

Literary Analysis: Dramatic Irony

Dramatic irony is a contradiction between what a character thinks and what the audience knows to be true. Dramatic irony engages the audience emotionally; tension and suspense build as the audience waits for the truth to be revealed to the characters.

Shakespeare understood the importance of providing a balance of tragic and comic elements in his plays. Injecting humor into an otherwise tragic plot allows the audience to experience a range of reactions to the events unfolding onstage. These comic elements are used throughout the play:

- **Comic relief:** the introduction of a humorous character or situation into an otherwise tragic scene.
- **Puns:** plays on words using a word with multiple meanings or two words that sound alike but have different meanings. For example, the dying Mercutio makes a pun using the word *grave*: "Ask for me tomorrow, and you shall find me a grave man."

As you read, notice how Shakespeare uses dramatic irony, comic relief, and puns to balance strong emotion with humor and wit.



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Reading Skill: Summarize

To summarize long passages of Shakespearean dialogue, you should **break down long sentences** into shorter units of meaning.

- If a sentence contains multiple subjects or verbs, separate it into smaller sentences with one subject and one verb.
- If a sentence contains colons, semicolons, or dashes, treat these marks as periods in order to make shorter sentences.

Using the Strategy: Summarizing Chart

Use a chart like this one to help you break down long sentences.

