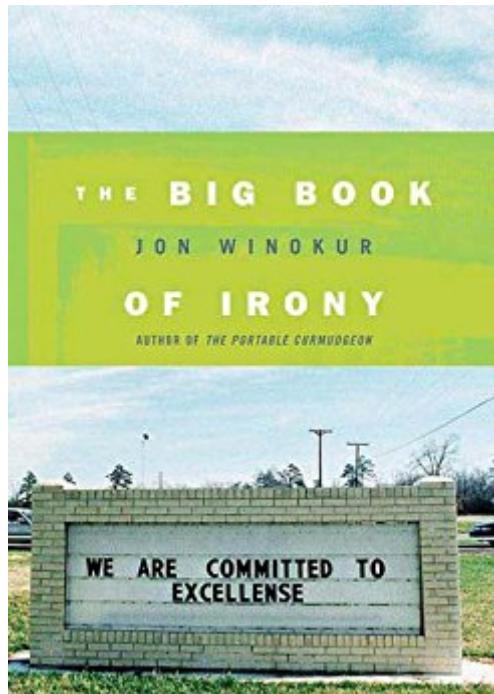


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The Big Book Of Irony



Synopsis

Jon Winokur defines and classifies irony and contrasts it with coincidence and cynicism, and other oft-confused concepts that many think are ironic. He looks at the different forms irony can take, from an irony deficiency to visual irony to an understatement, using photographs and relate-able examples from pop culture. * "Irony in Action" looks at irony in language, both verbal and visual, while "Bastions of Irony" and "Masters of Irony" look at institutions and individuals steeped in irony, though not always intentionally. PLUS: * The Annals of Irony looks at irony, and its lack thereof, throughout history. A delight for anyone with a smart, dark sense of humor.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

very thoughtful book, much more than a simple book of quotations, this is full anecdotes, various definitions, and plenty of quotes.

Rather boring and rambling account. The authors idea of irony lacked the humor I associate with the word

Jon Winokur's "The Big Book of Irony" is one of those books that is just exploding with tidbits that make you want to interrupt your reading and share what you've just read with a friend, a neighbor, or well, anybody. Ostensibly the book is about Irony - what it is, what it is not, how to recognize it, and how to use it properly. But the problem with irony is that it is the statement of one thing while being understood to mean the opposite, that opposite meaning being the intent all along. Thus, the title of this book implies it is a "big" book when, in fact, it is quite small, which was the intent in calling it, ironically, a big book. One easily ends up in verbal or visual loops and stands a good chance of mistaking coincidence for irony or irony for sarcasm. One of my favorite quotes in the book is from Bronislaw Malinowski: "I once talked to an old cannibal who, hearing of the Great War raging in Europe, was most curious to know how we Europeans managed to each such huge quantities of human flesh. When I told him the Europeans did not eat their slain foes, he looked at me with shocked horror and asked what sort of barbarians we were, to kill without any real object." The book includes examples of visual irony such as flame decals on a mini-van or Michael Jackson's multiply-defaced face. It has a section of ironic events reported in the media such as the executive at the Salt Lake Tribune in charge of implementing cost-cutting measures who was himself fired, reportedly as a "cost cutting measure." It even includes a self-test to help you measure your own irony potential but it, of course, is also ironic in that both the highest and lowest scores indicate the same thing. Definitely a fun book to have on your bookshelf or to give to an English major.

So what could I think at first, another quick-shot slick job to make money, this guy already wrote 19 books, titles like "Encyclopedia Neurotica," "Je Ne Sais What?," "The Portable Curmudgeon," "Zen to Go" ... what could I assume but another Treatment Lite (and Cute) of the topic. But was I wrong, as I sometimes am (which was not irony, or was it...) Quickly I saw a solid job here, complete and conceptualized plus specific and compact too. (And all in 162 pages of 5 X 8 format.) Heck, author Winocur even uses all the dry boring academic techniques to elucidate the subject (which I should know, being a former teacher, myself). He uses Classify and Divide (subtypes of irony--situational, cosmic, tragic--even faux or pseudo, more than even I had thought of, is that ironical?). Orwellian, postmodern, understatement, verbal but also visual irony.... He uses Compare/Contrast (irony is not coincidence, thank you, misconception clarified at last!--nor is it hypocrisy, sarcasm, bushwa....).... Then heck, he also employs Time or Historical Perspective: irony from Aristophanes right up to the present.... Then too, he invokes Spatial Locations of irony: Canada, Mad and New Yorker magazines, Seinfeld, Simpsons, Yiddishkeit.... Oh, and he even supplies Scholarly References: he sights--oops, cites--some classics even I had never heard of, for future reference. Of course "we all

know" of Wayne Booth's and Linda Hutcheon's works (at least I do, after learning of them earlier), but hail to D. C. Muecke's 1970 Irony, let alone an anthropological investigation Irony in Action.... Then Winocur supplies Exemplification: rich tiny nuggets of like "words that can only be ironic," even ironic punctuation, names, gestures, attire. Saddam Hussein's bunker; a movie about stupidity which Hollywood axed because test-audiences were, ah, too, hmm, dumb to understand it. A bumper sticker: "Honk if you know the difference between irony and sarcasm" (or, cynicism). Also spotted: a sticker "I love irony"--ironically seen in Branson, MO.... Plus he gives us the Biographical, or "masters of irony" such as Jane Austen, Yogi Berra, oh and Shakespeare, Oscar Wilde.... And importantly he provides Evaluation: defenses of, and significant critiques of, irony, as vitalizing but also as corroding also. All in all it was a revelation. As if, say, Irony was a person I knew somewhat, but this book was a personal celebration ceremony I sat in upon, where many friends and associates gave toasts and speeches really revealing that person's many facets. (That's not ironic, it's an analogy. I often taught analogies when I was teaching.) So Who Knew, or what did I know? Here is no lite fluff, but a solid survey. "Highly recommended," with admiration and a touch of envy for an important job well done (and heck, I used to teach, myself). (Nor was any irony used in the construction of this review--though heck, you wade around in this subject, and you soon risk having wafts or traces--or burrs--cling to you...) Winocur ends his Introduction by saying ""This book is an attempt to edify and entertain with irony's many facets. It's a small book, to be sure, but I hope the reader will agree that less is more." May I respectfully half-disagree here: although small in size, the book is gratifyingly large in scope-and-depth. So the very title, The BIG Book of Irony, plus the author's disclaimer, is--yes, ironic. So good is this volume, that indeed, I am now noln-ironically drawn to look into Winocur's other reference anthologies after all. So there; bravo...

I do not recommend this book. It is pretty vacuous and doesn't contain much more than you would find by searching around wikipedia. It is filled with anecdotes and quotes and feels like very light reading. If you actually want to work to understand irony as a concept then this book will only scrape the surface and give you some lines to throw around at a party. Not rigorous or well worked. If you want something quick and easy then I guess this will do. I felt like it was a waste of money and time.

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