



Unveiling Shakespeare's Dramatic Irony: The Art of Deception and Revelation on Stage



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Abstract. William Shakespeare's critics often label the irony yielding a comic situation as 'comic irony': it is that irony whose effect is to arouse laughter, hence intensifies the audience's desired response. More often and powerful than comic irony is the tragic irony that undertakes to emphasize the limited scope of man's mind and understanding . It is, however, the assumption of the researchers that it is also most likely to speak of another type of dramatic irony, which can be labeled as 'semi-comic', 'semi-tragic', or even 'tragi-comic' to indicate its being neither comic per se nor merely tragic, but a mixture of both. It brings about an effect of "mingled pain and amusement." It renders laughter and fear at the very time; but the dramatic situation eventually decides which surpasses what . This scholarly article primarily focuses on the utilization of irony within three Shakespearean plays, namely Twelfth Night, Romeo and Juliet, and Othello. The analysis delves into the dramatic exploration and skillful manipulation of three distinct forms of irony within these works.

Keywords: Shakespearean drama, irony, Romeo and Juliet, Twelfth Night, Othello, types of irony





الملخص. يُعَدُّ مصطلح "السخرية الكوميدية" هو المصطلح الذي يستخدمه النقاد بشكل متكرر لوصف السخرية التي تؤدي إلى وقوع موقف كوميدي، والذي يتميز بتأثيره في إثارة الضحك وتعزيز رد الفعل المرغوب من الجمهور. بالإضافة إلى ذلك، فإن السخرية الكوميدية تكون أكثر وجودًا وتأثيرًا من السخرية العادية، حيث تهدف إلى التأكيد على القدرات المحدودة لعقل الإنسان وفهمه. وعلى الرغم من ذلك، يفترض الباحثون أيضًا وجود نوع آخر من السخرية الدرامية يمكن تسميته بـ "السخرية شبه الكوميدية" أو "السخرية شبه المأساوية" أو حتى "السخرية شبه الكوميدية المأساوية" للإشارة إلى أنها ليست كوميدية بالمعنى المطلق ولا مأساوية بالمعنى المطلق، بل تمثل مزيجًا من العنصرين. ينجم عن ذلك تأثير يجمع بين "الألم والتسلية الممزوجة"، حيث أنها تثير الضحك والخوف في آن واحد، ويتم تحديد النوع السائد في نهاية المسرحية. يركز هذه البحث بشكل أساسي على استخدام السخرية في ثلاث مسرحيات لشكسبير، وهي "ليلة الثاني عشر" و"روميو وجولييت" و"أوتيلو". يكشف التحليل استكشافًا دراميًا وتلاعبًا ماهرًا بأشكال السخرية الثلاثة المختلفة في هذه الأعمال.

الكلمات المفتاحية: السخرية، المسرح الشكسبير، روميو وجولييت، الليلة الثانية عشرة، أوتيلو، انواع السخرية الادبية.

1. Chapter I

The nuanced connotations of irony are widely acknowledged by both linguists and literary critics, yet it is the latter who extensively emphasize the diverse functions and intricacies inherent in this investigative tool. Geoffrey Leech, among linguists, clearly displays that most of the critical writings about irony are literature-oriented, and nothing "has been written [. . .] on the specifically linguistic aspect of irony" (Leech, 2014: p. 182). Nevertheless, he couples irony with hyperbole and litotes in the sense that the three probes categorically deal with a situation "suggesting that the speaker's feelings are too deep for plain expression," (Leech, 2014: p. 170) hence, the two-layered significance. Broadly speaking, irony is a form of expression that embodies a stark contrast between the "literal" and the "figurative," as well as between the "intended" meaning and the "received" interpretation. (Al-Kawwaz, 2002: p. 38).

Undoubtedly, this dual-layered significance gives rise to a notable instance of ambiguity, wherein irony seamlessly integrates "into the general pattern of tropes." (Leech, 2014: p. 172). In addition to hyperbole and litotes, irony is intricately connected to punning, thereby introducing a profound dimension to the interpretation of utterances. Consequently, each reading becomes an act of "a re-creation, a fresh endeavor to interpret [the speaker's] intention." (Mahood, 2003: p. 164)



In the realm of drama, irony often assumes the presence of a “double audience” (Leech, 2014: p. 171). One audience member is conscious of the speaker’s true intention, while the other interprets the expression at face value. This duality stems from the inherent disparity or incongruity between the ‘intended’ meaning and the ‘received’ interpretation, as well as the misalignment between the expression and its intended significance. Verbal or situational in nature, irony embodies “an oblique quality or mode of expression” (Cuddon, 2013: p. 371), wherein lies shared information between the audience/reader and the playwright regarding certain incidents or circumstances unbeknownst to the speaker/character. Consequently, the character acts based on their own limited understanding, while the audience/reader possesses additional insight. Nevertheless, the outcome of such predictions may align with what is expected, albeit not according to the character making the prediction (Abrams, 1999: pp. 134-135).

The speaker’s confident familiarity with the expression inadvertently creates a sense of defamiliarization for the audience, who typically possess greater knowledge than the speaker believes. This resulting defamiliarization amplifies the audience’s perception of the underlying meaning and, consequently, enhances their understanding of the thematic and aesthetic qualities inherent in the dramatic situation. The audience’s heightened awareness of the speaker’s predictions and their pre-existing knowledge accentuates the play’s rhythmic tempo and dynamic progression, whether it be a comedy or a tragedy.

