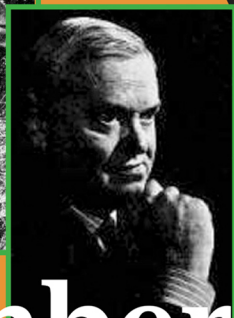
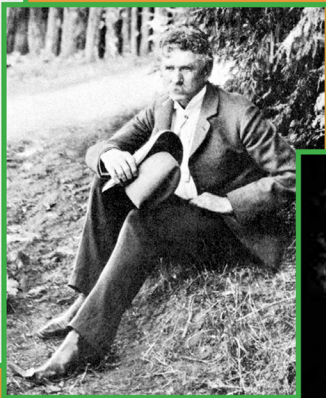
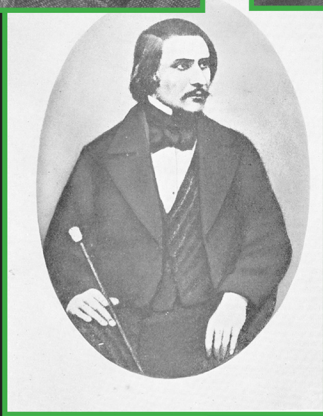
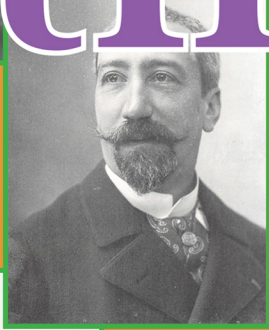
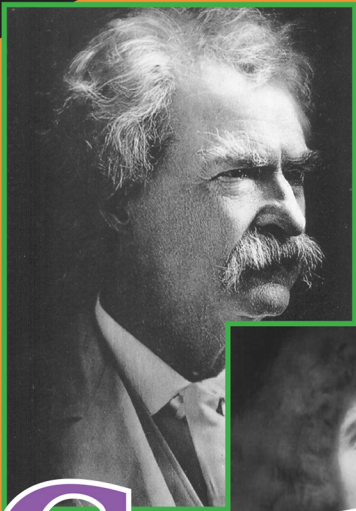


The Satirist



Leonard Feinberg

With a new introduction by Brian A. Connery

The
Satirist



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For Lilian, Ellen, and my mother





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Introduction to the Transaction Edition

It may not be entirely inappropriate, in an account of the original publication of *The Satirist: His Temperament, Motivation, and Influence*, to begin by applying something of the same approach to the subject as the subject itself applies to the works of others: How can we account for the original appearance of this work in 1963? What, in Leonard Feinberg's "temperament, motivation, and influence," can begin to explain his undertaking the vast research and writing task which resulted in this volume?

Feinberg was born in Vitebsk, Russia in 1914, came to the United States with his parents in 1923, was naturalized as a citizen in 1933, graduated from the University of Illinois in 1937, and completed his M.A. the following year. During World War II, he served as a convoy routing officer in the Aleutian Islands, an experience that informs his satirical novel, *Where the Williwaw Blows*, published in 2003. After the war, he returned to his studies, completing his Ph.D. in American literature at Illinois with a dissertation on Sinclair Lewis. In 1955,

then a member of the faculty at the Iowa State University, Feinberg produced a series of lectures, "Man and Laughter," which was broadcast by public television stations.

Perhaps his youthful experience, moving from one culture into another, provided him the alienated perspective, the capacity for apprehending as unfamiliar that which is familiar to others around him, the stranger-in-a-strange-land point of view that satirists from Juvenal to Swift to Voltaire to Mork from Ork have utilized in their commentaries on their contemporary cultures. Perhaps his own status as alien made literature that treated society as alien attractive and comforting. Perhaps his experience in wartime, his experience with the bureaucracy of the U.S. Navy, his immersion into an enforced society of Americans from all walks of life, isolated on the island of Anak, gave rise to his appreciation for a kind of writing that could accurately represent the absurdities of human beings, their societies, and the institutions which they create. Perhaps his experiences made him simultaneously angry at and amused by the complacencies of the Americans around him who inhabited, unawares, the absurd and fallen world that he perceived. And perhaps, aside from Feinberg's individual experience, it was the shared generational experience of the Second World War that produced, beginning in the late 1950s and continuing through the 1980s, such a burgeoning of satiric work as well as academic writing on satiric work. Perhaps.

