

**BỘ GIÁO DỤC VÀ ĐÀO TẠO  
TRƯỜNG ĐẠI HỌC DÂN LẬP HẢI PHÒNG**

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**KHÓA LUẬN TỐT NGHIỆP**

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**HẢI PHÒNG - 2010**

**HAIPHONG PRIVATE UNIVERSITY  
FOREIGN LANGUAGES DEPARTMENT**

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**GRADUATION PAPER**

**A STUDY ON IRONY IN SOME O' HENRY'S  
SHORT STORIES**

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**Class:**

**NA1002**

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**HAI PHONG - 2010**

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**TRƯỜNG ĐẠI HỌC DÂN LẬP HẢI PHÒNG**

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**Nhiệm vụ đề tài tốt nghiệp**

Sinh viên: .....Mã số:.....

Lớp: .....Ngành:.....

Tên đề tài: .....

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# Nhiệm vụ đề tài

1. Nội dung và các yêu cầu cần giải quyết trong nhiệm vụ đề tài tốt nghiệp (về lý luận, thực tiễn, các số liệu cần tính toán và các bản vẽ).

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2. Các số liệu cần thiết để thiết kế, tính toán.

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3. Địa điểm thực tập tốt nghiệp.

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## CÁN BỘ HƯỚNG DẪN ĐỀ TÀI

### Người hướng dẫn thứ nhất:

Họ và tên:.....

Học hàm, học vị:.....

Cơ quan công tác:.....

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Họ và tên:.....

Học hàm, học vị:.....

Cơ quan công tác:.....

Nội dung hướng dẫn:.....

Đề tài tốt nghiệp được giao ngày 12 tháng 04 năm 2010

Yêu cầu phải hoàn thành xong trước ngày 10 tháng 07 năm 2010

Đã nhận nhiệm vụ ĐTTN

*Sinh viên*

Đã giao nhiệm vụ ĐTTN

*Người hướng dẫn*

*Hải Phòng, ngày tháng năm 2010*

**HIỆU TRƯỞNG**

**GS.TS.NGŨT *Trần Hữu Nghị***

## PHẦN NHẬN XÉT TÓM TẮT CỦA CÁN BỘ HƯỚNG DẪN

### 1. Tinh thần thái độ của sinh viên trong quá trình làm đề tài tốt nghiệp:

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### 2. Đánh giá chất lượng của khóa luận (so với nội dung yêu cầu đã đề ra trong nhiệm vụ Đ.T. T.N trên các mặt lý luận, thực tiễn, tính toán số liệu...):

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*Hải Phòng, ngày ..... tháng ..... năm 2010*

**Cán bộ hướng dẫn**

*(họ tên và chữ ký)*

**NHẬN XÉT ĐÁNH GIÁ**  
**CỦA NGƯỜI CHĂM PHẢN BIỆN ĐỀ TÀI TỐT NGHIỆP**

1. Đánh giá chất lượng đề tài tốt nghiệp về các mặt thu thập và phân tích tài liệu, số liệu ban đầu, giá trị lí luận và thực tiễn của đề tài.

2. Cho điểm của người chấm phản biện :

*(Điểm ghi bằng số và chữ)*

Ngày..... tháng..... năm 2010

**Người chấm phản biện**

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Hai Phong, June 2010

Student

Hoang Anh Tuan



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# I. INTRODUCTION

## 1. Rationale

Irony is a special rhetorical figure used to express the opposite meaning or one's negative attitude to something, therefore, irony always concludes the clear expression and maybe excessiveness. The listener often receives the over-praises or opposite ones, s/he needs to be praised while receives a blame, and needs a criticism but receives a praise. Particularly, the speaker shows the illogical statement, for instants presented below:

[1:1] A mother knows her son gets good mark, she is very happy but keeps calm and says that “*Chó ngáp phải ruồi thôi mà*”.

[1:2] When Brazilian midfielder Richardo Kaka won the FIFA prize for the best player in year 2007, in an interview, his mom said that her son was a lucky man and fortunately gained this prize. However, in reality, Kaka tried his best and deserved for this prize.

[1:3] “*Nó làm như nó đẹp giai lắm. Các cô con gái Hà Nội ai cũng phải lòng nó*” (27:165)

In two examples above, two mothers want to heighten their sons but use the understatement to show their purposes. And in the example [1:3], the speaker uses “*đẹp giai lắm*” and “*phải lòng nó*” to ironize the appearance of the person called as “*nó*”.

Through the examples above, irony really proves its worth not only in daily communication but also in literature, especially in novels and short stories. Many authors in over the world used irony to show their points of view and achieve successes. Because of time limit and a student's knowledge, so I just focus on irony in literature, typically, a famous American author O. Henry with many ironies in his stories.

Choosing this subject, I hope that it will be useful to learners of English, and to whoever loves English literature and O. Henry.

## **2. Aims of the study**

This paper aims at:

- Presenting, classification, sources, problems in English
- Outlining some pairs of irony
- Irony used in O' Henry's short stories
- Comparing irony used in O' Henry's and one used in Nguyen Cong Hoan

## **3. Scope of the study**

Due to time limitation, the writer's knowledge and to make the study easy to understand and obtain the learners awareness of the wide use of irony, the writer focuses on analyzing the irony used in some O' Henry's short stories.

## **4. Method of the study**

This Graduation paper is carried out with view to help learners understand irony in use and in literature (through O. Henry's stories). The American writer from his real life stored and bequeathed for the next generations the big property. This study is fulfilled due to the *materials collected* from different sources to give the theoretical background such as introduction about words and word meaning as well as O. Henry's writings. Then, *an analysis* on irony in English including definitions of irony, classification, sources and its problems is used

## **5. Design of the study:**

This study consists of three parts of which the second is the most important one:

- Part one is the INTRODUCTION to the study, it states the background, the scope of the study, the method of the study and the way to collect data.
- Part two refers to the main content that consists of three chapters.

The first chapter is the theoretical background. It focuses on some general definitions about lexicology, words, and word meaning which relate to irony.

The second chapter stresses on irony in English including definitions, classifications, sources and its problems, and the expression of Irony in some O' Henry's short stories.

The third chapter states a small comparison between irony used in some O' Henry's short stories and one used in Nguyen Cong Hoan's.

- Part three is the CONCLUSION of the whole study.

## PART II: DEVELOPMENT

### CHAPTER I: THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

#### I. WORDS

##### 1. Definitions of the words

The term “**word**” is used to specify an intermediate structure which is smaller than a whole phrase and yet generally larger than single sound segment. Therefore, word may be defined differently.

Firstly, word is a unit of speech that, as such, serves the purposes of human communication. Thus, word can be defined as a unit of communication.

Secondly, the word, viewed structurally, possesses several characteristics. A word is the smallest free form (an item that may be uttered in isolation with semantic or pragmatic content) in a language, in contrast to a morpheme, which is the smallest unit of meaning. A word may consist of only one morpheme (e.g. wolf), but a single morpheme may not be able to exist as a free form (e.g. the English plural morpheme -s).

