Definition – Literary Tropes



The word trope can refer to any type of figure of speech, theme, image, character, or plot element that is used many times. Any kind of literary device or any specific example can be a trope. Most often the word is used to refer to tropes that are widespread such as irony, metaphor, juxtaposition, and hyperbole, or themes such as ‘the noble savage’ or ‘the reluctant hero.’ It must be used multiple times to be a ‘trope’

**Examples:**

**Simile**: is explicit comparison of things that are similar at some points (Her smile was like the sun, / As warm as morning light upon the rose).

**Analogy**: comparison of things that are not identical (He stood as if he were an oak / Braced against the wind.

**Contrast**: is comparison by pointing out the difference (The lake was no more mirror than the sky is a pancake.)

**Allusion**: reference to something outside the text (He came, like Rome, to see, and stayed to conquer.)

**Oxymoron**: combines objects that look the opposite; i.e., "sweet bitterness," "terrible beauty," "burning chill," and so forth.

* **Metaphoric Tropes**

**Denotation**: the primary meaning, or dictionary definition of a word; e.g., “heart = a bodily organ, the purpose of which is to circulate the blood.”

**Connotation**: the second meaning of a word; e.g., heart in “an affair of the heart” means love.

**Context**: the environment surrounding a word situated in a phrase, clause, or larger grammatical unit.

**A Symbol**: a concrete object that is at the same time understood on a n abstract level. Bird- a symbol of freedom.

**Paradox**: is a metaphor or statement that combines terms which seem mutually exclusive, but which in fact are not— “Freedom is the prison of rebellion.”

**Allegory**: a whole story based on a metaphor, usually commenting on human lives.

* **Rhetorical Tropes**

**Apostrophe**: speaking to somebody who is not present or to a personified object.

**Dramatic Irony**: what appears true to a character is not what the audience or reader knows to be true. The audience knows more about a character’s situation than the character does, foreseeing an outcome contrary to the character’s expectation. In tragedies, this is called "tragic irony."

**Irony**: is witty mockery, usually effected by saying the opposite of what is actually meant.

**Sarcasm**: is heavy verbal irony, saying the opposite of what is actually meant is similar to the technique of irony, but the emphasis is on the bitterness.

**Situational Irony**: what appears likely to happen is not what actually happens.

**Structural Irony**: involves the use of a naïve hero or unreliable narrator, whose view of the world differs widely from the true circumstances understood by the author and readers.

**Verbal Irony**: words that appear to mean one thing really mean the opposite.