegmental features," the ironic voice "allows one to convey, along with the message, the contradiction between the lexical meaning of the words and the speaker's communicative intention" (p. 273).

For irony to succeed as a rhetorical act, it depends both the intent of the author in using irony in the work and the ability of the reader to catch the proper clues to realize that the work is ironic (Booth, 1974, p. 91). The engagement between author and reader depends on an agreement of commonalities. These commonalities constitute a "world they never made" and include a common language (vocabulary and grammar) and cultural experience (meaning and values). These are "built into patterns of shared literary expectations – the grooves of genre, the trajectories of aroused expectations and gratifications" (p. 100). Most importantly, it includes a common experience of literary

genre and this is what determines whether the work is ironic. "Every reader must be sensitive in detecting and recounting ironic readings" (p. 1).

"Verbal irony can be the most difficult rhetorical device to master, since successful usage requires recognition by the reader or audience, even as it may demand authorial subtlety. Missing a verbal irony may lead the reader or audience to adopt a belief opposite to the one intended by the author." Tone and context may cue audiences to the author's intended meaning (Murfin & Ray, 1997, p. 178). However, the ironist should avoid nudging because it decreases the active role of the reader (Booth, p. 206). This causes the work to become descriptive instead of performative. Packard (1957) notes, "we cannot be too seriously manipulated if we know what is going on" (p. 265). For irony to achieve a measure of success, audiences must have the opportunity to participate in the act of reconstructing the irony. Nudging reduces the enthymematic potential stored in the intended meaning of the irony.

Reconstructing Texts

Booth (1974) chooses to describe the audience's process of reconciling an ironic incongruity as a "reconstruction" (p. 33). There are four steps in reconstructing an irony. First, the reader is required to reject the literal meaning. Clues help the reader recognize incongruity between the literal meaning and potential interpreted meanings. Alternate interpretations and explanations, all incongruous with what the literal meaning "says," come to the reader in a flood. The reader begins to try out these alternate interpretations. The reader must also make decisions about the author's knowledge and beliefs. Finally, the reader chooses with security and confidence, a new, interpreted meaning (pp. 9-14).

This metaphor of reconstruction is not a pulled plank revealing a deeper meaning but tearing down a building and reconstructing a new one. The movement is a leap or climb, "always toward an obscured point that is intended as wiser, wittier, more compassionate, subtler, truer, more moral, or at least obviously vulnerable to further irony" (p. 36). "All non-literal language, every 'abnormal' way of saying anything, invites us to reject a lower literal interpretation and climb to a better one" (p. 40). The final judgment is shared by all readers.

In inviting audiences to reconstruct the literal text, irony is "rejecting a whole structure of meanings, a kind of world that the author himself obviously rejects" (p. 36). Booth (1974) identifies five advantages to the reconstruction metaphor:

1. "It reminds us of inescapable complexities" like other "unspoken beliefs," "inferential processes," and "incongruities;"

2. It "dramatizes the possibility of an unlimited variety of 'distances' between the dwelling places" of the literal and ironic meanings;

3. It clarifies, leaving "many rejected propositions and many victims;"

4. It explains why words need to be reconstructed, as irony is revealed by its place and surroundings;

5. It shows that irony "must be performed."

A reconstruction builds in author, a conception of audience, and what is said (pp. 37-39). "Ironic reconstructions depend on an appeal to assumptions, often unstated, that ironists and readers share." Like verbal communication, "we never make all of our shared assumptions explicit, and if we encounter readers or auditors determined to deny all unproved assumptions, we're in trouble" (p. 33). Irony imposes its ideas and risks

failure, but, when successful, it works better than literal statements (Booth, pp. 41-42; Dews et al., 1995; Matthews et al., 2006).

One effect of reconstruction for audiences is an awareness of multiple texts, both literal and intended, within the author's work. In his explanation of parody, Booth makes a comparison between parody and op art. Once we see both images, "Our chief pleasure now becomes our awareness of the duplicity. …For both receiver and maker, then, the focusing of attention on duplicity inevitable makes each single effect peripheral and thus makes the full focusing on a single effect impossible" (1974, pp. 128, 29). For example, a viewer can enjoy the literal meaning of *The Colbert Report*: a "mega-American" show with an egotistical host espousing patriotism and disdaining all things "liberal." The viewer can also enjoy the ironic meaning of the show, parodying television programs like *The O'Reilly Factor*, their flag-waving patriotism, and their "truthiness" that doesn't get the facts right.

Ironic Clues

Ironic clues embedded in a text depend on both the norms embraced by readers and those intended by authors (Booth, 1974). Most obvious are straightforward warnings in the authors' own voice. These can occur in the title of the work, in epigraphs (quoting a famous ironist, for instance), or other direct statements. While these warnings give real help to the reader, they also reduce the value of the irony. They may also be further irony. Other clues are known errors, "simply incredible" foolishness. These may range from pop expressions to historical fact to common knowledge. Whether it is a warning or an error, the read must bring prior knowledge and experience to the work.

A third type of clue is conflicts of facts within the work. While it might be carelessness on the part of the author, it may be irony. Booth identifies three possible structures: a plausible but false voice, then introduction of contradictions to this voice, which leads to a correct voice being heard. For an author of an ironic work, this rhetorical trick can draw in an audience member by employing enthymeme, coaxing audiences to interact with the work by creating a text that completes the argument made by the rhetoric.

Another clue to irony is a clash of style, "recognizing different ways of saying...identical messages" (p. 68). Modern humorists specialize in these stylistic shifts[5]. This is most obvious in parody, a "mocking imitation by one author of another author's style" (pp. 71-72). In the *Poetics*, Aristotle notes that humans are the most imitative creatures on earth, finding both education and entertainment in acts of imitation. Acts of imitation are natural to humans and learning, says Aristotle, "is the greatest of pleasures" (trans. 1984, 1448b 13). If an audience viewing an imitation, including a satire or parody, is familiar with the original, they might take delight in the act of imitation. If they are not, they will be impressed with the artist's work as if it were an original (1448b 4-23). The stylistic ironic clue exposes which readers are experienced in identifying irony, as being well-read prepares us to enjoy subtleties and richness of parody. It also opens the ironist and the readers who "get it" to be labeled as "morally elitist" playing "a game for snobs" (p. 72).

The final kind of ironic clue is a conflict of belief. The reader becomes alert when a conflict arises between the beliefs expressed in the text and the beliefs we hold and suspect the author holds. When this incongruence develops, the reader must then

[5] For examples, see chapter 3.

consider a convincing reading for the given context. When considering whether a work

is ironic, Booth (1974) identifies contextual clues that can help readers. First, readers

must consider their past experience with the moral and intellectual position the author

presents in the work and ask themselves if the people they respect hold this position.

Readers must also consider the credibility of the author, asking what is known about the

beliefs of the author.

Booth (1974) gives a checklist of clues to guide decision-making as to whether a

work is ironic. Does the author give us direct guidance in the title, an epigraph, or other

direct clues? Does the author make deliberate errors of fact? Are there incongruities

between the style used in the work and the author? Are there incongruities between the

beliefs expressed and the beliefs we suspect the author holds? As readers interpret the

work through these clues, they make a decision as to whether the work is ironic.

Judging an Ironic Work

In a work containing stable irony, the author deliberately uses irony as a rhetorical

trope. The irony covertly contains a single, intended, meaning that is revealed by

reconstructing the text out of a literal reading. This meaning is finite, tied to time and

space. (Booth, 1974, pp. 3-7). A stable irony depends on the ironist and audience having

similar, shared norms.[6] To judge a stable irony, one must make a judgment against the

author's overt proposition; decide where the author stands; decide if the reconstructed

meaning is a good one; and ask if the author, as ironist, is justified in asking the audience

to reconstruct the text (Booth, 1974, p. 39-44).

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[6] Booth (1974) expressed concern that modern authors "have encouraged the notion that sharing value doesn't matter" (p. 171).

An initial act of judgment will work to support/weaken the second judgment of where the author stands. Ironic authors offer an aggressive invitation to readers to construct and judge the picture of an author's values. "Since the reader has put the final position together for himself, he moves to the third judgment – that the reconstruction is good" (Booth, 1974, p. 41). The reconstruction must be superior to the literal reading (pp. 40-41). The reconstructed meaning is greater than the sum of its linguistic parts (p. 43). The ironist does this by the rhetorical technique of enthymeme. By using irony to embed the intended text, the reader reconstructs the text, thus completing the argument and drawing the conclusion the author had intended. This ironic enthymeme "forces us into hierarchical participation, and hence makes the results" of the ironic text "more actively our own" (p. 41).

Morris (1987) applied the concept of ironic judgment to parody. To better understand the popularity of a parody, Morris developed a three-prong test can help determine whether an audience will accept a parody:

1. The author's parody must generate a perception of exclusiveness – those who "get it." The level of exclusiveness generated by the author must be sufficient to make the in-group selective.[7]

2. The membership, as defined, must be consistent with the members' other social affiliations and exist in the service of their own best interests.[8]

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[7] In regards to exclusiveness, Morris notes that audience response is based on both the audience's perception of the text and their intended use. The joke is the joke itself (1987, p. 468).
[8] For membership, audience members must be able to justify the consumption of the message. For example, viewers of *The Daily Show* might frame their membership as news consumption or as dissatisfaction with current affairs.

3. It must be obvious to the audience that the subject of the parody has violated a norm upheld by the in-group.[9] The relationship between the audience and the parody is embedded in its intended meaning.

An analysis of a story from *The Daily Show* confirms Morris' test.[10] In a 2004 episode of *The Daily Show*, host Jon Stewart announced that U.S. Attorney General John Ashcroft and U.S. Secretary of Commerce Don Evans have turned in their resignations to President Bush. The studio audience cheered; Stewart acknowledged that the audience was cheering the resignation of Ashcroft, not Evans. This then transitioned to the show's lead story, Ashcroft's resignation. Stewart took the opportunity to ridicule Ashcroft and his policies. The studio audience laughed and applauded in approval. In doing this, Stewart met Morris' criteria for: 1) exclusiveness, by ridiculing Ashcroft on *The Daily Show*, which appears exclusively on Comedy Central and has an audience well-versed in current events; 2), membership, by identifying Ashcroft's beliefs and behaviors as incongruent with Stewart's (and the audience's) value system; and 3) violating norms, by drawing attention to Ashcroft's least popular policy decisions.

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[9] Morris refers to this as culpability (1987, p. 466).