Typically, a word will consist of a root or stem, and zero or more affixes. Words can be combined to create other units of language, such as phrases, clauses, and/or sentences. A word consisting of two or more stems joined together form a compound. A word combined with an already existing word or parts of a word form a portmanteau.

Word may refer to a spoken word or a written word, or sometimes, the abstract concept behind either. Spoken words are made up of phonemes, and written words of graphemes

(<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Word>)

According to Greek, *lexis* means words and *logos* mean study or science of words. So, lexicology is a study or science of words. The word is, therefore, the central important element in lexicology.

According to Hoang Tat Truong (1993:11), word is defined “*A word is a dialectical unit of form and content, independent unit of language to form a sentence by itself*”; for example, “*book, bookish, go, eat,...*” and so on. Each word here can stand independently and it still has meaning.

According to Jackson and Amvela (2005:50), word is considered “*an uninterruptible unit of structure consisting of one or more morphemes and which typically occurs in the structure of phrase*”. The morphemes are the ultimate grammatical constituents, the minimal meaningful units of language. For example, the different forms of the verb “*learn*”, i.e. learn, learns, learning, learnt are separated words grammatically; similarly, the plural, the plural possessive and the possessive of the word “*baby*”, all are represented by the pronunciation /beibiz/ but spelt babies, babies’, baby’s respectively.

Word may be defined differently depending on whether the focus is on its representation, the thought which it expresses or purely formal criteria. Word can be defined basing on the phonological, lexical, grammatical points of view and semantics. However, the definition of word according to Hoang Tat Truong (1993:11) seems to be the most satisfactory.

Words in English can be classified as the lexical and grammatical ones. Lexical words including nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs have fairly independent meaning and may be meaningful even in isolation or in a series. It also referred to a “*lexeme*”. A lexeme is a lexical unit of the vocabulary. The term “*lexeme*” is sometimes used to denote a lexical word and this helps avoiding confusion with the term “*word*” in general. In contrast, grammatical words including articles, prepositions, and conjunctions, forms indicating number or tense and so on do not automatically suggest any identifiable meaning.

## 2. Types of words

Simple words, derived words and compound words are three types of word, according to Hoang Tat Truong.

### 2.1 Simple words

A simple word consists of a root morpheme:

[1:4] E.g: *Chalk, tall, girl...*

### 2.2 Derived words

A derived word is one that consists of a root and one or more derivational morphemes:

[1:5] E.g.: *Marvelously, engineer, comfortable...*

### 2.3. Compound words

A compound word is one that has at least two roots, with or without affixational morphemes:

[1:6] E.g.: *keyboard, iron-mound, object-ball, wishy-washy...*

Words are often considered linguistic sign, similar to natural and conventional signs. They do not have meaning but rather are capable of conveying meanings to those who can perceive, identify and interpret. Words go together to form sentences which are capable of conveying meanings-the meanings of the individual words and the meaning that comes from the relation of those words to one another. The linguistic “*sign*” is a mental unit including two faces, which cannot be separated: a concept and an acoustic image. The term “*sign*” is quite a general expression that can refer to sentences, clauses, phrases, words or morphemes and an alteration in the acoustic image must make a difference in the concept and vice versa. Since the word is a linguistic sign, a discussion of “*word meaning*” focuses on the relationship between the two faces of the sign.



## II. WORD MEANING

### 1. Definitions of meaning

There are many ways to define the word meaning, let's study this one:

Meaning is a notion in semantics classically defined as having two components:

- Reference, anything in the referential realm denoted by a word or expression, and
- Sense, the system of paradigmatic and syntagmatic relationships between a lexical unit and other lexical units in a language.

(<http://www.sil.org/linguistics/GlossaryOfLinguisticTerms/WhatIsMeaning.htm>)

Meaning can be more or less described as a component of the word through which a concept is communicated, in this way endowing the word with the ability of denoting real objects, qualities, actions and abstract notions.

(Nguyen Manh Hung, 2006:43)

For example:

[1:7] *A dove and the olive branch mean the peace*

([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Peace\\_symbols](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Peace_symbols))

The dove and the olive branch, or a dove carrying an olive branch in its beak, are ancient symbols of peace. Olives are naturally associated with peace because, practically speaking, one cannot cultivate an olive grove in a war zone. Many years of peace are necessary to grow olive trees, which take several years to produce their first fruit (and can live for 500 years). Farming itself is a peaceful occupation, but the olive has special qualities that can be associated with peace and harmony

[1:8] *That red flag means danger*

(Nguyen Hoa, 2001:7)

In saying this, one would not normally be implying that the flag had plans to endanger anyone; one would be pointing out that it is being used to indicate that there is danger in the surrounding environment, such as the use of explosives in a nearby quarry or deep lakes. Similar to the red flag use of the verb “*mean*”, in one respect at least is its use in:

[1:9] *Smoke means fire*

(Nguyen Hoa, 2001:8)

In two examples above, one thing is said to be a sign of something else: from the presence of the sign, a flag or smoke, anyone with the requisite knowledge can infer the existence of what it signifies, danger or fire, as the case may be.

However, there is also an important difference between [1:5] and [1:6]. Whereas smoke is a natural sign of fire, causally connected with what it signifies, the red flag is a conventional sign of danger: it is a culturally established symbol.

[1:10] *What does ‘capitalist’ mean to you?*

(Nguyen Hoa, 2001:8)

‘*Mean*’ in this sentence implies that ‘what does ‘capitalist’ convey to you’. After all, we can see that there are many different meanings of the word ‘mean’. It follows that, if semantics is defined as the study of meaning in language, there will be many differences but interesting, branches of semantics.

## **2. Types of meaning**

There are two types of meaning are lexical meaning and grammatical meaning

### **2.1. Lexical meaning**

Lexical meaning is one of two types of meanings found in words. Lexical meaning is the individual meaning each word has in the system of language. It is the realization of concept and emotion and brings together the different forms of the same word.

(Hoang Tat Truong, 1993:53)

When we hear or see the word *house* for example, our concept is realized and the picture or image of the house occurs to our mind. Therefore, this realization is called lexical meaning. On the other hand, the work *doctor*, it refers to person who works in hospital in order to treat patients. Lexical meaning is divided into two types. They are direct meaning and indirect meaning.

#### **2.1.1. Direct meaning**

As stated by Truong, Direct meaning is the meaning that directly denotes something without comparing it or associating with other things, i.e. we do not need a context. Direct meaning is also called literal meaning.

For example:

[1:11] *Where is the key for turning off the radiator?*

(Tran Kim No, 1993:1113)

The word “**key**” here is a small instrument using to open or close the door, or to start or stop the engine of a vehicle.

For example:

[1:12] “*He fell and hit his head.*”

Or

“*The ball hit her on the head.*”

(Tran Kim No, 1993: 935)

The word “**head**” is the part of the body containing the eyes, nose, mouth and brain. Etc. We need not the comparison or association with other things to understand it. Therefore, head in this sentence is direct meaning. It differs from indirect meaning which is discussed in the following.

### **2.1.2. Indirect meaning**

Indirect meaning is the meaning that indirectly denotes something. To understand it we have to compare it or associate with other things, i.e. we need contexts. Indirect meaning is also called “*figurative/transferred meaning*”.

