AIDS OF IRONY – A STYLISTIC DEVICE IN THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE

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Abstract
In this article, we’ll define and analyze the assorted kinds of irony and the way to use them in your writing. These types include dramatic, situational, and verbal irony, together with their offshoots and related terms. We’ll also give samples of each type in literature, films, and other media. Finally, we’ll debunk the concept of "rain on your wedding day" — which could be inconvenient but certainly isn’t ironic.

Key words: irony, types of irony, verbal irony, dramatic irony, situational irony.

I. Introduction
Irony may be a storytelling tool wont to create a contrast between how things seem and the way they really are beneath the surface. The term comes from the Latin word ironia, which suggests “feigned ignorance.” The three main types employed in literature are dramatic, situational, and verbal, as mentioned above. People often conflate irony with sarcasm, coincidence, or bad luck. While these concepts can have ironic characteristics, they’re not interchangeable with irony. So for instance, if you run to catch the bus and miss it by two seconds, that’s not ironic — unless the explanation you’re late is that you just were bragging about how you wouldn’t miss the bus. This creates an unexpected and comic contrast to what would otherwise just be an unfortunate situation. More on this later.

Dramatic irony occurs when readers are informed of great information that key characters are unaware of — basically, where we all know what is going to happen before they are doing. Tension rises between the purpose of revelation (when the reader first receives the key insight) and recognition (when the characters are finally brought into the loop). Again, Shakespeare’s an enormous fan of this one — even his comedies, such as Twelfth Night and A Midsummer Night’s Dream, are full of dramatic irony.

II. Main part
Dramatic irony doesn’t necessarily need to underline the entire storyline of a novel; it can also be used briefly to add punch to certain scenes. The Hobbit contains a perfect example of this, when Bilbo happens upon the ring while lost on a mountain. He puts it in his pocket and soon afterward encounters Gollum.

At this point, readers understand the significance of the ring and its importance to Gollum. However, Gollum does not yet realize he has lost the ring, and Bilbo doesn’t yet know who the ring belongs to. For this reason, the scene where Bilbo and Gollum engage in a game of riddles becomes even tenser for the audience.

In this case, the dramatic irony is also tragic irony; the characters in Romeo + Juliet find out the truth just moments too late to stop something horrible from happening. Alfred Hitchcock succinctly explains dramatic irony by describing two scenes: In the first, four people are sitting at a table, having a conversation, when a bomb explodes. In the second, we witness an anarchist enter the room, place a bomb under the table, and set it to
explode at 1pm. Moments later, we watch as four people sit at that table and begin a conversation. There is a clock on the wall that reads 12:45pm.

In the first scene, we experience a momentary surprise. In the second scene, an innocuous conversation becomes charged with prolonged suspense — dramatic irony.

2. Situational irony. When the reality contradicts an expected outcome, it's situational irony also called “the irony of events.” Again, just to clarify, irony isn't the identical as "coincidence" and "bad luck." If you purchase a replacement car so accidentally drive it into a tree, that's both coincidence and bad luck. However, if an expert stunt driver crashes into a tree on their way home from receiving a “best driver” award, that's situationally ironic. Example of situational irony: Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows

Throughout the seventh book of the Harry Potter series, readers follow Harry on his quest to find and destroy Voldemort’s six Horcruxes. At the end of the novel, we find out that there is a seventh Horcrux, so to speak — and it's Harry himself.

This unexpected twist also comes with the ironic realization that in order for Voldemort to die, Harry must sacrifice himself. So he willingly goes to meet Voldemort — and his own death. But when Voldemort uses the killing curse on Harry, it has the opposite of his desired effect. Harry lives while the Horcrux dies, bringing Voldemort that much closer to his greatest fear: mortality.

In this way, Harry being a Horcrux is actually a double case of situational irony. Harry believes he must die in order to vanquish his enemy, whereas Voldemort thinks he is killing Harry, but he's actually killing himself.

3. Verbal irony. The third and final major type of irony is verbal irony, in which the intended meaning of a statement is the opposite of what is said. Sound similar to sarcasm? Well, they’re not exactly the same: sarcasm is almost always used with the intent to denigrate someone or something, while irony isn’t necessarily. However, some would argue that sarcasm is simply one type of verbal irony, along with “overstatement” and “understatement” — which we’ll quickly cover right now.

