Use Of Satire In Markow’s Art

The use of satire has been looked at as an opportunity to ridicule an idea or person to expose and criticize, but over the years satire has appeared to be everywhere which has led to misinterpretation and overuse. In the online article from The Baffler “Satirized For Your Consumption,” Ben Schwartz, a comedian himself, claims that we live in a world with satirical excess. He tries to convince his audience, liberal young adults, to understand and use satire correctly. He states that there has been a shift between comedians and politicians, proving that satire has been degraded because of the “co-opting,” meaning that they have taken satire and used it for their own benefit and not its actual purpose. Politicians have made satire a form of communication between their government which has pushed comedians out of the satirical conversation. Therefore, this misuse has made satire lose its actual purpose, which is to expose and criticize a person or idea with humor and ridicule. I will argue that satire is still a useful tool to criticize and expose societal problems. Schwartz’s main argument proves that satire has become overused, but it still has an effect on its audience when used correctly and is not being co-opted.

In the satirical piece “Thank You Misses DeVos For My Real Good Education,” Steven Markow, a comedian, and writer for several satirical online sites, ridicules DeVos’ objective for the education system in order to expose the dangers of having her in office. Markow’s main argument proves that DeVos is not the right choice for Secretary of Education with a fake letter written from the perspective of a high school graduate who was schooled under DeVos’ system. The student writes to Betsy DeVos in the year 2040 thanking her for his “education.” He brings up DeVos’ ignorance by addressing her confirmation hearing in a subtle matter to prove that the education system will soon fail because of her beliefs. In this essay, I will analyze and evaluate Markow’s piece of satire as well as analyze and evaluate its relationship to the article “Satirized for you Consumption,” in order to establish that satire is still a useful tool in our society today. Only if comedians are able to write to a well-educated audience that will be able to distinguish the difference between the ridicule and mocking of an idea or person and the reality and purpose behind it, then satire will be useful.

Markow begins his argument by giving a visual anecdote to prove his claim that with DeVos as Secretary of Education our future education system will be broken. The speaker, “Gronothan” (Jonathan but he can’t spell his own name) introduces himself as a twenty-three-year-old former high school student from the year 2040, thanking DeVos for the education he’s received. He continues on to say he is rich, and he claims to have a lot of money in the bank yet has no access to it. He explains: “Every time I try to get in there [the bank] I get stuck in the spinning door, and smash through all the shiny walls to get to the candy basket” (Markow). This student makes himself an example of what the future holds for a lot of students. It proves that in a matter of years, common sense will be gone and young people won’t be able to accomplish simple tasks such as getting through a door. The student claims he is the smartest and oldest student in his school and is going to Harvard to study politics and make “good” changes just like DeVos has. The student is positive about this because his parents have “a lot of money.” This allows Markow to bring up the idea of school vouchers, which allow parents to choose a private school (religiously affiliated or not) for their child’s education that is eventually paid with public school funding. DeVos as Secretary of Education will ruin the minds of future students

because school vouchers will allow students to attend private schools to receive a “better education” compared to public schools. Markow establishes his credibility as he clearly goes straight into mocking and exposing DeVos beliefs in school vouchers, and demonstrates his correct use of satire as a comedian because of his ability to distinguish mockery from his point. The audience gains some background knowledge of DeVos’ beliefs and true character which allows them to see the truth through Markow’s anecdote that mocks DeVos’ beliefs. This helps Markow prove his main argument that DeVos is a threat to the future education system because, with the visual narrative, he is able to distinguish the mockery from his point. This extends Schwartz's argument because, with a thorough analysis, the audience can still identify the difference between satire and the pure mocking of something, which allows satire to serve its purpose. Schwartz claimed that we live in a comedy bubble that will eventually burst with the misuse and overuse of satire. He states that “online comedy has humorized our lives,” (Schwartz 145) and the overuse of humor and satire has become a dull part of our lives that doesn’t have an effect anymore. Although Schwartz argues that we have satirical excess in the world, he claims that satire still has an effect when used correctly, and Markow is able to prove that. He is able to criticize DeVos in a comedic manner yet he is able to separate his mockery from the real issue, which is the threat that DeVos makes to the future of students. With Markow’s use of satire, his audience is able to recognize his satire and separate pure mockery in order to understand his main claim which states that DeVos is a threat to our education system.