(Hoang Tat Truong, 1993:57)

On hearing the word ‘*key*’ for example, we are most likely to think of a small metal instrument using to open or lock the door. This is the direct meaning of ‘*key*’. On the other hand, if we come across the sentence. “He said that always listening to other ideas is the key to success”, we will think of the meaning of ‘the way to gain the success in life’, which is an indirect meaning.

It happens the same with the word head in the sentence ‘He is the *head* of the class’. “*head*” means the leader. Besides, there are many other direct meanings of head such as person in the sentence: ‘I count 29 heads at the party’ and beginning in the sentence: ‘The head step planned’.

Therefore, we can infer that to understand direct meaning, we need not the comparison but to understand indirect meaning, we need the comparison with direct meaning.

## **2.2. Grammatical meaning**

Grammatical meaning can be defined as an expression in speech of relation between words based on the contrastive features of arrangement in which they occur. This meaning is abstract and generalized.

(Hoang Tat Truong, 1993:53)

Every language has a grammatical system and different language has some-what different grammatical systems. We can explain what grammatical meanings are by showing how the sentence ‘some students are listening to music’ differs from other sentences that have the same or a similar, referring expression and the same predicate. The grammatical system of English makes possible the expression of meanings like these:

Statement vs. Question:	
Some students are listening to music	Are some students listening to music
Affirmative vs. negative	
Some students are listening to music	Some students are not listening to music
Present continuous vs. past	
Some students are listening to music	A student is listening to music
Plural vs. singular	
Some students are listening to music	A student is listening to music
Indefinite vs. definite	
Some students are listening to music	The students are listening to music

From the above comparison, we can conclude that grammatical meanings are expressed in various ways: *the arrangement of words* (referring to expression before the predicate, for instance), *by grammatical affixes* like the –s attached to the noun “student” and the –ed attached to the verb “listen”, and *by grammatical words or functional words*, like the ones illustrated in those sentences: be (in the form are), not, some, the. These words do not automatically suggest any identifiable meaning. They are elements like preposition, articles, and conjunctions, forms indicating number or tense, and so on.

Let’s consider the forms:

a) ***Eat, eating, ate, eaten***

b) ***Put up with, kick the budget, dog in the manger***

c) *Listen, speak, read, write*

How many words are there in the group (a)? Four or one? There are four with different meaning, but they have a shared meaning, which is lexical and other meaning of a grammatical nature added to the lexical meaning. Then we say that different forms of the word will share the same lexical meaning but different grammatical meanings.

Group (b) presents a different sort of problem. The expression “put up with” combines the forms of “*put*”, “*up*”, and “*with*”, but its meaning is not the combination of their separate meaning. Therefore, “*put up with*”, in the sense of “*endure*”, “*tolerate*” is a single word. The same in the cases of “*kick the budget*” which means “*die*” and dog in the manger when it refers to a person who will not let others share what he has, even though he does not use it himself. Here we find that some lexical words and functional words are put together to form a new meaning word.

In group (c), all of those words are verbs but each word denotes a different action. Therefore, different words may share the same grammatical meaning but different lexical meanings.

Besides, full word forms, which are forms of the major part of speech, such as nouns, verbs and adjectives have both lexical and grammatical meaning. For example, *child* and *children*, being forms of the same lexeme “*child*” have the same lexical meaning. When the lexemes have certain semantic relevant grammatical properties (it is a noun of particular kind), the two word-forms also share some parts of categorical meaning. Difference between singular and plural (in those languages in which it is grammatical) is another part of the categorical component of grammatical meaning. For example, the word “*father*”, it has lexical meaning (male, parent) and also grammatical meaning (singular, count noun, it can play the function of subject, object, complement)

All in all, lexical and grammatical meanings do not exist separately but always go together to make up the meaning of the word.

### III. WHAT IS IRONY?

#### 1. Definitions

Irony (from the Ancient Greek), meaning hypocrisy, deception, or feigned ignorance is a situation, literary technique, or rhetorical device, in which there is an incongruity or discordance that goes strikingly beyond the most simple and evident meaning of words or actions Irony also itself derives from eironeia, meaning “*dissembling*”. To this day, irony often depends on understatement, which requires the audience to recognize that the author, speaker, or character has purposely described something in a way that minimizes its evident significance.

For illustration:

[1:13] “*Saint Palermo!*”, Argentina fans called Martin Palermo when he missed three penalties for Argentina in a single international match against Colombia for the Copa América1999. Moreover, he is featured in the Guinness Book of World Records for professional football player who missed a greatest number of penalties in a match. People now usually refer to Palermo as a *syndrome*.

[1:14] In folk song,

“*Chuột chù chê khi rằng hôi*

*Khi nói phải rồi cả họ mày thom*”

(<http://www.viethoc.org/phorum/read.php?20,1288,35284,quote=1>)

The phrase “*cả họ mày thom*” expresses the opposite meaning. Old people want to ridicule the behavior of the person who is always self-important.

For example:



[1:15] *When the speaker says, "It was a bit cold.", when he has lost a leg due to frost bite*

Furthermore, Henry Watson Fowler, in *The King's English*, says "any definition of irony though hundreds might be given, and very few of them would be accepted must include this, that the surface meaning and the underlying meaning of what is said are not the same."

For example,

[1:16] *"When a man slightly says with his tear-drops "Sure, what the hell, it's only cancer..."*

(<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/ironym>)

[1:17] *"There was never anyone as educated"*, in describing someone who is uneducated.

American Heritage Dictionary's secondary meaning for irony: ***"incongruity between what might be expected and what actually occurs"***. This sense, however, is not synonymous with "***incongruous***" but merely a definition of dramatic or situational irony. The majority of American Heritage Dictionary's usage panel found it unacceptable to use the word ironic to describe mere unfortunate coincidences or surprising disappointments that ***"suggest no particular lessons about human vanity or folly"***.

## **2. Types of irony**

Several types of irony exist, all of which may be classified under one of three broad headings: **verbal irony**, **situational irony**, and **dramatic irony**.

### **2.1. Verbal irony**

Verbal irony is a disparity of expression and intention: when a speaker says one thing but means another, or when a literal meaning is contrary to its intended effect.

### **2.2. Situational irony**

Situational irony is the disparity of intention and result: when the result of an action is contrary to the desired or expected effect.

### **2.3. Dramatic irony**

Dramatic irony is the device of giving the spectator an item of information that at least one of the characters in the narrative is unaware of (at least consciously), thus placing the spectator a step ahead of at least one of the characters.

## **3. Irony in use**

### **3.1. Ironic art**

One point of view has it that all modern art is ironic because the viewer cannot help but compare it to previous works.

[1:18] For example, any portrait of a standing, non-smiling woman will naturally be compared with the Mona Lisa; the tension of meaning exists, whether the artist meant it or not.

(<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Irony>)

### **3.2. Comic irony**

Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* begins with the proposition “*It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife*”. In fact, it soon becomes clear that Austen means the opposite: women (or their mothers) are always in search of, and desperately on the lookout for, a rich single man to make a husband. The irony deepens as the story promotes his romance and ends in a double wedding.

