

Satire, Humor and the Construction of Identities – Massih Zekavat, - 2017.

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Due to his Iranian origins, the author of *Satire, Humor and the Construction of Identities* has always been captivated by satire for its prevalence and ethical implication. This endeavour has resulted in finding a discursive model for satire.

Consequently, *Satire, Humor and the Construction of Identities* investigates the ways through which satire determines the identities of social subjects, based on the assumption that satire and identity can be linked, and their relationship can be comprehended. In order to make this possible, the concept of opposition is introduced. Thus, otherness, incongruity and discursive opposition in satire can coincide with the opposition seminal to the process of othering, and since othering is the prerequisite of identity construction, then satire can construct the identities of social subjects or contribute to this process.

The author illustrates in his book a large diversity of theoretical studies and approaches common in the ever-growing field of identity construction.

Overview of the book

The introduction creates a framework on the identity construction based on satire. It brings a complex analysis on satire and humour, in the attempt to offer a definition to the first. It also introduces the concept of otherness for two reasons: first, to show how othering is at work in the construction of identities; second, to partly facilitate the amendment of misrepresentations and biased stereotypes by explaining their workings.

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Chapters 2 and 3 present a theoretical discussion, offering a detailed analytical and critical survey of the role that different trends of thought, theories and thinkers appoint to otherness in the construction of the identities of social subjects and the emergence of satire.

The following chapters will be each dedicated to the study of the role of otherness in the construction of gender, racial/ethnic, national, and religious identities.

The main amount of the theoretical scenery includes different theories that discuss the significance of otherness in identity construction and the centrality of opposition to satire. Various linguistic theories of humor, including the semantic script theory of humor, are investigated in order to clarify the role of opposition in these theories. Moreover, the researches of individual figures as Bergson receive due attention. Diverse theories including postcolonialism, psychoanalysis, structuralism, poststructuralism and even occasional sociological and anthropological insights are employed in order to study the role of otherness in the construction of identity. The case studies include examples extracted from postcolonialism, feminism and gender studies, as well as theoretical studies concerning ethnicity, racial and religious works. In order to provide a genuinely comparative viewpoint, the author selected examples from different literary traditions (mainly British and Persian), and across different temporal confines to show how satire can contribute to identity construction in various temporal and spatial spheres.

As already mentioned above, Chapter 2, *Otherness and identity construction*, examines the issue of identity construction through a critical survey of different trends and thinkers (Easthope 1996, Todorov 1982, Hegel 1977, Derrida 1982 and many others), and intends to convey that otherness and opposition occupy a central role in the construction of identities of social subjects. The focus of this chapter is on philosophical and psychoanalytical approaches to identity.

The third chapter, *Otherness, humor and satire*, intends to demonstrate how otherness and opposition are similarly essential to humour and satire. As one can see in this chapter, some of the theories reviewed concern humour rather than satire and the conclusion of the chapter is that opposition is essential both to the construction of gender identity in social subjects and to satire.

Chapter 4, *Humor, satire and identity construction*, indicates the existence of several suggestions on the role of satire and humour in identity construction, but no critical attempt to verify this assumption through extensive theoretical discussion aimed at explaining the mechanisms and reasons behind this function of satire. However, this book finds the common denominator that can connect identity and satire through extensive theoretical discussion on each issue.

Continuing the extended theoretical discussions from the third chapter, in Chapter 5, *Construction of racial and ethnic identities via satire*, Zekavat states that otherness and difference are similarly central to the formation of racial and ethnic identities, hence to illustrate how satire can contribute to their construction as opposite function as their common denominator. This chapter includes a first section on theoretical discussions about the role of otherness in racial and ethnic identities, showing then that this can function as a common denominator with satire, and finally illustrating the author's theoretical discussions through investigation works of a distinguished fourteenth-century Persian satirist and their role in the construction of social subjects' identities.

As the role of humour and satire in the construction of national identities has been greatly ignored in the past, in Chapter 6, *Construction of national identities via satire*, the author aims first to convey that satire can contribute to the construction of social subjects' national identities, and, then, to illustrate this claim in a case study. The second section investigates *Drapier's Letters* by the eighteenth-century Irish satirist Jonathan Swift (1965b) to illustrate how it can contribute to the formation of Irish and English national identities in their dialect opposition. The satiric incongruity in Swift's *Drapier's Letters* reiterates and reinforces the opposition between the Irish and English, hence, contributes to the establishment and consolidation of their national identities.

Drawing again on the insights offered in Chapter 3, the author shows in Chapter 7 – *Construction of religious identities via satire* how satire can contribute to religious identity. After critically surveying the theoretical grounds, different works by Swift (1965a) and Zākāni (2008) are examined to show how their satire can contribute to religious identity construction both within the boundaries of a certain religion (Christianity or Islam) and across religious frontiers.

Chapter 8 – *Construction of gender identities via satire* attempts to show how satire can similarly contribute to the construction of gender identity. First, the author argues that many thinkers assume opposition to be central to the construction of gender identity as mainly manifested in the men/women binary opposition. Then, concrete examples are explained based on different literary traditions and periods in order to provide some evidence for the above-mentioned theoretical discussion.

Conclusions reinforce the ideas already mentioned in the eight chapters of the book, and underline the idea that opposition is similarly essential to satire and humour, while it is at work in many other undesirable aspects of life like segregation, sexism, racism, and war.

Evaluative remarks

Having this book as a starting point, future research might investigate other literary traditions, cultures, and periods in order to examine how satire can contribute to the construction of various aspects of identity.

The merits of the book rely mostly in the valuable and diverse approaches it comprises, ranging from postcolonialism, psychoanalysis, structuralism, poststructuralism and even occasional sociological and anthropological insights employed in order to study the role of otherness in the construction of identity. Due to the multilateral approaches to identity construction: both general and specific, the target public of the book is represented both by language researchers and scholars from the fields of social sciences and psychology.

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