As Feinberg's own attempt in this volume to theorize and universalize the "temperament, motivation, and influence" of the satirist indicates, biography can take us only so far in accounting for a piece of writing. Neither biographical nor environmental explanations can be total. Nonetheless, reading Feinberg one has the sense of a writer deeply appreciative of the double vision of satire, with its insistence on the ironies generated by mutually contradictory truths: the ideal and the real, the normal and the absurd, the rhetoric and the reality. *The Satirist* is both a product of this individual critical sensibility and of the historical moment in which it emerged.

The Satirist, then, is very much itself an historical artifact. Indeed, reading this volume in the twenty-first century, a period during which postmodernism's definitive claim has been that there are no totalizing theories, there seems – in spite of its skepticism and knowingness – a degree of mid-twentieth century naive optimism about the work. Its project seems necessarily compromised from the outset, yet the book contains within itself a self-awareness of the slipperiness of its evidence and the consequent tentativeness of its conclusions.

One limitation in the work is immediately evident to a twenty-first century reader: while the volume strives for a sort of historical and geographical capaciousness, attempting to assemble the most diverse sample possible of satirists on which to ground its speculations, in spite of its astonishing

historical and geographical scope, including satirists from China to Peru, from classical Greece to then contemporary best-selling authors and comedians, Feinberg's satirists are all – both specifically and in the aggregate – male: “It does not matter, for our purposes, whether this satiric ability is innate or not. What does matter is that the potential satirist, usually as a boy, begins to use his talent.” And though his 2003 novel features an African-American character whose alienation from his fellow-servicemen offers a deeply satirical perspective, in his 1963 survey of satirists, people of color (e.g., Langston Hughes) are – from our twenty-first century perspective – peculiarly absent.

As well as being the product of Feinberg's industry and curiosity, then, *The Satirist*, is very much a product of its times. In the first half of the twentieth-century, though much fine satire was produced (from Twain to Parker to Lewis), scholarly interest in satire was limited, concerned chiefly, if at all, with British writers of the eighteenth century. In 1951, Maynard Mack published a short essay on the work of Alexander Pope, “The Muse of Satire,” offering an alternative to biographical readings of Pope's satires; the following year, Ian Jack offered an overview of English satire at the beginning of the eighteenth century, considering its formal characteristics and assorted subgenres; at the end of that decade, Louis Bredvold, looking at the same group of writers, published “The Gloom of the Tory Satirists,” offering a sense not so much of the temperaments but of the moods

of the writers and their works. Northrop Frye's *Anatomy of Criticism*, in 1957, included satire among the four primary literary modes under investigation. In 1959, Alvin Kernan began to fill in the literary historical gap between the satires of classical antiquity and those of the British eighteenth century with his study of Renaissance satire, *The Cankered Muse*. In 1960, Robert Elliott considered satire anthropologically in his eye-opening *The Power of Satire: Magic, Ritual, and Art*. In 1963, several of these critics founded *The Satire Newsletter*, a small academic journal published quarterly that announced satire as a subject of legitimate specialized scholarly inquiry.

It is, perhaps, in his participation in the movement, exemplified by Kernan and Elliott, to expand the satirical canon, both historically and geographically, that Feinberg's *The Satirist* makes its greatest contribution. Feinberg's reading is nothing if not vast; even with the exceptions noted above, his attempt is to be inclusive rather than exclusive. Like Elliott, and like his contemporary George Test (whose *Satire: Spirit and Art* would not appear until 1991, after a lifetime of research), Feinberg regards satire finally not as a historical phenomenon but as a transhistorical human behavior. In attempting to account for this behavior, he casts a wide net, well beyond the usual suspects – including writers like Ibsen, not ordinarily thought of primarily as a satirist. And he attempts to provide a global perspective, including writers and works from Greece, Rome, England, France,

Italy, Germany, the United States, Russia, Spain, Japan, and Ceylon, among other places. Considering satire as a mode rather than limiting himself to a genre, Feinberg ranges among poets, essayists, playwrights, and fiction writers.