### **3.3 Metafictions**

Metafictions are kinds of fiction that self-consciously address the devices of fiction. It usually involves irony and is self-reflective. Metafiction (or “romantic irony” in the sense of roman the prose fiction) refers to the effect when a story is interrupted to remind the audience or reader that it is really only a story.

[1:19] Examples include Henry Fielding’s interruptions of the storyline to comment on what has happened, or J.M. Barrie’s similar interjections in his book, Peter Pan. The concept is also explored in a philosophical context in Sophie's World, by Jostein Gaarder.

(<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Irony>)

### **3.4. Post-irony**

Post-irony is a technique that uses the juxtaposition of empty symbolism and loaded evocations to create humor whose roots lie not so much in the mocking of any one ideology proper so much as in mocking the stupidity that lies at the roots of the propagation of modern ideologies.

### **3.5. Irony as infinite, absolute negativity**

There is a tradition that sees irony not as a limited tool in the sense of the three types of irony above, but as a disruptive force with the power to undo texts and readers alike. Briefly, it insists that irony is, in Kierkegaard's words, "*infinite, absolute negativity*". Where much of philosophy attempts to reconcile opposites into a larger positive project, Kierkegaard and others insist that irony whether expressed in complex games of authorship or simple litotes must, in Kierkegaard's words, "swallow its own stomach". Irony entails endless reflection and violent reversals, and ensures incomprehensibility at the moment it compels speech. Not surprisingly, irony is the favorite textual property of deconstructionists.

## CHAPTER TWO: THE EXPRESSION OF IRONY IN SOME O. HENRY'S SHORT STORIES

Irony is a contradiction or incongruity between appearance or expectation and reality. This disparity manifested in a variety of ways. A discrepancy may exist between what someone says and what he or she actually means, between what someone expects to happen and what really does happen, or between what appears to be true and what actually is true. Furthermore, the terms *irony* may be applied to events, situations, and even structural elements of a work, not just to statements. Irony is commonly employed as a “*wink*” that the listener or reader is expected to notice so that he or she may be “*in on the secret.*” An irony that goes unnoticed, after all, fails to achieve its effect. Speakers and authors may even use irony as a mode of expression rather than make discrete ironic statements. In this sense, one might describe an author's very tone as ironic.

Irony often gives the impression of deliberate restraint. Instead of flatly stating a point, the ironist's speech is often tongue-in-cheek, deliberately polished and refined. The ironist's approach to his or her subject may even seem unemotional, a wry illustration of his or her point. For this reason, irony has often been called the subtlest rhetorical form, for the success of an ironic statement or passage depends upon the audience's recognition of the discrepancy at issue. The ironist wears a mask that must at certain points be perceived as a mask. Irony's paradoxical nature makes it one of the most difficult forms to master.

Irony has also been called the subtlest comic form. Although understatement may give rise to raised eyebrows or even outright laughter, irony that evokes these reactions is more likely to be achieved through the use of hyperbole, or overstatement, which involves deliberate exaggeration.

Many authors choose irony to make their writings more interesting, O' Henry who always brings the humor and interest for readers through ironic pen is not exception. Let's discover these points below.

## **I. Verbal irony.**

“Verbal irony, also called *rhetorical irony*, is the most common kind of irony. Verbal irony is characterized by a discrepancy between what the speaker or writer says and what he or she believes to be true. More specifically, the speaker or writer using verbal irony will say the opposite of what he or she actually means.”

(<http://edweb.tusd.k12.az.us>)

For instance:

[2:1] Imagine that you have come home after a day on which you failed a test, wrecked your car, and had a fight with your best friend. If your roommate asks you how your day went and you replied: “***Great day, Best ever***” you would be using verbal irony.

[2:2] “- *As soft as concrete*

- *As clear as mud*

- *As fun as cancer*

- “*as pleasant and relaxed as a coiled rattlesnake*” (Kurt Vonnegut from *Breakfast of Champions*)”

(<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Irony>)

Verbal irony is sometimes viewed as one of the tropes, which are figures of speech, since it is a rhetorical device that involves saying one thing but meaning the opposite. Verbal irony can be the most difficult rhetorical device to master, since successful usage requires recognition by the reader or audience, even as it may demand authorial subtlety. Missing a verbal irony

may lead the reader or audience to adopt a belief opposite to the one intended by the author.

Tone probably keys the listener in to the irony more than any other element, but knowledge of the circumstances surrounding the statement may also spur recognition of the speaker's true meaning.

[2:3] The roommate from the aforementioned example might, for instance, pick up on the irony either via the speaker's tone or because he or she knew that the speaker had suffered one or more calamities that day.

Since readers do not have the benefit of hearing a particular speaker's tone, knowledge and the general tone of the work play a greater role in accurately identifying ironic statements.

Now, let us consider the following example extracted mainly from some famous short stories of O' Henry to study on verbal irony.

### **1. A retrieved reformation**

[2:4] *"Me?" said Jimmy, in surprise. "Why, I **never cracked** a safe in my life."* (3:1)

*"Jimmy Valentine đáp trong vẻ ngạc nhiên:*

*-Tôi áy à? Cả đời tôi **chưa từng phá** một két sắt nào cả!"*

This dialogue is extracted from "A retrieved reformation" which talks about the way to amend of a famous bank thief Jimmy Valentine. And in this dialogue, Jimmy talks to his superintendent in prison. Two of them also clearly understand each other. They only want to make fun for the last meeting (Jimmy, after this conversation, is set free).

## 2. Make the whole world kin

[2:5] - *"Gallons," said the burglar. "If all the snakes I've used the oil of was strung out in a row they'd reach eight times as far as Saturn, and the rattles could be heard at Valparaiso, Indiana, and back."* (5:5)

- *Dùng cả chục lít. Nếu mọi con rắn tôi đã dùng được nối nhau kéo dài, chúng có thể dài đến sao Thổ, và tiếng chuông đuôi có thể vang đến Indiana rồi vọng về.*

The next illustration is extracted from "Make the whole world kin" of O' Henry, a funny story describes an ironical circumstance when a burglar breaks into a house, he bullies the house owner who is a patient of rheumatism, but he also suffers this disease. At this moment his rheumatism re-attacks him, therefore he can't carry out the robbery, in contrast, he actually sympathizes with his victim and they decide to go out and find the ways to cope with their same pain.

In saying above, the burglar shows his sadness and hopelessness through the ironic voice, he lists and exaggerates the medical method with snake, but this is in desperation.

## 3. The Pimienta pancakes

[2:6] - *"Two out of three,' says I. 'Birds just naturally seem to draw my fire wherever I go.'*

- *"Nice shooting,' says the sheep man, without a flutter. 'But don't you sometimes ever miss the third shot? Elegant fine rain that was last week for the young grass, Mr. Judson?' says he.* (6:7)

- *"Ba con chết hai rồi đó", tớ nói, "hình như cứ gặp chim ở đâu là tự nhiên tớ phải rút súng."*



- “**Bắn cừu lắm**” – gã nuôi cừu nói, không hề xao xuyến – “nhưng thỉnh thoảng có bao giờ ông bạn bắn trượt phát thứ ba không? Trận mưa tuần vừa qua thật là tuyệt cho cỏ non, ông Judson nhỉ.”

