

Dramatic, Situational, and Verbal Irony

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Irony:

Irony is defined as:

The expression of one's meaning by using language that normally signifies the opposite, typically for humorous or emphatic effect.

Dramatic Irony

Dramatic Irony is...

When the audience or reader is aware of critical information of which the characters are unaware.

There are three stages of dramatic irony:

Installation – audience is informed of something the character does not know about

Exploitation – using this information to develop curiosity among the audience

Resolution – what happens when the character finally finds out what is going on?

A special category of dramatic irony is tragic irony, which was common in ancient Greek plays.



Examples of Dramatic Irony:

“If someone knows the killer is a stranger, from some other state, let him not stay mute... I pray, too, that, if he should become an honoured guest in my own home and with my knowledge, I may suffer all those things I’ve just called down upon the killers.” *Oedipus Rex*, Sophocles

“The yellow star? Oh well, what of it? You don’t die of it...” - *Night*, Elie Wiesel, 9

Beauty and the Beast, has examples of dramatic irony. The audience knows from the beginning of the movie that the beast is a prince, but Belle does not.

In *Snow White and the Seven Dwarves*, we know that the old woman bringing the apple is the wicked queen who wants to kill Snow White, but she does not. She purchases the apple, takes a bite, and falls.

In *Romeo and Juliet*, the former thinks Juliet is dead, but the audience knows that she only took a sleeping potion.

A girl in a horror film hides in a closet where the killer just went (the audience knows the killer is there, but she does not).

In a scary movie, the character walks into a house and the audience knows the killer is in the house.

Situational Irony

Situational Irony is...

When what happens to a character is different from what's expected to happen.

Irony involving a situation in which actions have an effect that is opposite from what was intended, so that the outcome is contrary to what was expected.

There is however a difference between situational irony and coincidence or bad luck.

When someone washes his car and it rains, that is just bad luck; nothing led him or her to think that it would not rain. However, when a TV weather presenter gets caught in an unexpected storm, it is ironic because he or she is expected to know the exact weather changes.



Examples of Situational Irony:

In Oedipus Rex, Oedipus' father tries to stop the prophecy of his son killing him by exiling him, thus fulfilling the prophecy.

"I find I do not belong here anymore, it is a foreign world.... I must think of Kat and Albert and Muller and Tjaden, what will they be doing? No doubt they are sitting in the canteen, or perhaps swimming- soon they will have to go up to the front-line again" *All Quiet on the Western Front*, Enrique Maria Remarque, 168-169. Previously, all Paul wanted to do was go home, but then he just wants to return to the front when he is home.

Someone buys a gun to protect himself, but the same gun is used by another individual to injure him. One would expect that the gun would keep him safe, but it has actually caused him injury.

Gunpowder was discovered in the search for the elixir for immortality.

A teacher failing a test.

A pilot with a fear of heights.

An anti-technology website.

A fire station burning down.

Verbal Irony



Verbal Irony is...

When words express something contrary to truth or someone says the opposite of what they really feel or mean.

There are two types of verbal irony:

Overstatement – when a person exaggerates the character of something.

Understatement – when a person undermines the character of something.

Verbal Irony and Sarcasm

Most of the time, sarcasm and verbal irony are used interchangeably. There is however a clear distinction between the two.

In most cases, sarcasm is used to insult or to cause harm.



Examples of Verbal Irony:

In literature, Mark Antony's speech following the assassination of Caesar is an excellent classic example. Mark Antony praises the assassin Brutus as an ambitious and honorable man while at the same time condemning him.

"I say that you, with both eyes, are blind."
Oedipus Rex, Sophocles. Teiresias says this to Oedipus, calling him blind, although he had sight physically.

In the *Scarlett Letter*, Dimmesdale's confession and discussion of his congregation that was meant to get him to be shunned only led to the people to do the opposite.

Exclaiming "oh great" after failing an exam.

As pleasant as a tooth canal.

As sunny as a winter day in Alaska.

This steal is as tender as a leather shoe.

The weather is as cool as a summer day in the Midwest.

A man looked out of the window to see the storm intensify. He turned to his friend and said "wonderful weather we're having!"

Questions:

How do the three ironies affect the audience's opinion of a work of literature?

How does the specific irony affect the story of the passage you chose?

Now you try:

Write or come up with an example for the three ironies.



Mnemonics

DVS:

Drive- Dramatic

Very- Verbal

Slow- Situational

Bibliography:

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