[10] In a 2004 pilot study by the researcher, Attorney General Alberto Gonzales received widely divergent treatments by *The Daily Show* and the *NBC Nightly News*. Both programs showed footage of Gonzales accepting the nomination, but *NBC Nightly News* showed it in the first 30 seconds of the 2:13 long story, while *The Daily Show* waited to show Gonzales until the last 30 seconds of its 5:17 long story. *NBC Nightly News* barely mentioned outgoing Attorney General John Ashcroft, choosing to focus instead on Gonzales' role in drafting White House policy regarding al-Qaeda detainees at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba and its role in the Abu Ghraib prison scandal in Iraq. John Ashcroft was lampooned in *The Daily Show*'s story, which parodied Ashcroft's faith (scribbling in tongues), his musical tastes (footage of Ashcroft singing "Let the Eagle Soar"), his health problems (detaining his gall bladder for questioning), and his record (both politically and musically). One other noteworthy finding is how both shows depended on images to tell their story. While *NBC Nightly News* used their images coherently to reinforce what was being reported, *The Daily Show* used their well-timed images for comedic effect. Their reports and images also had coherence. It may be funny to hear that Ashcroft detained his gall bladder for questioning, but it was funnier to see a gall bladder in an orange jumpsuit, being walked by police because that image is incongruent and unexpected.

Many ironic judgments are obvious; it "silently demonstrates for us, without any need for theory or analysis, that a given ironic effect is appropriate or necessary" (Booth, 1974, p. 197). However, audiences must be wary of the ignorance, distractions, prejudices, lack of practice, and emotional inadequacy. We are least ignorant where we know most; we are most ignorant where we have overconfidence in our limited knowledge" (pp. 222-23). Irony "wakes men by punishing them for sleep" (pp. 223-24). Our beliefs and preconceived notions sometimes cloud our judgments (pp. 224-25). Audiences often misread texts about things they hold most dear (p. 226). There is a minimum threshold for understanding irony; readers need meaningful, quality experience to know how to identify irony (pp. 226-27). This is why children often misread ironic texts. There is also a golden mean, avoiding the "habitually sentimental or congenially cold" (p. 227). In overcoming these interpretive handicaps, "The trick is in developing a habit of great skepticism about one's own hypothesis, and great flexibility in trying out alternatives" (p. 225). The reader must not rely on rules, not relativism, alone. All rhetorical situations are unique: some are intended for a specific audience in a specific time and place or an imagined, timeless audience (pp. 227-29).

Irony tempts audiences into hubris (Baldick, 1990; Booth, 1974). We flatter ourselves when we get ironies that others do not (Booth, p. 1). "Most readers have a deeply moral feeling about right interpretation...our pride is more engaged in being right about irony" (p. 44). Baldick notes that irony "flatters its readers' intelligence at the expense of a character (or fictional narrator)" (p. 114). As Booth expounds on this idea:

But it is also clear by now why irony causes so much trouble. An aggressively intellectual exercise that fuses fact and value, requiring us to construct alternative

hierarchies and choose among them; demands that we look down on other men's follies or sins; floods us with emotion-charged value judgments which claim to be backed by the mind; accuses other men not only of wrong beliefs but of being wrong at their very foundations and blind to what those foundations imply – all of this coupled with a kind of subtlety that cannot be deciphered or 'proved' simply by looking closely at the words. (p. 44)

Those who misread ironic texts "will usually think of themselves as good readers" (Booth, 1974, p. 44). This is especially true of audiences of ironic content like *The Daily Show* and *The Onion* who tend to be young and/or well-read. The biggest fans of these are journalists and media critics. Because a successful reading of irony requires tact, experience, and wisdom (p. 44), "Irony then often produces a much higher degree of confidence than the literal statement" (p. 51).

However, it is worth noting that the volume of ironic works is not without costs to audiences. Irony, as a concept, is a paradox: it is good, a "perception of wheels within wheels, the vertiginous but finally delightful discovery of depths below depths." But irony "can weaken and finally destroy all artistic effect, including the perception of the paradox itself" (Booth, 1974, p. 177). "Irony is essentially 'subtractive;'" Booth wrote, "and once it is turned into a spirit or concept and released upon the world, it becomes a total irony that must discount itself, leaving [...] nothing" (pp. 177-78). When everything in life is ironized, according to Kirkegaard, it leads to boredom. Irony is freed from realities and "its blessings. For if it has nothing higher than itself, it may receive no blessing, for it is ever the lesser that is blessed of a greater. This is the freedom for which irony longs" (p. 296). Cuddon (1998) concurs, noting that some ironists "have distanced

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themselves to a vantage point, a quasi god-like eminence. [...] The artist becomes a kind of god viewing creation (and viewing his own creation) with a smile. From this it is a short step to the idea that God himself is the supreme ironist, watching the antics of human beings with a detached, ironical smile" (p. 431). For audiences, "The serious loss caused by irony comes when readers, barraged with critical talk hailing the discover of ambiguities as a major achievement, learn to live with blurred senses and dulled attention, and deprive themselves of the delights of precise and subtle communication that stable ironists provide" (p. 172).

Conclusion

In summary, irony is a participative rhetorical act. An author intentionally places an incongruity into the work. As the audience reads the work, they notice the incongruity. The audience must then deconstruct the work, reconstructing a text intended by the author. The irony serves as an enthymematic rhetorical device for the author, demanding that the audience complete the argument put forth by the author. In doing this reconstruction, the author has created a situation where the audience may have high affinity for the author because the author has written how the audience thinks because the audience has participated in creating the text. This explains why audiences are so passionate about satirical content and their authors, as well as the betrayal they feel when the work "changes" or "degrades." This also explains why audiences think that authors that employ irony in their satires and parodies are speaking "truth." By affirming shared values, the author has created a rhetorical situation where the audience participates in creating a text that affirms norms and values they share with the author.

CHAPTER 3

A HISTORIOGRAPHY OF NEWS SATIRE IN THE UNITED STATES

SINCE WORLD WAR II

The past 60 years have seen an explosion of critical analysis about irony (Booth,

1974, p. 12). Equally astonishing is how ironic works that utilize satire and parody have

utilized mass media and resonated with a wide audience. There are movies (*Wag the Dog*

and *Airplane*, for instance) and books that have parodied aspects of politics or popular

culture. More interesting is how some content has maintained relevance, even gaining

popularity over the years. This chapter will look at *MAD Magazine*, *Saturday Night Live*,

and *The Daily Show* as examples of satirical content that have stood the tests of time and

audience. These satires were chosen because of their longevity,[11] relevance[12] (as

measured by viewership and readership), and citation by other researchers.[13]

MAD Magazine

The medium of the comic book was very popular among male youth in the 1940s. In

1947, Bill Gaines took over his father's comic business, Educational Comics, and led the

business in a profitable transition to science fiction and horror. He and co-editor Al

Feldstein added artists, encouraging their autonomy and creative vision. Given the shift

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[11] *MAD Magazine* has been published since 1952. *Saturday Night Live* has appeared on air since 1975, with new episodes airing on NBC and reruns airing on both NBC and the cable network E! *The Daily Show* has aired on the cable network Comedy Central since 1996. *The Onion* has appeared online since 1996.

[12] At its peak in 1974, *MAD* had over 2,000,000 subscriptions (Reidelbach, 1991). *The Onion*'s website, www.theonion.com, has 5,115,368 monthly unique visitors (Media Kit 2008).

[13] McLuhan referenced *MAD* in his work *Understanding Media* (1966). Recent studies by the Pew Research Center for People and the Press (2007, 2008) about media use have used *Saturday Night Live*, *The Daily Show*, and *The Onion* by name.

away from education, Gaines changed the name of his company to Entertaining Comics

with the motto, "A New Trend in Comics" (Reidelbach, 1991, p. 10-14). Harvey

Kurtzman, one of the artists working for Gaines, sought more money for his work.

Gaines suggested a humor comic, but Kurtzman countered with an idea for a satire comic

which became *MAD*. In their first issue published in 1952, Kurtzman and a close-knit

group of artists parodied four comics published by Entertaining Comics (pp. 20-21). The

official MAD website jokes, "The second issue of MAD [went] on sale on December 9,

1952. On December 11, the first-ever letter complaining that MAD 'just isn't as funny

and original like it used to be' [arrived]" (Devlin, n.d.).

Harvey Kurtzman made several innovations via *MAD*. "He was the first to use

mainstream humorists as writers; he parodied many aspects of life" and popular culture in

mass media. "He pushed the boundaries of what a comic was supposed to look like,"

eventually "reaching the limits of the comic book medium" and guided *MAD*'s

conversion from comic book to magazine (Reidelbach, 1991, p. 22). Successful comic

books spawned imitators, and *MAD* was no different. Even Entertaining Comics, the

comic book business owned by *MAD* publisher Bill Gaines, created its own imitation of

MAD, called *Panic* (p. 24). In the 1950s, public outcry over comic books led to

subcommittee hearings in Congress. As a result, the Comics Code Authority was

established in 1954, a de facto censorship group sanitizing comics of violence and other

vulgarities. Within a year, Gaines had discontinued all comics published by Entertaining

Comics except for *MAD*. He also began to publish *MAD* in magazine format (pp. 22-32).

The key for *MAD* was caricature. "All had the ability to capture a likeness of a

performer – the hard part was depicting the character in a variety of situations,

responding with exaggerated facial expressions and postures that would never occur in reality" (Reidelbach, 1991, p. 76). *MAD* artist Will Elder's work parodied comics; his drawings were "virtually indistinguishable from drawings by the original artists" (p. 30). Describing his own ability to reproduce other comics in his parodies was, in his words, "part of the strength of the gag. It's only going to be funny when you can actually fool somebody, when you can actually shock them" (p. 32). As *MAD* artist Larry Siegel added, "anything is fair game if you do it right" (p. 94).

Within its first year of production, *MAD* had expanded the forms and media it parodied, from comics to poetry and literature. "Great poems, nursery rhymes, greeting card verses – nothing was safe from the satirists of *MAD*" (Reidelbach, 1991, p. 59). Issue 6 featured a parody of "Casey and the Bat." Classic stories, whether original or reworked in popular media, were also satirized in *MAD* (p. 59). Its writers and artists picked up on trends – product placement, violence, and the evolution of a show over a long run (pp. 80-86). In 1959, *MAD* satirized the Gettysburg Address by publishing both the original and a "Cool School" version filled with "beat" language. The beat version read, "Four score and like seven years ago our old daddies came on the scene with a new group, grooved in the free kicks, and hip to the Jazz that all cats make it the same" (pp. 59-60). In comparing the two versions, Reidelbach states, "The *MAD* version" of the Gettysburg Address "was quite accurate in content, and the tendency is to compare each new sentence with the original – encouraging most readers to spend more time willingly studying the Address than they ever would otherwise" (p. 60).

MAD has focused much of its satirical barbs on motion pictures and television programs (Reidelbach, 1991, p. 72). From the 1930s through the 1960s, the Hays Office

had a taming effect on movies. Television was also tamed due to heavy influence from its advertisers. In both cases, creativity, originality, and substance suffered and the complexities of human life were ignored (pp. 72-76). *MAD* highlighted the differences between the book and the movie during the years that the Hays Code was in effect (p. 89). After the Hays Code ended in 1967, *MAD* still satirized racy movies, but "*MAD*'s takeoffs were as clean as a G-rated movie," according to Reidelbach. "The parodying did allow underage readers at least a peek and a clue to what they were missing" (p. 92).