A story from the time O’ Henry lives in Texas, United States, “The Pimienta Pancakes” is about sad love story of a writer’s friend who is the main character. He loves a beautiful girl but she gets married with another. In the example above, the man proves his worth with his rival in love (a sheep man who after that becomes the husband of that beautiful girl), he shows off his skill in bird shooting (which is not reality) and his rival makes an ironical answer to irritate him.

Moreover, in this context the attitude of the person who makes the irony also helps him send the ironic message to his rival, “*says the sheep man, without a flutter*”.

#### **4. A Newspapers story**

[2:7] “*Besides these more **important chidings and requisitions upon the store of good citizenship,...***” (14:1)

“*Ngoài những **bài trách cứ và yêu sách** quan trọng này đối với cái kho tình thần công dân tốt,...*”

In this statement, O’ Henry uses the “**good citizenship**” what should be “**bad citizenship**”. With this way, writer makes the reader understand more about the consciousness of American in that time.

#### **5. One thousand dollar**

[2:8] “*There is a Miss Hayden, a ward of my uncle, who lived in his house. She’s a quiet thing - musical -the daughter of somebody who was **unlucky** enough to be his friend*” (7:2)

“*Còn Hayden nữa, bác cháu nhận nuôi cô ấy từ nhỏ, giờ vẫn đang sống trong nhà ông. Cô ấy khá lặng lẽ - giỏi âm nhạc – là con gái của bác*

cha mẹ nào đó đã **không may** có cái điểm phúc được làm bạn với ông bác cháu.”

In this example, the speaker talks about the lucky of the other with ironic voice. He uses “**unlucky**” to mean “**lucky**” and show that he doesn’t satisfy.

## 6. A Chaparral Prince

[2:8] “Now, you go on, and you read that scratchin’ out loud and in plain United States language to this here **company of educated society**” (12:8)

“Bây giờ, mày tới đây, mày đọc to lên mấy chữ gà bới đó trong tiếng Hiệp Chúng Quốc rõ ràng cho **đám xã hội có học thức này nghe**”.

This illustration is extracted from an O’ Henry legendary story “A Chaparral Prince” which describes an interesting rescue of robbers to a young girl

The saying above is said by a robber, and he ironizes himself. Of course, the group of robbers can not be a “**company of educated society**”. So, in this situation, he only intends to make fun.

## 7. The brief debut of Tindy

[2:9] “She was safe **abroad at any hour of the twenty-four.**”

(15:4)

“Vào bất kì giờ nào trên cả **hăm bốn tiếng cô cũng an toàn** khi đi ngoài phố”.

The story teller mentions the safety of character, who is an ugly girl, in twenty-four hours not to praise her absolute safety (or her happiness) but means her sadness and unfortunate fate.

Finally, the verbal irony in some illustrations of O’ Henry’s short stories shows the effects in use and makes fun for readers. Writer skillfully chooses the multiform of verbal irony to create the personality of characters. He subtly takes full advantages of verbal irony through dialogues.

## II. Situational Irony

“Situational irony, also called *irony of situation*, derives primarily from events or situations themselves, as opposed to statements made by any individual, whether or not that individual understands the situation as ironic. It typically involves a discrepancy between expectation and reality.”

(<http://edweb.tusd.k12.az.us>)

Or simpler than, situational irony is defined what happens is different from what we expect.

For example:

[2:10] “*When John Hinckley attempted to assassinate Ronald Reagan, all of his shots initially missed the President; however, a bullet ricocheted off the bullet-proof Presidential limousine and struck Reagan in the chest. Thus, a vehicle made to protect the President from gunfire was partially responsible for his being shot”*

(<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Irony>)

[2:11] After successfully going over Niagara Falls in a barrel, the stunt man goes home, takes a shower, slips on the soap, and breaks his leg.

In these examples, the first situational irony occurs when the person who is mentioned tried his best to assassinate the President but failed, however one of his missed shot struck his target. The second example is about a stunt man who went over the great falls but breaks his leg only when he takes a shower. Obviously, what happens is different from what they want.

Let’s study the examples below:

[2:12] -*A police station was robbed.*

-*A math teacher failed some easy operations of his grade four pupil.*

The police station was considered as the safest place and a math teacher nearly can not fail any grade four’s operation.

[2:13] Now, we study a typical illustration of situational irony in music field. The scenarios described by Alanis Morissette in her song *"Ironic"* (1995) also exemplify situational irony: dying the day after you win the lottery; working up the courage to take your first airplane flight and then crashing; finding the man of your dreams only to discover that he has a beautiful wife; and so forth.

### ***"Ironic"***

*An old man turned ninety-eight  
He won the lottery and died the next day  
It's a black fly in your Chardonnay  
It's a death row pardon two minutes too late  
And isn't it ironic... don't you think*

*It's like rain on your wedding day  
It's a free ride when you've already paid  
It's the good advice that you just didn't take  
Who would've thought... it figures*

*Mr. Play It Safe was afraid to fly  
He packed his suitcase and kissed his kids goodbye  
He waited his whole damn life to take that flight  
And as the plane crashed down he thought  
And isn't it ironic... don't you think*

*Well life has a funny way of sneaking up on you  
When you think everything's okay and everything's going right  
And life has a funny way of helping you out when  
You think everything's gone wrong and everything blows up*

*In your face*

*A traffic jam when you're already late*

*A no-smoking sign on your cigarette break*

*It's like ten thousand spoons when all you need is a knife*

*It's meeting the man of my dreams*

*And then meeting his beautiful wife*

*And isn't it ironic...don't you think*

*A little too ironic...and, yeah, I really do think...*

*Life has a funny way of sneaking up on you*

*Life has a funny, funny way of helping you out*

*Helping you out*

.....”

([http://www.lyricsmania.com/ironic\\_lyrics\\_alanis\\_morissette.html](http://www.lyricsmania.com/ironic_lyrics_alanis_morissette.html))

In literature, we go on with O' Henry's short stories. He has a good sense of humor and liked to depict ironic situations.

### **1. The gift of Magi**

“The gift of Magi” is considered one of the most famous and interesting Noel stories in every age. It is about the sacrifice of a poor married couple when Christmas Eve is coming. Both husband and wife give up their most prized possessions in order to give something to complement the other's most prized possession. The woman sells her beautiful long hair to buy a platinum fob chain for the man's watch; the man sells his watch to buy the woman tortoiseshell combs to hold up her hair. The ironic conclusion of the story is that both Della and Jim were unable to use the gifts they had gotten from each other.