As the Elizabethan attitude towards words and language is “much easier to feel than to define,” (Mahood, 2003: p. 169) it is always expected that they show distinct concern with, and interest in, the ‘power’ of language and the ‘authority’ of words (Al-Masdi, 2007: pp. 45-46). Shakespeare’s characters equally exhibit similar interest in their ability in ‘dealing’ with words. Irrespective of their status and intellect, Shakespeare’s comic figures are, for instance, endowed with a brilliant power to quibble, pun, and employ ironies. Equally powerful are his tragic figures, for their ‘wit’ is intensely quickened by their tremendously uncontrolled feelings and passions of love, hatred, and ambitions. In fact, this holds for both male and female characters in comedies as well as tragedies.

Shakespeare’s critics frequently categorize irony that generates a comedic situation as ‘comic irony’. This form of irony aims to evoke laughter and thereby intensify the desired response from the audience. While comic irony is prevalent and potent, there is another type of irony known as tragic irony,



which serves to underscore the limited capacity of human comprehension. However, it is the contention of the researchers that there exists another form of dramatic irony, which can be labeled as ‘semi-comic’, ‘semi-tragic’, or even ‘tragi-comic’. This label indicates that it is neither purely comic nor purely tragic, but rather a blend of both. It evokes a sense of “mingled pain and amusement” (Al-Kaffaji, 2004: p. 16), eliciting both laughter and fear simultaneously. However, the specific dramatic context ultimately determines which emotion prevails. The primary focus of this paper, however, centers on the exploration and skillful manipulation of irony in three Shakespearean plays: Twelfth Night, Romeo and Juliet, and Othello. These plays delve into and effectively utilize all three types of irony.

2. Chapter II

In line with his Elizabethan contemporaries, Shakespeare possesses a keen understanding of the profound impact language holds and its ability to elicit a significant response from the audience. As a skilled dramatist, Shakespeare is also aware of the impact of linguistic conciseness on the recipient. He recognizes that strategically crafted and economically employed language has greater potential to captivate and wield influence over the audience compared to elaborate discourse. As a poet and dramatist, Shakespeare employs condensed imagery as a substitution for intricate rhetorical language. In this approach, the function of language extends beyond direct communication and ventures into the realm of metaphorical representation, where imagery assumes a more vital role in evoking an expressive response from the audience.

Indeed, while Shakespeare may not have been a theorist in the conventional sense, it is evident that he possessed an innate understanding of the significance of poetics and rhetoric in enabling his dramatic discourse and dialogue to operate with greater power, thereby facilitating the realization of his artistic objectives. Since his romantic plays, Shakespeare has demonstrated a deep familiarity with the Elizabethan appreciation for both the mechanics of language and its lyrical qualities, evident in both his comedies and tragedies.

Twelfth Night employs a wide range of language devices and techniques in its dramatic execution. Within this romantic comedy of disguise, irony occupies a significant role, particularly in the form of comic irony, as a tool for manipulating language to drive the plot. The use of irony in Twelfth Night elicits a powerful impact on the audience’s response, enriching their understanding of the themes and their awareness of the story’s world. Moreover, irony plays a vital role in character portrayal, creating a sharp





contrast between what the characters believe or think they possess and the truth that the audience is aware of. Through irony, Shakespeare ridicules his characters while simultaneously entertaining the audience with the clever wit displayed in the ironic situations and dialogues. The characters' double-sided behavior, brought to light through their disguises, allows for the manipulation of language to portray their personalities and provide insights into their minds and intellects. This power of irony is particularly intriguing when applied to characters such as Malvolio, Orsino, Olivia, and Viola, who comically disguise themselves both physically (in Viola's case) and spiritually (in the case of the others).

Among modern critics, Malvolio is regarded as one of the most mistreated characters in *Twelfth Night*, ranking closely behind Shylock. Onstage, he becomes the target of scathing ridicule to such an extent that even Olivia, in a moment of reflection, sympathizes with his plight, acknowledging that Malvolio "hath been notoriously abused." Olivia goes further, proposing that if the "grounds and authors" of the trickery are exposed, Malvolio should be granted the role of both "the plaintiff and the judge/ Of [his] own cause" (Shakespeare, 2019; TW: V, I, 365, 391, 365-6).

Shakespeare portrays Malvolio as a foolish puritan, deeply self-absorbed in his perceived virtues. He deludes himself into believing that he is a nobleman, a belief reinforced by Olivia's treatment of him, which she admits involves "a more exalted respect than anyone else that follows her." Malvolio, adopting the identity of "Count Malvolio," eagerly anticipates the privileges and dignities associated with the position, relishing the opportunity to "have the humor of state" (TW: II, v, 31-2, 40, 59).

The irony in this situation arises from the stark contrast between Malvolio's expectations and the actual truth. While Malvolio indulges in fanciful daydreams of Olivia revealing her affection for him and urging him to reciprocate, (TW: II, v, 185-7) Olivia's true intention is quite different. As she acknowledges, Malvolio's melancholic demeanor and polite behavior make him a suitable servant for her unfortunate circumstances. In her own words, "[h]e is sad and civil/ And suits well for a servant with my [ill] fortunes" (TW: III, iv, 5-6). This disparity between Malvolio's deluded perception of being admired and loved, and the reality known to other characters and the audience, creates a captivating dramatic situation where irony serves as a biting mockery of the steward's vanity. The contrast between Malvolio's self-aggrandizement and the truth that unfolds becomes a source of both amusement and criticism.