Other subjects of parody and satire included fashion, mores, family life, normality, and keeping up with the Joneses (Reidelbach, 1991, p. 104). *MAD* satirized what admen and academics told Americans to do and "offered alternatives that were as ridiculous as their inspirations" (p. 102). For instance, in the article "How to Be Smart," *MAD* told readers that looking smart was key (p. 102). In the article "Young Men's Spring Fashions for 1956," the featured attire was styled after James Dean, not *Esquire* (p. 104). While Bill Gaines, publisher of *MAD*, said, "We've tried to keep *MAD* more or less apolitical" (p. 118), politics have not escaped *MAD*'s pages. Its first political satire was "What's My Shame," a combination of the show *What's My Line* and the Army-McCarthy hearings (p. 120).

MAD also satirized both advertising and the ad-men people creating advertisements in agencies (p. 54). In 1955, *MAD* discontinued advertising because, as *MAD* publisher Bill Gaines put it, "You can't take an advertisement and not be beholden to" the advertiser (pp. 50-52). "Advertising parodies in *MAD* continued to deflate the most ridiculous excesses of the Madison Avenue masterpieces. In doing so they armed their readers with a crucial weapon against the onslaught: awareness" (pp. 54-55). *MAD* editor Al Feldstein

said, "I was getting a great deal of satisfaction because I thought I was performing a kind

of service for young people in my own way as a liberal, in at least alerting them to what

was going on around them in the area of advertising, politics, manufacturing, packaging,

etc." (p. 38). *MAD* ran fewer advertising parodies in the 1980s and 90s because print

advertising had fewer campaigns and less impact on audiences that they did in the 1960s

and 70s. *MAD* was a victim of its own success in parody. "The biggest reason" there are

fewer advertising parodies in *MAD* "is that [...] in response to *MAD*'s barbs,

advertisements are smarter, wittier, and don't take themselves as seriously as they once

did" (p. 55). As *MAD* editor Nick Meglin noted, "Bright young people who were *MAD*

fans went onto careers in advertising and wrote funny ads that were satires of

themselves" (p. 55).

MAD's song parodies led to copyright infringement lawsuits from music publishers,

including Irving Berlin. In 1963, U.S. District Court (Southern District of New York)

found only two instances to have violated copyright. The case was upheld in the U.S.

Court of Appeals in Manhattan. In his opinion, Judge Irving Kaufman stated "that

parody and satire are deserving of substantial freedom – both as entertainment and as a

form of social and literary criticism. [...] many a true word is indeed spoken in jest"

(Berlin v. E.C. Publications, Inc., 545). Kaufman noted that incongruity and references

to meter, tune, and the occasional phrase were not infringing on the copyright of the

original: after all, a parody needs an original. The case was appealed to the U.S. Supreme

Court which upheld the decisions of the lower court by refusing the appeal without

comment (pp. 60-67).

McLuhan (1966), in *Understanding Media*, describes the medium of comics as having low definition and high participation. He notes that *MAD* magazine, with its send-ups of glossy magazine advertising and comic book parodies of popular television shows, emerged as television created inertia from "the sharp and glossy, in favor of the shaggy, the sculptural, and the tactual. Hence the sudden eminence of *MAD* magazine which offers, merely, a ludicrous and cool replay of the forms of hot media of photo, radio, and film. *MAD* is the old print and woodcut image that recurs in various media today" (p. 165). Conceiving comics as high participation may suggest why *MAD*'s medium may have made it well-suited to presenting ironic content. By embedding their social criticisms in humorous, ironic parodies, the staff of *MAD* was able to put forth an enthymeme, inviting audiences to complete the argument and expose social values violated in popular culture.

In *A Rhetoric of Irony* (1974), Booth disagrees with McLuhan's observation that *MAD* offers a "cool replay." Irony, including satirical content, is a "dramatic engagement of person with person" where readers are invited to reconstruct the text. "Ironic reconstructions," according to Booth, "depend on an appeal to assumptions, often unstated, that ironists and readers share." As Booth describes his metaphor of reconstruction he does not mean a pulled plank revealing a deeper meaning; rather, he means tearing down a building and reconstructing a new one. The reconstruction is a leap or climb, "always toward an obscured point that is intended as wiser, wittier, more compassionate, subtler, truer, more moral, or at least obviously vulnerable to further irony" (p. 36). As stated before, the reader must go through several steps to reveal the

irony: rejecting the literal meaning, reconstructing an ironic meaning, and determining if the author's intended ironic meaning is justified (pp. 39-44).

Another key to *MAD*'s success was an ability to expose the innate clichés of the genres in each medium (Reidelbach, 1991, p. 76). The satires that appeared in the pages of *MAD* were both short and long in form (pp. 78-79). Examples of short-form satires included "Scenes We'd Like to See" in television programs or movies and hybrids of genres like "Television Game Shows Based on Newspaper Headlines" (p. 78). In *MAD*, the long-form satire is a "narrative takeoff of a specific television show or movie. This allows the writer several pages to do a point-by-point, merciless dissection of plot, characters, and acting, often including references and comparisons to other shows. The artist opens the satire with a dramatic, page-size drawing known as a splash panel, then depicts the action in recreations and interpretations of a variety of scenes" (pp. 78-79).

An example of the long-form satire found in *MAD* is "M*U*S*H," a 1982 parody of the long-running sitcom *M*A*S*H*. The sitcom, inspired by the 1970 film of the same name, chronicled the life of a mobile army surgical hospital. The first page of the parody is a mail call of characters who had left the show in prior years. Later, Chaplain Francis John Patrick Mulcahy is satirized as Father Nokaypee, retells the creation story – a blend of Genesis and *M*A*S*H*. "In the Beginning, the Producers created a TV series…based on the Good Book and the Hit Movie! On the First Day, They created the Premise! On the Second Day, They created the Structure! And on the Third Day, They created the Pilot Episode! And They saw that it was good!" (pp. 84-85).

As discussed in Chapter 2, when reconstructing a text the reader's initial act of judgment will work to support (or weaken) the second judgment of where the author

stands (Booth, 1974, p. 41). Ironic authors offer an aggressive invitation to readers to construct and judge the picture of authors' views. "Since the reader has put the final position together for himself, he moves to the third judgment – that the reconstruction is good" (p. 41). To reconstruct "M*U*S*H" the reader must first judge the literal reading, which is what McLuhan referred to as the "cool replay [...] the old print and woodcut image" of an episode of *M*A*S*H*. Because this is *MAD*, the reader knows the authors, writer Arnie Kogen and artist Jack Davis, prefer satire so the reader begins to reconstruct an ironic reading of "M*U*S*H." The reader's ironic reading of "M*U*S*H," with its cynical look at the creation story of a television show and barb thrown at its longevity have a offer a better reading than the literal reading. The reader judges that the Kogen and Davis are justified in having the reader reconstruct the text.

Saturday Night Live

On October 11, 1975, NBC premiered a 90-minute, sketch-comedy show *Saturday Night Live*. Since its debut, the show has been a source of entertainment, both comedic and musical. Many sketches have parodied aspects of American politics and popular culture. *Saturday Night Live* writer James Downey said, "I'm not doing the show for myself and I'm not doing it for the audience. I'm doing it for my friends, who I tend to think of as having good taste and intelligence" (Cader, 1994, p. 28).

McLuhan (1966) speculated that rise of television over print media in the 20th century occurred because "television simply involved everybody in everybody more deeply" (p. 166). According to Lorne Michaels, creator and executive producer of *Saturday Night Live*, "The show is working when we're doing exactly what you were hoping we'd be doing, in a way that you hadn't thought we'd be doing it. In a way that is truly original.

That is, in the best sense, broadcasting – when a lot of people are having the same experience at the same time and talking about it the next day" (Cader, 1994, p. 8).

A sketch that has appeared in every episode of *Saturday Night Live*, "Weekend Update" is a fake news segment that parodies both the news and newsmakers. Chevy Chase, original cast member and first host of its weekly fake news segment "Weekend Update," described the hatred he had of the "man bites dog" stories that appeared right before the end of a television newscast. When he auditioned for *Saturday Night Live*, he parodied the "man bites dog" story. "Here's an opportunity to do parody, to be funny as a newsman [...] and to use that as a vehicle for satire to say damn well what I want on the news. Newsmen had "a pretension I didn't like," Chase said. "At some point" Chase went, "'I'm Chevy Chase and you're not.' I had nothing else to say" (p. 13).

Jane Curtin, another original cast member and host of "Weekend Update," said, "I did the generic newswoman. A lot of people thought I was doing someone else. They knew I wasn't doing them, but they knew someone I was doing" (p. 14). During *Saturday Night Live*'s first season on the air, Dan Akroyd and Jane Curtin parodied a point-counterpoint segment that had appeared on the television newsweekly *60 Minutes*. According to Don Hewitt, producer of *60 Minutes*, the parody actually helped to keep the original segment on air. Joe Piscopo also parodied a *60 Minutes* segment, impersonating commentator Andy Rooney on *Saturday Night Live*. However, Hewitt claims the impersonation was imperfect, as Piscopo said "Did you ever wonder why...?" and Rooney did not (pp. 138-39).

Packard (1957) notes that "when we learn to recognize the devices of the persuaders, we build up a 'recognition reflex'" (p. 265). *Saturday Night Live* writer James Downey

articulated the challenges of writing for the show in the 1990s because of the "recognition reflex" *SNL* viewers have built for themselves. "These days," said Downey, "the whole show is harder to write, because television and commercials and culture in general are a lot more sophisticated. It's not the big, fat, sexy target it once was. It's also not virgin territory. […] It's hard to find fresh, sincere, non-ironic stuff that hasn't already been worked over" (Cader, 1994, p. 28).

Political figures have hosted the show, ranging from New York mayors Ed Koch (May 14, 1983, May 12, 1984) and Rudy Guiliani (November 22, 1997) to former United States vice-president Al Gore (December 14, 2002). Beginning with the 1976 Ford-Carter presidential debates, parody of politics has been a regular feature of *Saturday Night Live*. In some cases, the show has altered the course of politics: according to Al Franken, Al Gore's staff had him watch *Saturday Night Live*'s parody of the first presidential debate in 2000 to change behaviors like his sighing (Adams & Brand, 2006).