## 2. The shock of doom

[2:14] *"I lunched there yesterday. To-night I couldn't buy a five-cent cup of coffee."* (16:3)

*"-Không hề gì cả. Hôm qua tôi ăn trưa ở đây. Tối nay tôi không thể mua nổi một cốc cà phê đáng giá 5 cent."*

[2:15] *"It's undiluted Hades, this city, "One day you're eating from china; the next you are eating in China - a chop-suey joint."* (16:3)

*"-Địa ngục trần gian, cái thành phố này! Một ngày anh ăn uống ở bên Tàu, ngày kế anh ăn uống với đồ sứ Tàu – mấy món đồ sứ nứt nẻ"*

Two utterances indicate the bad lucks of speaker from the different times. The opposite circumstances are mentioned: *"lunch there (there is a luxurious restaurant) yesterday"* and *"To-night I couldn't buy a five-cent cup of coffee"*, one day *"eating from China"* and the next day *"eating in China chop-suey joint"*. O' Henry subtly uses irony of situation to make readers laugh and moreover, we feel sorry for the unlucky fates of characters.

## 3. The ransom of the Red Chief

The next one is "The ransom of the Red Chief" which captures all the charm and exaggerated comedy of O' Henry classic story. This story talks about a young boy held for ransom by two money hungry criminals. With the naughty and stubborn characteristics, he made two big men from the role of kidnapers to the role of baby-sisters. Finally, the kidnapers gained nothing and gave up their job.

The most entertaining factor in this hilarious story is the situational irony. The ironic circumstance happens when two criminals' purpose in the first part of story is finally broken. Moreover, readers would be laughing at the dark humor while at the same time feeling great sympathy for all characters. As the story progresses, antagonists and protagonists would be difficult to identify and would depend on which side the reader is on. Readers don't

really know whether to sympathize with kidnappers or victim. Maybe this is successfulness of writer when use irony.

#### **4. The Marionette**

“The Marionette” is about a person who simultaneously plays two opposite roles: a doctor and a robber (or the robber under the pretence of a doctor). Once a day, he is invited to cure a man, he decides to rob the man and his wife’s possession but he discovers that they have nothing. The patient is a bad man who only brings his wife the sadness. The doctor decides to kill his patient and instead of robbery he gives the woman all his money of course in secret with her (In the end, she doesn’t know the good doctor is the killer).

The situational irony occurs when the doctor can not carry out his goal. He becomes an unwilling hero of his victim.

#### **5. A Chaparral Prince**

This story is originated from fairy tales, and in almost any fairy tale, the happy and surprised ending will happens.

The robbers firstly want to rob precious things from the couriers (of course include the letter of the young girl), then they really want to know the secrets in this letter, finally they discover and feel pity for the girl’s unfortunate fate and change their purpose to rescue for her. So the situational irony perfectly occurs, they rescue the young girl and randomly become her hero, her chaparral prince.

#### **6. The cop and the anthem**

In this story, the main character is a homeless young man who wants to have a warm place in winter, therefore he does a number of illegal activities but no one arrests him. Then, he comes and hears an anthem from a church. He rethinks decides to live as a good citizen. However, a cop arrests and sent him to a jail for three months.

Thus, the situational ironies occur when the young man wants to be thrown in jail, no one makes him satisfy. But when he is enlightened, immediately a cop takes away the power of him as a citizen.

### **7. Withes loaves**

A little bit light ironical story describes the funny love story of a woman who owns a little bakery. She loves a poor and simple man. Once, she secretly put on the poor man's bag a piece of butter. However, this piece of butter destroys his papers. Finally, she not only doesn't make him love but also makes him angry.

This story is a pretty sad one of O' Henry and it starts optimistically but the end is twisted in opposite direction. The situational irony occurs when what she wants is different from what happens.

### **8. Make the whole world kin**

"Make the whole world kin" is a fun story about the "friendship" between the burglar and the house owner. The surprised finish comes when two of them are patients of rheumatism, therefore, from the roles of persons in the opposite sides, they sympathize with each other and decide to co-operate. The robber even helps "his friend" with his money

### **III. Irony of fate (cosmic irony)**

A strange fatality which has brought about something quite the reverse of what might have been expected.

(<http://www.websters-online-dictionary.org/Ir/Irony+of+Fate.html>)

The expression "**irony of fate**" stems from the notion that the gods (or the Fates) are amusing themselves by toying with the minds of mortals with deliberate ironic intent. Closely connected with situational irony, it arises from sharp contrasts between reality and human ideals, or between human



intentions and actual results. The resulting situation is poignantly contrary to what was expected or intended.

(<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Irony>)

Examples in history and fact:

[2:16] *“Cane toads cannot jump very high, only about two feet actually, so they did not eat the beetles that for the most part lived in the upper stalks of cane plants. Instead of going after the beetles, as growers had planned, the cane toads began going after everything else in sight--insects, bird's eggs and even native frogs. And because the toads are poisonous, they began to kill would-be predators. The toll on native species has been immense.”*

([http://news.mongabay.com/2005/0417b-tina\\_butler.html](http://news.mongabay.com/2005/0417b-tina_butler.html))

Cane toads imported to protect the Australia environment but now created worse environmental problems for Australia. Obviously, Australian president can not anticipate this calamity.

[2:17] In 1974 the US Consumer Product Safety Commission had to recall 80,000 of its own lapel buttons promoting "toy safety", because the buttons had sharp edges, used lead paint, and had small clips that could be broken off and subsequently swallowed.

(<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Irony>)

[2:18] *“1985: Fans die in Heysel, Brussel, Belgium rioting. Thirty-nine Juventus football fans have died during rioting at the European Cup Final in Brussels. The tragedy occurred when a wall collapsed in the stadium and crushed Juventus fans as they tried to escape Liverpool supporters”*

([http://news.bbc.co.uk/onthisday/hi/dates/stories/may/29/newsid\\_2733000/2733979.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/onthisday/hi/dates/stories/may/29/newsid_2733000/2733979.stm))

In the Europe C2 final football match between Juventus (Italia) and Liverpool (England), a disaster happened when a wall of Heysel Stadium collapses, consequently, 38 Juventus fans and one from Belgium died. Of

course, this calamity happened due to some Juventus fans bought illegally their tickets, unexpectedly, these tickets are fatal ones.

In O' Henry's short stories, irony of fate is also used:

### **1. The furnished room**

The tragedy short story "The Furnished Room" of O' Henry's is about a young man who commits suicide in a room he rents. He has searched for his sweetheart fruitlessly for five months, with a hope that he can find her in the house he lives. But for the purpose of making profit, the landlady doesn't tell him the truth that his girlfriend kills herself in the same room a week ago. At the end the young man dies in despair.

The short story is really a tragedy and "irony of fate". The author presents the story not simply in order to appraise the young man's true love for the girl, but also to reveal the truth that the capital society makes some people cold-hearted. They are so realistic and cruel that they only care about their own profit without concerning others' emotion and life.

### **2. The gift of the Magi**

In O' Henry's story, a young couple is too poor to buy each other Christmas gifts. The wife cuts off her treasured hair to sell it to a wig-maker for money to buy her husband a chain for his heirloom pocket watch. She's shocked when she learns he had pawned his watch to buy her a set of combs for her long, beautiful, prized hair.

### **3. Make the whole world kin**

The fate changes the role of two main characters, from burglar and victim to friends.

#### **4. The ransom of the Red Chief**

This funny story also witnesses a change in roles of the characters. Two kidnapers turn into “baby-sisters” and the victim, a stubborn and naughty child changes into a “Red Chief” in the true sense of the word.