The devil a puritan that he is, or anything constantly, but a time-pleaser, an affectioned ass, that cons state without book, and utters it by great swarths; the best persuaded of himself; so crammed, as he thinks, with excellences, that it is his ground of faith that all that look on him love him (TW: II, iii, 161-7)

Beneath the façade of Malvolio's feigned purity and self-denial, there exists a deeply rooted sense of self-importance, driven by his ambitious desire to win Olivia's affections in order to attain a higher social status. This ambition can be likened to the Duchess of Malfi, who, as mentioned, "married the yeoman of the wardrobe" (TW: II, v, 45). Malvolio's worldly aspirations go against the principles of his Puritan philosophy and commitments, leading him to be blinded by his own desires and ultimately becoming a target of humiliation. His inherent weaknesses betray him and cause him to disregard the boundaries of decorum, etiquette, and social class, leaving him devoid of the respect he so fervently seeks.

The satirical intention is similarly evident in the portrayal of other characters. Orsino, who believes himself to be deeply in love with Olivia, is no less prone to self-delusion. He is depicted as being completely consumed by feelings of love and overwhelming passion, to the extent that he is incapable of directing his thoughts towards any other matter:

O, when mine eyes did see Olivia first,
Methought she purged the air of pestilence;
That instant, was I turned into a hart,
And my desires, like fell and cruel hounds,
E'en since pursue me. (TW: I, i, 19-23)

However, he stubbornly rejects the notion that Olivia cannot reciprocate his love, firmly believing that such a possibility is inconceivable. Shakespeare astutely recognizes the contrast between Orsino's perception of himself and how the audience perceives him, a disparity that significantly contributes to the satirical impact of the situation. Ironically, Orsino demonstrates that his particular brand of love has the potential to consume an individual's faculties, rendering them unable to do anything but obsessively fixate on "the constant image of the creature/ That is beloved." Despite Olivia's plea to be left to her grief and melancholy, Orsino disregards her wishes and instead threatens to inflict harm upon her upon discovering his perceived betrayal by Cesario, transforming into a tyrannical brute.



Why should I not, had I the heart to do it,
Like to the Egyptian thief at point of death,
Kill what I love? (TW: V, I, 121-3)

Despite his grandiose demonstrations of love throughout the majority of the play, Orsino, ironically, is not genuinely in love; his feelings are merely infatuation (Ryan, 2000: p. 194). Without any remorse, he quickly abandons his pursuit of Olivia's love and redirects his affections towards Viola, whom he had previously believed to be a man, declaring her his "mistress" and "fancy queen" once he realizes that Olivia is forever out of his reach.

And since you called me master for so long,
Here is my hand; you shall from this time be
Your master's mistress. (TW: V, I, 336-8)

The stark contrast between Orsino's expectations and the eventual outcome clearly indicates that his feelings are not genuine, as he has had minimal interaction with Olivia throughout the play. As Wilders suggests, "For him, it is as good to have loved and lost as to have loved and won" (Wilders, 1988: p. 164).

Olivia, however, is not exempt from self-deception, as she too indulges in ludicrous pretense. Described as intelligent and solitary, she shares a similar loss with Viola, having lost a brother for whom she has resolved to dedicate herself to mourning. In her grief, Olivia veils her face and imprisons herself for a prolonged period of seven years: "like a cloistress" (TW: I, i, 26-8). This extreme self-disguise seems to be an attempt to conceal herself "to the point of disappearing," as she finds her pain unbearable. Nevertheless, her conduct exhibits a notable divergence from authentic bereavement, particularly as she adeptly engages in jests with the clown.

Clown: Good madonna, why mourn'st thou?
Olivia: Good Fool, for my brother's death.
Clown: I think his soul is in hell, madonna.
Olivia: I know his soul is in heaven, Fool.
Clown: The more fool, madonna, to mourn for your brother's soul, being in heaven. Take away the fool, gentlemen.
(TW: I, v, 71-7)



Furthermore, Olivia fails to maintain her position as a woman and the mistress of the house, as there is a notable contradiction between her ability to assert herself against suitors, particularly the Duke, and her powerlessness when encountering Cesario. Despite rejecting the Duke's advances, she becomes passionately infatuated with his page, who is merely a façade of masculinity:

Thy tongue, thy face, thy limbs, actions, and spirit,
Do give thee five-fold blazon. Not too fast; soft! Soft!-
Unless the master were the man. . . How now!
Even so quickly may one catch the plague? (TW: I, v, 313-6)

In her pursuit of Cesario, she transgresses the “conventional standards of behavior for women of her class,” jeopardizing her social standing by sending Malvolio after him (Ryan, 2000: p. 193). Olivia is fully aware that she is violating norms and etiquette, as women are traditionally not expected to initiate courtship. This departure from societal expectations and norms highlights her loss of control over her own communication and interactions. Olivia's inability to navigate the situation successfully and live up to the established image of herself makes her a target for ridicule, both in terms of verbal exchanges and situational comedy.

In the case of Viola, comic irony takes on a distinct form. The charming and practical Viola disguises herself as a male servant, adding to the comedic effect and the resulting mockery. Ironically, Olivia is enamored by this very disguise, believing Cesario to be a genuine man whom she can potentially marry. To Olivia's dismay, Viola sympathizes with her and laments her unfortunate predicament but cannot reveal the truth: “I am the man; if it be so, as 'tis,/ Poor lady, she were better love a dream.” (TW: II, ii, 27-8)

The theme of disguise, which is prevalent in Elizabethan literature, serves as a significant element in Twelfth Night, contributing to the utilization of comic irony. Viola's mistaken identity as Cesario leads most characters, particularly in the final portion of the play, to believe her to be the male persona she portrays. Ironically, despite Viola's loyalty, she is falsely accused of ingratitude and cowardice for actions attributed to her (such as taking Antonio's purse, being married to Olivia, and engaging in a fight with Toby). Antonio, who has been caring for Viola's brother for three months, is the first to mistake Viola for Sebastian. As he is apprehended by the Duke's men, he



requests his purse. Viola, taken aback, offers to give him half of her money in return, as a gesture of gratitude (TW: III, iv, 346-348).

