

National Types of Wit and Humor



O even suggest that our readers do not know what is humorous, would be a rather dangerous proceeding for the writer, but we will crave your indulgence while we define with the aid of various authorities what is Humor, Wit and Laughter.

That quality of the imagination which gives to ideas a wild or fantastic turn, and tends to excite laughter or mirth by ludicrous images or representations, is called Humor. It is less poignant and brilliant than Wit, hence it is always agreeable. Wit directed against folly often offends by its severity; humor makes a man ashamed of his follies, without exciting his resentment. Humor may be employed solely to raise mirth and render conversation pleasant, or it may contain a nice kind of satire.

Wit is the faculty of associating ideas in a new and unexpected manner. Pope aptly defines Wit as "What oft was thought but n'er so well expressed." Wit consists in assembling and putting together with quickness, ideas in which can be found resemblance and congruity, by which to make up pleasant pictures and agreeable visions to the fancy.

Laughter or convulsive merriment is an expression of mirth peculiar to man, consisting in a queer noise and configuration of features with a shaking of the sides, and successive expulsions of breath. Types of laughter are a true index of mental calibre. Who is not familiar with the loud "guffaw" of the shallow-pated rustic; the meaningless "titter" of the society dame; the brainless "tee-hee" of the silly young school girl?

The prosperity of the jest lies chiefly in the ear of him who hears, as does beauty in the eye of him who sees. Beyond that, it lies in the personality of the narrator. To analyse further is not of much avail. A request to define beauty once brought the apt reply: "That is the question of a blind man." So of humor: the only one requiring a definition of humor is he who has no sense of it, and all the definitions in the world would never make him understand what it was.

It is equally difficult to draw any exact line of division between Wit and Humor, though many have tried to do so. I have defined above. With and Humor, I leave it to the reader to make the precise division. They are in truth different sides of the same thing. Humor is nature, we know; Wit is art. Humor has