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### Satirical Perspectives: A Cross-Cultural Comparison

Mariah Johnson

mariah.johnson@umconnect.umt.edu

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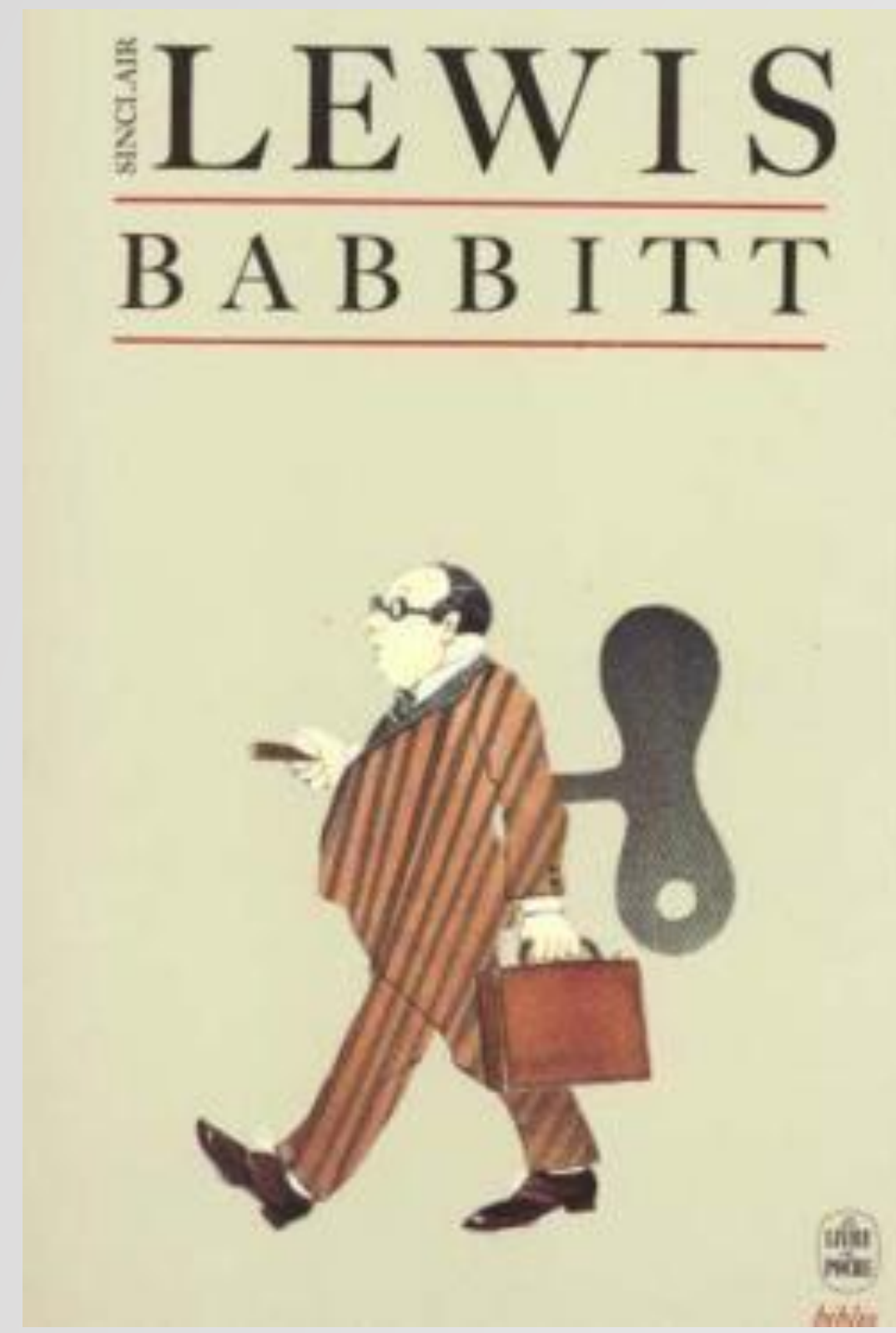


# Satirical Perspectives: A Cross-Cultural Comparison

Mariah Johnson Russian and English, University of Montana

## Introduction

- ❖ Satire has long been used as a form of social and political discourse
- ❖ Free political discourse is important as dictatorial governments around the world continue to suppress free speech
- ❖ In the 1920s, both America and the Soviet Union experienced a similar surge of industrialization and production
- ❖ How do satirists of different cultures satirize a similar situation?



## Methods

Two novels were used: Sinclair Lewis's *Babbitt* and Yurii Olesha's *Envy*. Each novel was historically contextualized with the events happening in America and the Soviet Union in the decade of their publication. Then, each text was analyzed under the techniques of satire outlined in Victor Raskin's *Semantic Mechanisms of Humor*. Finally, the implications of each satire are considered in the context of current events.

