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# Menippean Satire In The Digital Era: Gary Shteyngart's "Super Sad True Love Story"

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Menippean Satire in the Digital Era:  
Gary Shteyngart's *Super Sad True Love Story*

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[Note: an earlier, somewhat shorter version of this essay was published in Davis and Nace's anthology *Teaching Modern British and American Satire*. The essays in this 2019 volume are highly recommended for students of satire. For full details, see Works Cited below.]

In *Menippean Satire Reconsidered: From Antiquity to the Eighteenth Century*, Howard Weinbrot argues that Menippean satire tends to be produced in eras of “broken or fragile national, cultural, religious, political or generally intellectual values” (7). It protests cultural decadence and decline by incorporating contradiction into its form, using “at least two other genres, languages, cultures, or changes of voice to oppose a dangerous, false, or specious and threatening orthodoxy” (6). Although it may feature memorable characters, the Menippean mode primarily targets diseased and dangerous ideas or habits. It is encyclopedic in range and ambition, absorbing and parodying different discourses and genres while constructing a narrative via debates, fantasies, annotations (either within the text or in footnotes and/or appendices), and other rhetorical devices. The result is an anxious, angry, labyrinthine, fragmented, stubbornly contrarian text.

Some satires also feature a dramatic moment Weinbrot calls a *Menippean incursion*, which “appears when necessary, penetrates the action, [and] offers a new voice or point of view [about the] threat of a dangerous orthodoxy” (275). In this extreme form of textual violence, the invasive voice enacts the arrogance of a particular discourse and worldview, interrupting and then disappearing and leaving a textual wound. The violated

text thus stands as a scathing protest (and perhaps also a failed or despairing one) against the powers represented by the incursion.

Supplementing Weinbrot's anatomy of Menippean satire that stress the form's heterogeneity and contrariness, I'd make the following other general points. A satire that mainly lampoons a target, however cleverly, cannot be Menippean, for the boundary between what's mocked and the voice doing the mocking is too clear and stable: it offers us the chance to side with the primary speaker and laugh at someone or something from a secure, superior location outside or elsewhere. As Freud suggested in *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious*, jokes and satire commonly inoculate us with power over another and/or something that tormented us. Examples of satires featuring a primary character engaging in comic revenge are Nora Ephron's *Heartburn* and Philip Roth's *Sabbath's Theater* (two very different novels in other ways). A rarer mode, Menippean satire is energized by outrage too, but it never focuses primarily on one speaker and its purpose is more ambiguous. It immerses us, sometimes terrifyingly so, within fear and culture clash, with no "safe space" available. Not only does the Menippean incursion signify such danger, but the whole of the form enacts invasion and vulnerability on every page. It becomes really difficult to construct what a speaker's (or the author's) "intent" was, much less to figure out the meaning of particular passages or the work as a whole. Interpretive and formal instability, brokenness, and ambiguity bristle at both the smallest and largest scales; the work seems amalgamated of one aporia added to another and another— creating interpretive puzzlement, impasses, confusion. Affectively, this can make some viewers or readers feel a kind of emotional free fall generating exhilaration and terror, laughter and immense unease.

Menippean elements well describe the texture and structure of Gary Shteyngart's fiction and the crisis in U.S. imperial confidence at the end of the "American Century" that Shteyngart anatomizes. In particular, in his 2010 novel *Super Sad True Love Story* utopian narratives of technological progress, the triumph of neoliberalism, and "American Restoration" are roiled by anxious visions of decline, invasion, and loss occurring within the psyches of individual characters, their relationships, and the nation-state itself. Menippean satire is basically schizophrenic, marked by clashing voices, languages, worldviews, and values. So too is Shteyngart's text, split between the contrapuntal narratives of two protagonists from recent immigrant families, Lenny Abramov and Eunice Park. Shteyngart, however, updates the Menippean mode for an era that witnesses not just the atrophy of the nation-state (and the immigrant "success" story) but also of the print book and the practices of interpretation and empathy it encouraged. He slyly adds a strong contemporary instance of Menippean incursion, a supplement-epilogue that in a rather Derridean (or *Tristram Shandy*-an?) way reframes and unsettles all that we've just read.