Viola's willingness to offer financial compensation demonstrates her desire to express gratitude, unaware that Antonio's request is prompted by mistaken identity. This instance exemplifies the ironic situations that arise from Viola's disguise, adding to the overall comedic effect of the play.

For the fair kindness you have showed me here,
And part, being prompted to your resent trouble,
Out of my lean and low ability
I'll lend you something; my having is not much;
I'll make division of my present with you. (TW: III, iv, 378-82)

As Sebastian arrives in Illyria and the unresolved duel looms, Viola is confronted with yet another predicament. The scene unfolds with dramatic irony as Viola, disguised as Cesario, steps aside to allow Orsino to woo Olivia for the first time. However, in a twist of irony, Olivia mistakenly addresses Viola as "my lord" and later as "husband." Viola's denial fails to rectify the situation, and Orsino threatens to sacrifice "the lamb that I do love/ To spite a raven's heart within a dove." (TW: V, i, 134-5)

Adding to the irony, Olivia refers to the Friar, affirming their supposed prior contract of eternal love:

A contract of eternal bond of love,
Confirmed by mutual joinder of your hands,
Attested by the holy close of lips,
Strengthened by interchangement of your rings. (TW: V, i, 160-3)

The irony is heightened by Viola's earlier question (TW: I, ii, 2-4) about what she should do if her brother has gone to Elysium, as it finds a dramatic answer in the closing scene. Viola's journey culminates in her transformation from woman to man and ultimately to queen, allowing her to embrace a blissful life in an earthly Elysium. The resolution of Viola's journey adds to the richness of the dramatic irony present in the play's conclusion.

3. Chapter III

The juxtaposition of humor and eroticism in Romeo and Juliet serves as a key aspect of the Elizabethan audience's receptiveness to jest and sexuality.



The play encompasses a blend of both tragic and light-hearted irony, often influenced by the interplay between themes of brightness and darkness. Twelfth Night, on the other hand, primarily exhibits irony and lyricism through its vibrant and sunlit atmosphere, which contributes to the overall humor and satire. In Romeo and Juliet, however, lyricism takes on a different form, with its association with both the “fair day” and the “dark night,” highlighting the types of irony present in the play. The speeches of characters like Mercutio and the Nurse carry ironic implications that sharply contrast with those of Romeo and Juliet, creating a sense of foreboding for the audience due to the disparity between what is predicted and what actually occurs.

While Romeo and Juliet may not feature the same level of comic irony found in Twelfth Night, there are notable resemblances that should not go unnoticed. Many of the characters in Romeo and Juliet are imbued with melancholy, which inhibits their ability to utter comedic statements and steers them toward tragic circumstances. However, there are exceptions to this, mainly among the minor characters such as the Nurse, the servants, and Mercutio, who meets an untimely demise in the play. Interestingly, much of the comedy in the play is either heightened or suggested by these characters. Mercutio’s and the Nurse’s bawdy and erotic jests align with the imagery of the “fair day,” adding vibrancy, movement, and rhythm to the play. Simultaneously, they accentuate the tragic irony of the play’s outcome, particularly through the fiery temperament of Tybalt (Long, 1976: p. 227-8).

The Nurse consistently engages in jesting, displaying a propensity for levity and a predilection for sexually and erotically oriented jokes. However, in Romeo and Juliet, the potent force of sexuality is intertwined with violence. This fusion of elements, a subject of continual contemplation in Shakespeare’s plays, is regarded as a dangerous and volatile quality, yet one that is crucial and appealing to the audience (Long, 1976: p. 105). Moreover, this combination heightens the impact of the interplay between the comic and tragic ironies within the play.

An illustrative instance of the Nurse’s jesting can be found in her lighthearted yet ironic remarks regarding Juliet’s childhood accident, where she fractured her brow. This comedic exchange occurs at a significant juncture, coinciding with Juliet’s forthcoming discussion on marriage, thereby accentuating the underlying tragic implications of the jests (R&J: I, iii, 36-44).

Given that Shakespeare’s audience at the time was predominantly male, there existed a conducive environment for the frank and explicit exploration of sexual themes on stage. Consequently, the Nurse’s allusions and insinuations,



though imbued with humor, bear an ironic quality and are strategically employed precisely when Juliet is prompted to address matters of matrimony. This dramatic juxtaposition further underscores the inherent tragic nature of the jests.

Furthermore, the presence of the servants in the play contributes to the creation of a light-hearted atmosphere through their jesting and employment of comic irony. For instance, in Act IV, Scene v, following the purported demise of Juliet, a comic interlude ensues as Peter engages in banter with the musicians. The inclusion of such a humorous scene subsequent to such a “tragic” event suggests Shakespeare’s intention to satirize the characters who mourn Juliet, who is, in fact, not deceased.

O musicians, because my heart itself plays ‘My heart is full of woe;’ O! play me some merry dump to comfort me.

