
The Use of Irony to Emphasize Human Nature in Stephen King's Popsy and Kurt Vonnegut's Harrison Bergeron

Response to “Popsy” & “Harrison Bergeron”

In Popsy, by Stephen King, irony is used to make a point about human nature. Though this story is unrealistic and somewhat far-fetched, details make it seem realistic until the very end. The story begins with the main character, Sheridan, arriving to the Cousintown Mall. We soon discover that he is looking for a child to kidnap in order to pay back gambling debts. Upon finding a prime target, Sheridan initiates contact, discovering the boy had lost his ‘Popsy’. After some work, he gets the boy into his van, handcuffs him, and drives off to deliver him to Mr. Wizard. First, we have irony in the ease with which Sheridan kidnaps the boy. Passers-by see him talking to the boy, and solely based on his appearance decide that the situation is okay, and that Sheridan is a good guy, saying “A woman headed in glanced around with some vague concern.

'It's all right,' Sheridan said to her, and she went on” (Popsy). By saying this, King shows that not everything or everyone is what or who it seems to be. This woman seemed concerned, but after seeing this normal looking guy, and his saying that everything was fine, she deemed that the situation was okay. Ironically, this seemingly normal guy was in the process of kidnapping a child. Also ironically, the boy continuously warns Sheridan about the capabilities of his Popsy, that he is very strong, can fly, and will find him. Sheridan’s disbelief becomes ironic once Popsy literally lands on the moving vehicle and we find out that Popsy can, in fact, fly. The boy had tried to tell Sheridan, but he had not listened to his warnings. This story also points to the fact of human nature, that people will do whatever it takes to survive. Sheridan owes money to the wrong people, and the only way to save himself is by kidnapping children and delivering them to Mr. Wizard. Though there are signs that he does not like doing this, ultimately the message is conveyed that he, and humans in general, will do whatever is necessary to survive.

Harrison Bergeron, by Kurt Vonnegut, also uses irony to say something about human nature. This story, though more of a sci-fi story than horror, also uses details to make a futuristic, unrealistic story seem realistic or relatable. Set in the future, this story tells the reader of a world where everyone is equal. No one can be better than anyone else, and anyone born with a skill or talent has it taken away from them by the government. However, everyone is accepting of this world since they believe it is better than the old way, saying of the past “Pretty soon we'd be right back to the dark ages again, with everybody competing against everybody else. You wouldn't like that, would you?” (2). They refer to the past as the ‘dark ages’, implying its

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horridness, and also point out that neither of them would wish to be back in that time. Ironically, though they describe the past as horrible, the world that they currently live in is actually horrible. However, they are accepting of their new world and do not wish to break from it. This is seemingly part of human nature, not wanting to break from the norm or be different.

What I learned from these stories:

From these stories, I learned that it is possible to write of incredible things or fictional futuristic worlds, while still seeming realistic to the reader. King and Vonnegut somehow describe in great detail these things that do not exist, and still make them easily imaginable. Such as in Popsy, when I read the scene that Popsy lands on the van, it did not seem crazy or far-fetched, it just flowed with the rest of the story.

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