This essay offers not so much a lesson plan for *Super Sad True Love Story* but a set of topics and tensions from which a lesson plan may be generated for teaching Shteyngart's novel and introducing students to an understanding of Menippean satire. It also seeks broader conclusions about why satire's historically most heterogeneous and nihilistic mode now has renewed prominence. Earlier U.S. writers adept at the Menippean include Mark Twain, Nathanael West, and George Schuyler (*Pudd'nhead Wilson*; *Miss Lonelyhearts* and *Day of the Locust*; and *Black No More*). West's precedent is important for Shteyngart because of the ways in which he skewers "cures" for

modernity's malaise offered by commerce, technology, and the "fine arts." Twain and Schuyler are important for showing how the Menippean may engage with race. They parody both biological and cultural arguments for racial difference, while simultaneously making farcical the ways that "difference" has repeatedly been commodified. In Twain's text, the guilt is said by the narrator to lie with the "erroneous inventory" of the murderer's racial identity rather than his actual actions, yet once his "real" "black" self is exposed he is promptly sold to pay for debts he created when "white" [*Pudd'nhead* 121]. Twain's novel definitively solves its murder mystery, but it gives thoroughly contradictory answers about the *cause* of the murder. (Was it Tom's "black" blood or his "white" privileges that corrupted him?) In Schuyler's, a seeming reversal in race/power relations is marked by skin-*darkening* creams suddenly becoming best sellers: Americans remain obsessed with minute skin-color differences.

Since the 1960s—perhaps as a response to even more heightened uncertainty involving race, class, gender, sex, and the future of "human" identity—the Menippean mode in fiction has revived like some Frankensteinian patchwork monster. Thomas Pynchon, of course (most notably, *Gravity's Rainbow*), but also Fran Ross (*Oreo*), Maxine Hong Kingston (*Tripmaster Monkey: His Fake Book*), David Foster Wallace (*Infinite Jest*), Philip Roth (*The Counterlife*, *The Ghost Writer*, *Operation Shylock*), and Paul Beatty (*The White Boy Shuffle*, *The Sellout*) are standout examples. Yet the angry return of Menippean satire is arguably global: consider the farcical nihilism and linguistic inventiveness countering capitalism's new colonialism in Emile Habiby's *The Secret Life of Saeed the Pessoptimist* (1974) or Valeria Luiselli's *The Story of My Teeth* (2015).

Why should the electroshock revival of Menippean satire occur now? Perhaps because of this savage irony: Menippean energies have been appropriated by post-industrial multinational capitalism, all in the name of selling “freedom” and “development.” Creative destruction by the god of the market is perhaps the most profound Menippean “incursion” of all. What can sellers of mere fiction do in the face of such corporate power, which can invent infinite “shell” avatars while manipulating governments and shifting money from one location to another in milliseconds? Hypothesis: Menippean satire by writers rises in eras (such as the Gilded Age, the Depression, and the present) when elites engage in their own forms of fiction, scripting violent social disruption and lies in order to secure their power.

Shteyngart’s gambit is to turn neoliberalism’s appropriation of the Menippean against itself. What neoliberalism’s new colonialism fears most is skeptical laughter, an Emperor-Has-No-Clothes and We’re-Being-Robbed moment. Shteyngart imitates its workings in order for us to notice what is erased in the name of the new. In the twilight of the Gutenberg era of the print book, Shteyngart has produced a text that identifies, parodies, and counters narratives that promote digital technology as offering a brave new world of “Post-Human” information analysis (“scanning”) that supposedly will be vastly superior to old-school book- and individual-centered reading and interpretation. Shteyngart ironically binds such a commodified future *to* literary history and its representations of our fallible, non-quantifiable human tragicomedy. In the process, Shteyngart proves to be one of contemporary satire’s most inventive practitioners, both funny and frightening at once.

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Since this volume focuses on strategies for teaching satire, I conclude with some recommendations for teaching *Super Sad True Love Story*. I have taught this novel several times in a post-World War II survey course popular with both majors and non-majors. In my experience, students of the millennial generation immediately connect to the novel's adroit parodies of high-tech utopian gizmos and the pressures of contemporary social media. They identify with the conflicts experienced by the novel's primary protagonists, Lenny Abramov and Eunice Park, and will eagerly dissect the novel's examples of the market's overwhelming power, including its effects on identity and the ways in which an Orwellian world of top-down surveillance has now morphed to include a horizontal network of "voluntary" sharing and competitive status acquisition. They'll be struck by Shteyngart's suggestion that the United States, far from "exceptional," has basically become a "third-world" country with "first-world" pretensions, characterized by immense wealth inequities, social strife, decaying infrastructure, oligarchical rule, and faux, or rather farcical, mass-media narratives of "unity," "restoration," and "taking back" the country.

