

The Effect of 9/11 on Political Satire in the United States

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Abstract:

The evolution of modern television satire has grown from the imitative antics of comedians like Chevy Chase and

about telling jokes, not commenting on the policies and troubles of the Nixon administration (except Watergate, but that was as much a talking point and sensationalist story as it was a national crisis). The performance was rarely much more than the iconic double peace sign and the repetition of "I am not a crook."²

Saturday Night Live's Chevy Chase did an impression

messenger"³ but FOX shows continue to advertise as news. Even their slogan "We Report, You Decide" implies they are reporting facts, not opinion. Without clear separation of which shows are fact and which are editorial the lines become blurred and one can be easily mistaken for the other, regardless of Mr. Clemente's assertions to the contrary.

By presenting topics in a new light, namely a comedic light, satirists force the audience to consider the topics in a new way. By getting us to laugh at a serious point, such as the incompetence or dishonesty of a Presidential candidate, we suddenly see the situation differently. We become critical of the topics as the satirist criticizes, going along for the ride the satirist lays out for us. When comedic presentations of serious matters become too wide spread we take the comedic without thinking about what we're laughing at. The material is no longer jarring us.

Thus I believe *The Newsroom* is the most recent evolution of satire. By presenting the material in a dramatic narrative form it becomes new, something the audience cannot just mindlessly accept but are forced to think about. By Hodgart's definitions *The Newsroom* certainly qualifies. It does engage in the troubles of the world, not only in the current political climate but in media itself. *The Newsroom* uses invective and irony as well, making us realize the reason Casey Anthony got more television time than the debt ceiling debate was not solely the fault of the media but in us, the audience.

By making bold statements about current events, the media and the American people, *The Newsroom* brings current events to us in a way that makes us think about what we are watching. Instead of laughing with Jon Stewart or Stephen Colbert we gasp in horror as Jeff Daniels says the United States is not the greatest country in the world. That shock is transformed as Daniels goes on and on about why, presenting statistics and facts that are completely true. We are forced to look at his statements in a new way, which is precisely what satire sets out to do.

Biography:

John Faugno is a senior at the University of New Haven and is majoring in English. He is the

Treasurer of UNH's chapter of Sigma Tau Delta, the national English honors society, and was named Layout Editor for their regional literary journal *Mind Murals*. He is an aspiring writer, and spends as much of his free time behind a keyboard as he can. He has recently finished his first manuscript and is currently looking for a publisher. He would like to thank his wife, Dana, for enduring countless hours of *SNL* reruns in the name of research.

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