In 2007, Brian Williams, anchor of *The NBC Nightly News with Brian Williams*, served as guest host. In his monologue (a standard element for each episode), Williams confessed that he thought he was part of a long tradition of newscasters appearing on SNL. "It wasn't until rehearsal this morning that I was told that those were not the actual newsmen, but cast members doing impressions of them" (Brian Williams' Monologue, 2007, ¶ 3). In a brilliant, satirical, self-deprecating moment, he admitted that he was aware of the perception that he "is always in anchorman mode." Then the camera shot changed and an on-screen graphic appeared suddenly over his left shoulder, as one might see on the nightly news. "Tonight, that all changes," Williams said, promising to "relax…have fun…be spontaneous…and, most important, stay loose" (Brian Williams'

Monologue, 2007, ¶ 5-6). With perfect comic timing, the words "relax," "have fun," "be spontaneous," and "stay loose" appeared on the graphic. The satire worked on many levels because of the rich ironies embedded in the monologue. Williams, a respected newscaster, appeared on an "entertainment" program known for lampooning serious news subjects and reporters, including Williams himself. In his monologue, he "reported" that he was going to be spontaneous, using an on screen graphic – the antithesis of spontaneity – to emphasize his message. If this monologue is a criticism of television news, one could conclude that even Williams thinks that television news reporting, with its use of news graphics, can become formulaic and predictable.

With the 2008 Presidential election, *Saturday Night Live* has again found fertile soil for its satirical barbs. The February 23, 2008 episode featured a parody of the CNN Univision Democratic Debate between Senators Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton which had taken place on February 21 in Austin, Texas. In the parody, moderator Campbell Brown (played by cast member Kristen Wiig) confessed that she is partial to Obama. Speaking like a teenager smitten in love, she began the debate saying, "Like nearly everyone in the news media, the three of us are totally 'in the tank' for Senator Obama." Brown continues, "We will make every effort tonight to keep these [biases] hidden. [...] I, myself, have been clinically diagnosed as an Oba-maniac!" (CNN Univision Democratic Debate, 2008, ¶ 7). Brown, along with CNN's John King (played by Jason Sudeikis) and Univision's Jorge Ramos (played by Will Forte) offered each candidate questions that represented the perceived biases that the media held for each candidate at that time. Obama fielded questions such as "Are you comfortable? Is there anything we can get for you?" and "Are you sure? Because it's, you know, it's really no

trouble" (CNN Univision Democratic Debate, 2008, ¶ 13-17). Obama Girl also posed a

question, though Senator Clinton (played by Amy Poehler) was quick to point out that

Obama Girl lip-synched her question which was not, in fact, a question (CNN Univision

Democratic Debate, 2008, ¶ 32-33). Senator Clinton, who in real life had lost many

presidential primaries to Obama, responded in the skit to questions about her defeats and

how Obama might be eroding her core groups of supporters (CNN Univision Democratic

Debate, 2008, ¶ 21-29).

As the 2008 campaign has progressed there have been claims of media bias favoring

Obama over Clinton by members of the media and representatives of the Clinton

campaign (Dowd, 2008; Hoyt, 2008; PEJ, 2008; Steinberg, 2008; Taranto, 2008). Even

Senator Clinton made a very public reference to both the perceived bias and *SNL*'s satire

of the bias. In the first debate between Senators Clinton and Obama following this satire,

Clinton quipped, "[M]aybe we should ask Barack if he's comfortable and needs another

pillow" (The Democratic Debate in Cleveland, 2008, ¶ 80). Because of the perceived

bias, *SNL* can exaggerate the bias to such a degree that it can create a parody where the

media asks Senator Obama soft questions like, "Can I get you a pillow?" and Senator

Clinton questions about when she will concede the nomination to Senator Obama. "It

tells you that you might have articulated something that was vaguely out there, but had

yet to be stated in a comedy form," according to James Downey, the SNL writer who

composed the debate sketch. "Some things make you laugh because they're funny, and

other things, the effect is: 'Hey, that's right. That makes sense'" (Itzkoff, 2008, ¶ 6).

SNL creator and executive producer Lorne Michaels adds, "Jim's piece would not have

worked if the audience didn't see some element of truth in it" (¶ 13). In the days

following the sketch, the Project for Excellence in Journalism found that media increased its scrutiny of Senator Obama: between February 25 and March 2, he was a significant or dominant factor in 69% of news stories compared to 57% in the week prior (2008, ¶ 3).

The Daily Show

Innis (1972) wrote that media monopolies encourage development of other media to become new power bases, particularly by members of society marginalized by existing media (p. 41). While Innis spoke of people seeking simplicity in the written word in a time before moveable type, this observation helps account for why, in contemporary society, people turn from commercial television to new media and new forms of old media (Barnouw, 1990, p. 391). In the 1960s, commercial television, a symbol of the "establishment," was lampooned in underground films and magazines. Even television shows like the short-lived *That Was The Week That Was* and, in the 1970s, *Saturday Night Live* became a reaction to mainstream commercial television.

The Daily Show is a half-hour long show which airs Monday through Thursday at 11 p.m. on Comedy Central, a cable channel that is best known for the cartoon *South Park*. New broadcasts of *The Daily Show* appear Monday through Thursday at 11 p.m. Eastern and Pacific Time. Rebroadcasts are also shown. The show, which first appeared in 1996, is taped live in front of a live studio audience, though there are pre-recorded segments. Each broadcast lasts 30 minutes. Jon Stewart, a comedian with a long career in stand-up and television, has hosted the show since January 1999. Many of the writers also serve as correspondents and one of the executive producers, Ben Karlin, worked for the satirical newspaper *The Onion* prior to *The Daily Show*.

In its form and its content, *The Daily Show* shares similarities with the typical

broadcast network nightly news. Both focus on current affairs, particularly national

politics. Stories on *The Daily Show* are a combination of live and pre-recorded segments.

Anchor Jon Stewart reads many of these stories directly into the camera, supplemented

with pre-recorded video and over-the-shoulder graphics. The live stories that use

correspondents are similar in style to live stories in television news, where journalists

report from a location or engage in dialogue with the anchor in the studio. This is

normally presented on-screen with a split-screen graphic where both the anchor and

journalist are shown. In the case of *The Daily Show*, the correspondents are actually in-

studio, reporting in front of a green-screen. While the studio audience knows this, this

information is not immediately apparent to those who view the show on television. The

pre-recorded stories normally give an in-depth treatment to a current affairs issue. For

example, correspondent Ed Helms shared a story shortly after the 2004 presidential

election of a Florida resident who was not permitted to vote because she failed to check a

box certifying that she was not mentally retarded. *The Daily Show* also has recurring

segments, including "Science Scope" and "The Week in God," and an interview each

show. The interview subjects are usually entertainers, authors, or political figures.

The current affairs covered by *The Daily Show* are treated humorously; this occurs

both in the reporting of the news and in the images shown with those reports. Because

the show is recorded in front of a studio audience, Stewart also improvises responses to

both the stories and the audience's reactions to those stories. The preparations for *The*

Daily Show are similar to traditional news programs, according to Stewart:

We function [like] a news show in that we have sort of an editorial meeting in the morning. It's a really structured day. [...] [T]he beautiful thing about faking a news show is the topicality is delayed, and the truth is, it helps us more to have saturation of a news story because then everybody's familiar with the parameters of it, so we are generally working a day or two ahead. (¶ 14, 18)

The show's staff members are conscious of their satire of broadcast news. Rob Corddry, correspondent for *The Daily Show*, bristles at the notion that he and his colleagues are journalists. "I don't accept the contention that we are really like journalists or that people really get their news from us" (Guinto, 2004, p. 132). During a commercial break of a taping of *The Daily Show,* anchor Jon Stewart tells the live audience, "Remember, we are not actual newspeople" (St. John, 2004, p. E1). However, when Corddry explains his experiences in getting interviews and access to presidential candidates, he states, "I'm in there in spin alley with the rest of the reporters, and I'm usually being followed by a bunch of college-aged journalists who want to see what *The Daily Show* is going to do" (Guinto, p. 131).

Stephen Colbert related a story of how his imitation of the news fools viewers. He had ended a story of squabbling minorities at the Democratic presidential convention by saying, "I can't wait until the Republican convention where none of these voices will be heard." At the Republican convention someone approached Colbert complimenting the show. The person ended his compliments with, "I love that piece you did on diversity, especially that last line."

"You know that was ironic, right?" Colbert replied. "[T]he weakness of your party [is] that you're sort of monolithic and 83 percent of you are white and middle class." The

person replied "Oh? Well, I see what you mean now, but that's certainly not how I took it" (Gross, 2005, ¶ 20-21).

CHAPTER 4

TELEVISION NEWS: STORING HOUSE

OF SOCIAL VALUES

While today's newspapers can trace their lineage to the 18th century, the origins of

television news are in radio and newsreels. Beginning in the 1930s, CBS Radio used

unsold airtime to broadcast world news. CBS began calling it the World News Roundup

in 1938 (Barnouw, 1990, p. 86). In 1947, NBC television premiered the *Camel News*

Caravan hosted by John Cameron Swayze; CBS also had the *CBS Television News with*

Douglass Edwards (p. 102). Both shows were 15 minutes broadcasts in the early

evening, consisting of correspondents in other cities and newsreels. Footage came from

bureaus and stringers. Bureaus were located in major international cities and made of

film crews of a few people. Stringers were usually freelancers, often on location shoots

for movies, and also retirees. Coverage focused on predictable and staged events that

were photogenic and visual. News that couldn't be covered by film wasn't (pp. 168-

170).

By the 1960s, over half of Americans got their news from television, but few were

aware that television news had thin channels for coverage of foreign news and events.

Therefore, a major role in shaping public opinion on world events was news based on

official information relayed by the U.S. government (Barnouw, 1990, p. 290). During the

Eisenhower administration in the 1950s, Secretary of State John F. Dulles domineered

news reporting on these events "because of a thinness – sometimes a vacuum – of

available information" (p. 226). Dulles turned ordinary events like arrivals, departures, and speeches into press events for television reporters and their cameras. In preparation, he rehearsed these press events and kept edit priority over reporters' stories. When the U.S.S.R. shot down an American U-2 spy plane in 1960, it exposed the CIA's fabricated stories about the U.S. spy programs as lies. In 1961, television news reports on the Bay of Pigs invasion focused on the planning errors with little discussion of news sources and the CIA's ability to twist and misuse them. There was also little mention of violations of international treaties and the illegality of the invasion itself (p. 297). According to Barnouw, television played a central role in determining the course of action in the Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962, with Kennedy demonstrating poise and confidence on television in presenting the United States' position (p. 318). Coverage of the crisis on television "was an oversimplification – a defect not uncommon in television messages" (p. 319) because it misrepresented the situation as one where the villain and his plans were halted by the hero. . Even the 1969 moon landing was scripted and staged for television (pp. 422-428). Public television and the networks carried the Watergate hearings live with ratings that out gained regularly scheduled programming (p. 455).