Some students will be made uneasy or even offended by the text's intense pessimism and violence. To address these concerns, set up a class debate about the function of satire. Is satire's negativity and use of exaggeration—especially in its extreme Menippean mode—merely destructive and irresponsible, or do its painful truths perform a healthy function? If so, what? Such a discussion will to some degree reproduce the historical debate (begun by the Greeks) over whether satire is whether

allowing satire such liberties is a threat to society or necessary for its health. Apocalyptic fears about the end of the United States or even the end of the world are rife at present.

So too is unease with social media and its commodification and hypersexualization of bodies and selves. Some students will be offended or made uneasy with the novel's *Lolita* plot with an Orientalism twist: old insecure white guy falls for a Korean American 20-something, convinced she will revive his youth as well as appreciate the financial protection he can give her and her family. She, in turn, is grossed out by his hairy, aging body and his melancholic literary sensibilities—yet is drawn to his protectiveness, the ways he makes her feel loved despite her flaws, vulnerabilities, confusion. Lenny's attraction to Eunice is hardly as selfless as he likes to think it is; students will be quick to see his paternalistic narcissism and racist clichés. Eunice, similarly, is full of other contradictions, seeking shelter in Lenny's adoration yet also coldly calculating which man who falls for her can provide her family the most security while the U.S. dissolves in chaos. Lesson plans for *Super Sad* should not ignore the novel's daring exploration of gender, class, and race tensions in the midst of its end-of-the-world dystopia. Couple those topics with others, however, such as *Super Sad*'s sly rewriting of the standard American immigrant success narrative, and/or the ways in which it captures the ambivalence we have regarding social media and technological advances. Technology and social media seem to give us unprecedented power and connectedness, yet we also fear its power *over* us, the ways in which it simultaneously isolates us and entraps us all in a net of surveillance and data-gathering. Why is it important to give such doubts or ambivalence a voice, and how is *literature*—both



Lenny's secret diary and Eunice's private texts—powerfully equipped to explore such doubts?

An innovative text should generate innovative assignments. As well as (or in place of) requiring a conventional analytic paper, consider having students write a reader-response diary in Lenny's voice, or text their thoughts the way Eunice does. I also highly recommend a digital annotation assignment. This will help them explore how linguistic inventiveness is essential to Shteyngart's satire. Choose a number of invented terms or phrases key to *Super Sad True Love Story*—such as *äppärät* or American Restoration Authority—and let students nominate some too. Give them models for good annotation, then let them go to work singly or in small groups. After they present their annotations to the full class, broaden the discussion to consider why such micro-readings help deepen our understanding and enjoyment of the novel as a whole. It's also possible (with their permission) to publish revised and vetted student annotations or other guides on the internet, to assist a global community of readers. To see one class's annotations of *Super Sad True Love Story* keywords, go to my blog:

[http://blogs.swarthmore.edu/pschmid1/?page\\_id=544](http://blogs.swarthmore.edu/pschmid1/?page_id=544).

Using digital humanities to deepen students' engagement with *Super Sad True Love Story* may seem counterproductive, even perverse, given the novel's satire of the dangerous allure of digital culture's reproduction of the "human." But Shteyngart vividly shows how what the novel calls "Post-Human" narratives repress ironies and doubts that art and religion have long explored. His Menippean incursions are sharply relevant precisely at this historical moment, when humanities departments are obsessed with theorizing the post-human while embedded within academic institutions that each year

seem to function more and more on the corporate model. Could trying to become post-human be a dangerous and self-defeating gambit, especially when administrations are all too happy to shrink or make “post” the humanities?

*Super Sad* allows us to resist either/or choices between nostalgic notions of the “human” and utopian narratives claiming new technologies will somehow *in themselves* make the humanities relevant again. It’s the Menippean satiric way audaciously to cause such trouble while making us laugh uneasily (and sometimes uproariously) about our dilemmas. Just as Shteyngart deploys Menippean satire to absorb capitalism’s phantasmagoria of identity branding and then open it up to parody and critique, so too does his novel make a very pleasurable case for the dangerous relevance of satiric fiction in the age of Images, Retail, Credit, and global universities promoting neoliberalism as the one true way to freedom.



