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Satire Means Layers

Humor, specifically satire, has been used to make convincing arguments for centuries, a technique still not lost today. Satire addresses issues indirectly, whether they be minor inconveniences (follies) or major problems with the heart of the society (vices). To do this, they utilize humor and other techniques to draw attention to the issue discreetly. Serious arguments take a more direct approach but can suffer from a lack of engagement from the reader and may miss the point entirely. Such examples present themselves today just as they did centuries ago; a crucial example to note would be the juxtaposition of Saturday Night Live's *Amazon Echo* skit and Isabella Pires of The Spectrum's *Why Older Generations Hate Gen Z: They Exist*. Both pieces aim to describe the often unjustified distaste that the older generations have for younger generations. Although serious arguments like *Why Older Generations Hate Gen Z* get a similar point across, Saturday Night Live's *Amazon Echo* serves as a resonating argument that draws the attention to generational bias effectively by using situational irony and *reductio ad absurdum*, rhetorical techniques that make a captivating and witty argument that better connects with readers and surpass the complexity of those present in the literal argument.

In terms of the arguments that both pieces formulate against generational bias, the deliberate argument often misses the depth of the arguments provided by the satire. One of the arguments that both pieces aim to tackle is the issue of perceived technological dependency

amongst younger generations. Pires, in *The Spectrum*'s article, particularly targets critics of phone addiction, asserting that younger generations are only addicted to phones "because the real world is absolutely horrific ... With all the school shootings, wars such as Israel vs. Hamas and Ukraine vs. Russia, the past pandemic, and the judgment that Gen Zers" have to face (Pires). It is no wonder that younger generations do not want to get off their phones. To do that, they have to escape their perfect paradise. However, this argument falls flat when considering the experiences of older generations; they also went through their fair share of wars and sicknesses. The truth is that it has to do with how they view their past in the current day – an aspect only emphasized by the *Amazon Echo* skit. During the Saturday Night Live skit, the comedians pretend to be advertising for Amazon in a partnership with AARP (an interest group for people 50 years and older) in an attempt to legitimize and normalize the seemingly abnormal product. An old man asks the modified Alexa, "How many did Old Satchel strike out last night?" to which Alexa responded, "Satchel Page died in 1982" (Saturday Night Live). One thing about looking back at the past is that people only tend to remember the good moments, as that's what remains memorable. Living in the moment becomes a relatively mundane reality when compared to the former glory of the past. Only the satire provides this depth, addressing these surface level issues and deeper societal vices at the same time to form a more concrete argument – that older generations are stuck in the glory of the past. This same pattern reemerges again when considering the argument that younger generations do not go outside enough. Pires remarks that "It's hard to go outside and hang out with friends when you can't drive, it's not safe to walk many places, and your parents are either strict or just physically can't bring you" (Pires). In contrast, the *Amazon Echo* satire utilizes repetition and situational irony to draw a much deeper image. During the skit, an older woman sees a group of kids playing outside while Alexa

repeatedly tells her that “they are just playing” to which the woman, despite hearing it multiple times and witnessing it from her window, replies “I don’t know about that” (Saturday Night Live). This satire cleverly addresses the true issue at heart – younger kids are obviously more likely to play outside than their older counterparts, but it is their own denial that prevents them from recognizing that they do so. In doing so, they demonstrate their ego and “wiseness” through situational irony. The satire is also introducing a level of absurdity that the literal argument does not recognize. In fact, it chooses to agree with and accommodate this generational bias, sticking to the facts yet allowing the woman to remain in denial, exposing the true reality of the situation via *reductio ad absurdum*. Both patterns demonstrate that while the literal argument can target the same issues as the satire, it often misses layers that emphasize the reality and cause of the situation.

In addition to being more effective argumentatively, the satire typically connects better with readers through shared experiences. The Spectrum also tries to connect with readers throughout the piece, although ineffectively, particularly referring to the differences in slang between the generations. “Terms such as chill pill, dude, gnarly, yuppie, and crib are just some examples of Gen X slang. Though these terms are now frequently used and understood by many, at the time of their creation, they too were judged for not making any sense” (Pires). The issue with this argument is that slang already varies enough with other factors, and it doesn’t make sense that older generations would think that younger generations are lazy simply because they speak differently. This argument is unrealistic and non-explanatory to most audiences, reducing its relatability. On the other hand, the satire effectively demonstrates this through many parts of the skit, thanks to the fact that it integrates this criticism by utilizing a variation of a product that was extremely popular at the time, the Amazon Echo voice assistant. One aspect of the skit that

received popular attention from commenters and critics alike was the repetition of “I don’t know about that,” a phrase commonly utilized by the older generation. This phrase is used often in the skit to highlight the situational irony that is often present when it is used in situations where the older generation attempts to deny rigid facts, even if they are right in front of them. By utilizing this common phrase, which is often linked to ignorance, the satire caricatures this ignorance and increases the arguments relatability. It also does this by highlighting that they are the “greatest generation.” However, ironically, the satire continues to put them in situations where they are humbled or “blissfully unaware” (for example, a woman walking into a room asking for her phone while it is in her right hand). By doing this, the satire grounds the older generation in reality, affirming the message that the “greatest generation” is no better than anyone else, utilizing situational irony that is easy for audiences to recognize and relate with. By relating to the audience, the satire more effectively conveys the layers behind the issue than the literal argument, which struggles to describe the issue at heart.

Satire, despite being first utilized centuries ago, is a method of critique that is here to stay. Through the more effective use of rhetoric and the better connection with readers obtained by the satire, it forms layers that the literal argument made by The Spectrum simply cannot live up to. Overall, satirical pieces will be more effective in calling the reader (or in this case, the watcher) to action, making it more likely that fixes will be made.

Works Cited

Pires, Isabella. "Why Older Generations Hate Gen Z: They Exist." *The Spectrum - The Student News Site of Dartmouth High School*, The Spectrum - Dartmouth High School's Student Newspaper, 23 Sept. 2024, <https://www.dhsspectrum.com/opinion/2024/09/23/why-older-generations-hate-gen-z-they-exist/>.

Saturday Night Live. *Amazon Echo - SNL*. YouTube, 14 May 2017, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YvT_gqs5ETk.