During the 1960s and 1970s, the role of press coverage of government affairs and the Vietnam War transitioned from regurgitated boosterism of press briefings from government and military officials to reporting and value judgments of news events and policy decisions. While debate about the war appeared almost immediately in print media, that dialogue was mostly absent on television until the 1970s (Barnouw, 1990, p. 380-382). CBS television commentator Eric Sevareid visited Vietnam in 1966 to get a true picture of the country and the battleground. "He found an endless, baffling mosaic;

one might pick up a tiny piece but never glimpse how it might fit into the total" (p. 386).

ABC's James Hagerty felt that television coverage brought the Vietnam War to

Americans, but John Horn was concerned that it trivialized the war, making it equal to

other events reported on the news (pp. 401-02). After visiting Vietnam in 1968, CBS

nightly news anchor Walter Cronkite said on air that the Vietnam War might end in a

stalemate (p. 402). As president, Richard Nixon set discourse for news agendas, like his

predecessors. While his predecessor, Lyndon B. Johnson sought to manipulate the media

to serve his means (p. 387), Nixon, more than any of his predecessors, "became

[television's] most avid practitioner – in the frequency of his appearances and in the

range of devices used to influence, cajole, and control the medium" (p. 440). The book

Presidential Television (Minow, Martin, & Mitchell, 1973) inventories the ways that

Nixon took advantage of the relationship between president and television news to

advance his policies. Eventually television and other mass media reported outside of the

White House line, which led to tactics of pitting networks against their affiliates and

personal attacks (Barnouw, p. 441-446). By the mid-1970s, "The proper role of

television in relation to government had become a tense issue. [...] For some years,

television had edged, often reluctantly into that role of an 'additional check,' a thoughtful

observer, an elder statesman, an ombudsman. The role had earned it gratitude, but also

hatred" (pp. 463-64).

Television had a profound impact on other media and news coverage. In 1951, cities

with television stations noted a 20-40% drop in movie attendance (Barnouw, 1990, p.

114). Kennedy was the first president to allow live filming and telecast of press

conferences (p. 289). By 1963, television has replaced newspapers as the primary source

of news (p. 314). While the entertainment divisions of networks produced ratings, profits, and (in the words of one executive) "shit," news divisions rode the high road, bringing prestige to the networks even as they lost money and audiences (pp. 346-47).

In addition to daily news broadcasts, planned and breaking news events periodically interrupted and pre-empted the networks' regularly scheduled programming. Barnouw wrote that by 1960, television producers were ambivalent about special news events (p. 260). For example, at times during the four days of commercial-free coverage of the U.S. President John F. Kennedy's assassination, nine out of every ten Americans were watching it on television (pp. 332, 337). The new norm for networks was to prepare for, specialize in, and welcome these "grandstand interruptions" because it gave networks opportunities to develop reputations and skills (p. 260). Generally, these were loss leaders but might be profitable; "a necessary service" (p. 260) for the viewing public. These "grandstand interruptions" usually dealt with the U.S. president (presidential conventions, debates, assassinations, and pronouncements), U.S. Congressional hearings (McCarthyism, Tonkin Gulf, Watergate, impeachment), prominent international leaders and events (Khruschev visiting the U.S., the Cuban Missile Crisis), or other events of national significance (the moon landing, funerals of national dignitaries, the bicentennial, natural disasters)[14].

Outside of nightly news broadcasts and "grandstand interruptions," television news also began to explore deeper issues. The *March of Time* documentary series in theaters led to the creation of CBS' *See It Now*, a news program with segments of film, voiceover, and live broadcast that debuted in 1951. The impact of the documentaries on *See It Now* had "made television an indispensable medium" (Barnouw, 1990, p. 182). *See It Now*

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[14] Barnouw (1990) details the most notable of these grandstand interruptions in *Tube of Plenty*.

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and its anchor, Edward R. Murrow, ran a series of programs critical of U.S. Senator

Joseph McCarthy and his anti-communist policies in 1953, which led to government

hearings that eventually discredited the senator. However, the show was a victim of its

own success: it generated ratings, credibility, and new advertisers as well as controversy

and high production costs ($90,000 per episode). The show went from a weekly format

to occasional broadcasts in 1954 to make room for a quiz show (p. 184). *See It Now* was

cancelled in 1958 (p. 237). Other controversial programs, like panels, round-tables, and

interviews, moved to fringe periods on the broadcast schedule, like Sunday afternoons,

becoming known as the "cultural ghetto" (p. 206).

Documentary-style news reporting and investigative reporting by television networks

grew in the 1960s. "Film makers were becoming acutely aware of the ambiguity of the

film image. It had the ability to arouse strong emotions, but these emotions could be

steered in various directions" (Barnouw, 1990, p. 287-88). Technical advances made this

kind of filming more mobile, with 16mm cameras, videotape recorders, wireless

microphones, hidden cameras, and other equipment (pp. 286-289, 434). Footage shot to

tell one story could be edited and narrated to tell another (pp. 378-380). However, in the

1980s news divisions were no longer required to report public service achievements, so

news divisions transitioned to reality programming. These shows ranged from shows

with interviews, confrontations, and extreme close-ups like *60 Minutes* and *20/20*, to

fluffier syndicated programs like *Entertainment Tonight*, *The People's Court*, and

America's Most Wanted (pp. 479, 519).

The Nightly Network News

A program "dependent on entire teams and hierarchies of skill for corporate action" (McLuhan, 1966, p. 292), network nightly news is a 23-minute-long broadcast presented by one or two anchors with taped stories, "tell stories," pictures, maps, and graphs (Gans, 1979). A typical broadcast has five or six hard news stories (1-2 minutes each), one or two features (2-3 minutes each), and several tell stories (15-30 seconds each), which include the introductions and endings of film stories and summaries of other important news. The broadcast is spilt into four or five sections. The first story is the lead story, similar to a magazine cover story or an above-the-fold story on a newspaper. The first two sections are hard news, usually dealing with items of national importance or interest. The third section has stories with social implications. The final section usually has an anecdotal "man bites dog" story.

The news process begins with story suggestions from reporters, staff, wire services, and anticipated events, with a focus on the most salient aspects of the stories. Executive and assistant producers are story selectors, deciding what among the story suggestions can be reported. The associate producers then design the story by outlining it, including themes and questions. They then assign it to reporters. As stories take shape, reporters are torn between source and audience interests. Gans calls this process "buying and selling," which "leads journalists to construct a highlighted reality. [...] Selling, buying, and highlighting also help to explain why the news is dominated by well-known public officials and stories of conflict and disorder" (1979, p. 92).

The typical news day begins at 9 a.m. and ends at 7 p.m. The final newscast is the product of a process that is a combination of assembly line (idea to final product), funnel

(many stories to the final few), and accordion (additions of breaking news and postponed stories). Between 10 a.m. and 3 p.m., the studio waits for story submissions, though reporters and producers have been at work at them long before. At 12 p.m. the executive producer posts the first "rundown," or story list. The lead story is chosen. By 3:30 p.m., the top producers know what stories have been filmed, what shots have been taken, and the length of the stories. At 4 p.m., the executive producer posts the "published" story list, which announces what filmed and tell stories will appear in the broadcast, their order, and their length, as well as when breaks will occur. Between 4 and 5:30 p.m., the lineup will change at least twice. Between 5 p.m. and the 6:30 p.m. broadcast, the story list is converted into a program. Everyone contributes; there is no division of labor. Stories are reviewed, edited, trimmed, or omitted entirely. At 6:29 p.m., the anchors ready themselves. After the broadcast, the executive producer and others discuss mistakes and omissions while taking viewer calls (Gans, 1979, p. 109-113).

According to Gans' 1967 quantitative analysis of CBS' and NBC's nightly newscasts, 71 percent of news is made of "Knowns," be they political, economic, social, or cultural; 21 percent is made of "Unknowns," "ordinary people prototypical of the groups or aggregates that make up the nation" (1979, p. 9); and 8 percent is made of animals, objects, and abstractions. Knowns are split into the categories of incumbent presidents (11%), presidential candidates (4%), leading federal officials (38%), state and local officials (11%), and alleged or actual breakers of law or mores (10%). Unknowns are split into protesters and strikers (42%), victims (33%), alleged or actual breakers of law or mores (8%), voters and survey respondents (3%), and participants in unusual acts (7%). The acts that appear most frequently in the news are government activities. They

include conflicts and disagreements (17%); decrees, propositions, and ceremonies (12%); and personnel changes (6%). Other acts in the news include crimes, scandals, and investigations (28%); disasters, actual and averted (14%); protests (10%); innovations and traditions (8%); and rites of passage (4%). Only 14% of news deals with foreign news, which "deals either with stories thought relative to Americans or American interests; with the same themes and topics as domestic news; or when the topics are distinctive, with interpretations that apply American values" (p. 37).

News values are "preference statements about nation and society, and major national or societal issues," as defined by Gans (1979, p. 41). The most obvious are topical: opinions expressed about current events. More interesting are the enduring values, which affect what events become news and shape opinions. Gans identifies six:

1. Ethnocentrism: "American news values its own nation above all" (p. 42);

2. Altruistic democracy: "...the news implies that politics should follow a course based on the public interest and public service" (p. 43);

3. Responsible capitalism: competition and prosperity are good as long as unreasonable profits or exploitation does not occur;

4. Small-town pastoralism: upholding "rural and anti-industrial values" (p. 48);

5. Individualism: preservation of individual freedoms; and

6. Moderation: discouraging excesses and extremes.

In news stories, news values take the form of stories about "threats to various kinds of order, as well as measures taken to restore order" (Gans, 1979, p. 52), which Gans describes as "concern for social cohesion" (p. 58), including social, moral, natural, and technological order. As described above, news focuses on national leaders. Gans

concludes these leaders shape social processes. Who are they? Obedient public officials of upper and upper-middle class backgrounds who are older white males (pp. 60-62).

Gans also collected data about television news by participant-observation at the network headquarters for both NBC and CBS. "At that time" of observation in the late 1960s, "both programs were riding high in all respects, including the ratings; as a result, they were virtually autonomous" (1979, p. 74). He found television news to be a simple, flexible bureaucracy assembled ultimately assembled by 20 people in the New York City studios. At the top are corporate executives who have, but rarely wield, their unlimited power. The top producers (executive producers) have final say in story selection. Anchors have power and responsibilities like top producers, but they must attract significant numbers of viewers, too. Senior producers try to balance conflicts between top producers and journalists, who report stories and try to cooperate with each other and everyone else (pp. 93-94).