(R&J: IV, v, 107-8)

Mercutio, through his witty remarks and jests, primarily focuses on mocking Romeo’s love. His famous Queen Mab speech adds to the dynamic rhythm of the poetry, immersing the audience in the exhilarating realm of an imagination that is simultaneously rapid, intricate, and perceptive (Long, 1976: p. 224). The fusion of vibrant lyricism and kinetic energy embodies the environment in which the lovers reside and determines their fates. The imagery employed in the verse keeps pace with the escalating tempo of tragic events leading up to the play’s conclusion. Interestingly, even in his final moments, Mercutio maintains his light-hearted spirit, not allowing the weight of his wounds to dampen his demeanor, as he remarks, “No, ‘tis not so deep as a well nor wide as a church door, but ‘tis enough, ‘t will serve” (R&J: III, i, 101-3).

It is undeniable that the death of Mercutio marks the loss of the play’s comic spirit. Once Mercutio is killed, the tone shifts to that of a tragedy. Romeo himself reflects the dramatic irony of the situation when he states, “This day’s black fate on more days doth depend” (R&J: III, i, 125).

In the tragedy of Romeo and Juliet, the presence of jests and comic ironies occupies a distinct position that lies somewhere between the lightheartedness of Twelfth Night and the somberness of Othello. As a result, these elements do not undermine the tragic essence of the play. The introduction of tragedy is established right from the beginning, as the servants engage in a brawl that instills a sense of despair in both feuding families, setting the stage for the impending atmosphere of death that the ill-fated lovers will encounter.



The tragic narrative unfolds when Romeo, tormented by his unrequited love for Rosaline, learns of the Capulets' feast, which his beloved will be attending. In an attempt to console him, his friends propose that he attends the feast to compare Rosaline with other ladies present. Initially, Romeo rejects the idea, convinced that there is no one fairer than his beloved (R&J: I, ii, 97). However, he eventually agrees to go to the feast solely to catch a glimpse of Rosaline, disregarding any efforts made by his friends to lift his spirits.

Mercutio: . . . gentle Romeo, we must have you dance.

Romeo: Not I, believe me. You have dancing shoes

With nimble soles. I have a soul of lead

So stakes me to the ground I cannot move.

(R&J: I, iv, 13-6)

The initial sadness and negativity experienced by Romeo due to his unrequited love for Rosaline do not persist for long, as he soon encounters Juliet and, ironically, falls in love for the second time. The intensity and violence of this newfound passion differentiate it from his previous affection for Rosaline. Romeo's love for Juliet is characterized by its fervour and sensuality, highlighting the fusion of the 'lyrical' and the 'destructive' elements. While such powerful passion is typically associated with beauty and the creation of a fantastic world for lovers, it tragically engulfs their minds with thoughts of suicide, as expressed by Juliet's words: "My grave is like to be my wedding bed." (R&J: I, v, 139)

Despite only being together for a few hours, during which they declare their love and plan for marriage, Romeo and Juliet are optimistic about their future. When Romeo asks Friar Lawrence to officiate their marriage, the irony lies in the friar's belief that the union may bring about reconciliation between their feuding families, transforming their animosity into genuine love.

Juliet eagerly awaits her husband's arrival, comparing Romeo to "new robes" that she, like an impatient child, longs to wear. Unaware of Romeo's involvement in the death of Tybalt, Juliet remains unaware of the impending challenges they will face. However, Romeo arrives that night, and they spend the hours together, oblivious to her father's plans for her.

One might expect the newly-married couple, meeting under such circumstances and in light of Romeo's actions in Friar Lawrence's cell, to be consumed by despair and speak of how they can endure without each other.



However, Romeo maintains a belief that they will have a joyful day ahead, unaware of the tragic events that await them.

Juliet: O, think'st thou we shall ever meet again?

Romeo: I doubt it not; and all these woes shall serve

For sweet discourses in our times to come. (R&J: III, v, 51-3)

In contrast, Juliet remarks to Romeo that he appears pale, resembling a deceased individual lying in a grave: "As one dead in the bottom of a tomb./ Either my eyesight fails or thou look'st pale" (R&J: III, v, 56-7).

Upon her husband's departure, Juliet receives the devastating news that she is to be married to Paris. Despite her father's previous statement that Juliet has the right to choose her own spouse, he now imposes his will upon her. Despite Juliet's protests and expressions of gratitude, Old Capulet insists on the marriage, as Juliet is his heiress, and he is determined to control her marital destiny.

Old Capulet's demeanour changes drastically from his initial portrayal as a loving father. He threatens and intimidates Juliet, demanding that she complies with his wishes, even resorting to cruel statements:

Thank me no thankings, nor proud me no pouds,
But fettle your fine joints 'gainst Thursday next
To go with Paris to Saint Peter's Church,
Or I will drag thee on a hurdle thither.

...

I tell thee what: get thee to church o' Thursday,
Or never after look me in the face. (R&J: III, v, 153-6, 162-163)

Despite previously acknowledging Juliet's consent as a necessary component of any marriage proposal, Old Capulet's true intentions are revealed as he forces her into a union against her will. His anger and disappointment lead him to express regret for her very existence, illustrating the extreme measures he is willing to take to ensure his own choice of a husband for her.

Wife, we scarce thought us blessed
That God had lent us but this only child,
But now I see this one is one too much,



And that we have a curse in having her. (R&J: III, v, 166-9)

In contrast to Juliet's desperate situation, the Nurse, who has been a trusted confidante and caregiver to Juliet, aligns herself with the idea of the arranged marriage and abandons Juliet in her time of need. Left to suffer alone, Juliet seeks solace and guidance from Friar Lawrence, whom she sees as her last refuge after Romeo's departure. Ironically, Juliet seeks a "remedy" from the Friar, unaware that it will ultimately lead to her own death and that of her lover (R&J: IV, i, 72-73).

