

DRAMATIC IRONY

Whether it is a literary text or a film, a satisfying story is the result of the author's control over his or her material, so that it works at a number of different levels. By deliberately peppering a tale with seemingly innocent detail, the author provides insights or commentary that repays closer analysis. At a second or third viewing or reading these details may be found to carry extra, often ironic, significance.

Study the following elements from the screen version of *A Warning to the Curious*. In many ways it is a more richly wrought tale than its source material, brimming with apparently casual detail that carries extra meaning when viewed again and with hindsight. (Where a specific shot is referred to its position is given in minutes and seconds from the beginning of the film.) Next to each detail describe why it is dramatically ironic.

	Screen elements	Dramatic irony
1	The long shot of the first archaeologist digging up the mound (01.19). Given what happens to him – what impact is there when we see Paxton in exactly the same place and shot from exactly the same angle later in the film?	
2	The close up of Paxton's spade attached to his bag – the first thing we see of him as he gets off the train. (4.17)	
3	The fact that the crest showing the three crowns in the church porch is topped by some sort of ferocious heraldic beast. (7.01)	
4	The double use of the word 'haunted' by the vicar when referring to Ager.	
5	The text on Ager's headstone: 'May his soul rest in peace.' (10.02)	
6	The skull and snarling animal heads in the curiosity shop. (10.20 and 10.52)	
7	The comments during Paxton's conversation with the shop owner about human sacrifice and the setting of evil spirits on bridges to protect them.	
8	The fact that William Ager's date of death is a blank in the family Bible that Caxton discovers.	
9	Mention by the young woman of a 'tramp' she has seen in the woods.	

10	The apple-pie order of Paxton's archaeological tools arrayed on the bed just before he leaves on the final part of his quest. (19.00 approx)	
11	Paxton digs a deep hole into the mound – literally vanishing beneath the soil in his search for the crown.	
12	The discovery of part of a skull before his finds the crown.	
13	Paxton realises he has unseen company on the train.	
14	Dr Black's comment about the mysterious figure who seems to have appeared in the landscape where he had previously placed a figure in his picture to create 'perspective'.	
15	The framed religious motto on Paxton's hotel room wall: 'Cast Thy Burden On The Lord.'	