

ADVANCED PLACEMENT WORLD LITERATURE

NORTHROP FRYE'S THEORY OF ARCHETYPES

Winter: Irony and Satire

Introduction

Irony and satire parody romance by applying romantic mythical forms to a more realistic content, which fits them in unexpected ways. It presents an image where reality rather than ideology is dominant.

Satire is militant irony, where moral norms are relatively clear, and standards are assumed against which the grotesque and absurd are measured. Sheer invective or name-calling is satire with little irony. Because satire must carefully select content to criticize it is at least implicitly moral. Irony with little satire occurs when the reader is unsure of author's attitude or what their own should be.

Plot

This mythos is driven more by content than structure, so it is difficult to offer a typical example of plot.

One Example

A Goliath is encountered by a tiny David with his sudden and vicious stones: he is a giant prodded by a cool and observant but almost invisible enemy into a blind, stampeding fury and then polished off at leisure.

Characters

Eiron

- Hero, if there is one; part of irony and satire is the disappearance of the heroic
- A character who takes the attitude of flexible pragmatism and an avoidance of illusion or compulsive behavior, and is thus the most difficult to satirize

Alazon

- A deceiving or self-deceived character, often the object of ridicule in satire
- Often blocking characters that are in charge of society
- Represent conventions which are interpreted as humorous, and normally stereotypical in nature

Agroikos

- Plain, common sense, conventional foil for the various *alazons* of society
- Often a rustic with pastoral affinities

Traits

Two necessities of satire: wit or humor founded on fantasy or a sense of the grotesque or absurd, and an object of attack.

Humor, like attack is founded on convention. All humor demands agreement that certain things, such as a picture of a wife beating her husband in a comic strip, are conventionally funny. To introduce a comic strip in which a husband beats his wife would distress the reader, because it would mean learning a new convention. Note: if this example is not funny, it is perhaps because the convention has changed since Frye first suggested it.

Philosophy vs. Satire

Philosophies of life abstract from life, and an abstraction implies the leaving out of inconvenient data. The satirist brings up this inconvenient data, sometimes, in the form of alternative and equally plausible theories.

The satirist will attack an individual who is a member of a larger group, thus the satirist is attacking the individual given more power by the group rather than the individual or the group.

Phases of Irony and Satire

Satiric

1. Existent society remains: There is no displacement of the humorous society in this phase, and the absurdity often does not occur to the audience until after the story has ended, when a realization of the futility of the society is realized; it takes for granted a world that is full of anomalies, injustices, follies, and crimes that is permanent and displaceable; it suggests the only way to survive is for one to live with his or her eyes open and his or her mouth shut
2. Criticism of society without change: Sources of values and conventions are ridiculed usually by a successful rogue who challenges the society's generalizations, theories, and dogmas by showing their ineffectiveness in the face of reality; the rogue does not, however, offer a positive solution or create a new society
3. Existent society is replaced by happy society: In irony and satire this is accomplished by attacking and criticizing even basic common sense; there is usually a shift in perspective to show societies in a different light
4. Individual's faults: This phase applies a moral and realistic perspective to tragedy
5. Natural law: The main emphasis is on the natural cycle, examining the steady unbroken wheel of fate or fortune
6. World of shock and horror: Presents human life in terms of largely unrelieved bondage and social tyranny

Ironic