Upon her return with the vial of poison from the church, Juliet deceives her father by claiming that she has consented to the marriage he has arranged for her. Old Capulet, ironically overjoyed by what he perceives as Juliet's acceptance of the marriage, hastens the wedding, unknowingly hastening his own daughter's impending demise. He brings forward the date of the marriage, unknowingly bringing forward the date of her tragic death: "I'll have this knot knit up tomorrow morning.../ Why, I am glad on 't. This is well. Stand up." (R&J: IV, ii, 25, 29)

Old Capulet continues the preparations for the wedding, oblivious to the fact that Juliet is drinking a potion that will simulate her death. The irony lies in the fact that for Old Capulet, the word "church" symbolizes marriage, while for the audience, it foreshadows death: "Go, Nurse, go with her. We'll to church tomorrow." (R&J: IV, ii, 38)

Eventually, the moment arrives when the Nurse attempts to awaken Juliet, only to discover her seemingly lifeless body. The Nurse cries out and alerts everyone, and a chorus of lamentation ensues for the young "dead" lady.

All things that we ordained festival
Turn from their office to black funeral:
Our instruments to melancholy bells,
Our wedding cheer to a sad burial feast,
Our solemn hymns to sullen dirges change,
Our bridal flowers serve for a buried corse,
And all things change them to the contrary. (R&J: IV, v, 84-90)

Ironically, the characters in the play appear to show more concern and compassion for Juliet in her "death" than they did when she was alive. Their sudden outpouring of grief and mourning contrasts sharply with their previous disregard for her wishes. Just the day before, they were prepared to force her





into a marriage she had already determined to reject. This ironic shift in their attitudes highlights the tragedy of the situation and the missed opportunities for understanding and support.

Meanwhile, one might expect Romeo to be consumed by grief and on the brink of death in Mantua, unable to bear the separation from Juliet. However, as Act V begins, Romeo is unexpectedly in high spirits. He shares his dream of Juliet reviving him with a kiss, symbolizing a reunion and the restoration of life:

Her lips, that they have sucked, the precious honey,
Which bees do leave behind on every flower,
Will I take with me, and see by and by.
The Romeo that is dead is my poor heart,
So for a kinsman vexed him. Stay, Tybalt, stay!
Romeo, I come! This do I drink to thee. (R&J: V, i, 30-35)

This ironic twist in Romeo's state of mind adds another layer to the tragedy. Despite being separated from Juliet and facing the imminent news of her death, Romeo finds solace and hope in the thought of their eventual reunion.

Indeed, the events that unfold after Romeo's optimistic speech further emphasize the tragic irony of the play. Immediately after his hopeful words, Balthazar arrives and informs Romeo of Juliet's supposed death. This news shatters Romeo's newfound optimism, and he immediately seeks out poison to end his own life. In a poignant twist of irony, both Romeo and Juliet refer to the poison as a "remedy" or a "cordial" rather than a deadly substance.

Romeo makes his way to Juliet's grave, where he ends up engaging in a fatal duel with Paris and killing him. Tragically, shortly after Romeo's death, Juliet awakens to find her beloved lifeless beside her. In a heart-wrenching twist, she kisses Romeo, not to revive him as he had dreamed, but to join him in death. Their dual suicide becomes the ultimate expression of their love, albeit a tragic one. It is through their self-inflicted deaths that they believe they can preserve their love and escape the constraints of their feuding families.

The irony extends to the broader themes of the play as well. Juliet's reference to being the "hei to high fortune" (R&J: V, iii) takes on a bitter irony in the face of her tragic fate alongside Romeo. Similarly, Romeo's earlier speech about Rosaline, where he remarks that rejecting beauty cuts off all posterity (R&J: I, i), becomes ironic as it is Juliet's own posterity that is cut short due to her love and marriage with him.



Furthermore, the Friar's expectation that the marriage between Romeo and Juliet would bring an end to the feud between their families proves to be ironic. It is only after the young lovers have tragically perished that the two feuding families finally come to a reconciliation, but at the cost of their children's lives.

The play thus concludes with a profound sense of irony, as the characters' actions and the outcomes of their choices subvert expectations and lead to a tragic and bittersweet resolution.

4. Chapter IV

The kinetic lyrical tempo in Othello witnesses a distinctive departure from the world of the romantic tragedies, for the potent focus in Othello is essentially placed on the mind of man, and how it plays a significant role in affecting others' lives. Othello is a warrior-hero who extremely embraces marked idealism, and appears as "sumptuously Petrarchan and courteous in love, chivalric in bearing, magnificent in war," yet, he is equally "child-like if not childish" (Long, 1976: p. 37). This ironic mingle of extremes constitutes the incongruity between Othello's 'magnificent egotism' and the collapse of his personality between prediction of his statuses as a war hero and a lover: the pride and magnificence of occupation, and his management of marriage problems. It displays a sharp discrepancy that yields the irony both tragic and dramatic.

Othello's collapse both as a hero and a lover results from his failure to flexibly understand culture and control energies of sexuality and furious violence. It is, indeed, ironic that besides his excessive pride and attachment to ideal ethos, Othello equally blinds himself to the 'chaos' of life around him, which widely alienates him from the world of Venice and explores irremediable sexual jealousy potentially caused by the transport of words into live images. Plainly enough, Othello is subjected to influences that eventually attain and restore his sense of pride and grandeur. This ironic failure is tragic and the play is rich in instances that identify how the war-hero lover reacts even childishly, all by the effect of Iago's manipulation of words.

