

“Time to Lose Faith in Humanity”: *The Simpsons*, *South Park*, and the Satiric Tradition

About three years ago, I was teaching an English Literature survey course, and we began with the Augustans, focusing on Pope and Swift. I remember having a difficult time trying to get my students to see the fundamental differences in these writers' style and approach to satire. I also remember falling back on an explanation of Juvenalian versus Horatian modes and receiving too many blank stares in return for my trouble. One of those stares is forever ingrained in my memory because it provided the impetus for an epiphany. It wasn't the student's stare itself, but rather the stare, about two inches above hers on her baseball cap, of an angry, corpulent third grader named Eric Cartman. I didn't realize it at the time, but that baseball cap was pedagogical manna from above. "The difference between these two types of satire," I said, "is the difference between *The Simpsons* and *South Park*." This claim re-focused my class; there wasn't a drifter in the room at that moment, and it was clear to me that it worked. God bless you, Cartman!

I want to use the above analogy as the basis for my discussion of these two cartoons, but first I would like to review the traditional differences between Juvenalian and Horatian modes of satire. John Dennis