Feinberg's inclusiveness can be an occasional weakness. In order to cast a wide net, Feinberg includes among the texts and writers many who might be excluded by a critic using a more rigorous definition of satire. In particular, he seems to find considerable overlap between satire and humor and may – it's not entirely clear to me – see humor as an essential defining characteristic of satire; he sometimes uses humor as synonymous with satire, while at other times recognizing Freud's distinction between wit and humor, but he rarely seems to consider the literary sense of "humorist" (as applicable to such writers and performers as Mark Twain or Will Rogers) as potentially distinct from or as a possible (non-inclusive) sub-category of satire. In some cases, such imprecision can lead to confusion, as when Feinberg notes that in *De Rire*, in considering the phenomenon of laughter and the nature of the funny or the risible, Henri Bergson argues that detachment is requisite for laughter – and then demonstrates that many satirists are not "detached" from their subject matter. The implied conclusion is that Bergson is wrong – but Bergson is not making claims about satire. Nonetheless, I, for one, am grateful to Feinberg for including the many quotations from Bergson, as I am grateful for his many,

many startling quotations from satires, satirists, biographers, theorists, and psychologists.

While the great strengths of Feinberg's book are the extensive research, the compendium of quotations from writers, biographers, and critics, and the judiciousness with which his various arguments sift through the evidence, what is most striking today about the work is both the way in which it is enmeshed in the then dominant positivism of biographical and psychoanalytical criticism and the ways in which it attempts to respond to the emerging challenges to that criticism. Seeking to establish a near universal profile of "the satirist," Feinberg reads biographies (both traditional and Freudian), psychoanalytic theory, psychological studies, interviews with satirists, and satirists' statements about themselves and their art. As he compiles his data, nonetheless, he questions its validity: he dutifully reports the research of Heymans and Wiersma, which concludes with surprising precision that 7 percent of satirists had harmonious developments as children, compared to 25 percent of the non-satirist population who enjoyed harmonious developments, but he frames his report with caution and – if I'm reading correctly – not without a touch of irony. In doing so, he also fashions a substantive body of meta-criticism, commenting on and critiquing his collections of statements by and about satirists. Nonetheless, in spite of his frequent skepticism and his reservations, his project depends absolutely on the assumption that there *are* authors available to be examined and

analyzed, an assumption that was increasingly under attack as Feinberg was writing his book, both in literary studies generally, where the relation between author and work was under considerable scrutiny, and in satire studies specifically, where the self-representations of satirists within their works were increasingly being read as rhetorical fictions.

Perhaps most famously, following on the lead of C. S. Lewis and E. M. W. Tillyard's attack on "the personal heresy," W. K. Wimsatt, Jr. and Monroe C. Beardsley, in their promotion of the New Criticism, had argued strenuously in 1954 against the "intentional fallacy" on the grounds that authorial intention is "neither available [within the text] nor desirable [from without the text]" to readers. This questioning of the validity of authorial self-representations had been anticipated in the study of satire specifically by Maynard Mack, in "The Muse of Satire," in his claim that the "I" in Pope's satires was a construction, a mask, a "persona" and that the "I" should, consequently, be read – and analyzed — as a rhetorical construction rather than as a autobiographical revelation subject to moral evaluation and psychological analysis. That is, what had been previously seen as the satirist making claims about himself was, Mack was suggesting, to be seen more accurately as a *character* speaking in the first person.

Strictly speaking, Feinberg does not commit the intentional fallacy himself, since he does not offer readings of satires based on authorial intention;

however, his concerns – like those of many literary biographers – seem likely, at first glance, to be designed to facilitate the commission of the fallacy by his readers. Mack himself, though arguing that the “I” in the poems of Pope is a construction, was very much interested in the study of authors and would eventually complete what is today the authoritative literary biography of Pope. He was, consequently, not unaware of the difficulties that his position on Pope’s persona would create for biographers, though he was advocating for a greater judiciousness in literary biography. Nonetheless, his most resounding answerer was Irvin Ehrenpreis, in 1963, who was already embarking on what is now the authoritative biography of Pope’s contemporary, fellow satirist, and sometimes confidante, Jonathan Swift. Appearing in the same year as Feinberg’s *The Satirist*, Ehrenpreis’s essay “Personae” rejects Mack’s attempt to position the first-person speaker of a satire as, actually, an intermediary or a screen between the reader and the satirist. The debate between Ehrenpreis and Mack expanded among readers and critics of satire (and biographers of satirists) to produce a verbal roundtable in volume 3 of *The Satire Newsletter* (1966).

Feinberg’s research and writing took place both simultaneously and within academic earshot of this debate, and it is fascinating to watch as he alternately veers from one side to another. To accept wholesale the anti-biographical position would render his project futile – nothing can be said

about “the satirist” because no fully satisfactory evidence is available: the satire itself is a rhetorical construction rather than an unmediated piece of self-expression, and any extra-textual professions by the author are suspect. On the other hand, accepting authorial self-expression uncritically, whether inside or outside the satirical text (I’m particularly fond of Feinberg’s collection of the last dying words of satirists), would raise doubts among even the most positivistic of readers.

