

Honest Deception

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Deception is the act of deliberately making someone believes something that is not true. But, if there is a kind of deception in which people are aware of the true state of affair and still wish to be deceived for the sake of entertainment, it is called **Honest Deception**.

Why does Leech choose this title for chapter ten of his book, “A Linguistic Guide to English Poetry”?

Actually, in this chapter Leech studies three types *Hyperbole* (figure of overstatement), *Litotes* (figure of understatement) and *Irony*. They are all connected in that in a sense they misrepresent the truth. Hyperbole distorts by saying too much, Litotes distort truth by saying too little, Irony distorts truth by saying or implying the opposite of what one feels to be the case. But all these three tropes misrepresent truth not for the sake of deception but for the sake of emphasis. The reader is aware of the true state of affairs. This proviso of the awareness of the true state of affairs applies to all the three tropes. Here, the title of this chapter is “Honest Deception”. He explains that we should not expect literal truth in Literature but a more profound kind of truth which eludes (avoid) bald factual statement.

To illustrate these general points, Leech takes a closer look at the contrasting devices of hyperbole and litotes.

Hyperbole:

It is a way of describing something by saying it is much bigger, smaller, worse etc., than it actually is. To say “This chair weighs a ton.” is an example of hyperbole.

Exaggeration or use of hyperbole can be seen in everyday life. If we say “She is as old as the hills”. Definitely the statement is outside the bounds of positivity and is too fantastic to be believed. But, to emphasize how old she is people exaggerate.

Such absurdities occur with more serious intent in literature. Hyperbole is concerned with personal values and sentiments, with making subjective claims. For example, Cob in *Every Man in His Humor* says:

“I do honor the very flea of his dog”.

"I loved Ophelia: forty thousand brothers could not, with all their quantity of love, make up any sum".

Litotes

Litotes is a way of expressing your meaning by using a word that has the opposite meaning with a negative word such as “not” for example by saying not bad when you mean “good”.

Rich ←————→ Poor

Rich ←──────────────────────────────────→ **Poor**

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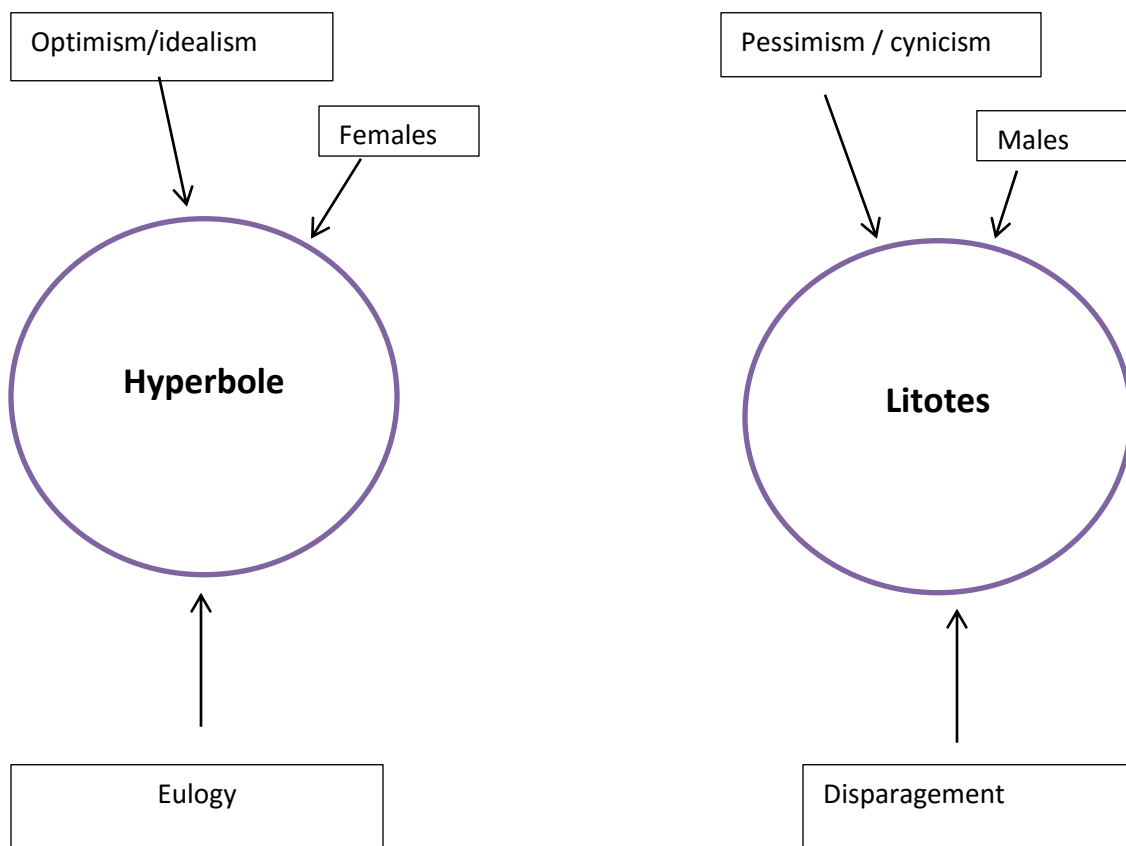
Not a pauper **a pauper**