The narrator continues to explain that he will be graduating with the highest honors and compares his accomplishments to DeVos’ actions. By comparing himself with DeVos, the author is able to prove his claim that DeVos has no experience or knowledge of her own to be Secretary of Education. The narrator begins to explain his first honor, which was having performed the most exorcisms on someone. He states he is unsure of why ghosts like him so much but he continues to explain that it is maybe because he walks like a crab. Although these two topics have no correlation with each other, Markow is able to use these examples to compare the student’s accomplishments and honors with DeVos’ knowledge to mock her lack of knowledge in public schools. In his letter, the student goes on to say he does it for fun, “What can I say? I like to mix things up just like you” (Markow). The author refers to Devos's confirmation hearing when she was asked about the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Senator Tim Kaine had asked DeVos if she thought all schools, disregarding their affiliation, should follow the requirements for the federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. She continuously dodged the question and had later on, stated she might’ve mixed up the fact that the IDEA is federal law. The narrator goes on to say that his “favorite parts of the school are prayer class [and] pledge of allegiance class…”(Markow). The author refers to Devos's belief in merging the ideas of church and state. In comparing the narrator to DeVos, the author illustrates the lack of knowledge DeVos has which makes her unqualified to be working for our education system considering it is made up of public schools that educate many individuals with disabilities and have no religious affiliations. With the fake honors, the author should be able to appeal to the audience’s– those who are middle-class people with upper-class hopes– sense of humor. The audience laughs along because they are able to recognize that Markow is comparing the lack of knowledge that DeVos has to an award this student has earned because of the amounts of exorcisms he’s performed. In order to be able to prove that DeVos lacks knowledge and experience in the education system, the author is able to make fake scenarios to allow the reader to understand that DeVos’s lack of knowledge towards the separation of church and state alone should eliminate her from becoming Secretary of Education. Furthermore, this allows the author to prove that DeVos is a threat to the future of

education because of her wanting to infiltrate religion into the education of young students. This illustrates Schwartz's argument because Markow's use of satire as a comedian has an impact on his audience who are educated on the issue. In "Satirized For Your Consumption," Schwartz claims that comedians have been losing their power with satire, and he states that "even when delivered [satire] in the sharpest and most unforgiving forms, [satire] hardly makes a dent." He is able to prove that the satirical excess we live in is diminishing the power satire once had in the hands of comedians. However, with the evident comparison between the narrator and DeVos, Markow proves that he is able to differentiate a joke and reality, allowing him to get his point across to his readers that DeVos is not qualified for this job. Markow's use of satire helps his audience realize that the ridicule he's writing is to prove DeVos' lack of knowledge regarding the education system.

In this essay, I analyzed and evaluated Markow's piece of satire as well as its relationship to the article "Satirized for you Consumption" in order to establish that satire is still a useful tool in our society today, only when a comedian's audience is able to understand their true purpose. In Markow's article, he is able to prove through his argument that he still holds some kind of power with satire. Markow is able to prove Schwartz's main argument because as a comedian his satire is still effective because he is able to show his audience the difference between real satire and mockery. He is able to shine a light on Devos's true character and beliefs for the future of the education system. Satire is still effective in the world to address societal issues because today humor is able to reach more audiences, and those audiences are able to understand and distinguish the difference between the use of satire and the pure action of mocking. Although Schwartz asserts that the overwhelming use of satire today has diminished its value and purpose I believe that with the use of satire everywhere, soon enough audiences will be able to identify satire and be able to understand its purpose.