

Antithesis

(Greek for “setting opposite”, from ἀντί ‘against’ and θέσις ‘position’)

The contrasting of two ideas by using words of opposite meaning in consecutive phrases. (hell/heaven; order/disorder, man/God, joy/pain etc.)

Examples:

To err is human; to forgive, divine.

Alexander Pope, *An Essay on Criticism*

Too black for heaven, and yet too white for hell.

John Dryden, *The Hind and the Panther*

Now is the winter of our discontent

Made glorious summer by the sun of York;

William Shakespeare, *Richard III* (I, i, 1-2)

Oxymoron

(Greek, from *oxy* ‘sharp’ and *moros* ‘dull’. The meaning is “that which is sharp *and* dull.”)

A figure of speech that combines two normally contradictory terms.

Examples:

1st witch When shall we three meet again?

In thunder, lightning, or in rain?

2nd witch When the hurlyburly’s done,

When the battle’s lost and won.

William Shakespeare, *Macbeth* (I, i, 1-4)

So foul and fair a day I have not seen

William Shakespeare, *Macbeth* (I, i, 38)

O anything of nothing first create!

O heavy lightness, serious vanity!

Misshapen chaos of well-seeming forms!

Feather of lead, bright smoke, cold fire, sick health!

William Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet* (I, i, 174-177)

I like a smuggler. He is the only honest thief.

Charles Lamb