Irony

Definition of Irony

Irony is a figure of speech in which words are used in such a way that their intended meaning is different from the actual meaning of the words. It may also be a situation that may end up in quite a different way than what is generally anticipated. In simple words, it is a difference between the appearance and the reality.

Types of Irony

On the grounds of the above definition, we distinguish two basic kinds of irony i.e. verbal irony and situational irony. A verbal irony involves what one does not mean. When in response to a foolish idea, we say, “what a great idea!” it is a verbal irony. A situational irony occurs when, for instance, a man is chuckling at the misfortune of the other even when the same misfortune, in complete unawareness, is befalling him.

Difference between Dramatic Irony and Situational Irony

Dramatic irony is a kind of irony in a situation, which the writers frequently employ in their works. In situational irony, both the characters and the audience are fully unaware of the implications of the real situation. In dramatic irony, the characters are oblivious of the situation but the audience is not. For example, in “*Romeo and Juliet*”, we know much before the characters that they are going to die.  
In real life circumstances, irony may be comical, bitter or sometimes unbearably offensive.

Common Examples of Irony

Let us analyze some interesting examples of irony from our daily life:

* I posted a video on YouTube about how boring and useless YouTube is.
* The name of Britain’s biggest dog was “Tiny”.
* You laugh at a person who slipped stepping on a banana peel and the next thing you know, you slipped too.
* The butter is as soft as a marble piece.
* “Oh great! Now you have broken my new camera.”

Examples of Irony from Literature

Example #1

We come across the following lines in Shakespeare’s “*Romeo and Juliet*”, Act I, Scene V.

“Go ask his name: if he be married.  
My grave is like to be my wedding bed.”

Juliet commands her nurse to find out who Romeo was and says if he were married, then her wedding bed would be her grave. It is a verbal irony because the audience knows that she is going to die on her wedding bed.

Example #2

Shakespeare employs this verbal irony in “*Julius Caesar*” Act I, Scene II,

**CASSIUS**: “‘tis true this god did shake”

Cassius, despite knowing the mortal flaws of Caesar, calls him “*this god*”.

Example #3

In the Greek drama “*Oedipus Rex*” written by “Sophocles”,

“Upon the murderer I invoke this curse – whether he is one man and all unknown,  
Or one of many – may he wear out his life in misery to miserable doom!”

The above lines are an illustration of verbal and dramatic irony. It was predicted that a man guilty of killing his father and marrying his own mother has brought curse on the city and its people. In the above-mentioned lines, Oedipus curses the man who is the cause of curse on his city. He is ignorant of the fact that he himself is that man and he is cursing himself. The audience, on the other hand, knows the situation.

Example #4

Irony examples are not only found in stage plays but in poems too. In his poem “*The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*”, Coleridge wrote:

“Water, water, everywhere,  
And all the boards did shrink;  
Water, water, everywhere,  
Nor any drop to drink.”

In the above stated lines, the ship, blown by the south wind, is stranded in the uncharted sea. Ironically, there is water everywhere but they do not have a single drop of water to drink.

Function of Irony

Like all other figures of speech, Irony brings about some added meanings to a situation. Ironical statements and situations in literature develop readers’ interest. Irony makes a work of literature more intriguing and forces the readers to use their imagination and comprehend the underlying meanings of the texts. Moreover, real life is full of ironical expressions and situations. Therefore, the use of irony brings a work of literature closer to the life.