Television news is driven by journalists who are constrained and empowered both by their sources (who provide story ideas and information for them) and audiences (who consume the news). "The relationship between sources and journalists resembles a dance, for sources seek access to journalists, and journalists seek access to sources" (Gans, 1979, p. 116). Sources are most important when they can provide information suitable for broadcast news; otherwise, there would only be breaking news. Other important factors include incentives, power, and proximity. Sources, especially those that serve constituencies, have incentives to provide information. "...[N]ews is weighted toward sources which are eager to provide information" (p. 117). The power to create suitable news is another important factor. Those with power – like Secretary of State

Dulles and the president, as discussed above – can create media events, which solely exist for news coverage. "Although media events are staged, the actual pseudo-event is the activity staged for the physically present audience, which serves only as a foil to reach the absentee audience. [...] All activities that become news stories are media events; whether activities are spontaneous or staged is less important than whether or not they appear in the news" (pp. 123-24). The less powerful must resort to dramatics and civil disorder. Proximity is another important. Geographically speaking, bureaus and stringers are located near "likely" news sources. Sociologically speaking, journalists prefer to deal with people who are "close" to them in social or cultural status. "Journalists move within a relatively small and narrow aggregate of sources, which is dominated by the people they contact or who contact them regularly" (p.126). Sources can be colleagues or personal. The suitability of sources is also determined by their past suitability, productivity or usefulness, reliability, trustworthiness, authority, and articulation. As Gans summarizes:

> The reliance on public officials, and on other, equally authoritative and efficient sources, is almost sufficient by itself to explain why the news draws the portrait of nation and society. [...] Sources alone do not determine the news, but they go a long way in focusing the journalists' attention on the social order described earlier. Neither do sources alone determine the values in the news, but their values are implicit in the information they provide. (p. 145)

The Contemporary News Landscape

The rise of new media for news – internet news aggregators, the expansion of television news programming, and distribution through mobile telephones – has

expanded the audience for news[15] (Lipset & Schneider, 1987, p. 405; Norris, 2000; PRCPP, 2007). It is now "easier to bump into the news, almost accidentally, than ever before, and this entire process has broadened the background of the news audience" (Norris, p. 15). This trend of more information and easier access reveals a "diversification" of news media "in terms of levels, formats, and topics" (p. 15). Indeed, diversification of the news marketplace has made news about public affairs more accessible than at any time in American history. In 2007, 94% of Americans said they regularly check the news[16], though the ability to recall key information about public affairs has remained static (PRCPP, 2007, p. 1, 11). As a result, people have become hunter-gatherers again, though their hunger is for information instead of food (McLuhan, 1966, p. 283).

News and Mythology

Stories

A story is "[a] connected, meaningful text which describes a set of situationally-important or relevant events in a structured manner for the purpose of making or illustrating some point" (Rice, 1980, p. 157). Rice identifies ten components that make up a story: initial situation, setting, theme, episode, problem, resolution, engagement, action, consequences, and conclusion. There may be multiple episodes within a story, each with its own setting, problem, resolution, and consequences. Colby (1975)

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[15] While Norris (2000) views this as a positive trend for both public affairs and their subjects, Lipset and Schneider (1987) see this as having a negative impact because of biases broadcast by news media (p. 403-06).

[16] A 2007 survey by the Pew Research Center for People and the Press asked people about 16 different sources spread over television, print, radio, and internet. From highest to lowest, they ranked as follows: Local television news; local daily newspaper; network evening news; Fox News Channel; CNN; network morning shows; National Public Radio; news from Google, Yahoo, etc.; news magazines; television news websites; *The O'Reilly Factor*; *The Daily Show*, *The Colbert Report*; *NewsHour with Jim Lehrer*; major newspaper websites; online news discussion blogs; and Rush Limbaugh's radio show. On average, people got their news from 4.6 of these sources.

considers stories as a genre within narrative and identifies five components essential to the grammar of a narrative: eidons (plot and the order of events), language (literally, "the language in which the story is told"), poetry (word choice and rhythm), drama (to "heighten interest and focus"), and symbol ("the symbolic significance of objects, characters, and [...] actions") (p. 916). The best storytellers are able to create stories sensitive to the situation while obeying conventions of cultural schemata and narrative grammar (Bird & Dardenne, 1988/1997, p. 347; Colby, p. 915; Meyrowitz, 1985, p. 42).

How Audiences Use Myths

"[A human] is a pattern-seeking animal," according to Colby (1966). "At the subliminal level [it] continually seeks patterns or regularities in [its] environment and unconsciously organizes such regularities in a mental structure" (pp. 796-97). To fill that need for pattern and organization, Colby asserted that people use narratives – stories, myths, and folk tales – to encode information about behavior and culture, values, and strategies for action (Colby, 1966, 1975). The process works in this way: people become familiar with stories, as well as the patterns used to tell the stories. They begin to mentally store and organize the patterns using "schemata" (Colby, 1966, p. 797) which allow them to encode, recall, and comprehend the information about behavior and culture within the stories and understand the "relationships among meanings" (Rice, 1980, p. 152-55). Schemata "[guide] the comprehension process by providing a system of expectations and an infrastructure for making inferences" (p. 155) and "permit the learning of culturally useful behavior" at all ages, even childhood (Colby, 1966, p. 797). The patterns that lead to schemata "often turn out to have a much wider social currency" Johnson (1996) notes. "They are among the most powerful and ubiquitous of *social*

categories or *subjective* forms. [...] Human beings live, love, suffer bereavement and go off and fight and die" (pp. 94-95).

News as Myth

"News is not fiction," according to Bird and Dardenne (1988/1997), but "it is a story about reality, not reality itself" (p. 346). As a social construction, the information presented in news stories is gathered, reported, and made by those who disseminate news (journalists, reporters, editors) and the subjects of news (McLuhan, 1966, p. 211-12; Shupe & Hadden, 1995, p. 178-179). "What [goes] into the press [is] news. The rest [is] not news" (McLuhan, p. 212). The news is more than narrative or storytelling in that the forms of typical news stories are archetypes. "News stories, like myths, do not 'tell it like it is,' but rather, 'tell it like it means'" (p. 337). News subjects, often organizations of power and influence or their representatives, "engage in elaborate programs of 'public relations' through advertising, sponsorships, contests, and charitable efforts" to persuade by word instead of coerce by force (Lazarsfeld & Merton, 1948/1960, p. 493). The daily output of the news media constitutes a chronicling function. "Chronicling repairs the myth on a day-to-day basis, assuring us of continued order and normality while plotting the parameters of this normality" (Bird & Dardenne, p. 347).

An example of this is news reports on government. By reporting on the communication and events of government, news media are, in a sense, "part of government and politics rather than outside it. For example, journalists ensure that the political process is always visible, keeping it on the public agenda and urging often uninterested people to continue to pay attention to it" (Gans, 2003, p. 82). Their

reporting informs people and organizations, assembles audiences, gives visibility to

people and places, and helps to create a political climate (pp. 83, 86).

Violation and Exposure of Social Values in Mass Media

Earlier in this chapter, a review of Gans' 1967 quantitative analysis of nightly news

broadcasts detailed the process of news reporting. A more basic understanding of news

in terms of its audience may be beneficial to understanding its role in society. First, news

functions within the mass media landscape. Molotch and Lester (1974/1997) frame news

as "the result of this invariant need for accounts of the unobserved" and "this capacity for

filling in others" (p. 193). Audiences use mass media, particularly the news, as a way to

understand, structure, and order their world (McCombs, 1994, p. 3). Several factors

account for this phenomenon: first, mass media have powers to filter and legitimize (Bird

& Dardenne, 1988/1997; Lazarsfeld & Merton, 1948/1960; Meyrowitz, 1985; Shupe &

Hadden, 1995; Silk, 1995). Next, news performs functions for its audiences beyond

informing them. Members of audiences who consume the most news tend to be more

engaged in public affairs. More importantly, audiences look to news to perform a

mythological function, as news reports store information about social norms. When the

subjects of these news stories (or even the stories themselves) violate the social norms,

another narrative is needed to critique those violations and uphold the social norms. A

news satire may be best suited to provide this necessary critical function for society.

Subjects of News Stories Violate Social Values

Gans (1979) identified six enduring news values: ethnocentrism, altruistic democracy,

responsible capitalism, small-town pastoralism, and moderation. Since news is a

culturally determined, structured narrative in which audiences embed their beliefs and

values (Bird & Dardenne, 1988/1997; Colby, 1966, 1975; Rice, 1980), the stories it tells

in mass media should chronicle the revelations of problems (threats to and violations of

these values) and their resolutions (actions taken to restore values) (Bird & Dardenne, p.

347; Gans, p. 52; Lazarsfeld and Merton, 1948/1960, p. 499). The subjects of these

stories (with their frequencies as analyzed by Gans) include crimes, scandals, and

investigations (28%); conflicts and disagreements (17%); disasters, actual and averted

(14%); decrees, propositions, and ceremonies (12%); protests (10%); innovations and

traditions (8%); personnel changes (6%); and rites of passage (4%).

The prevailing structures of power and can also violate these values. In an extended

essay, *Democracy and the News*, Gans (2003) describes how many people in American

society are systematically disempowered by economic and political structures and

processes that favor organizations and power (pp. 1-20). Polling data offers statistical

evidence that their trust in the federal government has eroded. Ladd (1999) analyzed

surveys conducted by the University of Michigan's National Election Studies. The poll

asked, "How much do you think you can trust the government in Washington to do what

is right – just about always, most of the time, or only some of the time?" In 1958, 73% of

respondents answered most or always, but that number had fallen to 21% by 1994 (pp.

94-98). In a 2006 interview, Larry King asked Jon Stewart, host of *The Daily Show*, a

series of questions about whether political foibles make him happy. Stewart responded

that when government officials and others responsible for public affairs "[become]

inspiring and [move] towards people's better nature and [begin] to solve problems in a

rational way rather than just a way that [involves] political dividends," *The Daily Show*

would gladly satirize other subjects (King, 2006, ¶ 184). Stewart made similar comments on a 2004 appearance on *Crossfire*[17].

News Media Violate Social Norms in Stories

Schemata are useful for organizing and processing information about the world around us as told through stories. However, this process creates an environment where schemata specific to a culture demand narratives to stay within the bounds of their given culture (Bird & Dardenne, 1988/1997, p. 341; Rice, 1980, p. 168). "We are free to say anything we like, but if we wish to be understood, we have to follow the rules" (Colby, 1966, p. 798). As a result, people may try to make information fit pre-determined schemata to the point of stereotyping, making up information, and omitting details. In a study of Americans retelling Eskimo stories, Rice found that respondents recalled the stories to fit "the American story schema" (p. 168).

The structure of news stories can be predictable, to the point of satire. Frayn's 1965 novel *The Tin Men* portrays a future where a government agency is tasked with programming a computer "to produce a perfectly satisfactory daily newspaper with all the variety and news sense of the old hand-made article" (1965/1981, p. 71). Staff combed through volumes of news stories to identify typical stories, their components and frequencies in print. Stories like "Child Told Dress Unsuitable by Teacher" and "I Test New Car" would supplant stories from "the raw, messy, offendable real world" (p. 71).