Litotes is not a common feature of later English verse. It is a stock device of the poetry of the Anglo-Saxon period because it reflected the ethic of warfare. The ideal warrior expressed himself by deeds rather than words: his use of *ly* was reserved and defensive, communicating his attitudes by implication rather than by open declaration. Therefore, in “The Battle of

Malden” for example, the poet talks about cowards feeling from the battle field as “They did not care for wars”.

Comparison of Litotes and Hyperbole:

Both hyperbole and litotes serve to color the expression of personal feelings and opinions. Litotes expresses an overt lack of commitment, and so implies a desire to suppress or conceal one’s true attitude, but paradoxically this may, like hyperbole be a mode of intensification, suggesting that speaker’s feelings are too deep for plain expression.



Leech discovers an association of sex. Hyperbole seems predominantly a characteristic of female speech and litotes of male speech, so that “It wasn’t too bad” as an expression of approval would almost certainly come from a man and “It was absolutely fabulous”. From a woman (178)

Irony

Irony is the use of words that are the opposite of what you really mean. Leech begins discussion of irony by talking about the “mask of irony”. He explains that the basis is the human disposition or tendency to adopt a pose, or to put on a mask. In irony there is an element of concealment and this concealment is meant to be found out. If you dress up as a rabbit at a fancy dress ball, you do not intend to be mistaken for a rabbit. In the same way mask of irony is not normally meant to deceive anyone – if it does, then it had the wrong effect. In other words when someone takes an ironical remark at face value, we are justified in saying that he has failed to appreciate the irony of it.

What is this mask of irony?

Let us see what Leech says about the nature of the mask of irony. Irony can have the mask of praise or neutrality. The mask of approval may be called the Quest or direct meaning, and the disapproval behind the mask the Covert or oblique meaning.

Tone is an important aspect of the mask of irony. For example exaggerated politeness behind the use of titles like “Sir” , “Madam”, “your highness” for people to whom they are clearly inappropriate. We can call this mock-politeness. For example if somebody wants to say “your jokes are stale and your facts wrong”. He can say with mock-politeness.

“The right honorable gentleman is indebted to his memory for his jests and to his imagination for his facts”

Mock-politeness is a common feature of parliamentary rhetoric. Without “The Right Honorable”, which preserves an act of decorum, the insult would lose its force and zest.

This mask of politeness or mock-politeness reminds us of pope, mock-epic style in “The Rape of the Lock” and “The Dunciad” where he satirizes the variety and triviality of the court, and the mental bankruptcy of the contemporary world of letters. This mock-rhetoric style shows incongruity of loftiness mixed with vulgarity of tone.

Besides, popes, swift and fielding are also known for employing irony for moral or ethical criticism. For examples, in “A Modest Proposal”, he contends with apparent gravity that the solution to the social problems of Ireland lies in cannibalism by referring to a year old healthy child as “a most delicious, nourishing food”. So, it is tone which the ironist adopts which subtly sharpens the edge of the irony.

Context, in addition to tone, is also an important aspect of irony and helps in deciphering irony. For example Mark Antony refers to Brutus repeatedly as an “honorable man” but at the same

time he makes his listeners believe that he is not an honorable man because he has killed Caesar.

Innuendos

An innuendo is an insinuation or remark concerning a person or thing, especially of a depreciatory (degrading) kind. It is a special kind of ironic statement which is remarkable for what it omits rather than for what it mentions. For example, a woman wants to tell the court that her husband is “a habitual drunkard” but she omits it and says “my husband has been sober several times in the past five years”. Her declaration would technically not be an accusation.

Sydney Smith’s comment on Macaulay’s powers as a conversationalist

“He has occasional flashes of silence that makes his conversations perfectly delightful”.

It is interesting, says Leech that in the above two examples of drunkard husband and Macaulay, inserting the word “only” will remove the ironic mask and make one directly aware of the writer’s real attitude.

“My husband has only been sober several times”.

And

“He has only occasional flashes of silence”.

This is because “only” has the force of contrary to expectation, “no more than” and makes it explicit that what is described is regarded as in some way extraordinary by normal standards of judgment.

CONCLUSION

To conclude, we can say that, Leech has, in discussing irony, explained how irony contains a mask and how it can be unmasked by using only and by being familiar with the context of the statement.