Complicating the issues of biography and self-expression (including expressions of intention) was the vogue of psychoanalysis, which privileged the psychoanalytic interpretation of an utterance over its literal meaning: any expression of intention, any self-referential statement, is liable, under the regime of psychoanalysis, to interpretation of an alternative and *truer* meaning about the author. Erik Erikson’s groundbreaking psycho-historical biography, *Young Man Luther*, had been published in 1958. Among authors generally, satirists – for better or worse – had come under particularly close scrutiny from psychoanalysis, and Feinberg collects a considerable number of statements from both practicing psychiatrists and from psychoanalytically inclined biographers which make for fascinating reading. Nonetheless, one applauds Feinberg’s judicious introduction to his chapter specifically about psychoanalysis in which he notes that such insights are not unique to satire: “In general, psychoanalysts agree that the satirist is a maladjusted individual who expresses his

maladjustment by writing satire. But this indictment is not especially severe, for most psychoanalysts begin with the assumption that almost every person is to a varying degree 'maladjusted'. . . ”

Within satire studies, the debate about “persona” was not, perhaps, resolved until Howard D. Weinbrot’s 1983 essay, “Masked Men and Satire and Pope,” which established a historical basis for believing that satirists might, in fact, wear literary disguises in their works which would mediate between readers and the actual author. But before that, in 1969, only six years following Feinberg’s book, Michel Foucault cut the Gordian knot of authorship and authority by introducing the idea of the “author function,” i.e., that an “author” is a label applied by readers to represent the entity which has produced a text or designated set of texts. When this understanding is applied specifically to the discourse of satire, “the satirist” becomes a construction, a product of the text’s representations, biographers’ statements, and reader apprehensions. And when such a constructed “satirist” is recognized as the object of study in Feinberg’s *The Satirist*, both the insurmountable difficulties of the project and the judiciousness of Feinberg’s examination of the evidence and multiple hesitations to pronounce universal conclusions become apparent. From the Foucauldian perspective, Feinberg is attempting to analyze the object (the satirist) while he is in the very process of constructing it.

Similarly, implicit in the debate between the biographical positivists and the anti-intentional

constructionists, as it manifests itself both in Feinberg's volume and in other analyses of satire contemporary with Feinberg, is the sense of satire as a special case, a discourse existing somewhere in a realm between fiction and nonfiction, between literature and rhetoric. The utter referentiality to current events, people, and institutions which, in part, *defines* satire situates both the author and the text within a historical moment in a manner far different from and far more apparent than the way in which a lyric poem (the primary concern of many New Critics) is (or is not) apprehended as a historical artifact. And while even some New Critically inclined readers might be willing to acknowledge the work of a poet as an expression of a singular sensibility responding to that which is ever with us (love, death, nature, in-laws, taxes), in the case of satire it is more difficult to distribute causality for the production of a text between the satirist and the event(s) to which the satirist responds. Do historical events create satirists? Or do satirists look for historical events as opportunities on which to vent their already satirically inclined temperaments and talents?

That is, as Feinberg repeatedly explains, allegations of the twisted, misanthropic, angry personalities of satirists may, in fact, be a means by society and by individual readers to deflect the attacks by satire that their own behavior has inspired or instigated. Early in the volume, Feinberg makes this point, again reflecting particularly upon Freudians: "Freud's theory, however, ignores the simple

fact that society is sometimes corrupt and individuals often misbehave; at such times not only neurotic and oversensitive individuals, but ‘normal,’ honest, courageous people, having no pretensions to art or literature, ought to criticize the existing state of affairs.” Is satire a response from a maladjusted personality to a well-adjusted society? Or is it a response from a well-adjusted personality to a maladjusted society? As Feinberg amply shows, the answer depends on whom you believe.

Feinberg’s sense of satire as a special case is clear from the outset. Most writers are said to write because of “an irresistible compulsion,” sometimes known as inspiration; but, as Feinberg notes, “many critics reject the concept that the creative impulse which motivates other writers is the same force that motivates the satirist. They have chosen to attribute to him different stimuli from those of other writers.” Thus begins Feinberg’s quest to find the “difference” – even as he insists, from the outset, that “it is only fair that a satirist be examined primarily as a writer.” Throughout his discussion, the question remains open: is the stimuli internal or external? Similarly, Feinberg wonders whether the inconsistency of ideological commitment and consequent seeming contradictions often observed in the writings of a satirist are due to the satirist’s instability or society’s:

The popular view is that the satirist is an unstable personality; unstable personalities are likely to be inconsistent; and inconsistency results in contradiction. But some satirists . . . reverse the argument and insist that it is society itself which

is unstable, inconsistent, and contradictory, and that the satirist, both in his personal adjustment and in the content of his work, is merely reflecting a schizoid and artificial society. A conclusion based on this “everybody is out of step except me” reasoning has never proved very popular. But the satirist feels that to a large extent it is true nonetheless.