For this reason, two captors can't achieve anything, except for the troubles. Maybe the fate treats badly with them.

#### **5. Witches loaves**

The bakery shop owner inserted a generous quantity of butter for the architect, she builds the good relationship but the fate builds the opposite to her expectation. If she directly gives him, if he doesn't buy bread for his work, and if...

### **IV. Dramatic Irony**

Definitions:

*“The dramatic effect achieved by leading an audience to understand an incongruity between a situation and the accompanying speeches, while the characters in the play remain unaware of the incongruity.”*

(<http://www.thefreedictionary.com/dramatic+irony>)

*“Dramatic irony is when the words and actions of the characters of a work of literature have a different meaning for the reader than they do for the characters. This is the result of the reader having a greater knowledge than the characters themselves”*

(<http://contemporarylit.about.com/cs/literaryterms/g/dramaticIrony.htm>)

Dramatic irony simply is what we – the audiences know but a character doesn't

For examples:

### **In movies:**

We know something the character does not know

- The horror movie - you know the bad guy is behind the door, but the character does not.

- Another similar example is when the main character (in a scary movie), is being chased by a killer and we know that the killer is hiding in the closet but the character does not know that.

### **In literature:**

- In "Romeo and Juliet" of Shakespeare, we know that Juliet faked her death. Romeo did not know this so he drank real poison and killed himself right before her poison wore off. She wakes up, sees Romeo is dead, and then kills herself for real.

- When we read the story of Anne Frank who wrote a famous diary in the World War II, we know that only her father survives, but all the characters in this play know the future will be.

- When we read Raymond's run by Toni Cade Bambara, the readers know that Raymond can run as fast as Squeaky, but Squeaky doesn't realize that he can until the day of race

- In "The tell tale heart", a short story by Edgar Allan Poe, the readers realizes early in the story that the narrator insane, but the narrator doesn't know that he is.

- When read "The landlady" by Roald Dahn, the readers have figured out that the landlady is the murderer, but the protagonist thinks she is nice and friendly.

- "The Lady or the Tiger?" is a famous short story written by Frank R. Stockton in 1882, the reader can realize that the princess know s which door the tiger is behind, but the man is coliseum doesn't know that the princess is debating.

## *In O' Henry's short stories*

### **1. The gift of the Magi**

When readers know clearly that two main characters sell their precious things to buy the Christmas gift to each other, but they don't know.

### **2. A retrieved reformation**

When read "A retrieved reformation", the readers know that Ralph D. Spencer is Jimmy Valentine, but almost people in this story don't know.

### **3. The cop and the anthem**

Read "The cop and the anthem", the readers know the person who breaks the shop window, steals the umbrella is only Soapy, but astonishingly all the people around don't know and even consider that he surely is innocent.

### **4. The furnished room**

In "The furnished room", all readers know that the lover of the young man has lived in this room, but only he don't know.

### **5. The Marionette**

In "The Marionette", the readers can recognize the doctor, however some characters don't do that.

### **6. A Chaparral Prince**

The readers know the robbers are the "Chaparral Princes" of the young girl but all characters in this story can't recognize.

## V. Tragic irony

*“Tragic irony is the revealing to an audience of a tragic event or consequence that remains unknown to the character concerned. It is a kind of dramatic irony.”*

([http://encarta.msn.com/dictionary\\_1861721334/tragic\\_irony.html](http://encarta.msn.com/dictionary_1861721334/tragic_irony.html))

*“Tragic irony is the use of dramatic irony in a tragedy (originally, in Greek tragedy), so that the audience is aware that a character's words or actions will bring about a tragic or fatal result, while the character himself is not”*

(<http://www.thefreedictionary.com/tragic+irony>)

*“Therefore, tragic irony is a type of dramatic irony marked by a sense of foreboding. While dramatic irony occurs in a wide variety of works, ranging from the comic to the tragic.”*

For examples:

- In Shakespeare's works:

In “Romeo and Juliet”, Most commonly a form of dramatic irony called "tragic irony" is employed heavily by Shakespeare. An example of this would be in the final scenes of Romeo and Juliet, in which the audience is aware that Juliet, whom Romeo has just found apparently dead, is in fact drugged and simply appears to have died. In his sorrow, Romeo then kills himself. When Juliet wakes, she finds the tragic Romeo and thus kills *herself*.

In Macbeth: Some other tragic ironies are also found in Act I. When Lady Macbeth, in support of her husband and his career, convinces him to kill King Duncan, she is ironically ending her marriage to Macbeth. The irony isn't seen until later in the play, but her actions in Act I set up the situation that ends their marriage. Once Macbeth gives in to the temptations of the witches, he loses sight of everything, including his marriage. The Macbeths are a loving couple in Act I.

- In Ancient Greek drama was especially characterized by tragic irony because the audiences were so familiar with the legends that most of the plays dramatized. Sophocles' Oedipus the King provides a classic example of tragic irony at its fullest.

*In O' Henry's short stories:*

### **1. The furnished room**

It is easy to recognize the tragic irony in this sad story. This young man gets suicide from what he gains. His death becomes more tragically when the people in a cold-hearted society witness without a little of the emotion and compassion.

### **2. The last leaf**

The tragic irony occurs when Johnsy decided to live because she realizes "It is a sin to want to die". Behrman had already painted the leaf and his destiny is set. As their lives were similar, so were their sudden realizations. Johnsy understood it was time to live and Behrman understood it was time to do something important with his life. The story has an interesting but tragic ending.

### **3. The gift of the Magi**

The couple sacrifices their precious things to bring the happiness to each other in Christmas Eve. But the small tragic irony occurs when their gifts also become useless.

However, the moral of the story is that physical possessions, however valuable they may be, are of little value in the grand scheme of things. The true unselfish love that the characters, Jim and Della, share is greater than their possessions.

# **CHAPTER THREE: THE COMPARISON BETWEEN IRONY USED IN O' HENRY'S SHORT STORIES AND ONE USED IN NGUYEN CONG HOAN'S SHORT STORIES**

Irony, a widely employed figure of speech, has used in not only usual communications but also literary works as fictions, short stories. In chapter two, we studied on irony in American writer O' Henry' short stories and realized that it plays a very important role to make his works become more successful. In this chapter, we make a small comparison between O' Henry's short stories and Nguyen Cong Hoan's short stories to highlight this fact.

Nguyen Cong Hoan is a famous writer in Vietnam realistic literature. He uses his pen to criticize, attack and ironize the contemporary society, his stories always bring the humor, compassion, humanism. With American readers, O' Henry is considered as "a master of short story", and with Vietnamese readers, this honor reserves for Nguyen Cong Hoan.

The small comparisons below will bring out the similar and different points in irony using between two writers through their works.



## I. Verbal irony

### In O' Henry's short stories

[3:1] -"Me?" said Jimmy, in surprise. "Why, I **never cracked a safe in my life.**" (3:1)

"Jimmy Valentine đáp trong vẻ ngạc nhiên:

-Tôi ấy à? Cả đời tôi **chưa từng phá một két sắt nào cả!**"

In this example, the speaker only wants to make fun. He is far from denying.