Gans (2003) offers a series of ideas for improving news. First, Gans suggests making news more "user-friendly" making news interesting, reporting important news, understanding how people inform themselves, and giving voice to everyday people (pp.

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[17] When asked which presidential candidate would provide the best fodder for *The Daily Show*, Stewart responded that it was not the candidate as much as the absurdity of the system itself that provides fodder for the show (¶ 368-384).

92-93). Next, find local angles for national and international stories by emphasizing the local implications "because the big story is actually in the personal impact of the national story on the major sectors of the local news audience" (pp. 94-95). Tell citizen-oriented stories of how people are participating in the process of governance: not just protests, but how people are contacting public officials, coffee shop conversations about politics, how people can participate, and where they can participate (pp. 95-99). Provide explanatory stories "to help people understand [...] the reasons for and the causes of what is happening" and information about what must be done for things to change. "Knowing why things are as they are and what shores up the status quo will help people figure out what political and other strategies might lead to the reforms they seek (p. 99).

In their critiques of news media, both Norris (2000) and Gans (2003) offer solutions to improve news coverage. Norris calls for contextual, practical knowledge for audiences that reveal "probable consequences of their political actions [...] at a variety of different levels, ranging from the most technical and thorough to the most simple accounts" because their audiences have a variety of experiences and knowledge (pp. 30-32). Building on Norris' ideas, Gans calls for an end to the segregation between straight news and political humor on television, suggesting they "appear right after the evening news at least once a week" (p. 106). As the Pew studies showed (2007, 2008), younger viewers are more comfortable with satire, so "more of them might pay attention to straight news if it accompanied or followed the political satire." This would make a clearer connection between news and the criticism it receives in news satires and other forms of commentary (Gans, p. 106).

CHAPTER 5

NEWS SATIRE: REPAIRING "BROKEN" NEWS

The information processed and transmitted by mass media in the news legitimize their

subjects and ideas (Bird & Dardenne, 1988/1997; Lazarsfeld & Merton, 1948/1960;

Meyrowitz, 1985; Shupe & Hadden, 1995; Silk, 1995). Lazarsfeld and Merton note that

the legitimizing function of the mass media employs circular logic: "If you really matter,

you will be at the focus of mass attention and, if you *are* at the focus of mass attention,

then surely you must really matter" (p. 498). Despite its dubious reasoning, mass media

can and do give status to their subjects. As an agent of social criticism, mass media

affirm social norms (Lazarsfeld and Merton, p. 498; Silk, p. 148-150).

Mass media also filter reality (Bird & Dardenne 1988/1997; Meyrowitz, 1985). Bird

and Dardenne place news between fiction and reality, calling it "a story about reality" (p.

346). Because of methods by staff in news organizations in gathering and reporting the

news (Gans 1979, 2003), a sameness emerges in how news is reported. "Journalists do

tend to tell the same stories in similar ways; the telling of one story by nature excludes all

the other stories that are never told" (Bird & Dardenne, p. 347). At the same time

audiences are filtering the news they receive through mass media and other means

(Norris, 2000; Shupe & Hadden, 1995, p. 179).

Lazarsfeld and Merton (1948/1960) noted that advances in education and mass

communication revealed a "gap between literacy and comprehension. People read more

but understand less" (pp. 505-06). They felt a need to cultivate critical thought about

information and ideas presented to mass audiences. More recently, Norris (2000) asserts that audiences "are critically and actively sifting, discarding, and interpreting the available information. A more educated and literate public is capable of using the more complex range of news sources and party messages to find the information they need to make practical political choices" (p. 17). Gans (2003) labels this activity as the "The Informing Effect" (p. 73). People manage the flow of information coming to them – how and when it comes, using a combination of news sources, opinion leaders such as friends or family, or non-news media, including *The Daily Show*[18] (Gans, p. 73-74; PRCPP, 2007, p. 14). McLuhan (1966) adds that both television and news promotes audience involvement.[19]

The information available through mass media may exert a "narcotizing dysfunction" on audiences, numbing them to inaction with knowledge. This causes concern because "It is not in the interest of modern complex society to have large masses of the population politically apathetic and inert" because they are busy information-gathering instead of participating in public affairs (Lazarsfeld & Merton, 1948/1960, p. 501-02). Based on research exploring the correlation between news media exposure and participation in public affairs, Norris (2000) argues instead that that there exists a dynamic relationship, "a virtuous circle," between news media and their audiences. The news media can positively affect involvement in public affairs by informing audiences and encouraging dialogue and participation (pp. 30, 317). News is a mosaic of "the community in action

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[18] Gans (2003) notes surprise that news media have not researched how people use news media and its alternatives in managing their flow of information (p. 147). However, as this study will show, researchers have awareness as to role of different news media in audiences' management of information. Mapping and measuring the flow of information would be an interesting avenue of future study.
[19] McLuhan (1966) speculated that rise of television over print media in the 20th century occurred because "television simply involved everybody in everybody more deeply" (p. 166).

and invites maximal participation in the social processes" (McLuhan, 1966, p. 227).

Greater media exposure leads to greater knowledge about, trust in, and participation in public affairs (p. 314) and "the most politically knowledgeable, trusting, and participatory are most likely to tune in to public-affairs coverage" (p. 317). The engaged become more engaged (p. 18). Because of their greater exposure to mass media, they may be better suited to serve as opinion leaders, leading by words in conversation instead of actions (Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1955, pp. 138, 316-18).

While American have tended to have a skeptical view of politicians because of concerns of corruption and honesty (Ladd & Bowman, 1998, p. 73-74), Ladd's (1999) analysis of other forms of citizen participation in government (contacting Congressional representatives, petitioning) had all increased over the same period. Nevertheless, in recent decades, increasing numbers of Americans perceive the federal government as having too much power, unable to solve problems, and being inefficient (Ladd & Bowman, p.76-78, 97-110). From 1964 to 1997, the percentage of Americans believing that government acts in favor of big interests increased from 29% to 74% (pp. 109-110). Still, a clear majority of Americans still believe in the system, agreeing with the statement, "Whatever its faults, the United States still has the best system of government in the world" (p. 114).

Research conducted by the Pew Research Center for People and the Press (2007, 2008) confirms that audiences who are heavy news consumers are more knowledgeable (PRCPP, 2008, p. 5) and more engaged (PRCPP, 2007). Audiences for major television news websites, the comedy shows, and *The O'Reilly Factor* visited more news sources (on average, more than 7 out of 16 compared to the overall average of 4.6) (PRCPP,

2007).[20] Also, registered voters scored an average of 19.3 percentage points higher on questions than those who are not registered to vote. "The polling does find the expected correlation between how much citizens know and how avidly they watch, read, or listen to news reports. The most knowledgeable third of the public is four times more likely than the least knowledgeable third to say they enjoy keeping up with the news 'a lot'" (pp. 1-2). While audiences for news via the internet and news satires skew young, a majority of the audience is 30 or older (p. 12).

News Satire as Critique and Exposure of Social Norms

The news satirist is one who can present a unified whole from the fragmentary reports of scattered journalists from scattered news organizations making trained, objective observations of the people and places whose actions and events and reporting their observations as news. Ben Karlin, executive producer of *The Daily Show* and *The Colbert Report*, explains, "By definition, we exist as a reaction to the press in terms of commenting off of what they are doing or what they're not doing" (Gross, 2006, ¶ 83). McLuhan (1966) uses two circus acts to illustrate this idea. The acrobat is a specialist, only using part of his or her talents. "The clown," says McLuhan, "is the integral man who mimes the acrobat in an elaborate drama of incompetence" (p. 183). Eric Burns, journalist and host of *Fox News Watch*, a weekly media roundtable on the Fox News Channel, said that *The Daily Show* "tells you the truth in a manner, not only humorous, but if you analyze it, pretty hard-hitting. It points out the fakery of the political statement, the facetiousness of certain things that on a regular newscast would be presented without

[20] Interestingly, this survey refers to both *The Daily Show* and *The Colbert Report* by name in its findings. The question asked was "Now I'd like to know how often you watch, listen to, or read some different news sources. Do you watch shows like *the Colbert Report* or *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart* regularly, or not?" (Pew, 2007, p. 30). The other Pew study (2008) also used *The Daily Show* by name, as well as *Saturday Night Live* and *The Onion* (p. 20, 22).

comment because that's what journalists are supposed to do. So apart from the humor

[…] it just presents truth at deeper level" (Gross, 2006, ¶ 52).

The truths revealed by *The Daily Show* in exposing social values can be seen in other

satirical genres. "As critical viewers and satirists," *MAD* contributors "were driven by

the gut feeling that both movies and television programming had a strange lack of depth,

and portrayed a world that was far from what most viewers recognized as reality. Such

offerings often lacked even internal logic" (Reidelbach, 1991, p. 76). *MAD*'s satire has,

over the years, given "an especially revealing look at the separate evolutions of television

and the movies, how the shows fit into the cultural context of the times, and how they

were received by those smart-alecks at *MAD*" (p. 80). Now, celebrities embraced being

satirized: "it has become a mark of true success to be in a television show or movie

lampooned in *MAD*. Celebrities send photos of themselves grimacing while reading the

parodies, and the editors run the shots on the letters page" (p. 92).

Subjects of News Satire

Satirizing Subjects in the News

News satire has its boundaries. On *The Daily Show*, satirizing behavior is within

bounds, but satirizing beliefs crosses a line[21]. As an example, correspondent Stephen

Colbert found it appropriate to lampoon a television news story from the Associated

Press where pharmacists were refusing to fill prescriptions for birth control pills. Colbert

finds hypocrisy in their protests because those same pharmacists likely fill prescriptions

for erectile dysfunction. For Colbert, "Birth control prevents abortion, and so if you are

anti-abortion, it seems like that would be one of the first things that you would do is give

people birth control" (Gross, 2005, ¶ 80). For *The Daily Show*, part of the process is

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[21] Audiences often misread texts about things they hold most dearly (Booth, 1974, p. 226).

interviewing real people to make satirical points in their fake news articles. Karlin explains, "We don't want to make anyone look bad unless they are doing something really horrible" (Gross, 2006, ¶ 43). Interview subjects are foils, sources for information so the show. When requesting interviews, "We don't lie about what we're doing and who we are, but we also don't necessarily say, 'Here is the joke that we're going to tell at your expense.' So it's kind of a balance, but we always are truthful to the degree that we don't deny, you know, where we work, and who we are, and what we're doing" (¶ 39).