Other indispensable elements for a *Super Sad True Love Story* teaching plan should be a focus on close-reading skills and an analysis of character development, followed by broader questions that will allow students to use this particular text to think about historical and cultural issues. Some basic comments and questions follow below, to help structure one or more class sessions based on this approach. I begin with character analysis and then move on to historical and cultural topics that have been of lively interest to my students.

The novel’s text juxtaposes Lenny Abramov’s handwritten journals and Eunice Park’s digital missives, and it is not until the final chapter that it’s revealed why we can read these two voices braided together, as well as contemplate the grotesque ways the

story of “Lenny <3 Euny” now has global pop culture buzz. The issues raised by this shocking ending will be explored at the end of this essay, but first it’s worth considering more closely the novel’s characterization of Lenny and Eunice, and the ways in which that intersects with its Menippean satire. The discussion below traces these central themes while interspersing commentary with suggestions for discussion prompts for students. I encourage teachers to take similar approaches to their own favorite passages in the novel, so that students learn to dive deep into a passage’s literary texture, not merely paraphrasing its content.

Lenny is a product of Jewish-Russian comic pessimism and irony; both he and his family, recent émigrés from the last years of Soviet communism, cast a cold eye on utopian narratives of progress. Yet Lenny desperately wants to achieve immortality through new technologies that his literary influences and his own experience warn him offer false hope. He has financial incentive to believe tech hype: he’s a mid-level employee for Post-Human Services, a Manhattan company selling “dechronification” products that supposedly reverse aging.

Lenny’s boss encourages his Post-Human employees to keep a diary “to remember who we were, because every moment our brains and synapses are being rebuilt and rewired with maddening disregard for our personalities, so that each year, each month, each day we transform into a different person, an utterly unfaithful iteration of our original selves” (65). Lenny complies, and his diary entries make up half the novel we read. Yet Lenny’s journal quickly strays from the script Josie dictated: it is double-voiced, tracing the clash between Lenny’s desire to be liberated from human fallibility and mortality and his skepticism about the ethics of such a goal. Consider for instance

Lenny's narrative about his first day on the job as an "Intake" specialist at Post-Human Services (120-25). His new task is to interview "High Net Worth" candidates for dechronification treatments, then decide their fate. Fewer than eighteen percent can be accepted. Much of Lenny's text exudes the hubristic high of new omnipotence:

I gave Barry the willingness-to-live test.... The Infinite Sadness Endurance Test.... He was saddened by life, by the endless progression from one source of pain to another, but not more than most.... I knew already that this perfectly reasonable, preternaturally kind fifty-two-year-old would not make the cut. He was doomed, like me. And so I smiled at him, congratulated him on his candor and patience, his intellect and maturity, and with a tap of my finger against my digital desk threw him onto the blazing funeral pyre of history." (125)

Beginning as a boast, Lenny's entry becomes pervaded with irony toward with his company's Post-Human propaganda. "[D]oomed like me" voices very human doubts rather than consigning skepticism to a funeral pyre. Further, Lenny's concluding phrase above resonates with tragic human history—not just the Holocaust but eons of individuals and groups scapegoated for someone else's dream of progress and purity. "Affecting a god-like air," as he calls it (123), Lenny's Post-Human Services persona nevertheless can't help but remember history's victims killed in the name of engineering a more perfect society. The recalcitrant memory textually encoded into this diary entry exposes the temptations of hubris, identifying *it* as the deadly "fallacy" (67), not the

humanist values his employer mocks. (And of course the dangers of *hubris* itself have a lengthy literary history, in the origins of tragedy.)

For teachers who want to use the above indented quotation for a close-reading exercise, here are some discussion prompts.

Ask students to consider how we should interpret the passage. Is Lenny boasting, proud of his superiority and power? What words imply that is so? Or do some students sense Lenny is conflicted about his role in the company, perhaps confessing secret doubts here in his private diary? What evidence supports that different reading?

Other questions: What is an “Infinite Sadness Endurance Test” and what would “passing” it mean? (Would you pass if you just denied you ever felt sad?) Do students think taking and passing such a test would be a good thing? Why or why not?

Also, ask students to the connotations of the words and the historical resonance of this climactic moment in the quotation: “[I] threw him onto the blazing funeral pyre of history.” How should we interpret Lenny’s statement?

The overall structure of *Super Sad* is similarly double-voiced and irony-drenched. The novel follows each chapter of Lenny’s handwritten diary with more or less contemporaneous excerpts from Eunice’s GlobalTeens text messages and emails to various people in her life, including Lenny. Filled with insecurity about her self-worth, Eunice has turned to Lenny for a kind of absolution, an unconditional love.