Othello is in fact a tragedy of words and intrigue; unlike Romeo and Juliet, it is characterized by a very minor space of faint smiles: there is hardly any room for jests; but the smile itself is blended with the bitterness of tragedy. The atmosphere of gloom and intrigue contributes to shaping the setting when a scheme is prepared by Iago who shrewdly conspires against both his leader and Cassio, for he thinks that Othello's choice of Cassio as his lieutenant is a





hideous military mistake. He believes that he is more entitled to the rank than the 'bookish' Cassio.

Three great ones of the city,
In personal suit to make me his lieutenant,
Off-capped to him; and, by the faith of man,
I know my price, I am worth no worse a place (Oth: I, i, 8-11)

To seek a *causus belli* for his malignity, Iago claims that he hates Othello because he suspects him of having a relationship with Emilia, Iago's wife. This claim serves as a convenient excuse for Iago to justify his malicious actions and to manipulate Othello's emotions. It is ironic because Iago's supposed motive is based on suspicion and jealousy, while in reality, it is his own twisted desire for power and revenge that drives his sinister plot. The irony lies in the fact that Iago uses the suspicion of infidelity, a theme that becomes central to the tragedy, as a weapon to bring about Othello's downfall.

In the darkness of night, Iago's plan begins to unfold. Taking advantage of the cover of darkness, he stirs up Brabantio against Othello, loudly proclaiming in the dead of night that Othello has abducted and married Desdemona. Iago's manipulation of language is skillful and subtle, as he possesses a formidable ability to use words and their imagery to achieve his desired outcome. He employs degrading and bestial images to undermine Brabantio's social status, planting seeds of doubt and animosity against Othello: "Even now, now, very now, an old black ram/ Is tugging your white ewe." (Oth: I, i, 88-9)

Ironically, when Iago encounters Othello, he addresses him as 'sir' and informs him that a villain has informed Brabantio about Othello's marriage. This irony lies in the fact that Iago, the true villain and orchestrator of the plot, pretends to be a loyal and concerned individual while secretly manipulating the situation to his advantage.

Nay, but he prated
And spoke such scurvy and provoking terms
Against your Honor,
That with the little godliness I have
I did full hard forbear him. (Oth: I, ii, 7-11)

More ironically, despite Othello's magnificent personality, he places complete trust in Iago and regards him as an 'honest' man: "A man he is of



honesty and trust.” (Oth: I, iii, 287) It’s not just Othello who trusts Iago, but all the other characters do as well. What makes it even more ironic is that it is Iago himself who, in his maliciousness, plans to bring harm to them all. Events unfold rapidly, playing right into Iago’s cunning schemes. The voyage to Cyprus, and the subsequent separation of Othello and Desdemona, contribute to the success of Iago’s vengeful plotting.

The shift in setting to Cyprus serves a dual purpose. It is not just a change in location but also symbolizes a shift in mood and fortunes. Apart from facilitating Iago’s schemes, it symbolically foreshadows Othello’s ill-fated circumstances as both a warrior and a lover. The stormy atmosphere highlights the contrast between the bright ambiance of Venice and the dark, violent world of Cyprus. The irony is heightened by the brief duration of their married life, dramatically emphasized by the physical separation of the newlyweds. Furthermore, it effectively implants Othello’s cultural mindset into an unfamiliar and volatile environment that is conducive to conflict and death. Othello is dispatched to battle external enemies, yet ironically, he becomes ensnared by an internal ‘green-eyed monster’ that exists only in his imagination, rendering him too vulnerable to conquer it despite his bravery.

To Othello’s dismay, Iago’s plans succeed unbelievably well. For instance, Cassio is immediately embroiled in a quarrel and loses his position as Othello’s lieutenant after stabbing Montano. Foolishly, Cassio places trust in Iago, unaware of the hidden evil within him: “You advise me well.” (Oth: II, iii, 335) When Cassio seeks advice, Iago instructs him to enlist Desdemona’s help in pleading to Othello on his behalf, marking the beginning of the second phase of his plan—to eliminate Desdemona.

And what’s he, then, that says I play the villain,
When this advice is free I give and honest (Oth: II, iii, 345-6)

Desdemona, on the other hand, displays complete sympathy towards Cassio’s predicament. Unaware of the ironic implications of her words, Desdemona fervently declares that she would rather die than allow his problem to go unresolved: “I would not kill thy unprepared spirit./ No, heaven forbid! I would not kill thy soul.” (Oth: III, iii, 1-2) Her prophetic anticipation of death amplifies the power of her words. This becomes instrumental in Iago’s plan as he subtly plants seeds of doubt in Othello’s mind, insinuating that Desdemona is betraying him with Cassio. Othello, consumed by sexual jealousy, is now depicted as weak and vulnerable:



Haply, for I am black
And have not those soft parts of conversation
That chamberers have, or for I am declined
Into the vale of years—yet that's not much—
She's gone. I am abused, and my relief
Must be to loathe her. (Oth: III, iii, 267-272)

Othello's insecurities, fuelled by Iago's manipulations, lead him to doubt Desdemona's fidelity and question his own worthiness. He becomes tormented by the idea of his wife's perceived infidelity, ultimately succumbing to the destructive force of jealousy. The irony lies in the stark contrast between Othello's initial grandeur and his descent into a jealous and vengeful state, all triggered by the manipulation of words and insinuations by Iago.

if I do prove her haggard,

.....
I'd whistle her off and let her down the wind
To prey at fortune. (Oth: III, iii, 260, 262-3)

Ironically, Iago manipulates the confused Othello by initially advising him to monitor Desdemona, but when he realizes that this approach is ineffective, he resorts to fabricating evidence of an affair to destroy Othello. This manipulation reaches a point where Othello demands visual proof from Iago, declaring his unwavering loyalty to him, stating, "I am bound to thee forever" (Oth: III, iii, 214). Consequently, Othello becomes convinced that his virtuous and innocent wife, Desdemona, whom Bradley characterizes as the embodiment of eternal femininity, has betrayed him with his trusted friend and loyal lieutenant, Cassio.