In his own deployment of argument reversal, Feinberg notes that satirists are often described – both clinically and colloquially – as “immature” and then systematically pursues what that might mean, noting the affinity between “maturity” and “jungle morality” and noting that in these terms, “young thieves mature most quickly, whereas people who keep longest the illusions of honesty, kindness, and generosity remain immature longest.” By the time Feinberg has finished his discussion, satirists are aligned with saints, and their critics with the sinners.

Feinberg also, however, often recognizes the satirist as something like a self-construction. In terms of personality and motivation, for instance, Feinberg dismisses morality as an essential characteristic of the individual writer who writes satire: “Neither a simple explanation of the satirist’s motivation – such as morality, nor a complex one – such as compensation, is wholly adequate, for there have been moral satirists and immoral, sentimental and brutal, crude and sophisticated.” Instead of a moral individual who writes, Feinberg discovers what might be called a “morality effect” in the writing: “The satirist expresses himself in criticism which is socially acceptable. Inasmuch as he wants people to read his satire . . . he must choose mate-

rial with which his audience is familiar, and an attitude with which it is sympathetic. In most civilized communities, the ‘moral’ position . . . is accepted by the satirist’s audience . . .” The appearance of morality in the satirist, then, is a rhetorical construction (exactly as Mack had argued that Pope’s mask of the *vir bonus* is a rhetorical and aesthetic construction); it is the function not of the satirist as an individual but of a technical requirement of the verbal artifact the satirist is creating.

We are very close to Foucault’s author function here – but having discovered the moral satirist as a construction, effected by the writing, Feinberg stops short of disallowing all examination of the satirist, as he continues steadfastly to pursue the individual human being: “The satirist is a writer, but the writer is a person.” Feinberg’s humane sensibility ultimately identifies the satirist as someone who writes a particular kind of thing on a particular occasion and who has a particular talent (distortion) that is suited to the task.

Finally, then, it is the humanity of this book, its insistence on writing as a human activity and its collection of comments from the many human beings involved in satire– the many voices of the writers, critics, social scientists, and biographers collected by Feinberg with vast intellectual generosity – that makes it special.

Brian A. Connery



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Preface

For more than two thousand years men have written about the satirist. Satirists themselves, scholars, critics, and psychologists have speculated about the satirist's reasons for writing, his temperament, his place in society. The conclusions they reached are sometimes contradictory, sometimes complementary, sometimes outlandish. I have tried to bring together the significant theories that have been expressed about the satirist, to provide in one book a summary of the problems which specialists have examined intensively in numerous books and articles.

In Part One, I list the major theories about the motivation of the satirist, and then express my own belief that "adjustment" comes most closely to answering that question. The personality of the satirist — the apparently paradoxical elements of his nature, the problem of why so many great humorists are sad men, the contributions of psychoanalysts — all this is discussed in Part Two, where I imply that the satirist is not as abnormal as he has sometimes been made to seem, and that if he is a neurotic he has a good deal of company. In Part Three, I examine the beliefs of satirists and their relation to the environment within

which they function. I stress the ubiquitousness of the satirist and suggest that there are a great many people with satiric temperaments who fail to attain literary expression.

I hope that this book will serve as an introduction, and that the reader will be sufficiently stimulated by the evidence of how much has been said about the satirist — and how little of it is conclusive — to investigate the subject further in some of the excellent books listed in the Reading List. A handbook of this kind is necessary because each proponent of a special theory has, naturally enough, applied his own point of view to the satirist he studied.

Whenever possible I have quoted verbatim, to keep the flavor of the writers' statements and to avoid distorting their remarks. In addition to summarizing the traditional and the psychoanalytic speculations, I have from time to time expressed my own opinions, trying to indicate clearly when those opinions differ from the conventional literary theories and the unconventional psychoanalytic interpretations.