I broke up with Ben. It was too much. He is so beautiful physically, so smart and such a rising star in Credit that I am completely intimidated by him. I can never reveal who I really am to him because he would just vomit. I know a part of him must be disgusted by my fat, fat body....

The weird thing is I've been thinking about Lenny, the old guy. I know he's gross physically, but there's something sweet about him, and honestly I need to be taken care of too. I feel safe with him because he is so not my ideal and I feel like I can be myself because I'm not in love with him. (74)

Later Eunice reflects "I guess what I'm saying is I'm not as turned off by Lenny's vulnerabilities anymore... I think it's a very Korean thing, to be able to sense someone so sweet and gentle and appreciate him for who he is" (199).

Ask students how they respond to Eunice's confusions. What different forces in her family history and in American culture do they think have caused her insecurities? How should we interpret her comment "I feel safe with [Lenny] because he is so not my ideal"? (Note also how that one word, *so*, perfectly captures Eunice's teenage voice.) Does it make sense to students that Eunice would turn to Lenny for a sense of absolution, of unconditional love, even though as she admits he is "gross" and hardly her romantic ideal?

When Lenny's neediness proves claustrophobic, Eunice turns back to believing in the miraculous powers of Images and Retail. These modes of capitalism converge in pornography, in which Eunice's generation has been immersed since early childhood.

Part of her believes true love must be about perfection, not shared vulnerability. And she has been taught that sex is really about power: one either dominates or is dominated. As these text-messages with her sister show, Eunice is both addicted to identity formation by sex-commodity and uneasy about it:

EUNI-TARD ABROAD: Sally, do you want TotalSurrender panties?

They're these sheer pop-offs that Polish porn star wears on AssDoctor.

SALLYSTAR: The one with the fake hips?

EUNI-TARD ABROAD: I think so. ...Why not just wear them with regular jeans. That way you can "protect the Mystery" as Mom says. (47)

Lenny's handwritten diary uses old-school literary devices like irony, allusion, and polyphony to voice ambivalence, but Eunice's digital texts enact something similar. Her witty GlobalTeen avatar is exemplary: Euni-tard puns on both "retard" (literary irony? negative self-image?) and "unitard," a piece of clothing associated with dance and sports and a relatively health body-image. Unlike TotalSurrender panties, a dance unitard offers at least minimal privacy, rendering the self non-transparent and not-defined by a brand name. (That's another meaning of "Mystery" in the above passage, not just virginity.) The sisters mock their mother's English but are also haunted by the truth in what she says. When Eunice and Lenny briefly bond, they do so in part because they feel their confusion about being human has found a relatively safe space in which to express itself. They desperately yearn for such a space, even while feeling it's embarrassing. Find discussion questions encouraging students to discuss all these issues.



So where is the Menippean incursion that renders this love story “Super Sad,” giving it a brand name perfect for marketing? It’s not just in the voice of capitalism, whose products and lingo pervade just about every sentence of the novel. And it’s not only in the plot, where Shteyngart puns on the Christian apocalyptic “Rapture” and depicts a *Rupture* in which the United States collapses “suddenly, spectacularly, irreversibly” into warring factions as China and Germany become world-dominant (331). The eeriest Menippean incursion occurs in the final chapter, where we learn Lenny and Eunice have split and Lenny has changed his name to “Larry Abraham” and moved to the Free State of Tuscany. It’s also revealed that *the novel we are reading is an assemblage made two decades after the Rupture* by anonymous content-providers at the Peoples’ Literature Publishing House based in Beijing and New York. Lenny’s “private” diary mysteriously survived, and Eunice’s and Lenny’s GlobalTeen accounts have been hacked. The resulting textual assemblage has turned into a worldwide bestseller. “Larry Abraham” ruefully but proudly explains all this in the “Notes” provided for the book’s second edition. Menippean satire for the age of mechanical/digital reproduction: Lenny and Eunice’s tragic story has been retitled *The Lenny Abramov Diaries* (thus marginalizing the importance of Eunice’s voice) and is now a global franchise, generating spin-off productions and rewrites—a Chinese-produced television melodrama, an Italian “video spray” in which the actress playing “Euny” uses sexist and racist stereotypes and “Lenny” is reduced to a series of “comic” ticks, tears, and memes (330-31).



