Irony

Irony occurs when there is a discrepancy between what is said and what is meant. There are three kinds of irony:

1. *verbal irony* is when an author says one thing and means something else.
2. *dramatic irony* is when an audience knows or comes to realize something that a character in the literature does not know.
3. *irony of situation* is a discrepancy between the expected result and actual results.

Irony involves the perception that things are not what they are said to be or what they seem. A writer may say the opposite of what he means, create a reversal between expectation and its fulfillment, or give the audience knowledge that a character lacks, making the character's words have meaning to the audience not perceived by the character. In verbal irony, the writer's meaning or even his attitude may be different from what he says: **Example:** "A fine thing indeed!" he muttered to himself.

An example of dramatic irony (where the audience has knowledge that gives additional meaning to a character's words) would be when King Oedipus, who has unknowingly killed his father, says that he will banish his father's killer when he finds him.

An example of situational irony would occur if a professional pickpocket had his own pocket picked just as he was in the act of picking someone else's pocket. The irony is generated by the surprise recognition by the audience of a contrast between an expected occurrence and/or outcome and what actually occurs (in this case, the pickpocket doesn't expect his own pocket to be picked). The surprise recognition by the audience often produces a comic effect, making irony often funny.

Irony is the most common and most efficient technique of the satirist, because it is an instrument of truth, provides wit and humor, and is usually at least indirectly critical, in that it deflates, scorns, or attacks.

The ability to detect irony is sometimes heralded as a test of intelligence and sophistication. When a text intended to be ironic is not recognized as such, the effect can be disastrous. Some students have taken Swift's "Modest Proposal" literally. And Defoe's contemporaries took his "Shortest Way with the Dissenters" literally and jailed him for it. To be an effective piece of sustained irony, there must be some sort of audience tip-off, through style, tone, use of clear exaggeration, or other device.