

IRONY, SARCASM, AND SATIRE

Irony is the discrepancy between

- what is said and what is meant,
- what is said and what is done,
- what is expected or intended and what happens,
- what is meant or said and what others understand.

Sometimes irony is classified by types:

- in *situational irony*, expectations aroused by a situation are reversed;
- in *cosmic irony* or *the irony of fate*, misfortune is the result of fate, chance or God;
- in *dramatic irony*, the audience knows more than the characters, so that words and action have additional meaning;
- *Socratic irony* is named after Socrates' teaching method, whereby he assumes ignorance of and openness to opposing points of view which turn out to be foolish.

Sarcasm is a form of irony in which praise is really an insult; sarcasm generally involves malice, the desire to hurt or to put someone down, e.g., "This is my brilliant son, who failed out of college."¹

Satire is the exposure of the vices or follies of an individual, a group, an institution, an idea, a society, etc., usually with a view to correcting them. Satirists frequently use irony to point out the discrepancies between appearance and reality, promises and fulfillment, the ideal and the practice, etc.¹

Life is filled with ironies, as in the following "true news stories."²

1. The average cost of rehabilitating a seal after the Exxon Valdez oil spill in Alaska was \$80,000. At a special ceremony, two of the most expensively saved animals were released back into the wild amid cheers and applause from onlookers. A minute later they were both eaten by a killer whale.
2. A psychology student in New York rented out her spare room to a carpenter in order to nag him constantly and study his reactions. After weeks of needling, he snapped and beat her repeatedly with an axe, leaving her mentally retarded.
3. In 1992, Frank Perkins of Los Angeles made an attempt on the world flagpole-sitting record. Suffering from the flu, he came down eight hours short of the 400-day record, to find that his sponsor had gone bust, his girlfriend had left him and his phone and electricity had been cut off.
4. A woman came home to find her husband in the kitchen, shaking frantically with what looked like a wire running from his waist towards the electric kettle. Intending to jolt him away from the deadly current she whacked him with a handy plank of wood by the back door, breaking his arm in two places. Till that moment he had been happily listening to his Walkman.
5. Two animal rights protesters were protesting at the cruelty of sending pigs to a slaughterhouse in Bonn. Suddenly the pigs, all two thousand of them, escaped through a broken fence and stampeded, trampling the two hapless protesters to death.
6. Iraqi terrorist, Khay Rahnajet, didn't pay enough postage on a letter bomb. It came back with "return to sender" stamped on it. Forgetting it was the bomb, he opened it and was blown to bits.

¹ Irony is often confused with sarcasm and satire

² These stories, which are fictional, circulated on the Internet as true and were accepted by many as factual.

BURLESQUE, PARODY, AND TRAVESTY

Burlesque achieves comedy by a ridiculous exaggeration of people, actions, customs, institutions, or other literary works; it reveals the flaws or deficiencies of the original. Burlesque may present serious subjects as trivial or trivial subjects with high seriousness; a dignified style and elevated language may be used for low, undignified subjects or actions and subjects,³ or undignified, inappropriate language for a serious subject or action.

The term "burlesque" is sometimes used interchangeably with "parody" and "travesty." Or burlesque can be used as the general literary category, and parody and travesty can be seen as types or subdivisions of burlesque. However classified, they are common devices in satire.

Parody imitates the style and/or spirit of a writer or a particular literary text to mock the original. *Shamela* is a parody of Richardson's *Pamela*.

Travesty transforms a serious work by presenting its subject in a degraded or grotesquely exaggerated way.

³ Fielding repeatedly uses the mock epic or the mock heroic in *Joseph Andrews*. The conventions of the epic, like apostrophes or extended Homeric similes, and the elevated style to laugh at a trivial or ordinary subject, like the "heroic" fight of Joseph and Adams with the dogs.