Thus generating a haunting set of questions. Is the book we are reading identical to that future text the epilogue describes? Are our modes of reading and interpretation basically just the same (if less influential) as what Chinese and Italian studios do to mangle the story? What is the fate of the novel, and of reading, in global mediascapes saturated with immortality narratives sold by multinational conglomerates?

“Larry’s” final words tell us that Lenny and Eunice “didn’t survive,” while also admitting he is finally able to grieve for them: the book ends with Larry/Lenny’s “silence, black and complete” (331). Yet could the *Super Sad True Love Story* we read perhaps *not be the same text* as *The Lenny Abramov Diaries* described in the epilogue? Hacks and hackers appropriate Lenny’s and Eunice’s stories to generate new media “content”—but could it be that reading enacts something profoundly different from commodified spin-offs? *Super Sad* reading, unlike scanning, arguably means profoundly identifying with the protagonists’ only-too-human confusions and memory, their desperate irony, their vulnerabilities and skepticism about programs designed to purify them into the “Post-Human.” True reading is attention to the wounds of history, its causes and effects. Or is such a view mere delusion?

A mash-up of analog and digital textual modes; mechanical reproduction and aura; enthusiasm for STEM and tech utopias crossed with an ironic skepticism as old as Goethe’s *Faust*, or perhaps the Book of Job and the prophets of the Old Testament, not to mention the genres of tragedy, comedy, and satire—Shteyngart’s text opens a space in which reading and interpretation may resist and question any discourse that claims to tell us what we think and feel and what it all means. Shteyngart’s novel is thus a textual

incursion countering orthodoxy, an updating of Menippean satire for the era of the apparent triumph of markets, neoliberalism, “big data,” and digital textual streaming.

Related topics for teaching include the following:

- Make a list of three to six features of Menippean satire as defined in the first five pages of this essay. How many of these elements do students find in Shteyngart’s novel? Weinbrot’s book on Menippean satire is not pitched at a level accessible to most undergraduates, but if teacher and student want to explore further a decent place to start is Wikipedia’s page on the subject. That page also decently explains why these satires are called Menippean.

- Do students see examples in Shteyngart’s novel of a Menippean *incursion*, that is, a violent disruption or set of disruptions representing bad ideas trying to enforce “orthodoxy” and consensus? Have them discuss several examples that they nominate. Two that I hope would be mentioned by students would be the American Restoration Authority’s actions in the book’s main plot (it’s basically a coup d’etat with an Orwellian name), and the novel’s startling epilogue, which as I argue above forces us to reinterpret all we’ve read.

- Why do students think the more violent and disjointed Menippean form of satire—which focuses on diseased ideas and their social repercussions and doesn’t allow a reader or viewer to enjoy a “safe space” free of those ideas’ influence—has become popular again in the present era? Can students think of other satiric works (texts or other media) that they would call Menippean? What are some examples of other works (texts or other media) featuring a Menippean “incursion” or violent interruptions or

juxtapositions? Consider, for instance, having students discuss the satiric elements in Donald Glover's ("Childish Gambino's") apocalyptic 2018 music video, "This Is America," which received over 200 million views and counting within a month of its release on May 5, 2018. Is this scathing music video Menippean? Why or why not? Have students explain their reasoning using their knowledge of the Menippean genre. For additional resources demonstrating that students and others can be *very* adept at interpreting satire, see FBE Shows' "College Kids React to This is America"; Genius.com; and Solomon Jones.

Note: the point of any discussion about defining Menippean satire should *not* be to embroil students in endless classification debates, but to allow them to distinguish between satiric works that just mock a person or an idea versus satires that work more complexly and dangerously. Students can also profit by exploring the difference discussed briefly on the Wikipedia page between satires in the mode of Aristophanes, which involve mockery of particular persons and situations, versus the true Menippean mode, which (as it has been classically defined by Weinbrot and others) diagnoses and parodies diseases of the intellect as they violently affect social conditions. The Menippean mode is deeply pessimistic about the present and future. At the end of *Super Sad*, appropriately, Lenny Abramov retreats into silence and mourning for all that has been lost. Have students debate the "value" of such pessimism. It is a luxury of the privileged, or a vital check on our delusions (and thus a necessary part of any movement for real social reform)?

Teachers, have fun with this text! For this rather too-serious essay has too often neglected to stress how outrageously *funny* Shteyngart's *Super Sad*'s satire is. He's a worthy and dangerous heir to Mark Twain.

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