[3:2] -"Gallons," said the burglar. "If all the snakes I've used the oil of was strung out in a row they'd reach eight times as far as Saturn, and the rattles could be heard at Valparaiso, Indiana, and back." (5:5)

- Dùng cả chục lít. Nếu mọi con rắn tôi đã dùng được nối nhau kéo dài, chúng có thể dài đến sao Thổ, và tiếng chuông đuôi có thể vang đến Indiana rồi vọng về.

In this example, the speaker wants to express his sadness and

### In Nguyen Cong Hoan's short stories

[3:5] "Ấy là lần đầu, **mà cũng là nhân tiện**, nên ông Trưởng mới mở va-ly ra thì biết thế, **chứ ông không có tính tò mò**, việc ai mặc người ấy, ông không muốn để mắt vào cách hành động của ông khách trọ làm gì." (21:3)

The person who is mentioned in the example above, is a curious, greedy and stupid. He is depicted as "**ông không có tính tò mò**" although he is really curious.

[3:6] "Được xem cái đám ma linh đình uy vệ là thế, thì ta nên khen người hiếu chủ đã khéo trả nghĩa mẹ. Mà nhất là nếu trông thấy người ấy, ta lại càng tâm phục cái **bụng hiếu thảo, không bển không bờ**" (22:5)

In this example, the speaker uses irony to criticize the person who has a "**cái bụng hiếu thảo, không bển không bờ**". In fact, he is an undutiful son and indirectly makes

disappointment. He ironizes what he did.

[3:3] “*Besides these more important chidings and requisitions upon the store of good citizenship,...*” (14:1)

“*Ngoài những bài trách cứ và yêu sách quan trọng này đối với cái kho tình thân công dân tốt,...*”

In this example, the speaker (or writer) wants to criticize what he doesn't satisfy.

[3:4] “*She was safe abroad at any hour of the twenty-four.*” (15:4)

“*Vào bất kì giờ nào trên cả hăm bốn tiếng cô cũng an toàn khi đi ngoài phố*”.

The last example, the speaker expresses his compassion through irony to his character.

his mother die.

[3:7] “*Người ta lại sợ hiếu chủ thương mẹ quá đập đầu vào quan tài, lỡ chết thì hoài, vì lúc trong bụng bố rồi vẫn hay sinh liêu, nên phải bện cái nùn rom để chít quanh đầu. Thì dù có đập mạnh đến đâu, cũng không đến nổi vỡ sọ*”.

(22:6)

In other one from this story, the speaker expresses the compassion to the undutiful son but through that shows the compassion to his mother.

[3:8] “*Phải hiểu rằng cụ chánh bá có thương nhà này thế nào, cụ mới quá bộ đến xoi rượu, chứ như nhà khác, dễ mà mời nổi cụ đấy hẳn*” (25:1)

[3:9] “*xưa nay cụ chúa ghét những thói gian xảo. ngay như đây tớ cụ, đưa nào mà lảng vảng ra chợ, tắt mắt đồ đạc của người ta, người ta có bắt được và trình cụ, thì cụ cũng không tha. cụ nhất định giữ lấy đồ ăn cắp, rồi sai đánh cho một trận thật*”.

(25:2)

In these examples above, the

speaker shows the scorn to a greedy and imperious man who called “*cụ chánh bá*”. The words: “*thương*” and “*chúa ghét những thói gian giảo*” are used to express the opposite meanings.

The examples above infer that each writer uses verbal irony with different purposes and different ways. Those are:

**The similar points:** both O’ Henry and Nguyen Cong Hoan use irony to show the criticism and sarcasm (examples: [3:3], [3:6], [3:7], [3:8], [3:9]), compassion and regret (examples: [3:4], [3:7]).

**The different points:**

- O’ Henry uses irony to make fun (example: [3:1]) while Nguyen Cong Hoan doesn’t do that.

- Nguyen Cong Hoan uses irony to scorn what he doesn’t satisfy (examples: [3:9], [3:6]) while this function doesn’t occur in O’ Henry’s stories.

## II. Situational irony

### In O' Henry's short stories

-In "The Chaparral Prince", the situational irony occurs when the robbers in final become the hero or the "Chaparral Prince" of the young girl although their first goal is not as that

-In "The cop and the anthem", the situational irony happens when the young man doesn't satisfy what he desires.

-In "Make the whole world kin"

The situational irony occurs when the thief in the end can't carry out his goal.

-In "Withes loaves"

The woman not only doesn't make him fall in love with her but also makes him angry. This story starts optimistically but the end twists in opposite direction. The situational irony occurs when what she wants is different from what happens.

### In Nguyen Cong Hoan's short stories

-In "Chiếc quan tài", the situational irony occurs when the coffin finally drifts out of the grave.

Through the comparison above, the situational irony appears in a great number of O' Henry's stories but irregularly occurs in Nguyen Cong Hoan's.

It is easy to understand because the stories of O' Henry usually finish with the surprises and twisted endings.

### III. Dramatic irony

#### In O' Henry's short stories

- In "The gift of the Magi"

When readers know clearly that two main characters sell their precious things to buy the Christmas gift to each other, but they don't know.

- In "A retrieved reformation"

When read "A retrieved reformation", the readers know that Ralph D. Spencer is Jimmy Valentine, but almost people in this story don't know.

- In "The Marionette"

In "The Marionette", the readers can recognize the doctor as the murderer, however some characters don't do that.

#### In Nguyen Cong Hoan's short stories

- In "Cụ chánh bá mất giày", readers know that "*cụ chánh bá*" makes a cheat when the house owners do not know.

- In "Đồng hào có ma", readers know that the mandarin takes away money of the woman but she doesn't.

- In "Cái thú tổ tôm", the house owner doesn't know that his daughter has dark relationship with "*cụ chánh bá*" but only he doesn't recognize.

- In "Chiếc quan tài", readers know the coffin drifts out of the grave but the characters don't.

Dramatic irony occurs in a wide variety of two authors' works, ranging from the comic to the tragic.

In conclusion, this small comparison indicates both similarities and differences in using irony between O' Henry and Nguyen Cong Hoan. Through that, we can deeply understand the influences of irony in literature.

## **PART III. CONCLUSION**

With the help of supervisors, teachers, family and friends, my graduation paper has been completed at last.

After consulting and collecting from teacher either English or Vietnamese, I have designed the paper into three parts.

The first part is an introduction which includes rationale, aim, scope, method, design of study.

The second part which consists of three chapters is major one. Chapter I states common knowledge on words in general and irony in particular. Chapter II gives general knowledge on irony in O' Henry's short stories, gives examples and analysis to understand the author's use of irony. The last is comparison between O' Henry's short stories and Nguyen Cong Hoan's short stories.

The third part summarizes the general content of this graduation paper.

It hopes that this study can help readers and learners, especially those who love literature can comprehend more about irony and its application.

Due to the time limitation and comprehensive knowledge of writer in this field, there are certainly short comings in this research paper. Hopefully, all the weaknesses would receive thoughtful consideration and generous view.

Once again, I would like to express my deepest gratitude to my supervisor, Mrs Nguyen Thi Thuy Thu, as well as all of my teachers in Foreign Language Department for their guidance and comments.

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