Desdemona [. . .] has been held to be divine ever since Cassio called her so. Bradley waxes lyrical: she is 'the "eternal womanly" in its most lovely and adorable forms simple and innocent as a child, ardent with courage and idealism of a saint, radiant with that heavenly purity of heart . . .', and so on. (Gaskin, 2018: p. 201).

In Act III, Scene iii, Desdemona insists that Othello reconsiders his decision concerning Cassio and, later, Desdemona asks Emilia to put her wedding sheets on her bed:



I have laid those sheets you bade me on the bed.
All's one. Good faith, how foolish are our minds!
If I do die before thee, prithee, shroud me
In one of those same sheets. (Oth: IV, iii, 22-25)

The irony in this instance lies in the contradiction between Desdemona's genuine intentions, aimed at reconciling Othello's relationship with Cassio, and the unintended consequences of her pleas. Unaware of Iago's manipulations, Desdemona unknowingly reinforces his false claims, intensifying Othello's fears, mistrust, and sexual jealousy. This irony arises from the incongruity between Desdemona's well-meaning intentions and the actual outcomes of her actions. Unable to restrain his violent impulses, Othello's treatment of Desdemona undergoes a significant transformation. She becomes enveloped in a sense of impending doom, as depicted when she requests Emilia to place her wedding sheets on the bed, symbolizing death and the dissolution of their marriage.

Undoubtedly, Othello possesses a substantial abundance of ironic implications, serving as the foundational underpinning of its narrative structure. The pervasive presence of irony in the play extends beyond Othello's personal downfall and encompasses the entire cast of characters. The victimization of Othello by Iago represents merely one facet of a broader tragic complacency, wherein every individual becomes ensnared in Iago's intricate web of schemes and intrigues. These machinations, bolstered by a diverse range of dramatic devices, including but not limited to tragic irony, assume a crucial role in driving the unfolding tragedy.

The multifaceted nature of irony infuses every layer of Othello, profoundly influencing its plot dynamics and character relationships. This pervasive irony underscores the play's thematic exploration of human fallibility, the insidious influence of manipulative rhetoric, and the cataclysmic consequences of unchecked jealousy. By deftly employing a variety of dramatic devices in addition to tragic irony, Shakespeare skillfully constructs a narrative that captivates the audience and prompts profound contemplation of the intricacies of human nature, as well as the pernicious forces that can emerge from within.

Ultimately, Othello stands as a testament to the intricacy and potency of irony as a narrative tool. The pervasive irony in the play unveils the tragic complacency that underlies Iago's schemes and intrigues, showcasing their far-reaching impact on the characters' lives. Through its meticulous integration of



various dramatic devices, Othello emerges as a work of profound complexity, inviting scholarly examination into the interplay between irony, tragedy, and the human condition.

Conclusion

In the works of William Shakespeare, tragic irony, comic irony, and tragicomic irony are deftly employed to create powerful and multi-layered narratives that delve into the intricacies of human emotions and relationships. Othello, Twelfth Night, and Romeo and Juliet stand as prime examples of Shakespeare's mastery in utilizing these different forms of irony to captivate audiences and provoke scholarly analysis.

Twelfth Night showcases Shakespeare's adeptness at using comic irony to create a lighthearted and entertaining atmosphere. Mistaken identities, cross-dressing, and misplaced affections abound, leading to humorous misunderstandings and delightful confusion. Viola, disguised as Cesario, becomes the object of Olivia's affection, while Olivia's steward Malvolio misinterprets a letter, believing Olivia loves him. This comic irony infuses the play with laughter and joy, as the audience revels in the characters' amusing predicaments.

In Romeo and Juliet, Shakespeare deftly employs tragicomic irony to underscore the tragic aspects of the play while also injecting moments of humor. The love between the young couple is fervent and genuine, yet their fate is sealed by a series of unfortunate events and misunderstandings. The friar's plan to reunite the lovers through a potion leads to unintended consequences, with tragic irony emerging as Romeo and Juliet meet their untimely demise. However, amidst the sorrow, moments of humor are found in the witty banter between the characters, such as the Nurse and Mercutio. This tragicomic irony adds depth and complexity to the play, making it a poignant exploration of love and fate.

On the other hand, in Othello, tragic irony is pervasive, driving the plot towards its inevitable and devastating conclusion. The audience is privy to information unknown to the characters, making them acutely aware of Iago's deceitful machinations. This dramatic irony heightens the sense of foreboding as the noble Othello, consumed by jealousy, tragically brings about his own downfall and that of Desdemona. The audience's helplessness in witnessing the characters' inexorable march towards tragedy enhances the emotional impact of the play.





In conclusion, William Shakespeare's plays exemplify his unparalleled skill in utilizing tragic irony, comic irony, and tragi-comic irony to create enduring and impactful narratives. Twelfth Night employs comic irony to elicit laughter and delight, Othello draws on tragic irony to evoke a sense of helplessness and foreboding, while Romeo and Juliet masterfully weaves tragi-comic irony to explore the complexities of love and fate. These different forms of irony not only serve as narrative devices but also invite scholarly analysis into the profound themes and emotions that Shakespeare's works continue to evoke in audiences today. Shakespeare's legacy as a literary genius is solidified through his adept use of irony, ensuring that his plays remain timeless and relevant for generations to come.

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