For reading the manuscript and offering helpful suggestions I am very grateful to four of my colleagues at Iowa State University — Albert L. Walker, Keith Huntress, Robert Orlovich, and Norris Yates.

LEONARD FEINBERG

Part One 

Motivation



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Creativity

There is an embarrassingly large number of theories which explain why a writer writes. The most popular answer is perhaps the least satisfactory one: he is driven by an irresistible compulsion. According to this somewhat imprecise theory, writers are “divinely” or “mysteriously” inspired, or forced to write without themselves understanding what inspired or forced them. One of the things that got Socrates into his final predicament was asking poets how they went about their work. They told him that they didn’t really know; the gods inspired them, and the poets simply carried out divine instructions.

In some respects, we are not much further ahead than Socrates’ contemporaries. A “creative impulse” of some sort has been generally accepted as a suitable motivation — for writers other than satirists. But many critics reject the concept that the creative impulse which motivates other writers is the same force that motivates the satirist. They

*the creative impulse in the artist,
springing from the tendency to
immortalize himself*

— Dr. Otto Rank

have chosen to attribute to him different stimuli from those of other writers. Nonetheless, the satirist is a writer. His being a writer may be inconvenient for theorists, or in somewhat bad taste, but there it is. He may be working the other side of the street from the poet, for instance, but he resembles the poet in many ways. It is only fair that a satirist be examined primarily as a writer.

The ancient theory of “creative inspiration” is supported to some extent in the psychology-conscious twentieth century not only by philosophers and mystics but by three fairly eminent psychoanalysts. According to Dr. Jung, “Art is a kind of *innate* drive that seizes a human being and makes him its instrument. The artist is not a person endowed with free will, who seeks his own end, but one who allows art to realize its purpose through him. . . . As an artist he is ‘man’ in a higher sense — he is ‘collective man’ — one who carries and shapes the unconscious psychic life of mankind.”

Dr. Otto Rank, representing another coterie, is in essential agreement. “Creation is itself an experience of the artist, perhaps the most intense possible for him or for mankind in general. . . . Even in spite of a clear original conception, the work turns during production into something other than the artist had originally planned.”

A spokesman for a third clique, Dr. S. Freud, wrote, “Wit shows in a most pronounced manner the character of an involuntary ‘inspiration’ or a sudden flash of thought. A moment

before one cannot tell what kind of a joke one is going to make . . . one usually experiences something indefinable which I should like most to compare to an absence, or sudden drop, of an intellectual tension; then all of a sudden the witticism appears." The process that Freud is here describing he calls the creating of "tendentious" wit — that is, wit at the expense of somebody or something. That, of course, is what satire is.

Juvenal's remark, "It is difficult *not* to write satire," has usually been interpreted as proof of morality being the motivation of the satirist. Juvenal was writing in the first century A.D., a period when Rome was corrupt, decadent, and immoral, even by liberal standards of morality. However, at the very time that Juvenal made this statement, hundreds of Roman writers found it not at all difficult to keep from writing satire; they wrote epics and lyrics instead. The supporters of the "aesthetic drive" theory are convinced that Juvenal would have written satire whenever he lived. They believe that the satirist is motivated simply by the desire for self-expression, and the drive he responds to is similar in its spontaneity to the impulse that makes poets write lyrics and musicians compose music. It is a drive that may have been conditioned differently from the musical and poetical drives, but which manifests itself in essentially the same way — as aesthetic expression. The satirist's motivation for writing satire, then, would be this internal, personal, subjective compulsion.

Perhaps the most vigorous spokesman for the theory that the satirist is motivated by an aesthetic drive is Wyndham Lewis. Lewis may or may not be correct in saying, "The artistic impulse is more primitive than the ethical," but he is certainly correct in saying that satire can exist for its own sake as well as anything else can exist for its own sake. Lewis contends that although satire often is moral and an expression of a desire to reform, it is also frequently amoral and an expression of an aesthetic drive.

At this stage it would be helpful to agree on a working definition of satire. Unfortunately, no universally accepted definition exists. It is generally agreed that both criticism and humor have to be present in a work before it can be called satiric. But even the criticism-plus-humor formula is not wholly adequate, for much of Juvenal's and Swift's satire is too bitter to be humorous, and in Orwell's *1984*, Twain's *Mysterious Stranger*, and Waugh's *Loved One* there is a good deal of material which is satiric but certainly not comical. Professor Edgar Johnson suggests that "unmasking" or exposing is the indispensable characteristic of satire, and he is right; but this won't do as a definition for there exists an enormous amount of "unmasking" and exposing which cannot by the widest stretch of the imagination be called satire. What detectives and the F.B.I. and congressional investigating committees expose rarely falls under the category of satiric communication.