## Exposure of National Traits

- ❖ A satiric technique where the humor lies in the difference between what a group of people claims to be and the apparent negation of that claim by their actions
- ❖ Sinclair Lewis uses this technique to comment on the standardization of American culture, including standardization of thought
- ❖ The end result is a commentary on the lack of individuality in a consumer-driven economy and concern for the state of the arts in a society wherein creative thought is not valued

1820-Industrialization begins in America

1917-America enters World War I

1919-League of Nations forms

1920-The "Roaring '20s" begins

1922-*Babbitt* written

## Denigration of a Political Idea

- ❖ A satiric technique where the humor lies in the difference of the ideals a political creed purports and how that creed is observed in action
- ❖ Yurii Olesha uses this technique to comment on the Bolsheviks' push for rapid industrialization and modernization at the cost of skills which the Bolsheviks do not consider useful
- ❖ The end result is a commentary on the disregard of art and creativity in the Bolshevik push to create a new kind of modern society in their vision

1837-Pushkin, Russia's premier poet, dies

1892-Industrialization begins in Russia

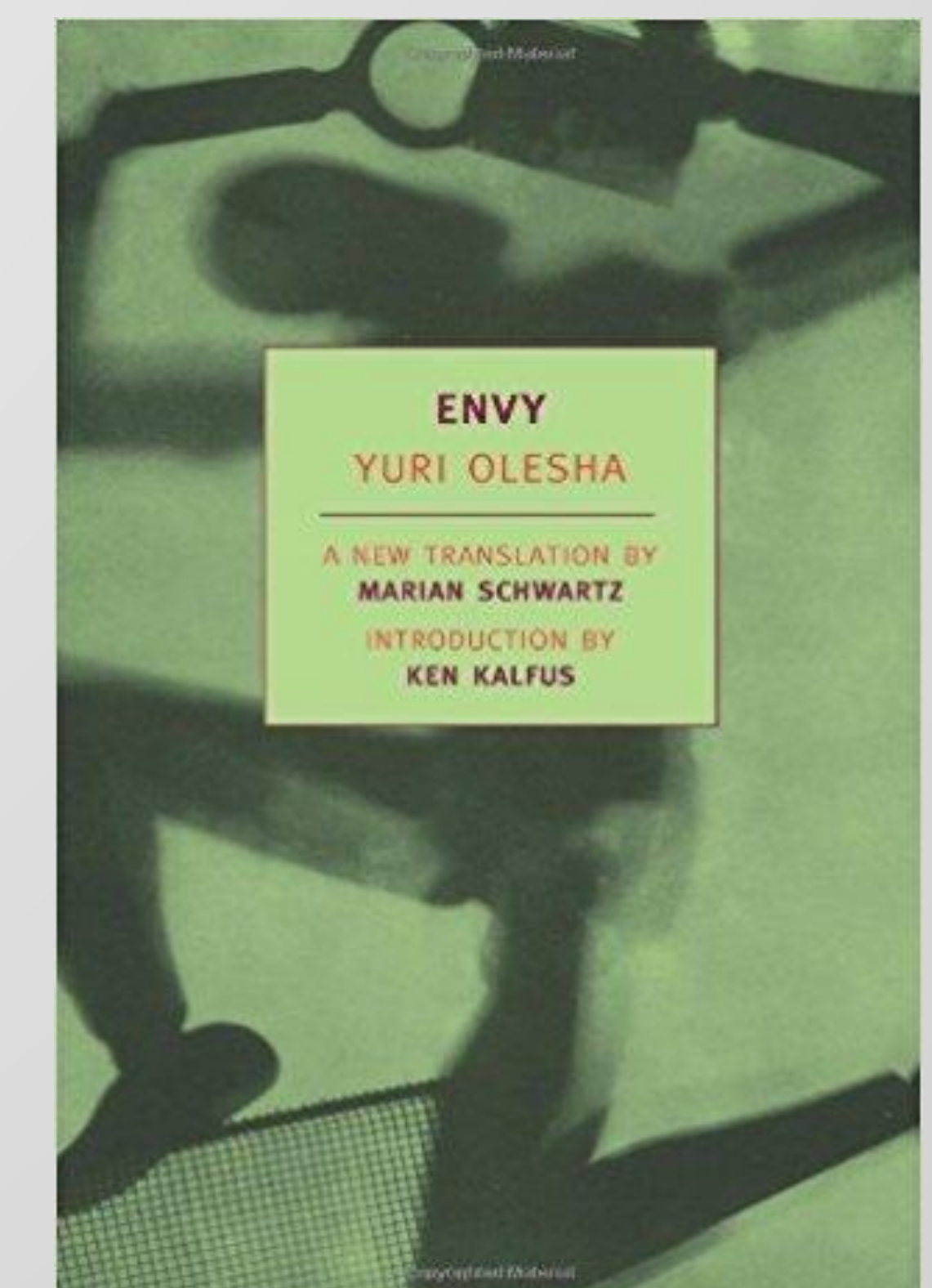
1914-World War I begins

1917-Bolshevik Revolution

1927-*Envy* written

## Conclusions

- ❖ Both authors, while satirizing different aspects of their respective societies, use similar techniques to do so
- ❖ Both commentaries express concern for the arts and creative thought in a society focused on production and modernization
- ❖ These satires maintain importance today as similar societal issues can be seen in both America and Russia
- ❖ The concern of two authors from different countries over the loss of art and creative thought cannot be ignored as significant
- ❖ A dialogue about the importance and benefits of art and creative thought should be maintained as opened by both Lewis and Olesha



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