In a 2006 interview with Terry Gross, Karlin described the response of staff when they learned of the Vice President Dick Cheney's hunting accident in 2006 where he shot a hunting companion. "None of us could believe that it actually happened. It's [...] probably the softest ball that has come across the plate, I would say. And there was no shortage of ideas" (¶ 8). *The Daily Show* decided the best angle for the story was not the hunting accident itself, but the fact that it occurred on a canned hunt. *The Daily Show* correspondent Nate Corddry went to a Hunting Preserve in North Carolina and filmed a story about the process of canned hunting:

> [Unidentified Man #1]: We release birds per order of the customer, and the customer is able to go to the field and hunt for these birds.
>
> [Mr. Corddry]: It's like regular hunting, but with a menu (¶ 14-15)

Later:

> [Mr. Corddry]: But would my thousand dollars ensure this was better than regular hunting?

[Man #1]: Well, here the birds are in the field for you. You know they're there. It's a sure thing. The birds are here. Now, in a wild bird hunt you may find birds and you may not find birds.

[Mr. Corddry]: And who really has time to hunt and track prey anymore?

[Man #1]: It's a sure thing.

[Mr. Corddry]: One thing I've always hated about hunting, the challenge. (¶ 26-30)

Satirizing the News Narrative

If news stories legitimize their subjects because of their presence in mass media, satirists lampoon, "and in the process question, the legitimacy of the people they skewer" (Gans, 2003, p. 74). He claims that news personalities have credibility and he does not; they must stand by their statements and he does not "because I'm not asking you to believe that I mean it. I'm just hoping that you'll laugh at what I say. It doesn't mean I don't mean it, but I'm not expecting to change your mind" (¶ 101). Research (PRCPP, 2004, 2007, 2008) suggests that *The Daily Show* does carry credibility with its audience and the general public. Further, Colbert's comments reveal an important distinction between the rhetorical goals of a newsperson, a news commentator, and *The Daily Show*. A news show reports information about current affairs. A commentator analyzes those reports and information to draw conclusions about the subjects and players in current affairs. *The Daily Show*, as a satire, lampoons both the news and its subjects to expose truths about how society ought to be.

In interviews (Gross, 2005; Safer, 2006), Colbert stresses the importance of imitation to his success as a satirist. He has dropped his Southern accent (because a non-Southern

accent seems smarter) and modeled his character on television news personalities Stone Phillips, anchor of *Dateline NBC*, and Geraldo Rivera to create "a very well-intentioned, poorly informed person" who is a "very high-status idiot" with good looks, impeccable diction, and no clue what he's talking about (¶ 135).

On the September 8, 2004 episode of *60 Minutes*, Dan Rather broke a story about George W. Bush's service in the National Guard. A week later, it was revealed that key documents for the story were false, calling the credibility of the story (and Rather) into question. In his coverage of the story, *The Daily Show* correspondent Stephen Colbert implicitly compared CBS' reporting to the case the Bush administration made for the 2003 Iraq war. He reported:

> So hasty was CBS News to get the story they wanted that they took obviously flawed intelligence from highly questionable sources and rushed to present it to the American people as reality. Then, even in the face of overwhelming countervailing evidence, CBS refused to back down. They unilaterally invaded our airwaves based on false pretenses. That's perhaps why tonight CBS finds itself isolated, without allies, its reputation in tatters. I cannot think of another example of this having happened. (Gross, 2005, ¶ 7)

Colbert explained the thought process that went into using this implicit comparison to satirize both the story and the Bush administration:

> It's the first thing we thought of, and then we said, 'Oh, nah, nah, nah, that's too obvious. Let's just do something else.' And then we eventually went back to it and – 'cause we couldn't think of anything better, and we said, 'No, that's clearly the joke for us here.' And the hardest thing about that joke for us was how hard do

we push that idea? Because we started writing this by saying, 'Oh, they went forward with flawed intelligence,' and we thought: Is that obvious enough? Are people gonna get that parallel as clearly as we see that parallel? And that's why we had to add in things like 'invaded our airwaves,' you know, 'bereft of allies,' you know, 'isolated in the world.' We were surprised it took that long in the monologue for the audience to catch on to what our game was, because it's the very first joke that occurred to us. (Gross, 2005, ¶ 29)

Deconstructing Colbert's story and the thought process behind it reveals insights into the process of satire. First, the story had national significance – a major media outlet had failed to check its facts on a story about the President of the United States. The story had attained a consciousness in the public – in fact, it had garnered a name, "Rathergate," and a companion website (Kurtz, 2004). Second, Colbert and other writers for *The Daily Show* had decided that the best way to satirize the subject was to use language from another familiar subject in current affairs: the Iraq war. In presenting the new story about CBS, they borrowed language from the old story about Iraq. At first, the language could refer to either a war or a news story ("flawed intelligence," "questionable sources"), but by the end of Colbert's report, his language echoes what audiences may remember hearing about the war ("unilateral," "invaded," "allies"). When Colbert finishes by saying, "I cannot think of another example of this having happened," the audience has caught on to satire. The audience can think of another example of this happening, and the audience knows that is exactly what Colbert is thinking. What makes this satire even richer is the depth of the irony: media organizations had been critical of the Bush

administration for using flawed evidence to justify its invasion of Iraq. Now, other media organizations criticize CBS for flawed evidence to report on Bush's military service.

An example of the superiority of news satire as a form of criticism is Jon Stewart's 2004 appearance on *Crossfire*. A daily program on CNN, *Crossfire* provides a forum for political pundits to debate current affairs, particularly of a political nature. Two hosts represent opposing points-of-view. On this episode, Stewart stepped out of his role as a fake news anchorman. He pleaded with *Crossfire*'s pundits Paul Begala and Tucker Carlson to stop polarizing and oversimplify issues because he felt it was "hurting America" (¶ 180). Stewart described *Crossfire* as "theater" and "partisan hackery" that serves the strategies of those in power – politicians and corporations (¶ 203-205, 298-300). Reflecting on Stewart's appearance, Karlin described it as "the most awkward thing" he'd ever seen because Stewart chose "naked reprobation" and honesty over lampooning the show and its guests (Gross, 2006, ¶105-118). Stewart's efforts failed because he chose a rhetorical form ill-suited to criticism he had intended.

Conclusion

This thesis has revealed that news satires expose the mythological function of news by revealing violations of social values expressed implicitly in news stories. These satires speak "truth" by exposing idealized social values that have been violated by subjects of news stories or by those who report the news.

News serves several functions for society. First, it provides information about current affairs. More significantly, news is a way for society to store, retrieve, and share information about the world. In this way, it creates a sense of order and helps to understand and makes sense of what is happening in the world around us. If news is a

source of information and creates a sense of order, then it is reasonable to say that it is also a storing house for values shared by society. If news embodies a society's values, then it serves a mythological function for society.

News satires use the rhetorical trope of irony to enter into an enthymematic dialogue with their audiences. A news satire will use stable irony to create an incongruity between its literal and intended meaning. As audiences read the literal text, they recognize the incongruity and undergo a process of reconstructing the text to arrive at the intended meaning of the news satire. By creating the intended text through reconstruction, the audience completes the argument as the authors of the news satire had intended.

A satire is a form of social critique, correcting moral failings in society. If news satire is a genre of satire directed at exposing idealized social values that have been violated by subjects of news stories or by those who report the news, and if news satires use irony as a rhetorical device to engage audiences through enthymeme and if news has a mythological function by helping audiences order their world, then news satires flourish where either subjects in the news or the news itself violates idealized social values implied by new stories. These idealized social values will be exposed by news satires.

Limitations of Research

The scope and depth of this thesis has been constrained by several research limitations. First, this thesis only considered three news satires – *MAD*, *Saturday Night Live*, and *The Daily Show*. Just in the United States, other news satires (*The Onion, The Borowitz Report*) have found audiences and critical acclaim. Other programs (*The Tonight Show, Late Night with Conan O'Brien, The Late Show with David Letterman*) have elements that could be considered within the genre of news satire. Additionally, it

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is reasonable to think that other countries, especially democracies with a relatively free press, also have news satires. Countries that exert a chilling effect on press freedoms may still have news satires, but those news satires may be marginalized and covert compared to those here in the United States. Also, news satires in this country may have been received differently prior to World War II.

In understanding the news satirists, the researcher relied exclusively on interviews conducted by the news media. The researcher did not personally interview anyone affiliated with *MAD*, *Saturday Night Live*, or *The Daily Show*. Observing and speaking with staff from these programs and publications may confirm findings from this research. Also, the expansion of new electronic media may be exerting effects on how these shows and publications present their content to their audiences. This research relied on quantitative studies conducted and analyzed by other researchers (ANES, 2004; Ladd & Bowman, 1998; Ladd, 1999; Norris, 2000; PRCPP, 2004, 2007, 2008). While the data gathered and presented by these researchers was helpful in this critical analysis, the researcher did not perform any secondary analyses on the data.

Suggestions for Future Research

This thesis has answered some questions about how news satires work, why they work, and why they appeal to their audiences. However, this research has raised many more questions and suggested new avenues for research worth exploring.

First, this research has scratched the surface of the relationship between the news and cultural values. Other nations certainly must have news satires; do news satires perform a similar function in other nations? How does this function change for less democratic countries? What about countries where the press is constrained by free speech

restrictions? Also, do subcultures in the United States have their own news satires? These might be based on geography, religion, ethnicity, or other identity-centered membership criteria (gender, sexuality, education, etc.). For example, *The Door* was a Christian satirical publication. What idealized values was it attempting to uphold within the larger Christian culture in the United States?

It may be worthwhile to consider comparing a typology of dominant cultural values in the United States against the cultural values upheld in news. Are certain values over- or under-represented in the news? Has the expansion of news media changed what values are represented? Have values changed over time? What other cultural institutions store values for society, and how do they interact with news?

It may also be time to undertake a new cataloging of news: the media for distribution, the forms of news stories, the subjects of news stories, who is reporting news, and where audiences are going for their news. While this research has turned to the Pew Research Center, Annenberg Center, the Project for Excellence in Journalism, and individual research (Ladd, Norris, and others) for quantitative analyses of these subjects, it may be beneficial to aggregate this data and identify emerging trends.

This would also be beneficial as it could complement a similar effort to catalog news satires. This could reveal where the violations of values occur most often. A focused, larger-scope quantitative analysis of audiences for news satires seems overdue. Research recognizes that news satires have relevance (ANES 2004; PRCPP 2004, 2007, 2008), but their findings are peripheral to larger studies on news.

It may be worth considering a rhetorical analysis of news satire. As social criticism, satire seems "safe" because it calls attention to violations of social norms without a

sufficient call to action. This makes the criticism more palatable, but does it cause or affect the social change it calls for?

Some people seem ready to dismiss news satires as mere entertainment. Building on the research of Dews et al. (1995) and Matthews et al. (2006) that looked a the humor function of irony, it is worth a serious examination of the entertainment function – are news satires really about social criticism or entertainment?

One other area of consideration is the writers and producers of news satires. All say that they are too busy working on their news satires to think about their work as "social critique." A demographic/psychographic profile may be interesting to see what in writers' experience and character makes them satirists.

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