The following definition will be used in this book: The technique of the satirist consists of a *playfully critical distortion of the familiar*. The word “playfully” here is intended to stress the element of “pretense” rather than of jollity, although pure jollity does sometimes appear in satire.

Like other arts and philosophy, satire is primarily concerned with the nature of reality. Unlike other arts and philosophy, which emphasize what *is* real, satire emphasizes what *seems* to be real but isn't. It rejects man's naive acceptance of other men and institutions at face value. That rejection may be expressed in amused terms or in bitter terms, but the essence of satire is persistent revelation and exaggeration of the contrast between reality and pretense. And the persistent revelation and exaggeration of that contrast requires a particular kind of personality. The satirist has it.

Another popular explanation of the writer's motivation is the “escape” theory. The hypothesis that writers create literature in order to escape from reality has a long history, but refinements have been offered by recent theorists, such as Albert Camus: “‘No artist can tolerate the real,’ said Nietzsche. This is true; but no artist can do without the real. Creation is a demand for unity and a refusal of the world.” W. H. Auden, explaining why nonsense poetry is written, calls it “an attempt to find a world where the divisions of class, sex, occupation did not operate.” And David

Worcester suggests: "Irony offers an escape from mental pain, as morphine offers an escape from physical pain. . . . The inveterate ironist escapes from the paralysis of the mind only to fall a victim to paralysis of the will."

Haakon Chevalier agrees that the ironic attitude is a dangerous philosophy. "In actual experience," he quips, "irony characterizes the attitude of one who, when confronted with the choice of two things that are mutually exclusive, chooses both. Which is but another way of saying that he chooses neither." Chevalier applies his theory: "Anatole France insists upon illusion because he wants illusion. He cannot escape the obsession because he does not want to: the Freudian pleasure-principle. He seeks illusion — beauty, a dream-world, fairyland. He feels an urgent need to escape actuality, which does not satisfy him." France once said, "A lasting illusion has the attributes of truth."

Dr. A. A. Brill, a psychoanalyst, lists Swift, Poe, Emily Dickinson, and "perhaps Hawthorne and Melville" as writers who considered "their dream-creations more real than the actual world." Professor J. G. Frederick adds Cabell, Dunsany, and Blake, each a writer escaping to "a world which he likes better than the world about him." And Aldous Huxley thinks that both Swift's *Gulliver* and Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound* originate in the authors' refusal to accept the physical reality of the world. (But Rabelais, Huxley says, accepts the world — and Rabelais too is a satirist.)

According to Donald Ogden Stewart, "When a

humorist feels deep down inside him that there is no outlet to his life, that he is surrounded by blind alleys, then his humor becomes mad, fantastic; then in his utter despair he creates illogical dream worlds." And in *Pierre*, Melville explains what he means by "demoniac" humor: "If fit opportunity offer in the hour of unusual affliction, minds of a certain temperament find a strange, hysterical relief in a wild, perverse humorously, the more alluring from its entire unsuitableness to the occasion."

The woman who was Sinclair Lewis' wife during his most productive and successful years recalls his constant restlessness — he always had to keep moving, to new houses and new cities; only writing a book relaxed and anchored him. As soon as he finished it, he felt impelled to move on again.

Some critics believe that under certain conditions the ironic attitude is a healthy one. "Well-integrated souls like Socrates or Sophocles," says A. R. Thompson, "may use irony constantly, but with them it is a weapon of offense. The man who suffers inner conflicts uses it in defense against himself." And, defending the daydreamer, James Thurber writes, "In a triumphant daydream, it seems to me, there is felicity and not defeat. You can't just take a humiliation and dismiss it from your mind. . . . The thing to do is to visualize a triumph over the humiliator, so vividly and so insistently that it becomes, in effect, an actuality."

Presumably, if writers turn to writing as an escape from reality, they regard the process as a

pleasant alternative, or at least a more pleasant alternative than facing reality. James Thurber so regards it. "You have to enjoy humorous writing while you're doing it," he says. "Anybody who says he doesn't is lying (he may, of course, not like to start). You've got to be enjoying it. You can't be mad, or bitter, or irate. If you are it will be no good."

