GENERAL

ap language multiple choice the art of satire by john dryden

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Introduction

When preparing for the AP Language and Composition exam, students often find themselves staring at a sea of passages and a daunting array of multiple choice questions. One passage that consistently appears on the test—either in its original form or as a variation—is John Dryden's **"The Art of Satire."**Understanding this text is essential not only for mastering the passage itself but also for developing the analytical skills that the AP Language exam demands. In this comprehensive guide, we'll explore why this passage is a staple, dissect its rhetorical strategies, and provide practical strategies for excelling on the multiple choice section.

Why "The Art of Satire" Is a Key Passage for AP Language

John Dryden's essay is a masterclass in rhetorical analysis. The AP Language exam tests students' ability to identify tone, purpose, audience, and rhetorical devices. Dryden's text offers a dense concentration of these elements, making it an ideal vehicle for practicing the skills the exam seeks:

- Complex language that challenges vocabulary and inference skills.
- Layered arguments that require readers to discern authorial intent.
- Use of satirical techniques such as irony, hyperbole, and parody.
- Historical context that encourages contextual analysis.

Because the passage frequently appears in past exams, familiarity can translate into confidence and higher scores.

Understanding Satire: Definition & Techniques

Before diving into Dryden's text, it's helpful to review the core elements of satire. Satire is a literary genre that uses humor, irony, exaggeration, or ridicule to expose and criticize human follies or social injustices. The goal is to provoke thought and, ideally, inspire change.

Key Satirical Techniques

1. Irony – saying the opposite of what you mean, often to highlight absurdity.
2. Hyperbole – extreme exaggeration to emphasize a point.
3. Parody – mimicking a style or genre to mock it.
4. Understatement – downplaying a serious issue to create contrast.
5. Juxtaposition – placing two contrasting ideas side by side.

Dryden's essay is peppered with these devices, and recognizing them will help you answer questions about the author's rhetorical choices.

John Dryden: A Brief Biography & Literary Context

John Dryden (1631–1700) was a prolific English poet, playwright, and literary critic. He served as Poet Laureate during the reign of King Charles II and was known for his sharp wit and intellectual vigor. Dryden's era was marked by political upheaval and cultural transformation, providing fertile ground for satire. His essay "The Art of Satire" was published in 1685 as part of a broader collection that examined the virtues and vices of contemporary

literature.

Understanding Dryden's background enriches the reading experience. His position as a court poet and critic gives his work a unique blend of authority and criticism, which the AP Language exam often asks students to identify.

Analyzing "The Art of Satire": Key Themes & Rhetorical Devices

Below is a breakdown of the passage's central ideas and the rhetorical tools Dryden employs to convey them.

Central Themes

- Critique of the literary establishment – Dryden challenges the complacency of writers who fail to engage with societal issues.
- The power of satire as a moral instrument – he argues that satire can awaken public conscience.
- Responsibility of the writer – authors should use their craft to illuminate truth, not merely entertain.

Rhetorical Devices in Action

1. Irony: Dryden often states that "the best satirist is the one who does not ridicule but rather corrects." The irony lies in the suggestion that ridicule is ineffective.
2. Hyperbole: He exaggerates the "madness" of the audience's indifference to highlight the severity of apathy.
3. Parody: Dryden mimics the style of contemporary poets to critique their lack of substance.
4. Juxtaposition: He contrasts the "flattery" of poets with the "truth" that satire demands.

Recognizing these devices is key to answering questions that ask you to identify the author's purpose or the effect of a particular passage.

Common AP Language Multiple Choice Question Types for This Passage

The AP Language multiple choice section typically tests several skills. For "The Art of Satire," you can expect questions in the following categories:

- Author's purpose – Why did Dryden write this essay?
- Tone & diction – What is the overall mood, and how does word choice influence it?
- Rhetorical devices – Identify and explain the use of irony, hyperbole, or other techniques.
- Inference & meaning – What can be inferred about Dryden's perspective on contemporary writers?
- Structure & organization – How does the arrangement of arguments support the thesis?

Understanding these categories will help you anticipate question types and focus your study.

Strategies for Tackling Multiple Choice Questions

Below are proven strategies that can boost your accuracy on the AP Language multiple choice section, especially for dense passages like "The Art of Satire."

1. Read the Passage First, Then the Questions

Skim the passage quickly to grasp the main idea, then read it again more carefully. Afterward, glance at the questions to determine what you need to look for. This prevents you from getting stuck on a single question before you understand the whole text.

2. Highlight Key Phrases

Mark words that indicate tone (e.g., "ridiculous," "shrewd"), rhetorical devices, or transitions that signal shifts in argument. Use a highlighter or underline in the margin if you're working with a printed copy.

3. Eliminate Wrong Answers First

AP multiple choice questions often have a “best answer” that is subtle. By eliminating obviously wrong choices, you narrow your focus and reduce guesswork.

4. Pay Attention to Authorial Voice

Dryden’s voice is formal yet biting. Look for phrases that reveal his attitude toward the subject. This helps answer tone related questions.

5. Use the Process of Inference

When a question asks you to infer meaning, consider what the passage explicitly states and then think about what it implies. Look for words like “implies,” “suggests,” or “consequences.”

6. Watch for “Best” Answers

AP exams often include a “best” answer that is more nuanced. Compare all options to find the one that most accurately reflects the passage’s content.

Practice Question Breakdown

To illustrate these strategies, let’s walk through a sample question set based on a typical AP Language passage. The following questions are modeled after the style you’ll encounter on the exam.

Sample Question 1: Author’s Purpose

Question: What is Dryden’s primary purpose in writing “The Art of Satire”?

- A. To praise contemporary poets for their technical skill.
- B. To argue that satire should be used only for entertainment.
- C. To critique writers who neglect social responsibility.
- D. To propose a new literary genre combining satire and drama.

Answer:C. The essay repeatedly emphasizes the need for writers to address societal issues, indicating that Dryden critiques those who ignore this responsibility.

Sample Question 2: Tone and Diction

Question: Which of the following words best describes the tone of the passage?

- A. Playful
- B. Sarcastic
- C. Reverent
- D. Apologetic

Answer: B. Sarcastic. Dryden’s use of irony and mockery signals a sarcastic tone.

Sample Question 3: Rhetorical Device

Question: Dryden’s comparison of “the best satirist” to a “cure” for social ills exemplifies which rhetorical device?

- A. Hyperbole
- B. Metaphor
- C. Personification
- D. Allusion

Answer: B. Metaphor. He likens satire to a cure, a figurative comparison.

Sample Question 4: Inference

Question: What can be inferred about Dryden's view of contemporary poets?

- A. They are highly skilled but lack moral courage.
- B. They are universally admired by the public.
- C. They are primarily focused on political commentary.
- D. They are indifferent to the needs of their audience.

Answer: A. The essay criticizes poets for lacking moral courage, implying they are skilled yet morally complacent.

Sample Question 5: Structure

Question: How does Dryden's arrangement of arguments support his thesis?

- A. By presenting opposing viewpoints before concluding.
- B. By beginning with an anecdote that illustrates satire's power.
- C. By systematically dismantling the notion that satire is merely entertainment.
- D. By ending with a call to action for readers.

Answer: C. The essay systematically dismantles the idea that satire is only for entertainment, reinforcing his thesis.

Tips for Time Management & Accuracy

AP Language passages can be long and complex. Here are practical tips to keep you on track during the exam.

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