

The Tragedy of Romeo and Juliet, Act IV, by William Shakespeare
Literary Analysis: Dramatic Irony

Dramatic irony is a contradiction between what a character thinks and says and what the audience or reader knows is true. For example, in Act III, Capulet plans Juliet’s wedding to Paris. He does not know what you know: that Juliet is already married to Romeo. Dramatic irony involves the audience emotionally in the story.

Shakespeare knew his audience could become *too* involved in the intense emotion of *Romeo and Juliet*. Therefore, he made sure to include the following elements to lighten the play’s mood:

- **Comic relief:** a technique used to interrupt a serious scene by introducing a humorous character or situation
- **Puns:** plays on words involving a word with multiple meanings or two words that sound alike but have different meanings. For example, the dying Mercutio makes a pun involving two meanings of the word *grave*: “Ask for me tomorrow, and you shall find me a grave man.”

DIRECTIONS: Use the lines provided to answer the following questions.

1. Explain the dramatic irony in this passage from Scene i, when Friar Lawrence asks Paris to leave.

FRIAR. My lord, we must entreat the time alone.

PARIS. God shield I should disturb devotion!

Juliet, on Thursday early will I rouse ye.

2. In Scene ii, Juliet tells her father she will go through with the wedding, and he begins to make preparations for the celebration. How do Capulet’s words create dramatic irony?

CAPULET. My heart is wondrous light,

Since this same wayward girl is so reclaimed.

3. Juliet prepares for bed in Scene iii. Why is this exchange dramatically ironic?

LADY CAPULET. What, are you busy, ho? Need you my help?

JULIET. No, madam; we have culled such necessities

As are behoveful for our state tomorrow. . . .

LADY CAPULET. Good night.

Get thee to bed, and rest: for thou hast need.