As you might expect, ironic understatement creates contrast by undermining the impact of something, though the thing itself will be rather substantial or serious. For example, in The Catcher in the Rye, Holden Caulfield casually says, “I have to have this operation. It isn't very serious. I have this tiny little tumor on the brain.” Of course, Holden is lying here, which is why he can be so cavalier; nevertheless, the overall sentiment of this statement remains ironic.

On the other hand, ironic overstatement makes something small sound like a much bigger deal, in order to emphasize how minor it actually is. Say you bought a scratch card for a multimillion dollar lotto, and ended up winning a grand total of $5. If a friend then asked you whether you won anything and you said, “Yeah, total jackpot” — that’s ironic overstatement. Note: this is not to be confused with hyperbole, in which the overstatement isn’t ironic, but stems from wanting to convey just how massive something is — even if isn’t actually that big. (E.g. “I’m so tired, I could sleep for a million years.”)

One of literature’s greatest instances of verbal irony can be found in the very first lines of ol’ reliable (at least in terms of irony examples): Romeo and Juliet.

_Two households, both alike in dignity_  
_In fair Verona, where we lay our scene_  
_From ancient grudge break to new mutiny_  
_Where civil blood makes civil hands unclean._

Two households, both alike in dignity
In fair Verona, where we lay our scene
From ancient grudge break to new mutiny
Where civil blood makes civil hands unclean.
Though the first line may sound respectful, we can see by the end of this verse that Shakespeare doesn’t mean both households are alike in their great dignity. Instead, these lines imply that both households are equally undignified. And this introduction does more than elicit a chuckle from those who are familiar with the play; it also sets the tone for the entire story, notifying first-time readers that not all that glitters is gold. While both families might technically be considered nobility, their shared inability to act nobly toward one another ultimately leads to a bitter end for our tragic heroes.

2. Common phrases. Here are some things you might hear in everyday conversation that perfectly exemplify verbal irony. Many of them are similes comparing two completely unalike things, and/or instances of sarcasm.

“Clear as mud”
“Friendly as a rattlesnake”
“About as much fun as a root canal”
“Thank you so much” (about something bad)
“Fat chance!”

To provide insight into a character
While characters are usually not in control of the ironic situations that befall them, verbal irony very much depends on the character’s awareness — they intentionally state something that contradicts their true meaning. As a result, it can be used to reveal a little more about a character’s personality or motives. This does rely on well-planned timing and context, however. A character needs to be properly developed, and the tone of a scene needs to be precisely conveyed, in order for dialogue to come across as ironic. Otherwise, there's a danger that the character’s statement may go over the reader’s head or be taken literally.

Of course, sometimes writers use verbal irony simply to be funny. Whether it’s to highlight a sarcastic character or to lighten tension during a dark or difficult scene, verbal irony typically does a very good job of providing comic relief.

Socratic irony. This one is a bit of a bonus, because it's not technically a literary device — it's more of an "everyday life" type of irony. Socratic irony can be used to expose the flaw in another person's logic or to encourage the logical reasoning of another person, and it does so by the same means: feigning a lack of knowledge about a certain subject. Socrates was known to do both.

In the first example, Socrates would pretend to be ignorant about a subject, encouraging his counterpart to explain it to him — which would eventually reveal the counterpart's ignorance, instead.

The second example refers to the Socratic Teaching Method — a kinder version of Socratic irony, where the teacher pretends not to know about a subject in order to encourage the student to use their power of reasoning to explain it. This allows the student to build their own deduction skills without relying on the teacher.

Conclusion

Hopefully, you now understand the general purpose of irony: to create a contrast between appearances and underlying truths. When done properly, this can rather significantly alter a reader’s interaction with, expectations of, and insight into a novel. Indeed, irony is a hallmark of some of the most interesting and sophisticated writing in this day and age. Remember to use it with care, however, as it requires people to read between the lines. Irony can add a lot to the reading experience, but shouldn’t throw us so far off course that we can’t find our
way to the truth. With that in mind, go forth and be ironic!

References:
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