Mark Twain also seemed to find that kind of pleasure in writing. While working on *The Prince and the Pauper*, he wrote to his wife, "I take so much pleasure in the story, I am loath to hurry, not wanting to get it done." Five months after the death of his daughter Suzy, Twain, in a letter to his friend Twitchell, said: "I am working, but it is for the sake of the work — the 'surcease of sorrow' that is found there. . . . This book will not long stand between trouble and me, now; but that is no matter, I have many unwritten books to fly to for my preservation."

But other satirists and humorists have not found writing a pleasant escape. Wilson Mizner said, "Writing is too damned lonesome," and Irvin S. Cobb called writing "the loneliest job in the world." Finley Dunne was so expert in procrastinating, and so ingenious in finding excuses to avoid writing, that his editor once locked him in the office with orders to write; an hour later, the editor found Dunne happily counting the squares on the wallpaper to pass the time; he had not written a word. And Dorothy Parker, ordered to stay in her office until she turned in the copy that she

was always late in producing, took the MEN sign off the washroom and put it outside her door.

Anatole France's dislike for the actual process of writing has been noted by several biographers. "Obviously," points out Chevalier, "he did not write forty volumes under protest. But the labor of composition was in the nature of an unpleasant necessity."

In addition to the conventional explanations of why writers write, a few surprising motivations have been suggested. To Franz Kafka, "Writing is a form of prayer." As far as Samuel Johnson was concerned, "No man but a block-head ever wrote, except for money." Replying to a questionnaire, Knut Hamsun said that he wrote to kill time.

Alva Johnson inverted a popular idea when he wrote: "Psychoanalysts build a false science on the theory that millions of people are maladjusted lovers; a better knowledge of the world would teach that they are maladjusted writers." Another reversal of the usual point of view was offered by Dr. Jung: "The work in process becomes the poet's fate and determines his psychic development. It is not Goethe who created *Faust*, but *Faust* which creates Goethe."

The wish for immortality is the basic reason for the creative urge, according to Dr. Otto Rank; every human being has a tremendous desire, conscious or subconscious, for immortality; or, failing that, for leaving some mark of his personality,

some product made by him, as evidence of his existence on earth and as an extension of his individuality. This is “the creative impulse in the artist, springing from the tendency to immortalize himself,” and it is only through this “will-to-self-immortalization” that we can understand the interrelationship of artistic production and suffering.

Man’s desire for immortality in a special form has been suggested by S. N. Behrman as the reason for Duveen’s phenomenal success in selling masterpieces to millionaires who had no aesthetic interest at all in paintings. Man’s wish for immortality has also been credited, or charged, with his desire to have children, establish foundations, and get streets or buildings named after him.

A number of writers have offered a motivation quite different, at least superficially, from the desire for immortality. Logan Pearsall Smith wrote: “Every author, however modest, keeps a most outrageous vanity chained like a madman in the padded cell of his breast.” William Bolitho went further in calling a man “immoderately vain or sensitive or obstinate (three names for the same thing).”

There is no coyness in Bernard Shaw’s announcement: “I am a master of comic irony.” H. G. Wells described Shaw as “fantastically vain. He was ruled by a naked, unqualified, ego-centered, devouring vanity.” And Aretino announced proudly, “Medals of me have been struck in gold, in silver,” and “My head is engraved on

combs . . . like that of Alexander, Caesar, and Scipio." Chevalier sees in Anatole France's subjectivity "evidence of a fundamental and inescapable egotism." And Pope was being much more honest than usual when he wrote:

Yes, I am proud; I must be proud to see
Men not afraid of God, afraid of me.

Edith Sitwell, an enthusiastic admirer of Pope, admits that vanity was "the one grave fault in his character." And Charles Rolo quotes a friend of Evelyn Waugh's saying, "Evelyn is so frightfully witty and so fearfully rude. Terribly conceited, of course."

Dr. Pannenburg's statistics (described in Chapter 5) have only limited value, based, as they are, on an insufficient number of examples and attempting, as they do, to measure intangibles. Still, for what they are worth, these figures claim that 71 per cent of the satirists are vain, compared to 36 per cent of the general public, and that 86 per cent of the satirists are "proud," compared to a 47 per cent average.

The notion that satirists may be writing simply in order to have fun has also been expressed. Byron said of his *Don Juan* that his purpose was to be "a little quietly facetious about everything," and Thomas Mann believed that the artist is usually concerned with enjoyment. Sinclair Lewis, speaking of his own *Main Street* and Upton Sinclair's *Jungle*, said: "I suspect that the authors of both these books wrote them — whatever reasons they